

## Special Article:

### Preface to Three Dialogue Books with Daisaku Ikeda published in Bulgarian

*In November 2008, a set of three dialogue books with Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International, were published in Bulgarian. To commemorate the publication, a special reception was held at the University of Sofia on November 25, 2008, on the auspicious occasion of the 120th anniversary of the university's founding, and over one hundred distinguished guests from various fields in Bulgaria were present to celebrate.*

*The first of the three books is a dialogue with the renowned 20th century historian Arnold Toynbee entitled Choose Life. The second is entitled Before It Is Too Late, a conversation with Aurelio Peccei, one of the founders and the first president of the Club of Rome. The third is The Beauty of a Lion's Heart, a discourse with Professor Axinia D. Djourova (Aksinia Djurova) at the University of Sofia. This book won the award of Book of the Year in Bulgaria when it was published in 2000.*

*The preface to this three-volume set, entitled "On the Power of Mind, Wisdom and Experience," is written by Vassja Velinova, associate professor and scholar of Slavo-Byzantine Studies at the University of Sofia. Dr. Velinova explains that these books, addressing the issue of conflict and confrontation between different cultures, will serve to promote intercultural exchange and help us recognize the rich cultural diversity we share. She concludes her preface with the following words:*

*"Probably we are in a process of giving new meaning to the impulse for a united world from the end of the last century. ...Whether this will happen through neutralizing the negative sides of globalization, or by going back to traditional cultures, or with the creation of a worldwide religion is impossible to prognosticate, exactly because the world is so diverse and often contradictory. One thing is sure—in order to choose the right direction, to uphold the humane principles, to 'choose life', not only courage but also a sense of duty and responsibility is required. I think in this aspect that the three dialogues have a lot to tell their readers."*

## On the Power of Mind, Wisdom and Experience

Vassja Velinova

**R**EADERS' approach to a book is a sign of its "long life" and when new editions are published it indicates permanent reader interest. In this particular case we are talking about three books, transformed into a part of an integral message to the 21<sup>st</sup> century with its contradictions and issues by the fact of their being reprinted in a set. The books were published in Bulgarian throughout the years—*Choose Life* in 1995, *Before It Is Too Late* in 1997, *The Beauty of a Lion's Heart* in 2000—but their association through their simultaneous republication has its reasons in the shared ideas, anxieties and insights.

A few words on the history of this type of books and their authors would help the readers orientate better in respect of their contribution in the intellectual demands in the last decades of the past 20<sup>th</sup> century and to evaluate their great merits and constructive potential.

From the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Japanese intellectual, humanitarian and religious figure, Daisaku Ikeda, honorary president of one of the most influential Japanese cultural, religious and social organizations—Soka Gakkai—started a series of dialogues with prominent people from the spheres of politics, economics, culture, science and art. Among the participants in his dialogues, dedicated to worldly substantial social, political and cultural problems, are politicians like Henry Kissinger and Mikhail Gorbachev, a remarkable figure like Fidel Castro, scientists like Linus Pauling, Anatoli Logunov, Arnold Toynbee, writers like André Malraux and Chingiz Aitmatov, intellectuals like Bryan Wilson and René Huyghe. In this elite circle we are honoured that there is a Bulgarian name as well—prof. Aksinia Djurova, notable scientist and acknowledged expert in the field of history of culture and modern art. The purpose of these dialogues is to represent the different points of view and in an unorthodox way to propose directions for the future development of humankind. Being people of influence and universally recognized authority, their opinions are perceived as independent factors in the global development.

The literary and philosophical dialogue is a genre form, known both

in the East and West since hoary antiquity. Confucius's principles are developed in the form of a dialogue; Plato's dialogues are an inseparable part of the ancient Greek heritage which later became the basis of all European culture. Though a little left behind during the Renaissance, the Classicism and the Enlightenment transform the dialogue into an interchange of messages held in the highest literary style, whilst in the modern ages the dialogue is almost as if left out of the intellectual and literary interest. This is exactly why its new reappearance in Daisaku Ikeda's series of books is turned into a challenge for the readers and allows them to almost feel the contiguity between two types of mentality—the eastern, deeply absorbed in itself and metaphorical, using poetical forms in its intellectual searches, and the western with its pragmatism, rationality and occasionally emphasized expression. In those books different types of cultural traditions interact, enriching one another and creating the specific spiritual aura of the modern and critical literary-philosophical dialogue. The modern person, deeply affected by the extreme Samuel Huntington's book on the collision of civilizations, looks at different cultures mainly in the light of confrontation; for him or her these books open a new horizon of tolerance and mutual latitude as a solid base for getting acquainted with the other and therefore—through his or her eyes—with your own self.

The books were published in Bulgarian in a rather brief amount of time—within the framework of five years. The original edition of the dialogue with Arnold Toynbee is from 1976 (a year after his death) and the one with Aurelio Peccei is from 1984 (also published after Peccei's death) and they bring us back to the newest European history around the time of the Cold War. This fact should not be disregarded because it converts the two books into an authentic proof of their time that even the most critical reader could value.

In regard to the third book, *The Beauty of a Lion's Heart*, it has been processed for over twenty years as the authors themselves say, and even though it has been published in 2000, in some parts it represents the realities in Bulgaria before the “changes” in 1989. Without falling into nostalgic reminiscences I think that for many young people who know about these times only from stories they heard and media publications they read, this book contains valuable and impartial information about an important period of our country's history. Thus the three books complete each other both thematically and chronologically.

The first dialogue, entitled *Choose Life*, between D. Ikeda and A. Toynbee, partially gives us an idea of the philosophical and cultural-anthropological basis of a number of events of our present-day exis-

tence. The second, *Before It Is Too Late*, a dialogue between D. Ikeda and A. Peccei, adds specificity and pragmatical purpose of a variety of ideas mentioned in the first one. Moreover the Italian author's appeal towards the preservation of the environment and his fears for the future of the Earth's biosphere, supported readily by Ikeda, displays its authenticity today. The third dialogue is dedicated mainly to the cultural traditions, to their preservation as a sign of national identity. It has a very gripping title for us as Bulgarians, *The Beauty of a Lion's Heart*, and in it the authors D. Ikeda and A. Djurova outline the importance of culture, art and national originality as a factor for spiritual survival in the globalizing world. The message of this dialogue, metaphorically situated on the Silk Route, is one of the most important—it is an appeal for the salvation of humanity and true values in a world, seized by virtual reality, profane mass media and all-powerful market rules.

The first two books—the dialogues Ikeda-Toynbee and Ikeda-Peccei—are a priceless source of information for the analytically predisposed reader with a sense towards history of contemporary geopolitics, culture and social issues. They offer a representative extract of the modern society's intellectual potential that created and partially realized the idea of a global world. In other words, the two books depict the globalization in different aspects of our life as it was contemplated with its noble goals and humane motives, with doubts and uncertainties.

In the Ikeda-Toynbee dialogue, the issues of international politics are analyzed profoundly in the entire second part of the book. In this part the necessity of “abdication” of national countries is motivated, the organic connection between economical growth and war is analyzed, the advantages of Western democracy, represented as standard for a future united world community, are outlined. The authors set forth—though only theoretically—the idea of world unification and emphasize the scientific-technological revolution which shortens distance and assists mutual understanding. On the basis of examples from European, Japanese and Chinese histories, the authors suggest fascinating reasoning on how the world's unification could be reached.

For everyone, acquainted with Toynbee's encyclopedic knowledge and historical and cultural determinism, this approach comes as no surprise. A world famous British historian, public figure, sociologist and diplomat for 30 years, he had been Director of the scientific department of the Royal Institute for International Politics, and he had taken part in the peace negotiations between the two World Wars which allowed him to gather substantial knowledge on the (then) newest European history.

Beginning his career as a specialist on Ancient Greek and Byzan-

tium's history, Toynbee has developed a broad intellectual horizon and has accumulated thorough learning on world cultures and civilizations. Influenced by Oswald Spengler's ideas, Toynbee creates his own model of world history, where the Western civilization's domination is given unhesitatingly. The academic circle hardly apprehends synonymously his fundamental work *A Study of History*; the reader can be critical towards some of the author's views, and yet the book remains a part of European cultural history and his ideas, supported by his authority of a public figure, exerting influence on the development of the Old Continent.

The dialogue *Choose Life* raises several questions of present interest that are yet to be answered. Probably the most reflection and discussions are offered in the third part of the book which scrutinizes religion's place in a modern society. Being an orthodox Buddhist, traditionalist and a religious reformer to some extent, Daisaku Ikeda stakes a lot on the religious upbringing as a tool for the accomplishment of "individual spiritual revolution" which should change each person separately and therefore the entire world. Adopting a rather moderate position, Toynbee speaks of "supreme religions" that are in his opinion necessary as a spiritual stronghold for the modern person. It is highly unlikely that the Western generation with its technological temptations would follow such ideas without reservation.

The perspective of a world unification based on one universal religion will probably remain a utopia. However we should note that several formulations in the Buddhist principles, which aren't a religion in the traditional Christian meaning and rather a systematized philosophical-religious experience, contain serious potential. The idea of purposeful spiritual self perfection, of achievement of unification with entire nature and of harmony of human activity with nature's laws, have a particular power of attraction even for the skeptical part of society, especially in more developed countries where material prosperity comes hand in hand with moral decay. The Western European rationalism, strengthened in the last few years by a misleading confidence in the infinite possibilities of science and technology, is tangibly distinguished from the Eastern ideology and approach towards the world. This is exactly why the internal, individual human revolution, disseminated by D. Ikeda, respectfully called Sensei (Master) by his followers cannot be accepted wholeheartedly. Probably it would be necessary to search and find a way towards spiritual progress but corresponding with the spiritual and cultural stereotypes inherent to every community.

Another moment represented in the books is a lot more important—

aiming to preserve spiritual and moral standards that make us human beings, and in this aspect, the two authors have a lot to share with people nowadays. Even though they find it difficult to avoid the instructive voice, they can't hide their apprehensions for the future of humankind in the process of uncontrolled development of technology, biotechnology and the competition to prepare for war which threatens to take over space as well.

The ideas deduced in theoretical aspect in the Ikeda-Toynbee dialogue find a more tangible explanation in the next book—the Ikeda-Peccei dialogue. Italian businessman Aurelio Peccei is a world known figure. He had headed firms like FIAT and Olivetti, participated in the founding of several non-government organizations, and is author of a book entitled *The Quality Human*, translated in Bulgarian. In 1968 Peccei founded The Club of Rome together with Scottish scientist Alexander King. According to its own definition, the Club is an organization of scientists, economists, businessmen, high international officials, present and ex-heads of state, all convinced that the future of humankind is not predetermined once and for all and that every single person can contribute to the improvement of our life. The Club of Rome attracts public attention with its annual report entitled *The Limits to Growth* from 1968 (mentioned often in the dialogue), published in 1972 as an individual book and translated into more than 30 languages. It is an original program document that gives notice to Western governments about the necessity of decrease in consumption as far as the world's resources are limited and cannot be exploited endlessly. Though popular, the document received serious criticism; however from the dialogue-book it becomes clear it has been accepted seriously and has given its reflection on Western European countries for decades forth.

The Ikeda-Peccei dialogue, entitled *Before It Is Too Late*, presents tangible issues and the aspects of a world transforming process that we call globalization are being scrutinized. In the three chapters the ideas for the overcoming of the national state can be traced not only theoretically but also practically. It is here that Peccei uses the catch-phrase “Think globally, act locally” which today helps globalism's theoreticians and practitioners speak about “glocalization” which, according to some authors, describes better the permanent and systematic interaction between global and local factors in the still building world society.

Having developed their ideas in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, when humankind still lived in a bipolar world, D. Ikeda and A. Peccei emphasize the problems of nuclear arming and the threats it poses to all people. In a time when the world domination was separated between the

two superpowers, USA and USSR, it is understandable why the authors place the subject of disarming in the center of their discussions. Even though nowadays the USSR doesn't exist any more, the two countries' nuclear arsenals are reality and the control over those arsenals is a question of security and survival of worldwide significance.

The rapacious attitude towards nature, the irrational waste of the world's resources and pollution of the environment are the components of a future ecological catastrophe which the authors forewarn about. Today, more than a quarter of a century after the publication of the dialogue we have the same fears, we talk about climate changes, and we ask ourselves how long this irresponsibility regarding the natural resources and the Earth—our home—will go on. The deforestation of the rain forests, the increase in the noxious gases emissions, the pollution with toxic waste—the other, hidden face of the global technological progress—threatens in the near future to transform the planet into a not such a good place to live. The questions asked more than a quarter of a century ago are alive today but the answers remain unknown. Thus the ideas, suggestions and anxious appeals towards the future generations sent by the two authors need our undivided attention, reflection and immediate actions. As A. Peccei says, humanity has never been so threatened standing at the peak of its technologic development to be destroyed by the exact same technological development because of the inability to control it. The Enlightenment's cult towards reason, rational knowledge and learning in general, cultivated for more than three centuries within our civilization, shows the power of human intelligence. But whether we are intelligent enough to master our own strength is a question which I am afraid cannot be answered with ease.

The two dialogues shortly represented here allow us to go back to the formation, discussion and gradual imposing of globalism as a world policy. If in the 80s and 90s of the 20th century, this concept was known mainly to experts in the fields of international relations, geopolitics, modern philosophy and political science, today it is an everyday word. We live in a reality designed decades earlier—the world of globalization as it is. Nowadays the critics of globalism are as many as its supporters. Clearly aware that the world cannot develop without change, we rather ask ourselves whether the chosen direction is the right one.

The modern man, witness of the bombing of Belgrade, the September 11 attacks and the following weird “war against world terrorism”, the actual war in Iraq, the economic wars hidden behind the mask of caring for the consumer, the powerful invasion of mass culture—often with questionable quality and yet good market acceptance—ever more criti-

cally asks oneself whether behind the seeming free-will society a super power's ambition for hegemony and world domination is hidden. The recent events on the Balkans—reshaping boundaries and the announcement of Kosovo for a sovereign state against the Serbian government and people's will—make us wonder why the idea of world unification come hand in hand with fragmentation of its regions and how exactly we should explain the reviving of nationalism in all parts of the globe. The double standard on all possible levels—economy, politics, culture—bears in itself the potential to turn globalization into yet another unsuccessful experiment which illustrates the abyss between a good idea and its practical realization.

The modern world remains open towards different points of view, critical revaluations and dialogue. In this context, the two books have a rather cognitive value as they represent some little known facts of European history as well as plentiful information about the traditions, the way of life and thinking, the religious beliefs in Japan and in general in the Eastern countries. Due to Dr. Ikeda's erudition, many sides of Japanese everyday life, the peculiarities of his spiritual world, and the specifics of the Buddhist religion become clear and simple even for the unprepared reader. The Japanese author's position, based on the experience accumulated for centuries in one of the world's oldest countries—Japan—, the wisdom he gets from his religious knowledge and the clear awareness for an achieved spiritual harmony, make him an exceptional interlocutor, bearer of the enigmatic for the European ability for self absorption and penetration beyond the visible form of things towards their true essence. This Ikeda's approach towards the problems represented in the dialogues adds continuity and persuasiveness to his position.

Based on everything said so far, the third dialogue *The Beauty of a Lion's Heart* occupies a rather different place in the reasoning for the world's fate. This is not only due to the fact that a very prominent Bulgarian scientist participates in it. Except for the normal pride we share as Bulgarians to have a Bulgarian name in this "alley of world glory", we have to add the fact that the dialogue between D. Ikeda and A. Djurova is a rehabilitation of true human values in a world subdued by market mechanisms, a rehabilitation of spirituality and humanity and not lastly—a marvelous presentation of Bulgarian culture with its richness, traditions and supreme achievements. It is barely necessary to present A. Djurova to the Bulgarian reader. Professor in Sofia University for many years, Ph.D. of the Center for Slavonic-Byzantine studies "Ivan Dujcev", as of recently international member of the Serbian acad-



emy of science and art, an honorary doctor of Soka University in Tokyo, she possesses a wide variety of knowledge in the area of history of art and culture as well as the area of modern fine arts. A sophisticated aesthete, with sense for details, she has always upheld a firm civil position which is a result of family background and her personal beliefs. This explains D. Ikeda's decision to have precisely her as an interlocutor in his dialogue for Bulgaria, being a cultural and religious figure as well as an aesthete and passionate photographer.

The two authors declare their common goal to present the "small" nation's cultures with clear consciousness that in the cultural history of humankind there are no "small" or "big" peoples. The main idea in the dialogue is that every distinctive cultural tradition should find place in the ever-changing world because this is the foundation of national identity. The depersonalization of different traditions and the unification of the diverse human spirituality is the most dreadful defeat that could possibly be inflicted upon the world, and the two participants in the dialogue unconditionally oppose that tendency. According to Ikeda, Japan and Bulgaria stand on two very distant points of the Silk Route but this is a challenge for them to become better acquainted. As he repeatedly emphasizes, the Silk Route doesn't divide but unites the nations that live on its trace, it is the surroundings that made possible the exchange of knowledge, technology and works of art. As I mentioned before, in this dialogue the Silk Route is a wonderful metaphor of the ever-changing and unifying world. But the most essential part of the book is that it depicts a world governed by spirituality, humanity and aesthetics.

*The Beauty of a Lion's Heart* was completed in 1999 and was published in Japanese. The book roused so much interest that as early as the following year there was a second printing. The time the readers became familiar with through reading the book was a time of changes. Repeatedly from its pages A. Djurova refers to this topic based on the Bulgarian experience. She speaks of the social price of the transitional period, the pros and cons of a process that changed the face of Europe. Although in terms of time Bulgaria has only small experience as part of the EU, we can see ideas in the dialogue that outran their time. We can verify from our own experience how market principles affect delicate spheres like culture and art and vital areas such as education and health service.

*The Beauty of a Lion's Heart*, despite its critical tone at times, is an optimistic book. It convincingly shows us through examples from centuries-old histories of Bulgaria and Japan that the nations are stronger than time's whims. The wisdom of survival, which is deep-seated in

smaller nations and peoples and the strength of their spirit (the parity with the portrait of the lion is not accidental either for Bulgaria or for Japan), are a guarantee for their future. The message of the book that forthcoming generations will find in themselves strength, courage and most of all wisdom to defend their own national and cultural dignity, gives a positive touch amongst the authors' fears. It is not accidental that in the chapter dedicated to Bulgaria and Japan in the 21st century the participants devote their attention to their apprehensions for a future development in the conditions of the "new world order" with all the convention this concept bears. For Djurova, the main problem on the Balkans is the ethnic differences which, being instigated from foreign geopolitical interests, cause armed conflicts. She sees Bulgaria's mission precisely in the direction of overcoming ethnic tension. But as the authoress writes, the result of these interests is a "policy of imposed peace", "limited sovereignty", and even "protectorate" status. The recent separation of Kosovo is yet another illustration of her standpoint.

*The Beauty of a Lion's Heart* presents two main problems—isn't the price we have to pay for the world's transformation into a global structure too high and how can spirituality be protected from the consumers' society liberalism, where everything is permitted and everything has a price. The optimism of the architects of the global world seems rather far-fetched, according to some authors even "surrealistic". Nevertheless critics and supporters of the process alike admit that it's a reality. And in this exact reality we have to find a way to go back to the ancient human values, as traditional as that may sound. It is difficult to prognosticate the direction in which humanity will continue its way in the 21st century—a century that started off dramatically, generating tension and "hot points" at multiple places in the world. Probably we are in a process of giving new meaning to the impulse for a united world from the end of the last century. We have to start thinking about the fact that we cannot live forever in a post-society—post-industrial, post-capitalistic, post-modern, and recently post-pessimistic. It is high time that humanity's intellectual energy be directed in a constructive direction, it is high time that we turn into a pre-society, a model for a more humane world. Whether this will happen through neutralizing the negative sides of globalization, or by going back to traditional cultures, or with the creation of a worldwide religion is impossible to prognosticate, exactly because the world is so diverse and often contradictory. One thing is sure—in order to choose the right direction, to uphold the humane principles, to "choose life", not only courage but also a sense of duty and responsibility is required. I think in this aspect that the three dialogues

have a lot to tell their readers. And if we take them not as obligatory directions but as cause for reflection and revaluation, even as a cause for polemics, I am convinced that the efforts of the authors, publishers and everyone else who contributed in a way would not have been in vain.