

Stop! In the Name of Peace

BY LESLIE WINES

New York, June 14

Gunshot wounds. The self-contempt of a child abuse survivor. An irrational fear of sudden movements and open spaces. Napalm scares. A terror of poorly lit urban streets. The decaying remains of a bombed-out village. A lifetime of exorbitant medical bills.

Every sane person is repelled by the effects of violence. Hardly anyone remains untouched these days. Thus the SGI-USA's Youth Peace Conference decided to sponsor Anti-Violence Awareness Day at the New York Culture Center today as a kickoff to its nationwide distribution of anti-violence videos and instructional kits. (Districts should receive them sometime this fall.)

A great deal of research preceded the event. Said YPC organizer Denise Royale: "We studied Gandhi and his philosophy of nonviolence and found that the desire to end violence and to promote justice is what Buddhism has been about for the last 3,000 years."

Because violence is a reality for many Americans today, helping people protect themselves is a form of bodhisattva action, according to Tod Randolph, organizer of the event's 14 workshops. David Bogoslaw, a member of the event's steering committee, elaborated: "The kosen-rufu movement exists to rid the world of its misery. In the past, some of us may have gotten the wrong idea, deciding Buddhism was about creating a safe little world to hide in. That's not it at all. Taking on the violence issue is in many ways like confronting the problems within the priesthood. It forces us to deal with the real problems in the world and not pretend that they don't exist."

The subject of violence isn't exactly upbeat, but daimoku infused the event with positive energy.

"I chanted and chanted that SGI President Ikeda's heart and Nichiren Daishonin's wisdom would permeate this event," remarked panel discussion coordinator Tabu Zalez.

Art and music helped promote a cheerful atmosphere, as did the rousing cultural performance that topped off the event. Lois Litvin said that the organizers worked hard to ensure that no one left feeling overwhelmed or depressed. "We made sure that everybody who came with a problem left with a new sense of possible solutions," she said.

Workshop organizers helped participants discover the positive lessons in grim realities. A workshop on structural violence, organized by Vietnam War veteran John Gentile, included a heart-wrenching account by Yiorgos Mannouris of the napalm bombing of his native village in Cyprus when he was 12 years old: The young boy's bleeding was so profuse after the attack that two bath towels were not enough to staunch it.

Mannouris added that this horror shaped his ideals of humanitarianism. "We moved out of our village after the bombing for a day or two," he said. "That 'day or two' has become 23 years. We became refugees, along with 200,000 other people. Everything we had built was gone. From my experience, I determined to work for the happiness and peace of others."

The "Roots of Violence Seminar" focused on child abuse as the basis of antisocial behavior. Workshop leader Sharon O'Connor, a former psychiatric social worker in New York City jails, reminded participants that under certain circumstances, many law-abiding people could slip over the edge. Interviews with members of the prison population had shown her that in certain ways they were "just like me." It's important, she said, to acknowledge their humanity. Combating crimes against children is a key to reducing violence over time, Ms. O'Connor believes.

New York University professor Aye Kyaw related a horror story of leaving his native

Title: Stop! In the Name of Peace

Subject: World Tribune 07/18/97 n.3148 p.1 WT970718p01 New York, New York 06/14/97

Author: Leslie Wines

Keywords: 06/14/97 Anti-Violence Events Exchanges Meetings Name National News Peace Stop York

Burma after a repressive regime killed more than 200 students and shut down all higher institutions of learning.

He praised his fellow countrywoman Aun San Kyo, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, who is a follower of the philosophy of nonviolence and a strong believer in the power of self-respect. "If you have no blessing for yourself, you have no blessing for others," he said.

The YPC members returned often to the link between self-respect and nonviolence.

"What I learned from this event is that violence has everything to do with a denial of respect and self-respect," said Tod Randolph. "The basic tenet of our practice is the dignity of human life and all other living beings. This basic right, the confidence in one's Buddha nature, has to be extended to everyone if society is to change."

*With additional reporting by
Brigid Witkowski*

Title: Stop! In the Name of Peace

Subject: World Tribune 07/18/97 n.3148 p.1 WT970718p01 New York, New York 06/14/97

Author: Leslie Wines

Keywords: 06/14/97 Anti-Violence Events Exchanges Meetings Name National News Peace Stop York