

PERSPECTIVE: Appreciating Our Planet — Every Day
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The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 240)

As an SGI member, I have heard much about environmental problems from SGI President Ikeda's speeches and dialogues with dignitaries, and exhibitions that have been sponsored by the SGI. Yet I feel that the current environmental crisis that we are entering needs further discussion; it needs our wisdom.

There are two major sources of environmental problems, the first being overpopulation. This is a popular issue in the United States, since this is *not* an issue for us — but it is an issue for “developing” nations. For instance, Bangladesh has a population growth rate that is twice as high as the U.S. growth rate. We too easily blame other countries for all the environmental degradation, saying that is caused by overpopulation.

This problem is just one side of the coin; the other side is consumption. The World Bank estimates that a typical American over his lifetime will consume and pollute the same amount as 29 people in Bangladesh. Since the United States has a population of 270 million people, the U.S. consumption level is equal to 7.8 billion Bangle.

This also points to the huge disparity between the “developed” countries and the “developing” countries. The United Nations states that 20 percent of the world's people in the high income countries account for 86 percent of total private consumption expenditures; the poorest 20 percent a minuscule 1.3 percent. This is not a popular issue in the United States, since our whole economy is based on us consuming as much as possible.

President Ikeda has addressed this issue before, but I feel that the SGI-USA must start to look at ways to encourage members to be more thoughtful about how our individual actions affect the planet. For instance, think about how many things in one day we throw away. Or better yet imagine if we had to carry all the things that we throw away! Just think how big this amount would be by the end of the day.

We talk a lot about being examples in our society, about being willing to take responsibility. Yet how often do we talk about being people thoughtful of how our daily actions affect our planet? To discuss that there should be no racism is nice, but to discuss how we can overcome our racial tendencies is a step much deeper. In the same spirit, we need to start discussing how we can show appreciation of our planet every day.

The United Nation has made five guidelines on how to solve the problems associated with consumption: 1) encouraging greater efficiency in the use of energy and resources; 2) minimizing the generation of wastes; 3) assisting individuals and households to make environmentally sound purchasing decisions; 4) exercising leadership through government purchasing; and 5) moving toward environmentally sound pricing. The first three are directly related to individual action. These along with open discussion are the first steps needed for us to start a life where we're more thoughtful on a daily basis toward this wonderful planet we live on.

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