BUDDHIST VALUES AND A CULTURE OF PEACE
TOSHINORI IWAZUMI, VICE PRESIDENT, SOKA GAKKAI (JAPAN)
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A delegation of SGI representatives from the United States and Japan attended the third Parliament of World Religions December 1–8, 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa. It was an interfaith gathering of seven thousand people from 138 countries. The following two speeches were presented by SGI representatives Toshinori Iwazumi and Tadashige Takamura from Japan.

BUDDHIST VALUES AND A CULTURE OF PEACE
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How can Buddhist values contribute to building a robust culture of peace in the twenty-first century?

Before examining this question, I would like first to recall UNESCO's Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace, adopted in Barcelona five years ago in 1994. This important document gives voices to many of the key principles and commitments that must concern us all. Among them: "[T]o transform conflicts without using violence, and to prevent them through education and the pursuit of justice." And to realize "truly humane education for all… education for peace, freedom, and human rights…"

I believe that two key values of Buddhism are the emphasis on the sanctity of life and on the limitless potential of the individual. From these, flow powerful commitments to peace and education. One scholar has in fact questioned whether or not Buddhism should be counted as a "religion." Rather, it should perhaps be thought of as a movement of popular education, awakening people to the true nature of their own lives and their own possibilities. The passages from the UNESCO documents I have quoted above point to the profound interconnection between peace and education. Preventing conflicts through education. Peace education.

In this vein, I think it is appropriate to ask what is "truly humane education"? I think that it is education that changes us deeply, that expands and opens us up to entirely new perspectives on life. Education that makes us keenly aware of other people's experiences, their realities, their sufferings and their dreams. In contrast, education that merely piles information and facts onto our preexisting prejudices, can make us better informed brutes, but it cannot have the kind of profound humanizing effect that is at the heart of education.

In the parlance of the Soka Gakkai this process of becoming genuinely and fully human, of taking responsibility for the entirety of one's life, expanding one's horizons to be able to take an active interest and responsibility toward the human future — this dynamic process of inner-driven transformation is referred to as "human revolution."

In this sense, I would like to take a few minutes to share some autobiographical material that I hope will shed light on my own humane education, my own learning about peace, and the role played by Buddhist values in this process.

I was born in Hiroshima in 1948. On August 6, 1945, my mother by mere coincidence happened to be out of town and so suffered no effects of the bombing. My father worked

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for the national railroad, and was in an office at the Hiroshima Main Station when the bomb hit. Of the three people in the room, one died instantly, another lost one eye, but my father was unhurt.

My aunt, however, was much closer to ground zero than my father, and was exposed to a massive dose of radiation. She managed to walk home, where her sister cared for her as best she could. She died in great pain, calling for water. The surviving sister shared these details with me on many occasions and this story was very much part of my upbringing. My surviving aunt fashioned a doll in memory of her younger sister and slept with it every night until she herself passed away in January of this year.

The City of Hiroshima built temporary housing just a few hundred meters from the blast center. Because my mother was pregnant with me, my family was given priority for housing. I was born soon after my family moved into these quarters. As children, we used to play and dig in the rubble. It was not unusual for us to unearth human bones. There were people in the housing unit who bore the scars, keloids, from the bombing and a child who was born with microencephalia as a result of exposure to radiation while in the womb. Born with an extremely small head, this child did not live long.

When I was ten, my family joined the Soka Gakkai. I know that the Buddhist philosophy of life, which emphasizes self-empowerment and a vigorous spirit of challenging fate, of refusing to be defeated by circumstances — I know that all this played an important role in enabling my parents to create a new sense of hope out of their circumstances.

In September 1957, the Second President of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, issued a declaration calling for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. He denounced these weapons as a fundamental violation of the humankind's most fundamental right — the right to survival — and called on the young people of Japan to spread this message to the world. This declaration, which voices the practical implications and real-world responsibilities that stem from the Buddhist concept of reverence for the sanctity of life, is considered the starting point for the Soka Gakkai's peace movement.

One of the things that make an atomic bombing different from other forms of bombing is that the effects are on going. Everyone exposed to radiation must live with the fear and anxiety of not knowing when, or in what form, the after-effects are going to appear.

When I was still in high school, there was one young man, in his thirties if I remember who often encouraged the younger members of our organization. He himself was suffering from leukemia, most likely as a result of the bombing. I was deeply inspired by the passion with which he was determined to dedicate the remainder of his life — however long that might be — to the cause of peace. People such as this young man laid the foundations for the Soka Gakkai's movement for peace, education and culture in Hiroshima.

It is not enough, of course, merely to pray for peace. We must take concrete action. This was a sense that I brought with me when I moved to Tokyo to attend university. In 1970, the third president of the Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, made a proposal to the youth membership that created a truly unique opportunity to do something concrete to create peace.

We began to collect record and set down the experiences of people whose lives had been affected by the war. The title of the series of publications that eventually emerged from this project is To the Generations Who Do Not Know War. This was a very profound learning experience for the several thousand young people who participated directly in collecting and editing these recollections. Often, we had to visit someone many times before we could

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gain their trust and they would start to open to us. We of course collected the experiences of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We also gathered the experiences people who had been on Okinawa, where the local residents, nominally Japanese, had been abused and murdered in great numbers by the Japanese army.

We interviewed not only the victims, by also the perpetrators, those who committed terrible deeds in China, Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Needless to say, many of these former soldiers were extremely reluctant to talk. They wanted, if possible, to forget what they had done. Those memories that could not be extinguished, they were clearly determined to take with them to the grave. It was very moving to see some of these people awaken to the idea that their most painful memories could be of use to future generations. That their private pain could have meaning as a larger good, as a warning against the kind of horror and folly that must never be repeated. I believe that this experience manifests the Buddhist principle of "turning poison into medicine" which states that even the most painful, negative experience can be transformed, as we transform ourselves and out attitudes, into some of profound and lasting value.

Eventually, the youth members of the Soka Gakkai published a total of eighty volumes of war recollections. In a related activity, the women of the organization collected and edited twenty volumes of women's experiences.

For myself and for the many young people who participated in this endeavor, this was a profound learning experience. It brought home to us the cruel banality, the horror and stupidity of war. I think that anyone who reads any of these publications — and some of them have been translated into English — will be forever immunized against the kind of pro-war, pro-violence messages that overflow the media and entertainment industry. We learned, in the depths of our beings, that war solves absolutely nothing, that it leaves only pain and scars that can never really be healed.

SGI President Ikeda has written words to the effect that to forget is an act of cruelty, but that to remember is an act of compassion.

I believe it was this conviction that inspired Mr. Ikeda to work with the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles to bring the exhibition "The Courage to Remember" to Japan. This was the first large-scale exhibition about the Holocaust to be held in Japan. To date it has been seen in a total of forty-six cities and been seen by a total of 1.6 million Japanese citizens. I was deeply moved by the fact that Hiroshima was chosen as a venue for this exhibition. I feel that there is enormous value that can be created when people — who have experienced something beyond the power of words to express — can share their experiences and develop a sense of solidarity and mission to create a world in which others will not have to undergo what they have suffered.

The things that we learn in sharing with others our own secret pain, in a process that moves us from an isolated past into a shared, a common future — I believe that this kind of learning constitutes the essence of what UNESCO calls for as "peace education," "truly humane education." These are some of the values that I have learned from Buddhism that I believe can contribute to building a new and lasting culture of peace in the twenty-first century. ❑

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Ten years have now passed since the end of the Cold War. The Cold War was a system of massive, entrenched structural violence. Some have described this as a "'pyramid of violence," with nuclear weapons and the threat of global annihilation at the top, interpersonal and domestic violence at the bottom. Others have noted the irony that the Cold War military "aid" that fueled and sustained so many regional conflicts has dried up now that the objectives of that aid must be the development of the educational and health-care infrastructures. In many senses, Apartheid was a product of the Cold War and the people of South Africa were victims of that global conflict.

So, whatever difficulties confront us, I think we should keep in sight the fact that we have succeeded in stepping out from under the shadow of the massive structural violence of the Cold War. We must never let go of the hope, of the sense of possibility that derives from this fact. This is, I believe, the special responsibility of the world's spiritual traditions. A faith commitment is just that—a faith in those things which as yet exist only as a possibility, coupled with the determined effort to take concrete steps towards making those better, happier, more positive possibilities a reality. I think that in a world such as ours, where there is such a profoundly confusing mixture of positive and negative trends, few things are more important than the work of enhancing people's ability to envisage and sustain their vision of a better world. This ability is, I believe, crucial to conflict prevention and is, again, a responsibility shared by all faith traditions.

Before returning to what I feel are some of the special contributions that Buddhist values can make to conflict prevention, I would like to briefly review what I feel are some of the important forces shaping our world today. In other words, what forces have moved in to fill in this vacuum left by the collapse of the Cold War structures?

The first is globalization, the neo- liberal doctrine of free trade, open markets, with highly fluid flows of capital, information and labor across national boundaries.

This is a highly complex phenomenon, and it is literally redrawing the maps of the globe as we speak. I can't attempt an in-depth analysis of globalization, but would like to just list here a few of the positive and negative impacts globalization can have on people; how it can advance or hinder the interests of human development and human security.

On the positive side, globalization has generated massive new wealth. It presents important new opportunities for economic development and the alleviation of the crushing burden of poverty. For example, there is absolutely no reason why developing countries can't "leapfrog" to environmentally clean technologies and renewable sources of energy. Likewise, new communications technologies have the potential to open up previously unimaginable educational opportunities. On the Internet, a lecture hall of twenty or thirty million is more than possible.

On the negative side, we see increasing disparity within countries, tensions with traditional values. For many people, integration into world markets means a new dependency, and vulnerability to their fluctuations. Many national governments feel that their ability to plot an independent economic course has been undermined by external market forces and their representatives in the IMF, who impose "one-size-fits-all" solutions on problems with unique local roots and implications.

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Nor are these positive and negative aspects distributed equitably. The positive aspects are concentrated among the global elites; the burdens are borne disproportionately by the already marginalized people both in the developed and developing world.

So we see an ironic continuity between the Cold War system and the forces of globalization to the extent that globalization embodies a strong element of structural violence.

The second force that has moved in to fill the vacuum left by the Cold War is that of nationalism.

With the restraint imposed by the Cold War removed, many long suppressed national aspirations have come to the surface. Minorities that have long suffered from discrimination and marginalization have sought to realize their dreams of equality and justice. They have done this by following the model offered by the Western nation-state: the acquisition of their own territorial state. Without digressing too far, I would like here to question the essential nature of the state. In its minimalist definition, to acquire a state means to control a territory and to gain a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within that territory. In reality, of course, it also means to accept a wide range of responsibilities for the rights and welfare of all the people living within that territory. But what I want to stress here is the centrality of violence in traditional understandings of the state. Traditionally, states are acquired and maintained by violence.

And it is this traditional, violent modality of statehood that comes to the fore in so many so-called "'ethnic conflicts," as long-simmering feelings of frustration are exploited by opportunistic politicians who see those feelings as their potential power-base.

Nationalism provides, in miniature, the kind of simplified, dichotomous worldview that characterized the Cold War: us vs. them, good vs. evil, self vs. other. Nor are rising nationalist sentiments unrelated to globalization which has put increased stress on so many societies, making people more open to simplistic solutions that are based on blaming and demonizing others.

The fact is that, although the danger of inter-state wars has receded, the conflicts of the post-war period (most of them within states, between governments and non-state groups and actors) have caused the deaths of an estimated six million people.

Here also, we see there is profound structural violence inherent in nationalism, at least as it is understood and practiced now.

In an important sense, structural violence, which is bound up in the very fabric of societies, is a problem of the human heart.

That is why it is very appropriate that we should discuss it here, at this gathering of the world's religious traditions. Religion has always sought to address the problems of the heart. I believe that it is particularly important that we all strive to address the problem of deep-rooted violence.

In recent years, South Africa has provided an inspiring example of a society seeking to deal courageously with the particularly vicious form of entrenched structural violence of Apartheid. I think that there is much that the world can learn from the dearly bought lessons of our host country.

Now I would like to look at some of the contributions that the Buddhist values and perspectives can offer toward the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

As I have attempted to outline above, the question of identity is at the heart of much of the conflict that plagues our world today. In other words, if we define ourselves by who we

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are not, by a potentially violent contradistinction to the Other, we are likely to lock ourselves into a cycle of conflict.

Also, people who feel that their sense of self, their traditional values and identity, are threatened by the homogenizing forces of globalization, may easily turn to radical nationalist ideology. Conversely, different groups within a country may develop a sense of their own unique history and identity, creating a dichotomous worldview in which the full humanity of other groups is denied. The politics of identity can play an important role in dehumanizing others and justifying violence.

How does Buddhism view identity, and how can the Buddhist understanding of identity contribute to the peaceful and creative resolution of conflict?

Buddhism takes a very flexible view of identity. In reality, we each live a in multi-layered, and constantly evolving scheme of identity and self-definition. For example, I am an Asian, Japanese (a category of identity that did not exist 150 years ago), a man, an academic... The significance of each of these layers of identity is something that takes shape in a process of dialogue and interaction with others, with you, here, in this moment. Buddhism acknowledges this reality; it undermines any attempt to fix or reify the incessant flux of life.

Buddhism is a teaching of inner diversity. It apprehends each human being as an immensely diverse entity, manifesting good and evil, creativity and destructiveness, love and hate, in a moment-by-moment interaction with our surroundings.

What we experience as personality, or identity, are in fact profoundly engraved tendencies or patterns of behavior. The technical term is karma. But this is not fixed or immutable. Likewise, what we know as national character or culture is the sum or accrual of these individual tendencies, reinforced through a shared history. But again, these group identities are not fixed, eternal or unchanging. They are relative, contingent and evolving.

And they are undergirded by our most fundamental identity—that is, our genuine humanity. The technical term is Buddha nature, which might be termed our inherent capacity to sense our oneness with the entirety of being.

Another aspect of the Buddhist outlook that I believe can contribute to conflict resolution is that it is focused firmly on the present and the future. A thorough airing of historical realities, acknowledgment and acceptance of those realities, is absolutely necessary. But what is more important is the recognition that we must live together now and into the future.

Returning to the question of nationalism mentioned earlier, even if a group of people wins independence and no longer has to share a country with others, we all still have to share this same, limited, shrinking Earth. So the future that we all will share should always be our proper focus.

In this sense, the concept of restorative justice, with its essentially present and future orientation, is crucial.

Thus we see that Buddhism does, like many of the great religious traditions, posit the existence of universal values that can serve as the basis for the identity of all people, enabling them to overcome their more superficial differences.

This may strike some people as alarming, especially in light of what I have just spoken about with regard to globalization, which many people perceive as the imposition of culturally specific values as if they were universal.

Buddhism regards the universal as something immanent in each individual. It has no independent existence apart from the specific, diverse realities of the individual. The

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universal can only become manifest through the specific lived realities of unique individuals. It cannot be imposed from without.

Ultimately, Buddhism views all existence as interdependent and interpenetrating. Ultimately, self and other are ontologically necessary to each other. You are necessary in order for me to experience the fullness of my own being, and vice versa. When people can awaken to the reality of our interdependence, we can move beyond a negative stance of tolerance to active appreciation of difference. It is even possible, in this view, to understand conflict as proof of our connectedness, that we share something profound with others. What we share most intensely is a common interest in bringing forth the creative possibilities inherent in this special form of connectedness we are experiencing as "conflict."

What are some of the concrete methodologies that arise from this worldview?

The first is an emphasis on dialogue. The truths gained through dialogue are always warm, living human truths; they are never mere cold, objective facts. As the SGI members in the UK describe the objective of our movement: trust through friendship: peace through trust. I believe that this simple formula can take a long way toward the prevention of conflict.

The president of the SGI and founder of Soka University, Daisaku Ikeda, has been relentless in his pursuit of dialogue for just this reason. Even at the height of the Cold War, he met the leaders of both China and the Soviet Union. When questioned as to why the leader of a religious organization would travel to countries whose policies deny religion, his response was disarmingly simple: there are people there. Both China and the Soviet Union are inhabited by people, people with whom we share a common humanity. Through frank, open exchange, it should be possible to create trust and, eventually, some kind of breakthrough. And I personally believe that Mr. Ikeda's efforts in the field of behind-the-scenes citizen's diplomacy were among those, undertaken by many people of good-will worldwide, that contributed to reducing Cold War tensions.

Interactions with other cultures and traditions can provide opportunities for us to discover the relativity of our identity, and to start to perceive and awaken to the universally human in others.

Cross-cultural encounters, however, must be structured in such a way as to generate real understanding. To give an extreme example, colonialism is a form of cultural encounter predicated on structural violence. The world will continue to struggle to overcome the negative heritage of colonialism for some years to come.

Writing on the issues of peace, Mr. Ikeda has proposed that the following principles guide cultural exchanges and interactions.

1. Gradualism. The experience should not be overwhelming to either party, but should be gradual enough so that ideas and influences can be absorbed and incorporated into existing ideational and value systems.

2. Mutuality. Both parties should approach the interaction with a sense of learning from each other. It should never be a one-way street. This means that exchanges must be rooted in a sense of fundamental respect and equality. We must all open ourselves to the fact that we can learn from other cultures and traditions. The arrogant assumption that one has something to teach but nothing to learn must be abandoned.

Finally, as Director of the Soka University Peace Research Institute, I would like to share

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with you some of our concrete activities to promote intercultural exchange and understanding.

Soka University has one of then largest international exchange programs in Japan. At present we have agreements with sixty-one universities in thirty-eight countries. A total of 201 students from other countries are presently studying at the Tokyo Campus and 120 students from Soka University are studying overseas, including five in Africa. The experience of exposure to other cultures and ways of life has an especially profound and long-lasting impact on young people.

I believe that Japan as a whole has a regrettable tendency to rank cultures, to feel that we have the most to learn from European culture, much less from Asia and Africa. Obviously, this is a serious error. To encourage greater interaction with scholars from throughout the region, Soka University has, since 1986, sponsored a biannual Pacific Basic Symposium. At the most recent one, held in at Thammasat University in Bangkok in 1998, scholars participated from a total of twenty-four countries, including China, Russia, South Korea and the ASEAN countries. Scholars are, of course, only a limited group, but exchanges among them often pave the way for broader interactions between cultures and countries.

We are especially proud of our exchanges with Korea, a country with which Japan has a long history of conflict. Despite the profound cultural debt Japan owes Korea, Japan has repeatedly attacked and invaded Korea. The colonial occupation that lasted from 1910 to 1945 left deep scars on Korea and a deep-rooted distrust and animosity toward Japan. It is a truism that most wars and conflicts occur between neighboring countries. To supplant mistrust with mutual understanding, Soka University has developed an extensive exchange program with Kyung Hee University. At the Seoul International Conference of NGOs this past October, we sponsored a conference that we hope will lead to the eventual creation of a Northeast Asia Regional Peace Forum.

In this paper, I have sought to outline some of the basic principles and outlooks of Buddhism that I think can help to prevent conflicts by uprooting the mistrust, misunderstanding and animosity that underlie them. I have also sought to introduce some of the activities that we have undertaken to put these principles into practice.

I look forward to further exchanges with you as we each explore the values that our different traditions can bring to the question of resolving and preventing conflicts and creating the foundations for lasting peace in the 21st century. ❑

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