

**YOUTH STUDY AUGUST 2001  
SECURING A NEW CENTURY  
BY KEN SARAGOSA  
SGI-USA VICE YOUTH LEADER**

**The following is the conclusion of a two-part essay about Nichiren Daishonin's "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," which is written in a Q-and-A format. In it, a "traveler" seeks to understand from the "host" why his country was suffering so much.**

Once there was a traveler who spoke these words in sorrow to his host....Famine and epidemics rage more fiercely than ever, beggars are everywhere in sight, and scenes of death fill our eyes. Corpses pile up in mounds like observation platforms, and dead bodies lie side by side like planks on a bridge...[W]hy is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed?

The host then spoke: I have been brooding alone upon this matter, indignant in my heart, but now that you have come, we can lament together. Let us discuss this question at length...

I have pondered this matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have looked a little at the scriptures for an answer. The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right; to a person, they give their allegiance to evil. This is the reason that the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation and departed together, that sages leave and do not return. And in their stead devils and demons come, and disasters and calamities occur. I cannot keep silent upon this matter. I cannot suppress my fears (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 6-7).

In the Japanese title of this writing, "Rissho Ankoku Ron," the characters for *rissho* literally mean to "establish true." If we think about "what error has been committed," it is—according to the host—that "the people of today all turn their backs upon what is right," and that the truth is not firmly established within society. But the place where Buddhism is to be established, is within the lives of individual people. *Rissho* means to establish the truth within our own life.

Therefore, *rissho* also includes the idea of propagation—of helping individual people establish the truth within their own lives. People may ask why we emphasize propagation so much, but it's because this is exactly what Nichiren Daishonin taught. This is based on his conviction that true improvement in society—real peace and security in the land—can only happen based on the inner transformation of the people.

*Ankoku* means "secure land." The land means the nation and the natural world. Through establishing the truth within our own lives, we impact both the social world—the world of human relationships and politics (friendships, family, community, government)—and also the natural world, the physical environment where we live.

You can see also how it relates to the concept of human revolution.

In the foreword to his novel *The Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda writes: “A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation, and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humanity.”

The basis of every meaningful social change is human revolution, and when a single individual transforms his or her own life for the better, a step is taken to improving a society, a nation, and all humanity.

If people are cynical and feel that how they live their lives doesn’t matter in the grand scheme of things, or that there’s nothing anyone can do to stop violence or war around the world, that view is directly opposite the perspective of Buddhism. The Daishonin’s Buddhism teaches the fundamental relationship between how an individual lives life and how a society functions. Many of us have heard that “faith equals daily life.” What this means is that efforts to change society are firmly based in efforts to develop ourselves from within — to do our own human revolution.

In the host’s answer to the guest’s first question, he says that he, too, has been thinking about why there is so much suffering. He concludes by saying, “I cannot keep silent on the matter. I cannot suppress my fears.”

This is a powerful statement of the Daishonin’s conviction, but it also expresses his sense of responsibility. It’s not enough to believe something yourself; if you think it will help others or help society, then you ought to share it. This sense of mission he expresses here is one of the primary reasons why this writing is so important.

This essay, though written in 13th century Japan, is still meaningful in 21st century America. Though the age and culture is radically different, the relationship between misleading beliefs and problems in society are still relevant. In a way, this is not a particularly radical argument. It just means that we have created the world we live in. If the culture is shallow; if politics are corrupt; if there is no meaningful opportunity for people; and if the environment is being destroyed, we could just chalk it up to some kind of inevitable destiny, or we could say that the situation is what people have made it. We could also say that the situation in the world is one which each one of us can potentially change.

As we seek to apply Buddhist insight and wisdom in our own lives, our society and our communities, it is in accord with the same spirit of the essay “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.” Our efforts to promote education and cultural exchange, or to establish a culture of peace and non-violence — all of this is based on the conviction and passion the Daishonin expresses in this writing.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of examples or situations where how an individual lives his or her life might affect a community or a society?

2. When you hear phrases like “turn their back upon what is right,” does this seem too exclusive to you? Why or why not?