

UNDERSTANDING COLUMBINE BY SGI-USA JR. HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION LEADERS A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE COLORADO SHOOTINGS

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April shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., have gripped our country in a way that few recent events have. That a couple of high school students would plan and carry out a two-man war against their own classmates is tragic and frightening.

In the wake of this tragedy, we have been forced to reflect on our society and the values we uphold. Do we have too many guns? What influence does popular culture have on our youth? What role should parents play in their children's lives?

It can be difficult to understand how we should view these events as Buddhists. The factors that contributed to this tragedy are too complex for simple interpretation. But, there are a couple of observations worth making at this time.

For one, it is futile to spend all of our energy looking for an easy scapegoat for the tragedy. Sure, the gunmen need to be held accountable for their actions. Sure, easy access to guns continually proves to be tragic. But, Buddhism regards all phenomena as interrelated. The principle of *engi* (dependent origination) holds that nothing exists in isolation. As President Ikeda says, "Each individual existence functions to bring into being the environment which in turn sustains all other existences." We can then say the shootings in Colorado occurred because we have collectively created an environment where tragedies like this are possible.

The Littleton shootings demonstrate what can happen when youth lack a sense of mission and a sound life philosophy. In his recent poem to the YWD, President Ikeda writes: "In my heart burns an immortal flame of philosophy shines the light of my lifelong mission resides a great purpose!"

Those who pray deeply with a firm and unshakable conviction in faith are liberated from the fear and anxiety of being cast adrift in the darkness!

From President Ikeda's example we can see that having a sense of mission gives us the strength to overcome any suffering.

The Littleton shootings show us how isolated many of today's teenagers feel. There were abundant signs that the Colorado gunmen were in agony and disposed to violence, signs present long before April 20. Yet, very few people around the two young men seemed to apprehend the issue. Without good friends and family around to provide support and guidance, for direction, most teens turn to pop culture, which does not prioritize human life, or teens turn to other teens who equally lack direction.

We need to help the young people around us create embracing and encouraging communities of friends. As SGI-USA jr. high and high school members, we need to have the compassion to get involved in the lives of our friends. As SGI-USA leaders and parents, we have to create an environment where teenagers can openly discuss their dreams and share their sufferings. After all, the value of human life can only be learned through strong personal bonds of friendship and support.

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