Special Series:

The Humanist Principle—Compassion and Tolerance (1)

Daisaku Ikeda
Felix Unger

Preparations are now underway for the publication of dialogues between Daisaku Ikeda, President of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), and Felix Unger, President of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. They met three times, in 1997, 2000 and 2001, and since then they have exchanged opinions in letters and other correspondence. In the first dialogue, they touch on the progression of violence in the world, and speak of the need to build ways, within the spirit, to overcome all possible confrontations in order for humans, as citizens of the earth, to coexist. In future, as well, they will confront many topics dealing with modern civilization, on themes such as "A Spirit of Tolerance and Mercy," "Religion and Humanity," "Creation of a Century of Peace," "Space, Earth, and Humanity," and "Life and the Ethics of Life," during which they will surely talk about how to raise the flag of humanism.

Dialogue and the Fate of the Earth

Ikeda: Is it the hard power of military and economic might or the soft power of dialogue that brings peace and security? The choice between the two has been sharply debated since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Has the globalization of dialogue kept pace with the rapid systemization and globalization of the economy and of communications? In the world today direct and structural violence trigger many problems for humanity. Some time ago, at Soka University, you made a highly instructive comment: "Our ability to engage in dialogue will determine the further fate of this Earth."

Never before have sincere intercultural and inter-religion dialogues been as necessary as they are now. I shall be supremely happy if this dialogue with you, president of the institute of leading thinkers called the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, contributes to the globalization of dialogue.

Unger: To that end, I intend to give my best to the project.

Today, with the incursion of materialistic value criteria, many religions are losing their shared traditional values. The globalization you mention gives impetus to the process. As the value put on life diminishes, slaughter becomes more common. On the one hand, religion declines; on the other, materialism grows more prevalent. Halting this trend requires us to recall values inherited from the distant past.

Ikeda: I see what you mean. As Lev N. Tolstoy said, recognition of the sacredness of every individual life is the first and only basis of all morality. Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions share fundamental ethical prohibitions against killing. To make the twenty-first a century free of violence and killing we must make such prohibitions the foundation of global ethics. In your speech at Soka University, you said, "Inter-religion dialogues must form the axis of all intercultural dialogue."

Unger: Soka Gakkai International, with which I have had repeated contacts for more then ten years, is a powerful Buddhist organization seeking to define reasonable goals for humanity from the Buddhist tradition and apply them to the real world.

This tradition is exemplified in you, Mr. Ikeda. Within the frame of enormous theological, organizational, and publication abilities, you strive to express the value of humanity in our world. Through international cultural exchanges, you have transmitted the message of peace with startling force. As we begin this dialogue, I should like to ask what has motivated you personally.

Removing Suffering and Bestowing Joy

Ikeda: Whether direct or structural, violence causes great suffering. Instead of merely contemplating others' suffering, we must rise up and practice the Buddhist doctrine of "removing suffering and bestowing joy" (*bakku yoraku* in Japanese). Sympathetic action of this kind constitutes the whole spirit of Mahayana Buddhism. The great Japanese priest and philosopher Nichiren Daishonin (1222-82), whom we of Soka Gakkai revere, taught this spirit in his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" (*Rissho Ankoku Ron*). Selfishly ignoring the misery the threat of violence causes others cannot lead to salvation of one's own soul.

In the very midst of World War II, two Japanese men strove to act on the basis of the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. They were Tsunesaburo

Makiguchi, first president of Soka Gakkai, and Josei Toda, second president and my own direct mentor. Militarist authorities threw Mr. Makiguchi in prison, where he died. Mr. Toda, too, was imprisoned but survived to carry on Mr. Makiguchi's spirit in the struggle for peace. I am Mr. Toda's spiritual heir.

Mr. Toda longed to eliminate misery from the world. Working to realize his goal is my whole life. In brief, my work for peace is first a religious mission, second an attempt to fulfill a vow made to my mentor, and third the result of my own war experiences.

War as Satanic Folly

Ikeda: During World War II, evil ultra-nationalism shattered the peace of our family. We lost our home in air raids, and my oldest brother died at the front. Though a courageous woman, my mother was crushed by news of his death. Later, when his ashes were returned to us, she sat holding the container, her shoulders shaking in grief. I shall always remember the sight. At an early age, I learned that, no matter how it may be papered over with lies, war is foolish, hideous misery.

Unger: The founders of Soka Gakkai worked actively for peace during World War II and incurred personal suffering and loss of freedom. From this starting point, Soka Gakkai has earnestly engaged in working for a world free of nuclear weapons. I have the greatest respect for that work.

Ikeda: I am grateful for your understanding. Mr. Toda's resolution to prohibit nuclear arms and his insistence that anything threatening our innate right to life is evil and satanic constitute his testament to us. Nuclear weapons have the power to destroy all life—the human race and the whole ecological system. We must make all humanity aware of this evil. Part of our work to this end is the exhibition entitled "Nuclear Arms-Threat to Our World," which we have held in 23 nations and 38 cities, including Vienna, the capital of your homeland. In promoting cultural exchanges we have held several other exhibitions in Vienna: "Treasures of Japanese Art;" "The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road;" and "Dialogue with Nature," an exhibition of my own photographs, supported—to my honor—by your academy. I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude again.

Peaceful Coexistence with Nature

Unger: Though I do not know your intentions precisely, this is how I interpret your photographic goals. Man is to be regarded as a member of nature and is on the right road only when grounded in nature. In your landscape photographs, you reveal this symbolically in a fascinating way—pristine nature, cultivated nature, and completely manmade gardens. Your images show not only the possibility of peaceful coexistence with nature, but also the foundation in nature for peaceful human togetherness.

In spite of this possibility, however, man is capable of dominating nature and destroying the basis of life. In your book *LIFE: An Enigma, a Precious Jewel*, you explain this from the standpoint of Buddhist tradition.

Ikeda: Yes. In that book I examine relations between nature and humanity. In the Buddhist view, the fundamental law, which may be called the cosmic force of life, manifests itself in all individual life forms—humanity, nonhuman nature, and the stars of the firmament. Not mere isolated parts, individual life forms are integrated with the cosmic life force. In other words, the part is the whole, and the whole is the part. Human beings and nonhuman nature are integrated parts of the same cosmic life force and, because they are unique in the individual sense and whole in the symbiotic, cosmic sense, they are irrevocably integrated with each other. Therefore, to destroy nonhuman nature is to destroy humanity. Buddhism cannot countenance human destruction of nonhuman nature or its exploitation to satisfy selfish greed. Furthermore, Buddhists regard environmental devastation, social devastation in the form of rampant violence and extreme poverty, and spiritual devastation in the form of hypertrophic egoism as having a common root deep in the cosmic life force.

Although our spiritual traditions differ, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, which you founded with the support of European leaders and intellectuals, shares the SGI outlook on various issues. By means of intercultural and inter-religion dialogues on the basis of traditional Christian values, the academy attempts to restructure relations between human beings and the spirit, society, and nonhuman nature. I am proud to play a part in the academy's noble mission as an honorary senator.

Now permit me to ask you a few questions. You are the president of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts and a busy cardiac sur-

geon. I imagine that certain people who instructed you either in your field of learning or in private life have earned your profound respect. Who are some of them?

Good Teachers

Unger: Two of my uncles were good teachers who exerted a strong influence on me from the time when I was small. One was Count Karl von Arco, a representative of one of the oldest families in Austria. He taught me how to think in all instances and how to act when in difficulty. The other was Professor Gernot Eder, who taught me scientific, analytical, metaphysical, and broadly inclusive thought. Later, I enjoyed the guidance of a wonderful cardiologist, Prof. Kurt Polzer, who was a fatherly mentor to me.

Ikeda: Those must have been splendid relationships. I can see that your youth was rich with intellectual development. Your father was a famous painter and the rector of the University of Applied Arts Vienna [Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Wien]. What are your most vivid recollections of him? Which of the lessons you learned from your mother remain most firmly fixed in your heart?

Unger: I appreciate your asking about my late parents. My father was a painter with a very keen eye. He could accurately capture a landscape and render it in splendid colors—as you do in your photographs. My wonderful mother taught me having no fear in doing things and to think in metaphysical concepts. Her father was an important Austrian painter.

Ikeda: Thank you for the compliment. Your parents lived through both world wars and through the turbulent times of Hitler's *Anschluss*, the merging of Germany and Austria.

Unger: Yes, they were still very young at the time of the *Anschluss*. Father had to go to war, but they survived the fires of the conflict.

My father spoke clearly, extremely accurately, and honestly. From him I learned the importance of speaking correctly and justly in troubled times like the present. I imagine he learned this from his own father, who was an architectural engineer. My family taught me that money is not everything and that living justly is important. A cheerful, broad-minded, optimistic person, mother taught me never to be afraid. No matter what problems she encountered, she would always say, "It's nothing!

There's bound to be a solution!"

Ikeda: Your parents were wonderful people, fine philosophers who taught you the way to justice and happiness. I sense the great light of faith in them. True education consists in cultivating minds willing to struggle for the sake of justice.

Founded fourteen years ago, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts has grown into an organization of 1,200 intellectuals from more than 50 countries in Europe, North and South America, the Middle East, and Asia. King Juan Carlos of Spain is a protector, and Václav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic, is a honorary senator, and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, former president of the Soviet Union, is a honorary member. I have had the honor of meeting all these people. Traditional academies exist all over Europe. Why did you decide to establish a new kind of academy?

The Harmonious Triangle

Unger: The European Academy of Sciences and Arts was founded in response to the contemporary nexus of problems. We founders realized that the image of science has shifted away from the human and has become lopsidedly material. We felt that, as materialism gets the upper hand in science and society, humanity diverges from its essential qualities and degenerates metaphysically, thus threatening to spoil human nature. Concern for this situation motivated the founding of the academy.

The natural sciences are founded on humanity. The tendency towards materialism denies their spiritual aspects. Something similar occurs in the field of economics. Instead of serving human needs—including spiritual needs—science becomes independent and dominates humanity. Our academy views science from another standpoint.

Human relations consist in a harmonious, manageable triangle made up of relations with nature, relations among human beings, and relations with the spiritual. These three orient human existence and facilitate problem solving. All three are essential, and none must be overstressed. Sciences that take nature as their theme—natural sciences and technological disciplines—require social and spiritual supplementation. The same is true for sciences that investigate relations among human beings—from social sciences and linguistics to law, economics, and politics. Psychology and medicine build a bridge between natural and spiritual, social sciences and connect them with the purely spiritual fields of

philosophy, art, and religion.

Ikeda: At Soka University, you said in your speech, "We must enable the sciences to work together to form a network encompassing all of life....It is imperative for science to acquire an all-disciplinary philosophy." In other words, human beings must occupy the center of your harmonious triangle of natural science, social science, and the humanities. In different terms, human beings do not exist for the sake of science; science exists for the sake of human beings. What concrete actions is your academy taking to deal with this issue?

Health Care and the Sustainable Society

Unger: The academy is planning various projects for the present and the next few years in connection with problems of a sustainable society and investigations of water resources.

One of our big projects is the Institute of Medicine. We think that, in Europe, increasingly brutal capitalism, preposterous public authorities, bureaucratization of hospitals, and inept politics have created a two-class system of medical care. People with money can afford medical care; those without must look out for themselves. As a doctor, I find this set of circumstances intolerable. We have founded the Institute of Medicine in the hope of working together with the European Parliament and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to develop a new health-care system. We must not be satisfied with pragmatic—not to say, superficial—correctives but must look deeper into the problem. It is clear to all my colleagues at the academy that contemporary medicine has miscalculated the nature of its own existence.

Ikeda: In what connection?

Unger: Its strong inclination towards the natural sciences has caused medicine unintentionally to regard patients as peculiar cases describable in natural-scientific terms. The patient becomes an anomaly that should be dealt with like other social anomalies, for instance, criminality. This invites the involvement of the authorities, since the patient as anomaly is a cost factor and cost factors must be minimized. Thus the patient becomes a mere object of medical and state action, and medicine acquires a meaning the opposite of its true one, which is to serve the interests of the patient and his or her good health exclusively.

Ikeda: Yes, you are saying that doctors are losing sight of the fundamental point that medicine exists for the sake of the patient. They subdivide fields of research and adopt the reductionist viewpoint that accumulated research in limited areas will provide them with a holistic view. Observable in Western medicine, this phenomenon can be seen in all the natural sciences. Studying only specific parts, losing sight of the patient as a whole, and considering patients not as human beings but as cases—anomalies, as you put it—may be in a sense inevitable since modern Western medicine developed within the framework of the natural sciences. But such an approach tends to neglect the living human being.

In a dialogue we conducted, the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee said that it seems hardly possible for anyone to be a spiritually and ethically adequate physician unless he [she] has some religious or philosophical view of, and attitude towards, human life and towards the universe in which mankind finds itself.[1] Reforming medicine cannot be accomplished only within the medical field. It requires the help of religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, and sociology.

Medicine directly concerns the totality of human life. That is why, first of all, we must make sure it includes the triangle your academy advocates: natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities.

Science and Religion Seeking Common Denominators

Unger: Another related activity of our academy is the attempt to find common fundamental elements among fields of learning. Our philosophers and natural scientists willingly affirm this undertaking. Finding common denominators is the noblest task of science. As the science that implies the most radical contemporary social, ethical, and anthropological consequences, genetic technology provides especially powerful suggestions. As a doctor, I am occupied with the problem of when life begins and ends. In this issue, genetic technology plays a part.

Ikeda: Both Shakyamuni and Jesus compared their roles as saviors with that of a physician. The Buddhist scriptures speak of Shakyamuni as the Great Healer; that is, a physician to life itself. Treating the malfunctioning part is not enough to cure the illness. Medicine alone cannot answer questions about the beginning and end of life, or life and death. The assistance of religion is needed. Dialogue between medical science and religion is indispensable to addressing the issue of genetic engineering and life ethics. Later I should like to refer to your great experience as a cardiac surgeon in this connection.

Unger: Today, as information increases and is transmitted increasingly rapidly, dialogue becomes more essential than ever before. Whether they like it or not—whether they know it or not—cultures are integrated. And this makes possible more intense exchanges. The exciting thing about intercontinental discussions is the way they enable us to compare our own traditional ways of thinking with those of other peoples. Serious comparisons of this kind always reveal more similarities than differences.

Ikeda: Through dialogue, people brought up in different philosophical traditions discover more shared elements than differences.

The same is true of inter-religion dialogue. With their long histories, world religions share many fundamental elements. In April 2002, I met with Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia and leader of the largest Indonesian Islamic organization. We agreed that all religions exist for the sake of human happiness and that, without compromising their doctrines, all religions should cooperate in the name of peace.

Unger: Yes. Though they differ on some points, all religions share the same hope of peace for humanity.

Minimal Genetic Difference

Ikeda: At the United Nations millennium summit in the fall of 2000, President Wahid said that dialogue gives human faces to people of different ethnicities, cultures, and historical backgrounds. He added that dialogue propagates shared values and opens the way to the realization of harmony and a global peace culture.

Dialogue is the best way to help us discover our common humanity and return to universal human values.

Unger: As a doctor, I realize that human beings throughout the world are amazingly similar physiologically. On this physiology we impose violent cultural and religious differences. But given our bodily similarities, are we not fooling ourselves when we define cultural and religious differences as basic conflicts?

Ikeda: Physiological identity is one human equality that transcends race and ethnic group. Genetic technology has recently shown that individual differences in human DNA disposition amount to no more than 0.1 percent. What is more, as the world-renowned Indian agronomist and presi-

dent of the Pugwash Conferences M.S. Swaminathan insists, human beings and plants closely resemble each other genetically. In short, modern genetics confirms the oneness of all life on Earth.

Unger: Scientific knowledge suggests that we should seek common elements and resemblances on different continents and in different cultures and religions.

Ikeda: For three years, beginning in 1997, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts has conducted six symposia on the theme "Buddhist-Christian Dialogues." In response to your request, SGI has participated in them.

Unger: In spite of differences in systems of thought like that between Buddhist wisdom and Christian revelation, these six symposia were successful in ascertaining common points between the two religions that can be applied toward triumphing over problems concerning all humankind. We have to build bridges.

Happiness Based on the Sanctity of Life

Ikeda: I agree with you that Christianity and Buddhism share many things in common. First, both are salvationist religions. Buddhist compassion and Christian love both seek the salvation of humanity. The mission of Buddhism is the salvation of humankind through compassion derived from the universal force of life and made manifest in human life. In the face of oppression, Shakyamuni and his disciples traveled the breadth of India saving the ordinary people.

Unger: Christianity teaches the love of God and strives to inculcate neighborly love. Jesus Christ and his disciples suffered oppression and hardship as they taught the people. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

Ikeda: Second, both Christianity and Buddhism indicate ways of shedding light on human suffering and leading people to true happiness. Buddhism identifies fundamental, innate ignorance of the source of life as the basic cause of suffering. Christianity sees original sin as the source of all unhappiness. Both posit an eternal realm where the causes of suffering will be exposed and true happiness will be attained.

Unger: As you point out, though their philosophical grounds for explaining it differ, both Christianity and Buddhism focus on the way through life: birth, aging, illness, and death.

Ikeda: Their third shared characteristic is teaching the dignity of humanity and of life on the basis of the sacred. Buddhism teaches that the transcendent cosmic force of life is manifest in each individual life in the form of the Buddha nature. The dignity of life and of humanity derives from the manifestation of that nature. In the world civilization of the future, these dignities must become the mainstays of ethics and value criteria.

Unger: In the Christian view, human dignity derives from our having been created in God's image. In spite of their differences, Buddhism and Christianity converge on certain points transcending current problems, for instance, human rights, value systems, and the global environment.

Buddhism the Bridge between Christianity and Islam

Ikeda: When we met in July, 2001, you proposed expanding the Buddhist-Christian Dialogues to include all four of the major religions: those two plus Judaism and Islam. I was in complete agreement. SGI representatives took part in the first of the expanded conferences scheduled for September 15, 2001, shortly after the terrorist attacks on the United States.

Unger: Originally the conference theme was to have been life ethics. But at the beginning of the meeting, I said that the attacks perpetrated four days earlier increased the danger of global conflict. Against the background of this emergency, I proposed that the representatives of the four religions consider innate human destructiveness and aggressiveness. They did so. And, after lively debate, they reached a consensus to the effect that violent military retribution must be avoided and that discussion is the way to halt war.

Ikeda: I am grateful for the wise leadership you demonstrated at that time. I understand that the theologian and a journalist Dr. Norbert Göttler expressed the opinion that Buddhism can bridge the gap between Christianity and Islam. Repeated in 2002 and 2003, these conferences among the four great religions have produced significant positive results.

Unger: Through our discussion, we earnestly hope to show that dialogue and mutual cooperation among all religions is both possible and desired by all humanity. Dialogues between Christianity and Buddhism and among the four great religions have inspired my determination to join you in continuing to speak out for the dignity of life, respect for humanity, and peace.

Tolerance as a Universal Duty

Ikeda: In the spirit of inter-religion dialogue, in January 2002, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts issued its Tolerance Charter, which I should now like to discuss. It proclaims tolerance to be the duty of all people. How did the document evolve?

Unger: Our Tolerance Charter can be understood as having evolved from the multi-disciplinary and international nature of the academy. Our many religious dialogues have shown living together to be both a virtue and a pressing demand. The desire to fulfill it led to the creation of a council to formulate the charter as representing our senate and speaking for the academy. For us, it has great cultural significance.

Ikeda: The preamble of our SGI charter, enacted in November 1995, proclaims our dedication to the ideal of global citizenship, the spirit of tolerance, and respect for human rights. All three concepts are founded on humanism. In addition it states our intention of making positive contributions to society by addressing problem-solution through nonviolent dialogue. Tolerance is one of its main pillars. The succeeding ten articles of the main text set forth goals and principles.

Unger: Our Tolerance Charter has two parts: the preamble and six program definitions. We formulated the preamble from social circumstances and conditions. It has three parts.

Ikeda: The Tolerance Charter states that everyone must respect different ways of living and recognize them as valuable. I put this injunction into practice by repeatedly engaging in and publishing dialogues conducted with people of diverse religious backgrounds: Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and so on.

Unger: It describes human life as constantly changing and sees the speed and scale of change as characteristic of our time. It adds the

injunction to employ a tolerant culture to counter the diverse forms of intolerance we observe. Growing individualization leads many people to rate their own lives as absolute and to be unsympathetic with others. The family ought to function as the stable nucleus of human society. But, imperiled, it is increasingly incapable of doing so. We remind all official personages of their responsibility to make tolerance valid as a social good.

I wonder if the SGI preamble does not restrict itself too much to the humanistic aspects of Buddhism. We direct our claim to all peoples alike, no matter what their religious or political affiliations.

Tolerance Defined

Ikeda: The SGI Charter rests firmly on the Buddhist goal of developing universal humanity. Our membership comes from 190 countries and regions and transcends national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. The diverse traditions of ethnicity, culture, and religion in the regions where we are active may be either tolerant or intolerant. Through the stimulus of open dialogue we strive to encourage benevolent tolerance. We believe that the culture of dialogue provides the soil in which universal humanity can bloom in diverse forms. The SGI Charter expresses our vow as Buddhists to encourage peace and symbiosis.

Unger: The preamble of the Tolerance Charter is followed by six definitions.

> Tolerance is the individual readiness to stand up for the dignity of any other human being.
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> Tolerance is part of a value system that emphasizes human dignity.
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> Tolerance requires a person's ability to understand other people and to respect different behaviour.
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> Tolerance is based on a self-confident point of view.
>
> Tolerance serves as a protector of dignity and freedom of each human being within in his or her own cultural environment.
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> The guaranty and continuing development of tolerance should be considered our common duty and the fundamental element of any education.

Ikeda: I agree totally with the spirit of tolerance set forth in these definitions. The following articles demonstrate the way the spirit of tolerance finds clear expression in the main text of the SGI Charter.

* SGI, based on the ideal of world citizenship, shall safeguard funda-

mental human rights and not discriminate against any individual on any grounds.

* SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity.
* SGI shall respect cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange, thereby creating an international society of mutual understanding and harmony.
* SGI shall promote, based on the Buddhist ideal of symbiosis, the protection of nature and the environment.
* SGI shall contribute to the promotion of education, in the pursuit of truth as well as development of scholarship, to enable all people to cultivate their individual character and enjoy fulfilling and happy lives.

As these statements make clear, the academy's Tolerance Charter and the SGI Charter generally coincide in their approach to the spirit of tolerance.

Going the Second Mile

Unger: Our reaction to dialogue is one of the many things we share. Any sincere dialogue indicates the kind of tolerance represented in the New Testament appeal to go the "second mile." This difficult metaphor refers to the Roman requirement made on all Jews to accompany a Roman citizen for a mile to carry his baggage. Christ's injunction to go a second mile lays the groundwork for dialogue, since sharing the road for the additional distance gives both parties a chance to talk things over.

You come from the Buddhist tradition, and your image of the world differs from the Christian one. Nevertheless, we Christians are becoming increasingly familiar with your image. Not that we want to accept it entirely, but we discern its profoundly humanistic elements. The traditions behind your charter and our Tolerance Charter differ. We do not associate tolerance with our religious tradition as you do; we are more intensely secular. Still we are connected by basic values, and working together reveals new elements.

Ikeda: The content of the academy's Tolerance Charter should serve as a model for the leaders of all nations. Overcoming intolerance is one of the primary aims of the United Nations, as is stated in the preamble to its charter: "...to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors...."

In 2001, The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held in Durban. From the preparations stage, SGI representatives participated enthusiastically in all phases of the conference. In spite of international efforts of this kind, however, intolerance and discrimination are proving difficult to uproot.

Unger: Undeniably, things like racism stand in the way of tolerance. You and I both adopt human rights as our starting point. But we should try to trace their nature and evolution. Are human rights universally applicable? Or do they reflect largely the European tradition, especially the tradition that started with the French Revolution?

The Evolution of Human Rights

Ikeda: Undeniably Europe has played a major role in establishing human rights. For instance, the 18th century European Enlightenment was a mainstay in the struggle for rights proclaimed in the American and French revolutions. In the 20th century, in Europe and many other parts of the world, people strove to create a firm foundation for the universalization of respect for human rights. The culmination of these efforts was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the third meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. In the declaration we can perceive a firm resolution that the atrocious violation of human rights committed during World War II should not be repeated.

The people who made major contributions to the compilation of the Universal Declaration include Austregésilo Athayde, late president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters—with whom I engaged in a dialogue on the topic Human Rights in the 21st Century; Dr. René Cassin, president of the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg and laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize; and Eleanor Roosevelt. Mr. Athayde gave precedence to human rights over political systems and methods and insisted that, eternal and universal, they must be free of political or temporal restrictions.[2] In the search for a correct understanding of their foundations, Mr. Athayde traced the history of concern with human rights all the way back to the Code of Hammurabi in the 18th century BCE.[3] Do you agree that this topic is worth pursuing further?

Unger: Of course.

Ikeda: In our discussion of the universal basis for human rights, Mr. Athayde mentioned the Mosaic Decalogue. I spoke of the Buddhist fun-

damentals known as the Five Precepts and Ten Good Precepts. The first of the Five Precepts prohibits the taking of life. The nonviolence and respect for life it embodies characterize the whole set of five. Buddhism stresses the dignity of life because each individual life is endowed with the Buddha Nature and with the possibility of manifesting it.

As Mr. Athayde said emphatically, "In the Orient, Buddhism reveals the process for the acquisition of human rights.... Those who lack the vision to detect the 'sacred' in others (as it is expounded in Buddhism) are incapable of understanding the root idea of human dignity. This is one of the reasons I sympathize with the Buddhist way of thinking."[4]

Nichiren Daishonin clearly proclaimed humankind's innate freedom. Living in the 13th century, he suffered oppression at the hands of rabid state authorities. But he declared, "Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler's domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart."[5] These words represent a crystallization of the philosophy extolling the freedom of the human spirit. They are included in *Birthright of Man*, compiled by UNESCO to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Honoring human rights expands the world of tolerance, whereas despising them allows the evil of intolerance to run rife. This is why the 21st century must witness redoubled efforts among world religions, including Christianity and Buddhism, to evolve from their traditions of thought and spirit a philosophical basis for human rights.

Unger: The reality the media report to us daily from the whole world terrifies me. It is really ghastly. Intolerance is the bad in us human beings. But I say again that tolerance is in our genes. In spite of the horrors of present global events, I view possible future developments optimistically. Two factors make me think this way. One is to be found in the tradition of Joachim di Fiore, Nikolaus Cusanus, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. All three of these thinkers were convinced that the human spirit develops and that we are capable of spiritual maturity. Teilhard de Chardin pointed out perspectives for genetic engineering in this connection. Genetic technology shows us that we are all the result of variation, thus the result of mutations. That is why I entertain the justifiable hope that humanity can develop in ways that will ultimately make peaceful coexistence possible.

Hope for the Future

Ikeda: All three of the philosophers you mention believed that the

human spirit can grow infinitely. This belief gave them hope for the future. Nichiren Daishonin, too, had radiant hope for peaceful symbiosis among members of the human race. He lived in 13th century Japan at a time of widespread pessimism and despair. In Buddhist terminology, it was what is called the Latter Day of the Law, a time after the death of Shakyamuni when the Buddhist faith has been lost, human society becomes increasingly defiled, and the age is confused and corrupt. But Nichiren Daishonin believed that precisely these critical conditions meant the time had come to create from confusion a new spiritual flourishing and to realize a world of lasting peace. He saw himself as the active leader of this historic reformation.

Unger: The evolution of Europe from fractured bellicosity to an increasingly-apparent unity is significant. In this process we always confront the problem of how to overcome old nationalism and forge European unity while at the same time preserving vital regional structures within the total framework. Europe has achieved two striking, encouraging things: the Schengen Agreement and the Euro as the uniform currency. The Schengen Agreement has done away with border controls in many—though not yet all—European countries.

A Pluralistic, Nonmilitary Europe

Ikeda: By preserving local regionality, Europe voluntarily moves towards unity in a peaceful way. Its pluralistic, nonmilitary order is expected to serve as a model for a new regional and global order. I am reminded of the Austrian Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, who advocated the Pan-European concept. In 1967, he and I engaged in repeated dialogues. At the time, I was young enough to have been his son. His earnest way of speaking made me feel as if he were bequeathing a mission to me. Our dialogues were published as the book *Bunmei Nishi to Higashi* [Civilization, East and West]. In it, Count Coudenhove-Kalergi said that averting a third world war will be possible only if we consistently stress the importance of human symbiosis and mutual trust on the basis of a spiritual movement transcending conflicts arising from racial, religious, ideological and national differences.[6] This statement is more important now than it was when originally made thirty-odd years ago. Bonds of mutual trust and a federation of compassion and tolerance are essential if we are to halt the steadily-increasing violence in the world.

Utopian Dream or Practical Plan

Unger: I became personally acquainted with Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi at a Pan-Europe congress in Vienna in 1964. He was descended from the Hapsburgs, who, guided by the principle of live and let live, ruled Central Europe in an exemplary fashion. Many languages were brought together under one crown; that is, one idea. The tradition, which goes back to Charlemagne and the ruling ideas of the Holy Roman Empire, provided a bond assuring people that they could live well. Today we need a similar European idea operative in more than the fields of bureaucracy and economy. In 1923, Count Coudenhove-Kalergi took up this idea, reminiscent of the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, and developed a brilliant vision from it.

Ikeda: Yes, in the book *Pan-Europe,* which is dedicated to the youth of Europe, he wrote that whether an idea remains a Utopian dream or is actually put into practice depends on the numbers and strength of the people who believe in it. If supported by a few thousand, it remains Utopian; and if by a few million, it becomes a government program. It will be actually implemented when its supporters number tens of millions. If he were alive today, the Count would rejoice to see that hundreds of millions of people believe in his idea. To reach this stage, however, Europe had to experience the extreme intolerance of fascism and Stalinism.

Unger: The extraordinary brutality and intolerance of Nazism and Stalinism and their, till then, unimaginable contempt for humanity remain a trauma for Europeans to this day. We still ask ourselves how an ideology could have swept away a highly-diversified culture like ours and could have led to indiscriminate mass murder. Or, in harsher terms, what went wrong in the highly-diversified European culture to provide grounds for such ideologies to operate and flourish? To be sure, dictatorial socialism was ultimately eradicated. But does this automatically mean the end of all ideologies contemptuous of humanity—the end of all hegemonic powers, which do so little for human life?

Holes of Oblivion

Ikeda: Totalitarian ideologies contemptuous of humanity may appear over and over in various forms. Totalitarianism worships group strength and regards the individual always as a tool of the state system. Under

such systems, national egoism tramples on human dignity. Arnold J. Toynbee and I discussed this topic exhaustively. He told me that fascism and communism, which are new lower religions, emerged to replace Christianity. But because they were in themselves too inferior for people to worship, they became religions worshipping group power.

Unger: Japan, too, has experienced similar traumas. How do Japanese artists and intellectuals discuss the past, and what conclusions do they reach?

Ikeda: In the past, very few artists, intellectuals, and religious leaders resisted rampant, contemptuous totalitarianism. Josei Toda, second president of Soka Gakkai, resisted nationalist Shinto so fiercely that he was imprisoned. This is one of the reasons why I put absolute trust in him. It is true that in postwar Japan, when professions of pacificism and antiwar sentiments ran high, some artists and intellectuals sincerely and earnestly opposed totalitarianism. At the same time, however, many of them avoided directly coming to terms with the misery Japan caused other Asian nations.

The political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) has used the words the *holes of oblivion* to express the way that totalitarianism erases folk memory. Many Japanese have consigned the misery Japan inflicted on others to the hole of forgetfulness and oblivion. The resulting failure to overcome the totalitarian mindset fully is one of the reasons why the citizens of the Asian countries Japan invaded still mistrust us. During its long history, Austria has evolved profound wisdom in connection with tolerance. Still, under the Nazis, it experienced extreme intolerance. The former Yugoslavia, a hotbed of ethnic conflicts, was once part of the Habsburg Empire. The Danube Union, a source of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan-Europe concept, was Austrian in origin.

Pairing Freedom and Conscience

Unger: The imperial tradition of Charlemagne, which lasted for a thousand years, until the time of Charles I (1887–1922), would have been impossible without a human concept of empire. Even today there exists an idea of Europe under which everybody can live in freedom. One of the ingredients of Christian, freedom is based on and expressed in the Gospels, especially the Epistles of Paul, where it is said that human beings can develop only in conditions of spiritual freedom. But, in this context, when put into action, freedom is to be understood as paired

with the individual conscience.

Ikeda: Exactly. Otherwise, freedom can lapse into self-indulgence. That is why religious cultivation of the conscience is essential in a free society. During the Cold War, a split between the East and the West ruptured the spirit of symbiosis cultivated over long years. But the European world started reviving when the Cold War ended. The Berlin Wall came down fifteen years ago. What were your reactions to the event?

The Fall of the Wall

Unger: November 9, 1989, the day the wall came down, had tremendous significance for Europe.

Called "*Die Wende*," or the reversal, in German, it did in fact reverse everything about Europeans' way of life. But, with it, World War II truly came to an end.

The day was a very moving experience. It meant that relations among Central European nations were being normalized. My wife Monica and I went straight to Berlin, where we hammered off a bit of the wall, which we still have at home.

No one had imagined that communism would collapse all at once without a single gunshot. I felt certain that the destruction of the wall opened new, hopeful perspectives for Europe.

Not long ago, I traveled to Riga, the capital of the Republic of Latvia, where I clearly stated that, in the past, there had never been problems between Russia and Europe. The trouble started when communist ideology split Europe apart. That is all over now. From the European standpoint, discourse with Moscow or Saint Petersburg is nothing special. Long ago Russia, Germany, and Austria talked things over in a natural set of relations that was, unfortunately, discontinued for about a century.

All Earthlings

Ikeda: I visited Berlin in October, 1961, two months after the Berlin Wall went up. To some friends who were with me I said, "I am sure that in 30 years, this Berlin Wall will no longer stand." I was expressing, not a wish or a prophecy, but my conviction that the freedom- and peace-loving human spirit would triumph. At the same time, I was expressing determination to devote myself entirely to making my mentor Josei Toda's dream of global citizenship a reality.

Unger: I believe that, as Josei Toda said, we must all arrive at an awareness of being citizens of the Earth, in spite of speaking different languages, living in different cultures, and entertaining different religious views. This idea ought to unite us instead of driving us apart. We are all children of God.

Ikeda: I hope that you and I can continue our discussions of compassion and tolerance in ways that help build a spiritual basis for the unification of humanity.

The Role of Religion

Religion as Healing

Unger: In this second chapter we address the central theme of our dialogue: religion, which for me is the essence of humanity. How have I as a doctor in our times reached this conclusion? Are not people turning away from the great churches in growing numbers? And is this not reasonable? Certainly the answers to both questions is yes. But, as a doctor, I observe that, in difficult times, many patients cling to their religious beliefs.

Ikeda: That is an important observation. The suffering of illness makes people confront their own deaths and inspires profound reexaminations of life. Sincere concentration on life and death awakens in the mind the need for an unshakeable philosophy and religion. Nichiren Daishonin teaches: "Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the way."[7] He also writes: "I should first of all learn about death, and then about other things."[8]

The Japanese attach great importance to the appearance of the dead. Some people die with a gentle, beautiful facial expression, which is taken as evidence of their having led fulfilled and valuable lives. Others may die with any of various other expressions. How does this emphasis on final appearance strike you as a doctor?

Unger: As you say, people die with different kinds of expressions on their faces. Those whose lives have been very fulfilled and happy and those who complete their lives with confidence and mental calm can be said to die in a good state of life. And, if reincarnated, such people will

be reborn in a good state. Investigations show that people whose final facial expression is distorted and frightful have met death with problems on their minds. Perhaps they lacked self-confidence and fulfillment during life.

Four Encounters

Ikeda: Buddhism presents the solemn facts of life, aging, illness, and death in terms of the teachings of the Four Sufferings. No medical advances and no amount of material wealth can solve the problems they pose. The fundamental issue of our existence is overcoming them in such a way as to maximize the radiance of life.

The story of the Four Encounters outside the confines of his father's palace reveals how Shakyamuni became aware of the Four Sufferings. On one occasion, Prince Gautama—as Shakyamuni was known before he entered the religious life—went out from the palace by the east gate and met an old person. On another day, upon going out by the south gate, he encountered an ill person. On yet another day, when he left the palace by the west gate, he came upon a corpse. These encounters enlightened the prince to the inevitability of the Four Sufferings. Then, on the fourth occasion, leaving by the north gate, he encountered a religious ascetic. These four encounters inspired Gautama to abandon secular life for the life of religious pursuits.

Fundamentally religions exist to enable people to confront the truth of life in the form of birth, aging, illness, and death and then to pursue the quest for real happiness. In this sense, all human beings are innately religious. As you put it, religion "is the essence of humanity." Fleeing from the Four Sufferings and losing sight of the wise religious way to pursue happiness aid and abet the tendency to undervalue life.

Unger: I agree. Today issues like abortion and genetic manipulation blur definitions of the beginning and ending of human life. This in turn makes it easy for science to take advantage of life. The nature of our times makes it imperative to employ inter-religion dialogues to build a culture of respect for life. On the one hand, our world is dominated by utilitarian values—that is, constant technological advance. On the other hand, we are entering an age of emphasis on life values immeasurable in utilitarian terms. Profound religious experiences are becoming increasingly important to an understanding of the meaning of life.

Ikeda: Very true. Confronting the Four Sufferings teaches us how to

deepen our "understanding of the meaning of life" and, reaffirming its dignity, makes life more radiant. This is the essential mission of religion. Goethe, who himself overcame great sickness, wrote in *Hermann und Dorothea*, "The affecting image of death is neither fearsome to the wise nor an end to the pious. It draws the one back to life and teaches the other how to act. It strengthens the hope of future salvation in the afflicted pious. For both, death becomes life."[9]

Unger: A very significant passage.

Ikeda: In a similar connection, the International Conference on Palliative Treatments, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care in November 2004, dealt with the importance of ameliorating both actual physical suffering in patients with stubborn illnesses and the suffering caused ultimately by death itself.

A doctor of my acquaintance told me of terminally-ill cancer patients who, in spite of their own suffering, worry about helping and encouraging their friends and others. As the doctor said, such people are strong in the face of illness and death. In contrast, when a crisis comes, people who have lived for nothing but their own egoistic needs prove weak. Strength is to be found in lives lived in open solidarity with others and doing everything possible for their sakes.

The quintessence of Mahayana Buddhism is the teaching of the dignity of life and the compassionate Bodhisattva Way based on Nichiren's teaching concerning karmic cause and effect. Compassionate deeds eliminate the sufferings of and impart joy to others. At the same time, they evoke and develop the performer's Life force. Nichiren Daishonin wrote that both birth and death are joy and that we use the aspects of birth, aging, sickness, and death to adorn the tower that is our body.[10]

Respect for Life

Unger: Christian love, too, is a highly positive, supremely noble energy. Jesus Christ constantly spoke of love as a generator of perfect energy. Any doctor or scientist who intervenes in life can hardly avoid feeling respect for it. The more a person knows about its relation with Nature, the greater that respect.

Ikeda: We must strive to cultivate a world view founded on such respect, which is the foundation of all true religion. The dignity of life must become the absolute, universal norm for the 21st century. Giving

precedence to anything over life inevitably leads to oppression of human nature.

As you know from experience, respect for life is the point of contact between science and religion.

Unger: I believe the age of reductionism is behind us. Anyone today who attempts to reduce all higher manifestations of life to simple, low-level processes becomes embroiled in contradictions.

Cosmic Tie-ups

Ikeda: Since the time of Descartes, scientific progress has been thought to depend on resolving difficult things into their component parts. In fact, however, all forms of life are organically connected in one great entity. The French-born American doctor and microbiologist René Dubos (1901–82), whom I met, commented that the palpable meanings of religion, philosophy, and social beliefs all arise from the awareness, however indistinct, that one's whole being is related to the universe, the past, the future, and all humanity outside oneself. This significance of connectedness with the whole universe resembles a religious experience. As you know, Western words for religion probably derive from Latin *religare*, to tie together. In other words, religion is a quest for tie-ups between the individual and the sacred.

Each religion has a cosmology in which humanity has an assigned place and role. Awareness of cosmic connections constitutes the nature and reason for human existence and would seem to be the source of religiosity.

Unger: Questioning the meaning of existence is more than a childish quest for security. People are not deluding themselves when they seek a mainstay in religion. Furthermore religion satisfies the basic human need for people attempting to include the force of life in such greater human connections as the following:

1. Relations between humanity and Nature;
2. Relations among human beings;
3. Relations between the human and the spiritual.

The loss of one of the three factors results in discord. Our existence remains balanced only as long as this triangle of relations remains whole and harmonious.

Ikeda: What you say suggests to me the Buddhist teaching of the Three

Thousand Realms in a Single Thought Moment expounded by Tiantai (T'en-tai) (538–97) and Nichiren Daishonin. Explained simply, this teaching holds that all (three thousand) of the worlds of phenomena are contained in one-thought moment; that is, one instant of life. Each of those instants manifests Ten Realms of Life (Ten Worlds[11]) and is therefore by nature highly diverse. As a result of what is called mutual possession, each of the ten realms can include all ten in itself, for one hundred worlds. Multiplied by the Ten Factors of Life[12], this gives one thousand. And this in turn multiplied by the Three Realms of Existence[13] gives a total of three thousand. Your idea of the triangle of relations corresponds to the Buddhist doctrine of the Three Realms of Existence.

Because the single moment of life—the single thought moment—includes the entire phenomenal world (the Three Thousand Realms), reform in one profound human thought moment can effect reform throughout society and the environment. Our single thought moments contain cosmic wisdom and compassion. The goal of the Soka Gakkai Human Revolution movement is to call forth this wisdom and compassion and to act in solidarity to build a tranquil, peaceful society and environment.

Unger: I am aware of the Buddhist philosophy that strives to create peace in individual minds, in society and humanity, and in the Natural world and its ecology.

Ikeda: In our dialogue, demonstrating profound understanding of Buddhism, Arnold J. Toynbee mentioned the importance and necessity of a world religion that would enable humankind to realize that they are part of the whole cosmic life and expressed his hope that Mahayana philosophy will enable us to overcome greedy egoism.

How Religions Relate to Nature

Unger: You seem to interpret what we, from the Christian standpoint, call the Creator of the World as a spirit binding all things together. Christians consider love to be the bond between humanity and the Creator. The philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) emphasized this and spent his whole life working on the question of unity between divine and human reason. In a certain way, you go still farther to see the spirit of God—what you would call the universal spirit—at work, not only in the human spirit, but also in all things. Christianity has not endowed the world of Nature with such great value. As a result of

the Fall, at the end of time, creation itself will need to be saved. Only then will God be all in all things. You do not recognize this kind of postponed deification. I have been using Christian terms like the *spirit of God*, though they may be inapplicable to Buddhism.

Ikeda: Instead of positing a postponed deification, Buddhism teaches that the supremely-precious Buddha nature is inherent equally in all things and can be revealed and manifested at any time and in all places through the operation of the deep relationship between latent cause and manifest effect. The world of nonhuman Nature too is endowed with the Buddha nature.

Buddhism also teaches that the distinctive characteristics of each individual should be allowed to reach full brilliance in their own ways just as the cherry tree, the plum, the peach, and the apricot all bloom in appealingly distinctive ways. The meaning of life is to manifest this supreme value fully, thus enriching the radiance of the self and the environment.

Another Buddhist doctrine called esho-funi in Japanese teaches the indivisible oneness (funi) of life (sho) and its environment (e). Human actions determine the extent to which society and natural world can manifest their values. In other words, Buddhism recognizes in human actions the power and responsibility to elevate and impart value to the whole world, including the realm of nonhuman nature.

Unger: What you say provides much food for thought. To avoid misunderstanding, we must try to clarify the Buddhist and Christian understandings of *spirit*.

Ikeda: That is true. Another increasingly important factor in connection with environmental issues is examining how religions define Nature and relate to it. In February, 2005, I spoke with Wangari Maathai, Kenyan environmental minister, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and founder of the Green Belt Movement, an NGO devoted to conserving the environment and raising living standards. Members of the movement have already planted thirty million trees. Delighted to be the first environmentalist to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, she was deeply sympathetic with the Buddhist philosophy of attaching great importance to life, Nature, and the human community. In the 21st century, religion must revive its efforts to teach human beings how to live with clear views on society, the world, and all Nature.

Dialogue: a Mechanism for Collision Aversion

Unger: For me the core questions are "Where did I come from?" and "Where am I going?" Religions, philosophies, and art have posed and tried to answer these questions. They continue doing so today. But some of their answers either fail to satisfy me entirely or appear senseless or false. Tolerance requires me to say this clearly, because I would not take seriously any answer that I have not assessed. But assessing is different from condemning. We must always keep this in mind.

Ikeda: The graver the issue, the more it requires candid dialogue. The civilization of the 21st century must be a civilization of dialogue, as my friend the Harvard Professor Du Weiming has proposed. Professor Du is active in many areas. For instance, in connection with the United Nations "Year of Dialogue among Civilizations" in 2001, he spoke on Confucian civilization at a meeting of the Panel of Eminent Persons convened by Secretary General Kofi Annan. He has called dialogue an important mechanism for eliminating intercultural contradictions and collisions, and insists that we must recognize and respect others' values and conditions and learn from and benefit from each other. By taking the lead in inter-religion dialogues you act in accord with his admonitions.

The Therapeutic Dimension

Unger: To rectify the distortions arising everywhere today, we must reorganize everything to work to the advantage of humanity. When it loses sight of the fundamental need to serve those advantages, science can become domineering. The same is true of religion. When used as tools to promote the good of humanity and life, however, science and knowledge become an art.

Ikeda: That is beautifully expressed. I agree entirely.

Unger: Eugen Biser, theologian and dean of our academy, interprets both Buddhism and Christianity in a therapeutic dimension open to both individuals and humanity as a whole.

Ikeda: Shakyamuni's teaching of the Four Noble Truths represents a therapeutic method of curing human sufferings. They are the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. Because,

from the time of Shakyamuni himself, it has exerted all its energy to eliminating suffering, Buddhism can be called therapy on all levels, from the individual to society as a whole.

Unger: Today as society globalizes, the social therapeutic dimension seems to be growing increasingly important. Accordingly, it must deal with a large number of traditions, viewpoints, and values that, within global society, interact side by side, albeit incoherently. Compelled to cobble together their own private thought systems from what is available, people make use of all apparently suitable elements, no matter whether or not they fit together.

Ikeda: The economic activities of transnational corporations, improved air travel, satellite broadcasting, and the Internet bring us into contact with diverse traditional philosophies and value systems of different historical and cultural backgrounds. On the one hand, the reception of diverse values enriches our thinking. On the other, however, it confronts us with the destruction of traditional cultures and confusion of value criteria. In this age of globalization, we must discover and firmly establish both uniqueness and universality of values.

The exclusive pursuit of universality can lead to uniformity. On the other hand, total immersion in individuality may generate self-righteousness. As you say, losing sight of overall connections and remaining obsessed with individuality breeds self-righteousness, prejudice, and discrimination. A religion that understands the individual in terms of the whole of humanity and that strives to promote harmony between individuality and society and the natural environment can play a big role in preventing this.

Tolerance and Intolerance

Unger: Since religion is a powerful factor in life, we ought to prevent its leading to intolerance. But history casts doubt on our ability to do this. For instance, while teaching neighborly love, Christianity is sometimes intolerant, as is illustrated by things like the Crusades, the persecution of the Jews, and attitudes toward abortion. We must ask ourselves whether religion and intolerance are inseparable. What are your thoughts on the subject?

Ikeda: A very important point. Fundamentally religion is not necessarily always intolerant. The crisis of tolerance involves not only religion,

but also a complex interweaving of various factors including politics and economics.

At the same time, in all parts of the world today, people must struggle against the threat of intolerance. In connection with this issue, we must ask ourselves what the nature and goals of religion are.

Religion must lead people toward eternal universal truth. Since this is the case, all religions must ultimately be characterized by a desire to contribute to the pursuit of human happiness. Religions that lapse into intolerance and consequent self-righteousness reject their own religiosity.

Unger: Throughout history, some religious representatives have tried—and continue to try—to pretend that their own version of the truth is the only ultimately-valid one. In this they have abetted intolerance. Thus, intolerance has come to seem the aboriginal, more vital power, whereas aspirations toward tolerance seem late, artificial, and weak.

Ikeda: It is natural for believers to be convinced of the absolute nature of truths attained though insight or revelation. But no religion that strives to elucidate the truth can allow such convictions to drag them into self-righteousness, exclusivism, and narrow-mindedness. For the sake of clarifying ultimate truth, religions should pool their wisdom and compete in the name of human happiness. Truths uncovered by other religions often complement and prove truths uncovered by one's own. Sweeping negation of other religions negates their universal truths, including those shared with one's own religion.

Tolerance as a Philosophical Concept

Unger: In this context, experience with the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century can help us. Ultimately the Enlightenment taught us to see through and repudiate claims of absolute validity. In Europe, tolerance is often regarded more as a philosophical than as a religious idea.

Ikeda: In English and many Western languages, traditionally those words which indicate or describe ideals and principles can be thought to represent philosophical concepts. In the modern West, with the advance of secularization, traditional theological explanations of the reason for human existence have lost power to convince. Since the time of Kierkegaard (1813–55), existential philosophies have pointed this out.

From their viewpoint, as you say, in the West, tolerance is a philosophical ideal.

In Japan, which lacks the Western philosophical tradition of pursuing eternal, universal ideals and principles, deciding if tolerance is a religious or philosophical matter is difficult. In the Orient, religion has been a philosophy of humanity, life, and actual practice. Naturally, therefore, a philosophical issue is a religious issue. If tolerance is a virtue needed to help humanity overcome suffering, obviously religion must show the way.

I seek the way on the basis of the Buddhist philosophy of the dignity of life, universal equality, and respect for humanity. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who appears in the Lotus Sutra, sets us an example by always paying reverence to the supremely precious Buddha nature in all people. Those ignorant of their own Buddha natures despise and persecute him. Ultimately, however, his efforts are rewarded; and the occasion of his death awakens his detractors to their own inherent dignity.

Unger: Perhaps religion's main task is indeed to restore to people a sense and awareness of their own value. In things like fasting, prayer, meditation, and self-knowledge, it has the means to accomplish this. Restoration of awareness of self-value, can serve as a foundation for symbiosis in this millennium.

Ikeda: I agree. The person who is deeply aware of the dignity of his own life respects the lives of others and pioneers a triumphant way of life in which individualities are manifest to the maximum.

Formalistic and True Tolerance

Unger: Diversity is indeed a real issue. In the extreme secularization of the present, owing to the limitless liberty of pluralism, as long as his or her field of interest remains inviolate, each person is completely free to act according to inclination. Undoubtedly this set of circumstances contributes greatly to the exploitation and destruction of the planet at the hands of human beings. These developments are moving ahead in tandem with what might be called politically correct tolerance as a mere formality, which is patently insufficient. By the end of the 20th century, desecration of the globe had made substantial tolerance urgently necessary. Sustaining the world requires human beings to come to terms with their own essential natures. Because this must begin with the individual, we must adopt three behavioral models: human dignity, human develop-

ment, and human (life) protection. Thoughtful consideration of the value of life is essential to the last of the three. Inter-religion dialogues can work out basic policies for it and for the protection of humanity and society and create global values transcending religious differences.

Ikeda: Yes, I can see that. Formalistic tolerance that gives free play to the egoism of both sides of an issue is impermissible. True tolerance is founded on overcoming rapacious human greed. This is a role religion has played since ancient times. Your three models represent three indispensable guidelines for transcending greed and cultivating tolerance. To raise basic policies to the level of such universal values of life, we stand in need of inter-religion dialogue.

Religion and Authority

Unger: But the professional clergy represents a stumbling block. Though it is a part of life itself, true tolerance leaves them indifferent. They fear that their own authority will be undermined. And, like everyone who is afraid, they resort to threats. They menace with damnation anyone who does not parrot their own words.

Ikeda: An authoritarian clergy is degenerate and has lost sight of salvation as the basic mission of religion. All the great founders have established their religions in response to the cries of suffering contemporaries. The teachings and clarifications of life and truth they have evolved from their own ideas have spread and resonate with the hearts of the people because they address popular needs. Nonetheless, once rigid social systems and positions have been established, clergymen begin using the people as mere means to protect their own advantages and prestige. When this happens, they ignore the popular voice. If the great goal of salvation for the masses drops from sight, all desire to improve and all wisdom to see the truth are lost. This lowers levels of religiosity and results in false, tyrannical priests more secular than the secular. Unless we struggle resolutely against such false priests, the people will fall upon the road to misery.

In my youth, state Shinto, the psychological mainstay of the ultranationalists, propelled the people of Japan into a war of aggression. As you know, Soka Gakkai's first two presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, unrelentingly wrote and spoke out against the authorities of the time. Inevitably, after Japan's defeat, I too was critical of religion yet was in search of a correct philosophical attitude toward life. At that

point I met my mentor Josei Toda and was so strongly attracted by his profound humanity that I came to embrace faith in the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, to which he was devoted. From our very first meeting, I felt as if I had known him for years. With great sincerity and candor, he urged us to create a nation with a peaceful, placid culture, a country that could contribute to the well-being of all humanity. From Mr. Toda I learned that true religion serves the interests of peace-building, cultural development, and the happiness of the ordinary people. I understood fully that it generates indomitable faith, action, and humaneness.

Unger: In keeping with Mr. Toda's admonition, you now devote yourself tirelessly to promoting peace through cultural exchanges that are indispensable to the peaceful future of humanity.

Ikeda: In his *Ein Gewissen gegen die Gewalt* [A Conscience Against Violence], the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) described a theologian, Sebastian Castellio (1515–63), who issued a declaration of tolerance, saying that authority always tries to clothe its violent deeds in religious or world-view ideals.

Unger: Yes. That is an historical fact.

Ikeda: Zweig insisted that violence inevitably cheapens all ideas. Religion is destroyed from within when it allows itself to be used by or actually cooperates with authoritarian violence and belligerence. Authority has a demonic inner egoism. In contrast, true religion essentially acts to relieve human suffering. Whereas authority oppresses, dominates, and trivializes humanity from without, religion evokes the force of life from within and makes human beings capable of creating great value. By its nature, religion is an art for purifying the egocentric greed of authority and orienting political power towards the interests of the ordinary people.

Unger: Yes, politics should be an art of service to the people. After all, the word *minister* derives from a Latin term meaning servant.

Ikeda: Religion should be a force for converting mistaken authoritarianism. Sometimes, however, its desire to protect itself by means of political authority or to become an authority and a power in itself generates intolerant cruelty. Because, as you say, religion is an essential part of

human nature, hypocrisy on the part of religious leaders invites profound distrust. Tyranny on the part of false religious leaders hiding behind authority is unforgivable. We must rely on such peaceful means as free speech to resist intolerance that threatens human dignity. This is the meaning of positive tolerance, the spirit of which is to protect the ordinary people from deception and to make them stronger and wiser. This is the kind of work we of Soka Gakkai are engaged in.

Unger: Precisely. People with tolerant minds have the courage to advance the cause of peace. They can resist the fanaticism and vengefulness that threaten human dignity. It is a mistake to assume—as I said earlier—that intolerance is aboriginal and strong, whereas tolerance is late and weak. Tolerance and religion are inseparable.

Ikeda: I might cite an historical reference substantiating your assertion of the inseparable nature of religion and tolerance. Some of the leading intellectuals in the world I talked with showed a keen interest in the ancient Indian king Ashoka and his humanistic politics founded on Buddhist compassion conducted in the name of the general happiness. An advocate of tolerance, he recognized others' freedom of belief. In addition, abandoning wars of conquest, he carried out extensive peaceful exchanges with many other countries. His method demonstrates the ideal relation between politics and religion and provides a shining example of the way religious tolerance promotes brilliant prosperity. King Ashoka politically embodied the spirit of Shakyamuni, the compassionate ideals that were the origin of Buddhism.

In all religions, constantly referring to the spirit and basic teachings of founders is of the greatest importance. King Ashoka opposed religious leaders who had abandoned the spirit of Shakyamuni and had forgotten their responsibility for saving the ordinary people. One of the many edicts he had carved on stones and pillars as a way of communicating with the people is this: "Whoever, whether monk or nun, splits the Sangha (Body of Believers) is to be made to wear white clothes and to reside somewhere other than in a monastery."[14]

Josei Toda was fond of telling us that, if they should assemble in one room, the founders of the world's great religions and philosophies would certainly find much to agree upon. All strivers for human liberation and peace, Jesus, Muhammad, and Shakyamuni supported the afflicted and helped the suffering, as did Nichiren Daishonin, whom we revere.

One aspect of the movement founded by Nichiren Daishonin was the

admonition to return to the teachings of Shakyamuni, who sought to free all peoples from suffering. It was also the admonition to once again value the dignity of all human beings and return to the Lotus Sutra which recognizes the dignity of every individual. The return to the role of relieving human beings and bringing them true happiness is the alpha and the omega of religion.

Harmony with Scientific Thought

Unger: As a scientist, I can say that tolerance is the basic condition for coexistence. In their own way, religions are science. They generate theologies to guide believers in the search for God and in this way provide new stimuli.

Ikeda: Religion is the wise pursuit of the truth of life and the cosmos. It is an existential search for ways to realize human happiness. On the basis of the results of their search, all religions and sects have developed organized systems of teachings in the form of theologies and philosophies. Using their own religious experiences, founders and believers evolve coordinated theoretical systems. In this sense, religions embody the empirical logic required of modern science.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was an educator. The desire to make each student happy inspired him to define the values that every life ought to manifest and to build his own original theory around them. During the course of this undertaking, he encountered the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin and was so sympathetic with its ideas of the dignity of humanity and the possibility of reforming real life and society that he became a believer. This was the origin of the Soka Gakkai popular movement for peace, culture, and education, which is founded on Nichiren Buddhism. As a modern man, Mr. Makiguchi set out to prove the correctness of Nichiren Buddhism and the theory of value through scientific methods involving actual practice and verification. His approach was a modernized version of the method Nichiren Daishonin himself used to compare religions and philosophies: documentary proof, theoretical proof, and actual proof. As I have indicated, Buddhism, especially the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, is rational and empirical in the manner of modern science.

Unger: Fascinating.

Ikeda: The religion that serves as a basis for 21st century civilization

must both harmonize with and lead scientific rational thought. I believe that Buddhism includes ideas that resonate with the observations of contemporary science, humanities, and social studies. My discussions with intellectuals from all over the world have confirmed me in this belief. What are your opinions of the assertion that, from the 17th century, with the rise of rationalism in reaction against religious wars, religion itself retreated to be replaced by reason and science, which in their turn became a new kind of religion.

Unger: Certainly in the last two hundred years, the mathematical and rational have been overvalued. The image of our world is eccentric, unregulated, and abnormally inclined in the direction of the rational and theoretical. Excessive stress on money is synonymous with our distorted world image. Regulations are off in my own field of medicine, too. In medical schools, human beings are looked down on as mere objects. Patients are treated as prospective payers of medical insurance. We must firmly realize that science is not and cannot be a replacement for God. Exclusive emphasis on reason has essentially altered relations between human beings and Nature, among human beings, and between the human and the spiritual. We have fallen out of an anthropocentric harmony. Concerned people are beginning to realize that "there are more things in heaven and earth" (Hamlet, 1. V.) that cannot be measured. Like all other world images and cultures, the new global culture must clearly rest on the possibility that human beings can embrace faith. Though subject to diverse interpretations, religion is the source of all culture. That is why inter-religion dialogues of the most substantial kind are essential.

Inter-religion Dialogues

Ikeda: From this viewpoint, inter-religion dialogues must be made the core of inter-civilization dialogue.

Unger: Dialogue serves to widen our horizons by calling attention to the experiences of others. But this is more difficult to do in the case of religion than in the case of natural science. In the natural sciences, measurements can be compared to provide reliable bases. A kilogram of bread is always a kilogram of bread. But spiritual bread cannot be so easily compared. Although no less important than precisely-weighable material bread, it cannot be readily measured and sold. As we put too much faith in material bread, bit by bit, the material gains the upper

hand over the spiritual until, ultimately, we have a capitalism in which humanity has metaphysically degenerated. Thus a means of self-management has been converted into a goal in itself. I object to this because capital must not be taken as a gauge for measuring the value of life.

Ikeda: The academy you head is currently conducting inter-religion dialogues as a strategy for combating the materialism of contemporary civilization. You have already held Christianity-Buddhism dialogues (published in both English and German). Your expanded dialogues among the four great religions—Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism—constitute a courageous struggle of great significance for the history of humanity.

Start by Saving Humanity

Unger: In Europe, very strong, even critical, secularization marginalizes religion with the result that European churches no longer have the powerful voice they once had. I by no means regard secularization as a misfortune.

I see opportunities in it. Because it compels churches to justify themselves, it throws a great deal of the dogmatic ballast of the past overboard. Only by showing that they are conducive to harmonious human coexistence can churches legitimize themselves.

Ikeda: You describe what we must require of religion in the 21st century. The lifeline of religion is empathy and cooperation in overcoming suffering. In the Buddhist scripture known as the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the ailing layman Vimalakirti says he is sick because all living beings are sick.[15] Nichiren Daishonin, too, said that the sufferings of all living beings were his own sufferings.[16] The spirit of accepting others' sufferings as one's own is surely the driving power that can propel inter-religion dialogues, overcome differences, and build a symbiotic society.

In our book *Before It Is Too Late*, Aurelio Peccei and I discussed the possibility of global religious cooperation. He posed the pressing question: "Have all these great religions ever called on the other major faiths to work and learn together how to guide the world population away from its present plight and towards terrestrial salvation before it is too late?"[17]

Unger: What are the goals of inter-religion dialogues as you envisage them?

Ikeda: To make a resume of what we have said, first comes mutual understanding among religions. This is the initial stage of tolerance. Each religion has its own thought system on which its own system of beliefs rests. If representatives of the different thought systems try to understand each other, they will discover that they have much in common.

Unger: We have already discussed in some detail the aspects shared by Christianity and Buddhism.

Ikeda: The second goal of inter-religion dialogues is for each religion to learn from the others and use the lessons learned for further self-development. All religions must grow in response to other philosophies and religions, the spirit of the times, and world conditions.

The third goal is, as Dr. Peccei pointed out, for all religions "to work and learn together how to guide the world population away from its present plight." Our current plight can be described in terms of three classes of relations: the three you stress—relations between human beings and Nature, among human beings, and between the human and the spiritual. The first set of problems pertains to relations between humanity and the Natural environment in the sphere of ecology: destruction of the ecological balance most dramatically represented by global warming. Then come problems of human-to-human relations in the political and economic sphere, including nuclear arms, conflict and war, economic disparity and poverty, and human rights and closely-related terrorism. Central to all three, the third category involves human spiritual decline and breakdown made apparent through phenomena like apathy, outbreaks of violence, chronic mental illness, and drug addiction even among the young. In this connection, ethical controls on rapidly-developing information science and genetics are being discussed.

Challenging problems on a humanity-wide, global scale demands application of results from many fields of learning. The key to everything is revival of the spirit and creativity to enable us to make full use of our intellectual heritage. In all these efforts, religion has the mission of empowering that spirit and elevating our ethical and moral values.

Unger: You have outlined in detail the way in which religion, in your precise understanding of it, can assist in opening the way to a peaceful world in which humanity and non-human Nature are recognized equitably. There can be no doubt that religion has the power to accomplish this.

NOTES

[1] *Choose Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press. Inc., 1989) p. 96.

[2] *Direitos Humanos no Século XXI* [Human Rights in the 21st Century] (Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Editora Record, 2000), p. 81.

[3] Ibid. p. 104.

[4] Ibid. p. 110, 120.

[5] *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* [WND], p. 579.

[6] *Bunmei Nishi to Higashi* [Civilization, East and West] (Tokyo: Sankei Shimbunsha Shuppankyoku, 1972), p. 89.

[7] WND, p. 937.

[8] *Goshozenshu*, p. 1404.

[9] Ninth Song "Urania: Prospect [Aussicht]".

[10] *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* (trans. by Burton Watson, Soka Gakkai, 2004), p. 90.

[11] The Ten Worlds: (1) hell, (2) hungry spirits, (3) animals, (4) asuras or egoistic anger, (5) human beings, (6) heavenly beings, (7) voice-hearers, (8) cause-awakened ones, (9) bodhisattvas, and (10) Buddhas

[12] The Ten Factors of Life: Appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end

[13] Three Realms of Existence: The realm of the five components, the realm of living beings, and the realm of the environment.

[14] Trans. by Ven. S. Dhammika: "white clothes" mean "lay clothes."

[15] *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (trans. by Burton Watson, Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), p. 65.

[16] *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 138.

[17] *Before It Is Too Late* (Kodansha International, 1984), p. 97.

Daisaku Ikeda
Born in 1928. Honorary President of Soka Gakkai. President of Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Founder of The Institute of Oriental Philosophy. Established educational institutions such as Soka University, Soka University of America and Soka Schools; cultural institutions such as the Min-On Concert Association and the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum; as well as academic and peace-research institutions such as Toda Institute for Global Peace & Policy Research and the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. Authored numerous literary works such as "*The Human Revolution*" (12 volumes), "*The New Human Revolution*" (in progress), and "*The Intimate Talks with Global Pioneers*," and "*Recollections of My Meetings with Leading World Figures*." Furthermore, there are many collections of dialogues with intelligentsia from around the world, "*Choose Life*" (A. Toynbee), "*Moral Lessons of the Twentieth Century*" (M.S. Gorbachev), "*Choose Peace*" (Johan Galtung), etc. He has received 182 honorary doctorates and honorary professorships from universities and institutes around the world, such as Moscow State University, University of Glasgow and Beijing University.

Felix Unger
Born in 1946. Doctor of medicine (cardiac surgery). Graduate of Medical School of the University of Vienna in Austria. Head of the Department of Cardiac Surgery at Salzburg State Hospital, by way of Professor at Innsbruck University and resident at the Clinic for Cardiology of the University of Vienna. In 1990, as one of the founding members of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts assumed position of President. He is also director of European Heart Institute. Author and editor of 16 volumes, including "*Health is wealth*," *Strategic Visions for European Health Care at the beginning of the 21st century Report to the European Parliament*. His wife Monika is an artist. Holds honorary medical doctorates from Budapest University, Timisoara University, and honorary doctorates from Soka University, Marburg University and Riga University.

Feature:

A Vision of 21st Century Oriental Thought

From the Symposium Cosponsored by the Daisaku Ikeda Research Society of Beijing University:

The third joint symposium of our Institute, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, with "Modern Civilization and Dialogue between Religions" as its theme, was held at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing (on October 12 and 13, 2004). The first symposium was held in 1999 and the second in 2001. In addition, on October 15 and 16, under the dual auspices of the Ikeda Daisaku Research Group, at Beijing University's Center of Japanese Studies, and our Institute, an international academic symposium, on the theme "A Vision of 21st Century Oriental Thought" was held at Beijing University. About 80 guests from 16 universities and research organizations, having facilities researching the thought and philosophy of SGI President Ikeda, participated in the symposium, including China's Hunan Normal University, Canton-Zhaoqing University, and the Chinese Culture University of Taiwan. At the opening ceremony, messages from the Vice-President of Beijing University Ji Xianlin and SGI President Ikeda were introduced. During the symposium, presentations discussing Buddhist views of humanity, women and civilization were made, on the Chinese side by Beijing University Professor Wei Changhai, Institute of Japanese Cultural Studies (Beijing University) Chief Liu Jincai and Professor Wang Xinsheng, and on the Japanese side by our Research Fellows Mikio Matsuoka, Toshie Kurihara, and Shuichi Yamamoto. From August 16–21 of the same year, the 37th International Conference of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS), having the general theme "Unity Within Diversity," was held in Moscow. ICANAS is a world-class academic conference, with a 130-year-old tradition. At the opening ceremony, Russian President Putin and SGI President Ikeda's message were introduced, and during the "Spiritual Culture" subcommittee, President Ikeda's keynote thesis, "Century of Peace and the Lotus Sutra" was presented. From our institute, institute director Yoichi Kawada, Chief Research Fellow Toru Shiotsu and Senior Research Fellow Hiroshi Kanno also participated in giving presentations.

Message

Daisaku Ikeda

MY heartiest congratulations on the international symposium at Peking University in China, hosted jointly by the Daisaku Ikeda Research Society of the Center of Japanese Studies of Peking University and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) located in Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan. I wish in particular to thank all the scholars from various educational institutions who, despite their busy schedules, took time to attend the symposium, among them representatives from Soka University in Tokyo, of which I am the founder.

The participants, representing specialists in various fields related to Oriental thought, in conjunction with the delegates from Japan, came together to examine the theme "Perspectives of Oriental Philosophy in the 21st Century." Approaching it from many different angles, their discussions will be, I am sure, of far-reaching significance.

Propelled largely by technological advances developed in modern Western society, our present-day civilization has been able to provide human beings with countless conveniences and much material wealth. Striking progress in the areas of transportation, communication, and the exchange of information has led to a process of increasing globalization.

At the same time, however, globalization has brought with it cultural conflicts, deeply troubling problems related to the natural environment, nuclear proliferation, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, marked increases in the refugee population, and other questions tied to ethnic and religious differences, dark clouds that profoundly shadow the horizon. The 9/11 terrorist attacks of three years ago are symbolic of these problems.

As a result of such friction, many innocent citizens in various parts of the world have found themselves caught up in acts of indiscriminate terrorism, and the situation shows signs of continued worsening. Hatred and distrust grow ever deeper, and the forces of division appear to be tearing humanity apart.

But human life is richly endowed with good impulses as well, with emotions of compassion and mutual trust. These impulses toward good