HOW DOES BUDDHISM VIEW TERRORISM?
BY JEFF KRIGER
SGI-USA VICE STUDY DEPARTMENT LEADER

What is the perspective of Buddhism on terrorism or man-made tragedies such as we all witnessed on Sept. 11?

Most everyone experienced deep shock, outrage and sadness upon witnessing this wanton destruction of human life. As Buddhists, and human beings, we cannot avoid sharing the grief and anguish of all Americans and people throughout the world at this tragic loss of life.

Buddhism has the highest regard for life itself. The supreme Law of the universe is innate and intrinsic to human life, and to destroy such life is a profound affront to this Law. This is why, since its inception, Buddhism has strictly prohibited the taking of life. This prohibition is intended not only to protect potential victims of violence but also potential perpetrators from sowing the seeds of their own enduring misery. The Buddhist Law of causality makes clear that to harm another is to harm oneself.

Shakyamuni Buddha was no stranger to the horrors of terrorism. Not only was he personally targeted for death by the jealous Devadatta and others, his entire clan, the Shakyas of the city of Kapilavastu, became victims of genocide at the hands of a neighboring kingdom.

The Buddha struggled tenaciously and bravely to prevent violence, trying repeatedly to dissuade rulers from waging war on neighboring kingdoms.

Shakyamuni attributed the cause of violence to an invisible "arrow of division" piercing people's hearts.

That is to say, when we view others as separate and apart from ourselves, as different or lesser, we become susceptible to committing violence against them. At the same time, we wound our own hearts. Buddhism expounds the law of dependent origination, that all things and beings are mutually linked, intrinsically interdependent. It also expounds the principle of nonsubstantiality, that nothing has substance in and of itself, or is isolated from its surroundings. Our true substance and identity exist only among the connective threads that tie us to all people.

From this perspective, any act of violence or malicious discrimination toward another is an act of violence against oneself. Any terrorist is his own ultimate victim, if not immediately, then certainly in the long term.

Recently, the United States was subject to an attack of unprecedented viciousness. Because of our connection to the deceased and injured, or to their grieving loved ones and friends, we all hurt. However, it is not merely our bond as fellow Americans that connects us — certainly, not all the victims were American citizens. It is our shared humanity.

If we allow this horrendous act, however reprehensible, to drive an "arrow of division" into our own hearts, then we become true victims of terrorism. This arrow may already have toppled some. Insinuations that we should mount a "war on Islam," calls for the use of nuclear weapons, for war waged with disregard for the lives of civilians, and for intensified "racial profiling" may well be symptoms of this wound. Criminal acts against innocent individuals are a clear malignant outgrowth of a spirit damaged by this arrow of division. They arise from the same source as the acts of the terrorist, or any grave injustice.

Buddhism is a pacifist faith, but does not advocate passiveness. Perpetrators of

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terrorism should be carefully identified and held accountable for their actions. Furthermore, the wisest course of action must be pursued to prevent a repetition of such horror. On a more essential level, however, we need to tenaciously challenge and change the kind of hatred and distorted thinking that led to this tragedy.

In his book *For the Sake of Peace*, SGI President Ikeda writes: "The real seeds of peace lie not only 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. 41).

Many held Shakyamuni deeply in awe because he was successful in subduing, pacifying and converting through dialogue the vicious murderer Angulimala, who wore a necklace of fingers taken from his nearly 1,000 victims.

We may not be successful in "converting" all of the most vengeful and brutal people on the planet to a humane perspective. We can, however, work to forge strong solidarity among all people who value life based on our shared humanity. This solidarity, which transcends differences in race, culture or religion, can serve as a fortress against future violence, terror and war. Fostering division, on the other hand, plants the seeds for future bloodshed.

Terrorism aims to create fear and hopelessness. The purpose of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is to awaken in us profound hope and courage. To pray to do this ourselves, and to reach out to others and help them do the same, is our most basic course of action as Buddhists.

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