

SEEKING THE LIGHT OF PEACE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001— OUR TRAGEDY AND CHALLENGE

The real seeds of peace lie not in lofty ideas but in human understanding and the empathy of ordinary people.

While radicalism is fated by its nature to resort to violence and terror, the most potent weapon in the arsenal of the gradualist—the radical's opposite—is dialogue. We see in Socrates the steadfast commitment to dialogue, to verbal combat from which there is no retreat, and an intensity that is, in some literal sense, death-defying. Such dialogue can only be sustained by resources of spiritual energy and strength far greater and deeper than will be found among those who so quickly turn to violence (p. 40).

Courage and hope are essential; we must never lose these vitally human qualities. Each of us must awaken to our unique mission as protagonists in the transformation of history. And we must unite in a shared human struggle to confront and resolve the pressing problems facing our planet (p. 180).

From For the Sake of Peace by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

The unprecedented terrorist acts of September 11 have changed the world forever. The following pages contain comments of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, friends of the SGI, SGI-USA leaders and others.

SEEKING PEACE THROUGH DIALOGUE

(Excerpts from the September 16–17, 2001, *Seikyo Shimbun*, the organ newspaper of the Soka Gakkai)

Ignorance is a dangerous thing. Without factual knowledge, stereotypes and the imagery they spawn invariably assume a momentum of their own, proliferating out of control.

Just because the perpetrators of the appalling terrorist attacks are believed to be of Arab descent, I pray that people will not immediately jump to the conclusion that all Arabs are dangerous and that Islam encourages violence. It is in no way true that all 1.2 billion Muslims in the world are violent. Even the recent revival of Islam, which is sometimes confused with Islamic fundamentalism, is not a monolithic mass movement. The extremists constitute a very small minority; the vast majority are moderates.

Obviously, every act of terrorism is reprehensible and wrong, regardless of its motive. Yet we absolutely must not treat terrorism as an inevitable consequence of faith in the tenets of Islam.

The Middle East issue is one in which the Palestinian issue, the Gulf War and vested interests in the oil industry and military-industrial complexes have become entangled with other factors in a massive and complicated snarl. To view this as a conflict between good and evil is simplistic and dangerous.

Humankind will never see the light of peace as long as one party seeks to subjugate the other by force, both sides caught in a vicious cycle of reprisals that exacts an eye for an eye, a

life for a life.

It is because we cherish and admire the values and ideals of Western civilization that we urge humanity to resolutely pursue the path of nonviolence that is truly worthy of the civilized world. We insist that a just and equitable international tribunal be established to try those responsible for acts of war and terrorism. We insist that every effort be rendered so as to transform distrust into trust. I believe this is the most effective and fundamental antidote against terrorism and its repugnant worship of violence.

The importance of dialogue cannot be overstated. Nothing must be allowed to impinge upon its free exchange. For unless we put an end to an era dictated by sheer force of arms, the twenty-first century will be no different from the twentieth, and we will regress once more into a century of war.

There are a number of short-term measures that may be implemented to combat violence and terrorism, but the only viable and fundamental long-term solution is education. There is no other alternative but to educate people on the loftiest humanitarian values and views of life in order to establish a foundation of peace and stability for humankind in these times of tumultuous change. What we must strive to bring about is a century upholding the dignity of life, a century predicated upon humanistic education.

A MUSLIM CALLS FOR SANITY

His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is widely recognized as a world leader for peace, human rights and intercultural dialogue. He is also the third president of the Club of Rome and the first recipient of the Gandhi, King, Ikeda Community Builders Prize, which was awarded to him at the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta, on April 8, 2001. We are printing his message to the American people at the time of the terrorist attacks on September 11 to offer a perspective from a Muslim and world-renowned humanitarian.

Not as moderator of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, nor as a Muslim directly descended from the Prophet Muhammad, but as a member of our common human family, I wish to express my deepest condolences to the families, friends and colleagues who have lost loved ones in the heinous attacks in New York and other cities of the United States of America yesterday (September 11, 2001). I further extend my deepest sympathy to the people of the United States of America, to all concerned humanity and to President George W. Bush. The world's faithful stand aghast at the tragedy that has befallen ordinary people of all nations and faiths who live within the United States, and I condemn unequivocally this outrage against humanity.

Respecting the sanctity of life is the cornerstone of all great faiths.

Such acts of extreme violence, in which innocent men, women and children are both the targets and the pawns, are totally unjustifiable. No religious tradition can or will tolerate such behavior and all will loudly condemn it.

Terrorism is by nature indiscriminate, killing civilians of all ages, colors and persuasions; it intimidates individuals and communities the world over; its very existence depends upon its ability to perpetuate fear; it is perhaps the most dreadful tool used to express violence.

The proliferation of terrorist cells operating throughout the world challenges us all,

particularly governments, which will have to address this provocation at all levels in the twenty-first century. A piecemeal approach will not do. Nor will a reaction based upon conjecture as to whom might be responsible. In times like these, it is easy to act immediately and to think things through only once irrevocable decisions have been made.

I therefore urge the United States and the international community to exercise restraint in the face of this daunting challenge. And I urge that this challenge be seen as a global challenge, for terrorism affects all nations, large and small.

I also urge all people of goodwill to recall the wise words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said that hate, like cancer, “begets hate and violence begets violence in a never-ending circle of destruction.”

In the aftermath of this heinous crime, there is the risk that specific communities, such as the Muslims, will face violent repercussions; Islamophobia is not, alas, an uncommon form of xenophobia and intolerance. So it must be emphasized that all ordinary Muslims stand together in condemning such acts of terror. Contemporary Muslim societies have been largely shaped by the recent legacy of their colonial subjugation. Yet, despite their often-grim social reality, ordinary Muslim men, women and children abhor those who would use violence to air their grievances.

Muslims, Christians and Jews have a common shared history. The politics of the Middle East must not be allowed to destroy the natural capacity that people of faith have to live together and to work together. We must always hold fast to the moral values contained in our common heritage despite the conflicting rights and comparable injustices still separating us. Bloodshed is no answer.

Yesterday’s tragic events serve to remind us that the world today is increasingly interconnected. And as borders come to lose their meaning, no nation can afford to isolate itself. We are moving toward a single world with a single agenda and that agenda must be set with a view to fostering reconciliation and understanding.

Although tit-for-tat measures may sometimes appear to be an attractive option in the short-term, we in the Middle East know that they only make a mockery of any and all attempts at real peace—between traditions, between nations, between civilizations, between equals. We ourselves have failed to develop a civilized framework for disagreement.

Sometimes, too, we reject international processes that just might allow us to find a new way forward. This is a mistake and one that must not be repeated in the context of the struggle against terrorism. A common consensus must be reached to strengthen UN Security Council Resolutions encouraging international cooperation against terrorist activities. Our goal will be to tighten the noose around terrorist networks and their supporters. World leaders and religious representatives across the globe must also send out a clear message that terrorism is anathema to any religion and must be isolated from it.

As we contemplate, in the days and weeks ahead, the horrific images of devastation now etched in our memories and share the grief of our neighbors in the United States, we will also search for other ways to reinforce our common humanity and identify our common fears. For make no mistake about it: yesterday’s attacks were aimed at one world composed of many nations and not at one nation alone.

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, September 12, 2001

TERRORISM AND NONVIOLENCE BY ARUN GANDHI, PH.D

In the following response to the September 11 tragedies in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, Dr. Arun Gandhi is speaking on behalf of the M.K.Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, which he founded. We offer his perspective as an expert in the philosophy of nonviolence established by his grandfather, Mohandas K. ("Mahatma") Gandhi.

Understandably, after the tragedy in New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, many have written or called the office to find out what would be an appropriate nonviolent response to such an unbelievably inhuman act of violence.

First, we must understand that nonviolence is not a strategy that we can use in a moment of crisis and discard in times of peace. Nonviolence is about personal attitudes, about becoming the change we wish to see in the world. Because, a nation's collective attitude is based on the attitude of the individual. Nonviolence is about building positive relationships with all human beings — relationships that are based on love, compassion, respect, understanding and appreciation.

Nonviolence is also about not judging a person, as we perceive them to be — that is, a murderer is not born a murderer; a terrorist is not born a terrorist. People become murderers, robbers and terrorists because of circumstances and experiences in life. Killing or confining murders, robbers, terrorists or the like is not going to rid this world of them. For every one we kill or confine, we create another hundred to take their place. What we need to do is to analyze dispassionately what are those circumstances that create such monsters and how can we help eliminate those circumstances, not the monsters. Justice should mean reformation and not revenge.

We saw some people in Iraq and Palestine, and I dare say many other countries, rejoice in the blowing up of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It horrified us, as it should. But, let us not forget that we do the same thing. When Israel bombs the Palestinians we either rejoice or show no compassion. Our attitude is they deserve what they get. When the Palestinians bomb the Israelis we are indignant and condemn them as vermin who need to be eliminated.

Television Has Desensitized Us

We reacted without compassion when we bombed the cities of Iraq. I was among the millions in the United States who sat glued to the television and watched the drama as though it was a made-for-television film. The television had desensitized us. Thousands of innocent men, women and children were being blown to bits and instead of feeling sorry for them, we marveled at the efficiency of our military. For more than ten years we have continued to wreak havoc in Iraq — an estimated 50,000 children die every year because of sanctions that we have imposed — and it hasn't moved us to compassion. All this is done, we are told, because we want to get rid of the Satan called Saddam Hussein.

Now we are getting ready to do this all over again to get rid of another Satan called Osama bin Laden. We will bomb the cities of Afghanistan because they harbor the Satan and in the process we will help create a thousand other bin Ladens.

Some might say, "We don't care what the world thinks of us as long as they respect our

strength.” After all, we have the means to blow this world to pieces since we are the only surviving super-power. Do we want the world to respect us the way school children respect a bully? Is that our role in the world?

If a bully is what we want to be, then we must be prepared to face the same consequences a schoolyard bully faces. On the other hand, we cannot tell the world “leave us alone.” Isolationism is not what this world is built for.

All of this brings us back to the question: How do we respond nonviolently to terrorism?

The consequences of a military response are not very rosy. Many thousands of innocent people will die both here and in the country or countries we attack. Militancy will increase exponentially and, ultimately, we will be faced with another, more pertinent, moral question: what will we gain by destroying half the world? Will we be able to live with a clear conscience?

We must acknowledge our role in helping create monsters in the world and then find ways to contain these monsters without hurting more innocent people and then redefine our role in the world. I think we must move from seeking to be respected for our military strength to being respected for our moral strength.

We need to appreciate that we are in a position to play a powerful role in helping the “other half” of the world attain a better standard of life not by throwing a few crumbs but by significantly involving ourselves in constructive economic programs.

What Is Good for the World

For too long, our foreign policy has been based on “what is good for the United States.” It smacks of selfishness. Our foreign policy should now be based on what is good for the world and how we can do the right thing to help the world become more peaceful.

To those who have lost loved ones in this and other terrorist acts, I say, I share your grief. I am sorry that you have become victims of senseless violence. But let this sad episode not make you vengeful, because no amount of violence and killing is going to bring you inner peace. Anger and hate never do. The memory of those victims who have died in this and other violent incidents around the world will be better preserved and meaningfully commemorated if we all learn to forgive and dedicate our lives to helping create a peaceful, respectful and understanding world.