

From the Symposium with the World Poetry Society Intercontinental

Message

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THE year 2007 marks two important anniversaries. The Institute of Oriental Philosophy was founded in 1962, 45 years ago, and the opening of its Indian center took place in 1992, 15 years ago. I offer my heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of this splendid symposium cosponsored by the institute and the World Poetry Society Intercontinental. Further, I should like to express my sincerest thanks to all of the people who have taken time from their busy schedules to attend, including of course my very dear friends President Krishna Srinavas, Vice-president A. Padmanaban, and Chairman Sethu Kumanan (Soka Ikeda College of Arts and Science for Women).

As a poet, I am proud and honored to have been chosen World Poet Laureate by the World Poetry Society Intercontinental in 1995. I place great hopes in this symposium and its discussions shared by the members of your association and of our research institute on the important subject of poetry for the sake of humanism, world peace, harmony, and peaceful coexistence.

Thanks to tremendous advances in information, communications, and transportation technology, modern material civilization has attained unprecedented heights of convenience and affluence. The Internet, e-mail, and transportation networks carry information and goods to all parts of the globe faster than has ever been thought possible before. But whether the resultant flood of information and goods enriches the citizens of our material civilization is questionable. Are people losing the fecundity of spirit to write poetry, enjoy the sight of flowers and the singing of birds, and communicate with the stars of the nighttime sky? It would seem that today the human mind is isolated and cut off from the expanses of the cosmos, the rhythms of nature, and the eternal flow of time. We seem to be witnessing an unending attenuation of bonds between humanity and the universe, nature, and society and in interpersonal relations as well.

On one dimension, techno-scientific development makes people objectify external phenomena and think of them as separate from themselves. Inherent in the trend to think this way is the danger of regarding phenomena as mere things. Undeniably, establishing a distance from things and objectifying and numerating them account for the rapid progress of modern material civilization.

At the same time, however, the tendency to regard even irreplaceable life itself in terms of material things and statistics debilitates the poetic spirit. This is lamentable because that spirit should move us, keep us in tune with nature and the universe, and serve as the source of spiritual and ethical riches. Weakening the poetic spirit deprives us of these blessings. The basic rhythms resounding from nature and the universe are eternal. Being cut off from them generates the loneliness and isolation experienced by humanity today.

People often pursue nothing but material wealth and the satisfaction of insatiable desires. They care only about their own welfare. As this kind of egoism spreads, so do indifference and the inability to relate to others. The resultant intolerance, discrimination, and hatred trigger such structural and direct violence as ecological destruction, strife, and terrorism. Schisms disrupting the coexistence and harmony of all things, venomous egoism, and the trivialization of the self stir up conflict that tramples on the peace of families, ethnic groups, nations, and all of human society.

When we met for the first time in July 1979, President Srinavas said to me, "A true poet is one who speaks of the cosmos, the spirit, and the truth.... A poet must always have a message; it must be eternal."

In the section on the Void in his great long poem "The Five Elements," he nobly describes the eternal source of all things as Reality.

Alone? No... You are not alone!...

A whisper from Afar—
From beyond galactic clouds
Of interstellar dust
Measuring light years
And millions of suns—

I come from Reality—
Everlasting pyramidal creations—

From this phoenix realities
Will sudden bloom a new Eden—

The Reality President Srinavas describes is the fundamental universal Law of the Void (Shunyata) permeating all external things and the inner universe of the human being. The poetic spirit is born when the human mind resonates with that Law.

The poet sometimes beholds the fundamental universal Law and sometimes discovers the infinite possibilities in human life. Because he breathes the Reality of the universal Law, the poet unites all living things, connects human minds, and makes of human society a garden of harmony and peace.

As a consequence of his observations of the relations between the universe and all things, Josei Toda, my mentor and the second president of the Soka Gakkai, said that everything in the universe is the true entity of the Buddha and that all phenomena are the operations of compassion, which can be called the essential nature of the cosmos. The true entity of the Buddha is the compassionate life essentially inherent in the universe. Thus Mr. Toda interpreted all phenomena as manifestations of the fundamental cosmic Law of compassion.

In his *The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life*, the great Japanese Buddhist priest and philosopher Nichiren (1222–82) describes the operations of the five elements that make up all things in the universe. Those five are earth, water, fire, wind, and void. The last, which corresponds to the Reality in President's Srinavas's poem, is the fundamental Law of the cosmos operating through the other four.

Today, in a world rent with schisms, excessive greed threatens the survival of the human race through such things as destruction of the environment, global warming, and weapons of mass destruction. The voice of the poet calls out for peace and harmonious coexistence. At times like these, that voice is indispensable if we are to draw on the compassionate energy embodied in the fundamental Law and, with the aid of the light of wisdom, to perceive the mystic workings of the four elements to bind together humanity, society, and the universe.

Essentially everyone is a poet. The poetic spirit throbbing deep within the lives of all peoples resonates with the eternal and the fundamental to manifest itself brilliantly in the spirit of compassion, nonviolence, empathy, tolerance, and wisdom. The persons possessed of this spirit consider giving up and indifference the defeat of the soul. Unable to forgive such attitudes, the poet equates violations of human dignity and ethnic suppression with desecration of himself. The poet draws words from profound observations of the cosmos and the depths of humanity to cry out and give expression to the weeping voices of all suffering and oppressed peoples.

Holding aloft the banner of humanism, poets love the people, share their lives, and resolutely struggle against evil authorities that despise them. They illuminate the flames of hope and courage in people's breasts and awaken the sun inherent in their hearts.

The poet is a compassionate person who joins ordinary people in their battle with evil and a wise person who shines guiding light on the future. I am deeply convinced that poets of this kind will give birth to limitless poems of world peace, harmony, and humanism.

In conclusion, I should like to express my heartfelt prayers for the continued good health and activity of all the participants in this symposium.