

**THE CHANGE MUST BEGIN WITH US**  
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Recent events of violence have shocked our nation. The school shootings in Colorado and Georgia, the murderous hate crimes in Chicago the July 4th weekend and the overall increase in violence, especially among youth, have led the entire nation to ask, “What’s going on?” In response to these events, the SGI-USA youth have initiated a signature-collecting campaign called Victory Over Violence. This campaign centers on dialogue about respect for the dignity of life and the understanding that the change must begin with us.

During the time of his youth, Nichiren Daishonin was confronted with the suffering that society around him was undergoing. Japan, at that time, faced an onslaught of natural disasters, epidemics and famine. The people began looking for the cause of their misery, much the way that our nation is now looking for the underlying cause of the violent episodes that occurred recently.

Under these circumstances, the Daishonin wrote the “Rissho Ankoku Ron” and clearly outlined that it was only through creating a change in our own lives that we could affect a change in society.

As SGI President Ikeda states, “The message of the ‘Rissho Ankoku Ron,’ simply put, is that each of us should accomplish a personal human revolution based on the principle of humanism and thus become key players in realizing social prosperity and world peace” (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 4, pp. 241–42). The change must begin in our lives, and this will lead to a change in society.

While this principle that change must begin with us may seem obvious, it is something that I have found very difficult to remember and apply. When we are faced with suffering, it is much easier to look for the cause of our suffering outside ourselves. In the same way, we end up looking for the solution outside ourselves.

Buddhism teaches, however, that our lives have infinite potential and value, and that when we tap this potential we can transform our situation for the better and also transform society. I believe that firmly grasping this principle in our lives and sharing it with others is an important first step toward creating a Victory over Violence.

In the “Rissho Ankoku Ron,” the Daishonin explains that, from the perspective of Buddhism, the underlying force behind the disruption of peaceful relations among people is anger. It is anger in the lives of people that causes war; it is what causes violence.

In his “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda states: “Anger is fundamentally an arrogant state of life.... Those in the world of Anger vie with one another in their quest for status and power, spilling blood and doing injury to one another” (July 1998 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 21–31).

Overcoming anger in each of our lives is fundamental to standing up for nonviolence. But, how do we do this? Courage is the key to overcoming our anger. In “Discussions on Youth,” President Ikeda states: “The people who have no courage are the ones who steal, who oppress, who kill and maim, who threaten lives with weapons, who wage war. People do such evil things because they are cowards” (May 7 *World Tribune*, p. 1).

With courage, we can overcome our lesser self and awaken to the greater mission that we possess and that others do, too. President Ikeda goes on to explain that compassion is also an important part of courage, and that compassion has, at its roots, a great respect for

the dignity of life.

One of the greatest examples of courage and compassion is Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. The Lotus Sutra introduces the actions of this man, who praised every person he met because he understood that every single person has the Buddha nature in their lives.

Armed with this respect for the dignity of each person's life, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging traveled widely and shared with people the spirit and practice of respecting life — despite his being vilified and even stoned.

Based on the great compassion he had for all life, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging met these persecutions and continued to live with courage, setting an example for all to follow.

President Ikeda states, "Courage is the strength to live our lives the right way, to walk the right path" (May 7 *World Tribune*, p. 6). This is exactly how Bodhisattva Never Disparaging lived.

Similarly, we must tap the compassion that exists within our lives and live with courage. Resorting to violence to solve our problems is behaving cowardly and signifies a weak life. A life of courage, in the end, is also a life of no regrets. As our society seeks an understanding and solution to the recent events of violence, we must firmly engage in dialogue with our peers, with our juniors and seniors, and share the great values of humanism that we embrace.

President Ikeda has traveled the globe exhaustively to share these values throughout the world. He is living up to the spirit of the "Rissho Ankoku Ron" and setting an example for all of us.

In his recent message to us, he states, "What becomes of America will determine what becomes of the world.... And what becomes of America will be determined by its youth" (July 9 *World Tribune*). Now is the time for us to stand up and call out for peace. We must not sit idly by as spectators to a society that is more and more frequently resorting to violence to solve problems. The future is in our hands! Together, let's stand up for a Victory Over Violence.

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