

**TRAILBLAZERS**  
**WE THE PEOPLE...OF EARTH**  
**BY SHAN SERAFIN, SGI-USA JR. HIGH SCHOOL LEADER**

Only recently am I coming to understand how difficult a concept global citizenship is. I used to hear the term and think, “Yeah, duh, global citizen, who wouldn’t want that?” But, I’m starting to see the challenge we face in believing we’re all on the same team.

One of the televised images of the Sept. 11 attack depicted people in the Middle East celebrating the destruction. Their joy seemed an unimaginable expression of evil, an instance of humanity needing obvious correction. I certainly agree; it does need to change. But I believe one crucial step in doing so, for us as Americans, is to realize that such wicked celebration of violence exists here too, here in our homeland.

I was in college during the Persian Gulf War. I remember being with a bunch of friends in my dorm watching CNN broadcast the point-of-view of a missile as it whipped down an elevator shaft and blew up a building. My friends cheered and continued to cheer as they soon saw images of bombs bursting over Baghdad. Here were my college-going buddies, the social exemplars of American youth, applauding human massacre. I see much of the same sentiment now with Afghanistan — in large rallies, in media rhetoric, in intimate conversations.

Nationalism inevitably requires an “us vs. them” mentality. If you put your own nation first, your nation’s welfare takes priority over the welfare of all others, at the expense of all others. When we become nationalistic in a time of violence, like during war, we’re expecting one side to lose — their side — at a time when losing means many innocent people will die.

In being a superpower, we have the potential to inspire as well as set fire. It’s like a playground where someone just threw a rock at the biggest kid in school. Bystanders expect the big kid to yell, “You don’t mess with me!” and trounce the perpetrator. But what if this same big kid, who holds the powerful status to which other kids aspire, approached the rock thrower and talked with him? The bystanders would then, through example, behold a new ideal — the power of dialogue. I feel there’s a parallel: the countries in the current world theater are scrutinizing American actions. Many of them are entrenched in equally deadly situations, poised for bloodshed. It would be a powerful statement if we took a nonviolent course of action, doing it at a time when many people of the world consider violent retaliation justifiable.

I asked SGI-USA Women’s Leader Matilda Buck if she thought terrorism could really be affected by a grass-roots Victory Over Violence campaign. She responded with a simple, profound thought — terrorism is itself a grass-roots movement; so, yes, it could be affected by a grass-roots campaign.

Skillfully talking with people about this subject has been hard for me. There are legitimate emotions involved, which require sensitivity and there is a wealth of history and insight I still don’t have. But, there are great resources to help. I remind myself that studying just one of SGI President Ikeda’s many peace proposals will well equip me to sit in a living room with a few friends and rationalize a Buddhist course of action. This way I can, in a small but definite way, advance our civilization toward being a world of global citizens.