

DIALOGUES ON PEACE SCIENCE EXISTS FOR THE SAKE OF PEOPLE

‘The basis for peace lies in ordinary people becoming wise and not condoning the selfishness of leaders who are only concerned with promoting the interests of a select group of countries.’

On Nov. 17, 2000, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts EASA awarded SGI President Ikeda its Medal of Merit in recognition of his achievements in promoting the spirit of tolerance and contributing to world peace. The medal was presented by EASA President Felix Unger at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Shinanomachi, Tokyo. The event was attended by SGI representatives from six countries and territories.

The EASA was founded in 1990 by Dr. Unger together with Franz Kardinal König and Nikolaus Lobkowitz— current EASA honorary president and vice president, respectively— as a think tank with the goal of contributing to positive change in European culture, by repositioning the sciences and the arts in an integrative and interdisciplinary way. The academy brings together experts in a wide variety of fields to find practical solutions to international issues and promote global harmony, and its members include philosophers, artists, physicians, scientists, doctors, lawyers, sociologists, educators, ecologists, politicians, writers, journalists and grass-roots activists. It has some 1,200 members in 56 countries in Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East. Among the academy’s patrons are King Juan Carlos I of Spain, HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, former Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg, President Johannes Rau of Germany, President Árpád Göncz of Hungary, President Václav Havel of the Czech Republic and President Romano Prodi of the European Commission.

President Ikeda was appointed an honorary senator of the academy in 1997. Other leaders who share this distinction include former Austrian Prime Minister Franz Vranitzky, former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and former European Commission President Jacques Santer. Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is an honorary EASA member.

The academy also actively pursues interfaith dialogue in the belief that religion, as the foundation of culture, has a vital role to play in advancing peace and human prosperity. In addition to such dialogue between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, EASA has conducted six dialogues between Buddhist and Christian faiths from 1997 to 2000, choosing the SGI as one of the groups to represent Buddhism. During a symposium in October 1999, Dr. Eugen Biser, a leading Christian theologian (professor at the University of Munich and dean of World Religion at EASA), said that the discussion had given him an entirely new appreciation of Buddhism as a teaching with a profound philosophical side.

In his speech at the presentation ceremony, Dr. Unger offered his congratulations on the Soka Gakkai’s 70th anniversary. He praised President Ikeda’s accomplishments in cultivating a spirit of tolerance in the world through interfaith dialogue and his efforts to contribute to global harmony.

The SGI leader delivered an acceptance speech, in which he said that tolerance must be the foundation of humankind in the 21st century. Explaining that this quality is also expressed in Buddhism by the word compassion, he pledged to continue working to spread the spirit of tolerance worldwide.

Following the presentation, Mr. Ikeda held a discussion with Dr. Unger, who is also a

prominent heart surgeon, on health, education, life and death, and other topics. The Austrian doctor, formerly a professor of medicine at the Austria's University of Innsbruck, currently serves as head of the Department of Cardiac Surgery at Salzburg State Hospital and as chairman of Austria's Institute of Cardiac Surgery.

President Ikeda began by asking what foods are beneficial for the heart. Dr. Unger stressed the importance of eating a well-balanced diet, recommending that one avoid eating large servings of red meat and ensure that one's diet also includes fish, fruit, grains and vegetables. Drinking a glass of wine is also fine, he said. He emphasized, however, that balance is important and that eating and drinking to excess can lead to illness. In response to a question on the best exercise for cardiac health, Dr. Unger suggested walking every day, and using stairs rather than elevators whenever possible—something that he makes a point of doing. The heart surgeon also said that morning is the best time of day to exercise, because it improves circulation. Cardiovascular exercise helps us better tolerate daytime stress, he added. Dr. Unger noted that walking is also a good way of relieving stress that is beneficial to the heart, as is getting sufficient sleep and having loving relationships.

Concurring that these guidelines contain important truths, President Ikeda then asked his guest what kind of factors contribute to longevity. Dr. Unger explained that statistically someone who reaches 60 stands a good chance of living to a ripe old age. In addition to our genes, he commented, staying active both mentally and physically also plays a major role in longevity. The SGI leader asked whether such spiritual activities as faith and belief also have an impact on longevity. Dr. Unger replied in the affirmative, saying that faith and belief are important because they provide stability in our lives and liberate us from fear. Asked about the ideal life span of human beings, Dr. Unger said that, all other things being equal, he thought people could live to 120. He explained that after 120 years human cells seem to lose their regenerative powers. Mr. Ikeda noted that Buddhism concurs in the view that 120 years is the natural span of human life.

The SGI leader next asked his guest about the feasibility of organ transplants from animals into humans, noting that there is currently considerable debate on the subject of transplanting hearts from pigs into human beings. Dr. Unger said he is skeptical on the subject, given the many difficult problems involved. He pointed out, for example, that when tissue is transplanted from a different species there is a high risk that viruses endemic to the donor animal will also be introduced to the recipient. Asked about advances in artificial heart technology, Dr. Unger predicted that in the future artificial hearts would become as commonly used as pacemakers are today.

Relating that there have been a number of incidents in Japan recently where people have died as a result of medical malpractice, President Ikeda asked the physician about his thoughts on the best ways of preventing such accidents from occurring. Dr. Unger replied that since physicians are only human, there is always a danger that they can make an error. For that reason, when a mistake occurs it is important to carefully investigate the circumstances and determine the cause, he said. He noted that massive amounts of paperwork and hospital bureaucracy, combined with an over-reliance on computers, all tend to reduce the amount of time available for doctors to spend with patients.

Turning to the topic of brain death, the SGI leader observed that opinion around the world is divided on whether cessation of neural activity should be recognized as the death of a person. And he asked his guest about his view on the matter. Dr. Unger explained that during the 19th century, the appearance of black spots on the back was the standard for

judging death. Later, for a period of about 50 years, the moment when the heart ceased activity, as displayed on an electrocardiogram, was regarded as constituting death. Today, he continued, the standard of brain death has been introduced, adding that it continues to be a very important issue.

Dr. Unger noted that the French word *coma* indicates a comatose state, while the term *coma dépassé* describes an excessive comatose state. In such a state, the brain ceases to function normally, body temperature falls, and while the heart may continue beating, there is a decline in circulation, so that the nails turn bluish black. Somewhere along the line this state came to be called “brain death” in English, Dr. Unger said, a term that he believes is a mistranslation. He added that this is a tragedy, because due to the use of the term “brain death,” people regard someone in a severe comatose state as being dead and discontinue intensive care and life-support systems that would otherwise have been continued in the past. He proposed that instead of “brain death,” it should perhaps be termed a “permanent comatose state.” At the very least, he asserted that the existence of such a state should be recognized.

President Ikeda noted that all physicians take what is known as the Hippocratic Oath, named after the Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, as their fundamental ethical guide. He explained that Buddhism teaches principles of medical ethics through the example of Jivaka, a skilled physician of ancient India who was also a devout Buddhist. He then asked his guest what kind of person, in his opinion, makes an ideal physician.

Dr. Unger remarked that what the medical field needs are people who are genuine physicians not merely skilled medical technicians. His definition of a physician, he explained, is a doctor who has a well-rounded character, rich humanity and balanced judgment. He went on to say that he felt the Hippocratic Oath—which includes injunctions to relieve suffering, give care and cure disease—to be a universal ethical foundation.

The SGI leader then turned the conversation to the activities of EASA and the areas that the academy plans to pursue in particular in the 21st century. Dr. Unger replied that it would focus on three main pivots: 1) the relationship between human beings and nature; 2) the relationship between human beings themselves; and 3) the relationship between human beings and spirituality. Only when these three aspects are harmonized, he asserted, can we hope to achieve true stability. In this respect, he said the academy would continue to pursue its interdisciplinary approach. President Ikeda remarked that Dr. Unger’s insight resonates with the Buddhist principle of three thousand realms in a single life-moment. He explained that the three areas that the doctor cited also correspond to the three realms of the environment, living beings, and the five components in Buddhism.

Dr. Unger further remarked that there is need for people to unite across borders, noting that human life transcends national boundaries. While mathematically one plus one equals two, he noted, in life it is possible to make one plus one equal three. The doctor also stressed the importance of reevaluating science in terms of how it can contribute to humanity and of broadening our outlook toward science. President Ikeda agreed, saying that there is an urgent need to correct the backward notion that people somehow exist for the sake of science, when the opposite should be true.

As their conversation drew to a close, Dr. Unger frankly asked the SGI leader whether the world would become a more peaceful place. President Ikeda responded that the basis for peace lies in ordinary people becoming wise and not condoning the selfishness of leaders who are only concerned with promoting the interests of a select group of countries. To achieve this, he stressed, education and a spirit of tolerance are essential.