Special Series:

The Spirit of India—Buddhism and Hinduism (2)

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India, the Cradle of Culture and Pacifism

The Limits of Modern Rationalism and the Restoration of the Spirit of India

Ikeda: Professor Nanda, your birthplace in India on the Asian subcontinent was the locus of the Indus valley civilization, one of the oldest civilizations in the world. I have had the opportunity to visit India many times, and each time my poetic and creative imagination has been sparked by experiencing the variety of animal calls and bird songs intermingling with the hustle and bustle of human society at the beginning of a busy day. The power to nurture the creative spirit seems to emanate abundantly from the land itself. It is not surprising, therefore, that since antiquity many genres of learning, culture, and arts flourished in India, making it one of the greatest contributors to human history.

We tentatively entitled this dialogue "The Spirit of India: Buddhism and Hinduism" in order to highlight the greatness of the Indian spirit that transcends and encompasses both Hinduism and Buddhism. In so doing, we hope to find ways for coping with the crises confronting modern civilization based on Western rationalism.

Nanda: Dr. Ikeda, the points you raised are, as always, quite profound. They are of immense importance in the modern world because we find ourselves facing what some have called a "clash of civilizations" instead of a dialogue among civilizations. And today, even if America's leaders repeatedly insist that, "We are not against Islam, and the West has no desire to dominate others," western culture is seen by many religions and cultures as indeed domineering, arrogant, and exclusive.

Let me give a very simple example. Take, for instance, our role as human beings on this planet. Although in the West environmental considerations and preservation of endangered species are given lip service, Western thought, based on modern rationalist philosophy, presupposes that human beings are superior to all other creatures and that the natural

world exists to serve us. This tenet is the assumption on which Western thought is founded.

Ikeda: This perspective lends itself too easily to the idea that human beings possess the power to determine the right to survival of all the creatures on the earth. Dr. Karan Singh, in a dialogue with me (*Humanity at the Crossroads*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1988), pointed out the belief, common to Hinduism and Buddhism, that human beings are an integral part of nature and that the prosperity of humanity is inseparable from the well-being of other living beings. This is the antithesis of "humanism" as developed in the West.

Nanda: In Hindu scriptures, the care and protection of the environment is considered a religious duty. Hinduism and Buddhism part company with the western view of man and the universe because both these faiths firmly believe that as human beings, our role on this planet is not to dominate the rest of creation, not to be in dominion over all beings. Both these faiths appreciate and respect our fellow creatures and consider the role of humans as being responsible for and providing protection for them. In both faiths, living in harmony with nature is fundamental. Hindus look upon nature as sacred and stress the protection of Mother Earth.

Transmigration (Samsāra): The Symbolism of Transmigration

Ikeda: The notion that human beings and other living creatures are equal to each other represents, philosophically speaking, the concepts of transmigration and dependent origination. In ancient India, the theory of transmigration described existence as a cyclical flow of life through various permutations. The Buddhist scriptures mention "Jataka." This refers to teachings in which Shakyamuni swore to save every living being and actually took on the forms of different creatures as he carried out his pledge. He was a Bodhisattva devotedly serving others, being reborn as a human being and as other creatures such as a bird and a deer. These tales may be interpreted as extolling the Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva's noble way of life.

Nanda: We as human beings have thought processes, we are more advanced spiritually than other beings, and, instead of seeking dominion over the entire universe, we must consider ourselves to be a part of it and to take seriously our responsibility to maintain it. The tales you mentioned illustrate this very well.

Ikeda: Yes. The stories are about the possibility of living a noble life in service to others, as did Shakyamuni who even took the form of birds and beasts. The creatures of the earth have much to teach human beings about the correct way to live.

By aspiring to the way of the Bodhisattva, that is, by devoting ourselves to the service of others and contributing to the happiness and well-being of humankind, we can free ourselves from self-centered egotism and anthropocentrism. I believe that as members of the human race, we have a noble mission to ensure the coexistence and development of all the creatures of the earth. This perspective reflects the concepts of transmigration and eternal life.

Nanda: Yes. Hindus respect the Divine presence in animals and recognize that animals will eventually achieve liberation. You have identified transmigration and eternal life as perhaps the greatest basic difference that separates Hindu and Buddhist thought from modern Western thought. As you know, Hindus believe that the soul is eternal and immortal. Hence, life does not end with death; the doctrines of Karma, reincarnation, and moksha (meaning salvation, liberation, or emancipation) are concepts central to Hinduism.

Ikeda: In my dialogue with Iranian Professor Majid Tehranian (University of Hawaii) entitled, *Global Civilization—A Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue*, the professor pointed out that when we read sacred religious texts, we must not be ensnared by a superficial literal interpretation, but rather reflect deeply on the symbolic meanings to discern what the scriptures would teach us. I agree completely.

This is the main principle conveyed in Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren interpreted the scriptures in three steps, i.e., words, meaning, and intent. "Words" refer to the actual expression transmitted by the words of the text. "Meaning" refers to the meaning expressed, and "intent" refers to the underlying intention and sentiment that gave rise to the words. Nichiren insisted that the sacred texts must be read using these three stages of understanding. Of course, "intent" refers to the sutra's intent or the heart of the Buddha. Only after we have embraced the heart of the Buddha as our own and followed the actions of the Buddha in our own lives can we be said to have really read and understood the scriptures. For Nichiren, the Lotus Sutra, which represented the essence of Mahayana Buddhism, was not merely a fairy tale from the past. He believed that it transcended the generations and held truths that we must live by as independent beings. To intently read the Lotus Sutra means

that we will be able to understand the universal truths it teaches, which we must put into practice through experiences in our lives.

Nanda: Therefore, if I understand correctly, Nichiren believed that the Lotus Sutra contains a blueprint for the actions that we must take here and now?

Ikeda: That is exactly right. The interpretation of the scriptures in terms of their "intent," as explained by Nichiren, must include Professor Tehranian's point about "symbolic meaning." Therefore, if we consider this vantage point, the Buddhist theory of transmigration points to the honorable mission of the Bodhisattva which is our purpose in life, which has been, from ancient times, to seek the truth and save others from their suffering.

One more point springs from the concept of transmigration. And that is that we must correct our narrow-minded human-centered understanding of our place in the universe. Instead, we must view the creatures in our midst, for example, the bird we see there, the dog here, as creatures who are on a quest for eternal development on the path of the Bodhisattva. Therefore, rather than thoughtlessly mistreat them, we must embrace them with respect, treating them fairly and with compassion as they are also aspiring to the Bodhisattva way.

Nanda: Indeed. That is why Hindus are sensitive to the sacred nature of all life and see the Conscious Being in all creation. The perspective you describe would instantly solve many of the problems we face. To reiterate, it is a terrible mistake to think that since human beings have the power of intellect, they are more spiritually advanced than other creatures, and consequently, are meant to hold dominion over the entire universe. This type of thinking leads to the intolerance and arrogance of those who think that their way is the only right way. It is exclusivity in the extreme.

Dependent Origination and Its Meaning

Ikeda: The Buddhist view of dependent origination is highly critical of egotistical, anthropocentric, and ethnocentric ways of thought. Dependent origination is multifaceted in significance, and one major aspect is "interdependence." This is to say that no one and nothing can exist in isolation. The concept of dependent origination applies to the conceptual frameworks that make up language and philosophy.

To cite an example given by the great Mahayana Buddhist scholar

Nagarjuna, a parent can not exist in isolation. In other words, only when a child comes into the picture can a person be called a parent. Therefore, the terms "parent" and "child" are nothing more than words, concepts created for human convenience.

Every person is a being deserving of fair treatment and respect. However, society often views children as incomplete or immature adults and deals with them in an overbearing manner. Also, people often exclude others by identifying themselves using contrived categories such as citizen and nation, when in reality, all people are basically the same with negligible differences. In any case, dependent origination reveals that the identities we unceasingly create for ourselves are nothing but fabrications. In a sense, modern rationalism is a variation of the theme appearing in medieval times of the absolute God who stood at the apex of the celestial hierarchy. Today, human beings have placed themselves at the top of the celestial cosmology, having usurped the position of the absolute deity. The consequences of this view of the world have led to serious environmental problems. If we continue to behave as if we are the supreme deities of the universe, we invite irreparable environmental destruction and threaten the very survival of the planet itself.

The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging who appears in the Lotus Sutra views everyone as having a pure Buddha nature and greets them with a prayer. This prayer or "Namu" is the Japanized Sanskrit word "Namas." It is a greeting which honors the precious sacred essence of every person. In other words, the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging sees the Buddha in others. In the Indian greeting, "Namaste," "te" means you. Therefore, "namaste" means "I hold you in the highest regard."

Nanda: That is correct. Both literally and in spirit, "namaste" connoted the recognition that the Divine within me bows to the Divine within you.

Ikeda: In Buddhist terminology, this would mean "I respect and honor the Buddha nature within you." Nichiren taught that "When one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back." (Gosho, p. 769.) If people would praise and honor the Buddha nature within each other, the various conflicts we face today would surely be resolved.

Arundhati Roy, a contemporary Indian intellectual, discusses the "obscene accumulation of power, this greatly increased distance between those who make the decisions and those who have to suffer them." She continues, "Our fight, our goal, our vision of another world must be to eliminate that distance." (*War Talk*, South End Press, 2003, p. 107.)

As Roy states, and as Gandhi put into practice in his life, this trend in

modern society to distinguish oneself and scornfully exclude others must not go without a challenge. This struggle of disobedience must first be fought in the heart of the individual. The individual must fight his own intolerance and tendency to discriminate and exclude others.

Nanda: You are absolutely right. And that is why I mentioned exclusivity: the tendency to say "my way is the only way. And if you don't follow my path, you will not be saved and my God will punish you." This kind of thinking leads to the often-heard assertion: "Either you are with us or you are against us." Unfortunately, in the Western tradition today, this kind of exclusivity has become a dominant feature. Punishing people, demonizing them, talking about them as evil—this thinking and behavior must stop, for it creates confrontation, conflict, and what you, Dr. Ikeda, have called a crisis point.

In Hindu philosophy there is no room for feelings of superiority or prejudice. The essence of Hindu Dharma is that all creation, animate and inanimate, is endowed with divinity. Thus, as the divine spark exists in all souls, among all there is a common bond. Under this philosophy, how could there be differentiation of superiority and inferiority? Outward differences based on color and racial features notwithstanding, since all have the same divinity within them, discrimination is unacceptable. The often-repeated Hindu precept "vasudaiva kutumbhakam"—the entire human race is one family—embodies the concept of mutual respect and human dignity.

Ikeda: Most of all, in order to overcome this exclusivity, people must begin to examine their lives and social phenomena from a more fundamental understanding of life. Shakyamuni described his motivation to abandon his princely status in the following way. "Surely one of the uneducated manyfolk, though himself subject to old age and decay, not having passed beyond old age and decay, when he sees another broken down with age, is troubled, ashamed, disgusted, forgetful that he himself is such a one. Now I too am subject to old age and decay. Were I to see another broken down with old age, I might be troubled, ashamed and disgusted. That would not be seemly in me. Thus, monks, as I considered the matter, all pride in my youth deserted me." (The Book of Gradual Sayings, translated by F. L. Woodward, Pali Text Society 1970, p. 9, Book of Threes 4–38, Anguttara-Nikâya.)

Following this passage, Shakyamuni discusses disease and death. He observes that people tend to abhor disease and death, though they themselves are subject to them, and when they see those who suffer from dis-

ease or who are dying, they are scornful and distance themselves. In fact, often those who scorn others, claiming some unconvincing excuse, are unable to look the target of their ridicule directly in the eye, perhaps because they see their own selves there.

Education in Ancient India

Ikeda: The world views India as the land of spirituality and philosophy. This is truly the case, in my opinion. India's rich spiritual culture, including Buddhism, was conveyed throughout Southeast, Central, and East Asia. It also exerted influence on West Asia and Europe through a variety of mediums. In modern times, we have seen it become a major impact on trends of thought in Europe and the U.S.

To explore the soil in which this multifaceted spiritual culture evolved, I would like to next discuss scholarship and education. In the fifth century, the Nalanda Monastery in eastern India was at the height of its development. It was a Buddhist university, a great center of Buddhist study that served as many as 7,000 teachers and students who lived in the dormitories, and possessed a library housing thousands of volumes. There were other academic centers in places like Taxila reputed for medicine, and Benares, known for religious and philosophical studies.

These centers of learning for advanced and specialized study must have been the world's first universities. In contrast, in the West, the University of Bologna in Italy is said to be the oldest, but it did not begin to function as a university until the eleventh century. The University of Paris and Oxford University were established shortly thereafter. Why do you think that a successful Indian system of higher education was established much earlier than in the West?

Nanda: The Nalanda Monastery was known for its monumental contribution to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge and the pursuit of enlightenment through knowledge and wisdom. The success of Nalanda has its roots in Indian history. I should also mention that around 700 BCE. there existed a great university called Takshashila. Located in the Northwest region of India, it attracted students not only from India but from Babylon, Greece, Syria and China. The subjects taught at the university ranged widely, from the Vedas, languages, grammar, philosophy, medicine, and surgery, to music, dance and archery. There were over 10,000 students at the university. Experienced teachers there included renowned names, such as Kautilya, Panini, Vishusharma, and Jivak.

Ikeda: In other words, simply feeding information to students is not the objective of a true education. Rather, in India, education was seen as imparting wisdom through dialogue with a teacher who could share knowledge based on profound insight and life experience.

Nanda: Yes, exactly. The classical Indian model of education included spiritual knowledge like yoga and Vedanta. Hinduism did not see any dichotomy between religion and science, and both were taught in educational institutions. In ancient India, the higher knowledge dealt with consciousness. Education brought together a richness of various points of view and the coexistence of several different systems of thought, thus stimulating the intelligence of individuals.

Ikeda: A well-known Japanese educator, Mr. Tatsuru Uchida (1950–), once said, "True intelligence is not being able to remember the correct answer. It is the ability to articulate doubt." Education for knowledge teaches already established fact. Of course, this is important in its own right, but education for wisdom teaches readiness for future events. This is true education of the intellect.

Nanda: In ancient Indian philosophy, life was considered to be made up of four stages. The first stage was Brahmacharya, the stage for studying, acquiring knowledge. This practice had developed long before the establishment of the famous Nalanda University. Sages and seers had prescribed that, during the first stage—the first 25 years of life, the most formative years—one needs to study, acquire knowledge, and learn experientially, so as to grow in wisdom.

This first stage was a preparation for the second stage, that of Grahastha. During the second stage, that of a householder, a person is to work, acquire wealth, marry, have children, and seek prosperity, but also do good work. By actively participating in society, one leads an active social life. One engages fully in the economic, social, and political life of society. This stage lasts another 25 to 30 years.

Ikeda: And the third stage is called Vanaprastha.

Nanda: Yes. After age 55 to 60, during the third stage, that of Vanaprastha, one is to start moving away from worldly and material things, giving more time to society, although still caring for family and friends. This stage also lasts for twenty-five years. After the age of about eighty years, during the fourth stage, that of Sanyasa, having acquired

wisdom and experience, one gives all one's time and energy to society and works fully in the service of society and of humanity. This is a rough sketch of the four stages of life.

But you raised an important point—education in ancient India and higher education in Indian universities played a most significant role in shaping Indian society.

Ikeda: Professor Nanda, you have just discussed the Indian life pattern that serves as the foundation for higher education, that is, the four stages of life. The educational system has grown out of the social foundation which has its roots in daily life.

Nanda: That is right. The Indian system of higher education was made possible by a way of life based on an already existing educational orientation in Indian society. This system describing the productive life should be followed everywhere today.

Establishment of Public Debate and Institutions of Higher Education

Nanda: Next, I would like to discuss what made possible the development of large scale institutions of higher learning in ancient India.

During the Vedic period, as educators, sages and seers had established centers of education. An apt analogy would be that those sages and seers were like Socrates and all those Greek philosophers who imparted vigorous training through dialogue and questioning. In ancient Hindu society, during the first period, one studied, questioned, debated, and formed ideas in discourse with teachers and fellow students. And one learned to express oneself in a civil fashion.

Ikeda: Through the development of commerce, cities evolved in ancient India, just as they had in Greece. During that period, more and more free-thinking philosophers appeared, such as the Six Teachers described in the Buddhist texts, who were unfettered by the traditional Brahman religion.

Nanda: Yes. During that period, one did not have to physically fight to win, but there were intellectual and spiritual duels. And one could either win or lose the battle of ideas or the battle for the hearts and minds of the people.

Ikeda: In sacred texts such as the Upanishads, one frequently reads of scenes in which sages and philosophers engage in public debates before

the king. These events were, in a sense, philosophy Olympics. Through open debate, the ideas of the victorious philosopher would become the common asset of the masses. This scenario makes it easy to understand how the spiritual development of all of humankind would advance at once.

Nanda: For Indians, this process of thinking and articulating ideas, and studying and preparing for the later stages of life, was what occupied Hindus during the first stage of life. And ancient universities, such as Takshashila and Nalanda, were famous for preparing people for those later stages.

Ikeda: So, students most probably focused on training their minds by contemplating questions such as: What are life and death or true happiness? What is the purpose of life? During one's youth when the foundation for one's life is created, and during middle age when one examines one's entire life, there must be a profound philosophy supporting one's life. Nichiren describes this as "the treasures of the heart." (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851.)

Students in India learn that "More valuable than treasures in a warehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all." A truly victorious life is one in which a person can look back and reap the precious treasures of the heart. This is a shining example of a life well lived. In India, we see that society provides young people the opportunity to study philosophy and learn this at a very critical time in their lives.

Nanda: That is true.

Ikeda: Professor Nanda, you have described the Indian and Greek philosophers' practice of freely engaging in public debates. This is exactly what Nichiren attempted to do in his lifetime. During the Kamakura period in Japan, Nichiren engaged in intense struggle against political leadership and philosophies that he felt were leading society in the wrong direction.

For this reason, Nichiren was misunderstood and persecuted. Twice he was falsely accused and banished to remote islands. Nichiren was not the type to flatter or curry favor with powerful people. He was exiled because he assertively and courageously attempted to advance dialogue on issues he felt important to the security of Japan.

Uchimura Kanzo, a Christian who opposed war and was oppressed

because of his views, described Nichiren as a true example of a modern Japanese intellectual. He said, "He is the only case, as far as we know, of Japanese Buddhists, who, without any example to follow after, stood for a Sutra and a Law with his life in his hand. . . . Religious persecution in its true sense began in Japan with Nichiren." (Kanzo Uchimura, Representative Men of Japan, in The Complete Works of Kanzo Uchimura; Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1972, vol. 2, p. 125. Uchimura originally wrote in English.)

Yet, Nichiren did not even once commit an act of violence. He expressed the belief that "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." (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 579.) Nichiren attempted to articulate the truth as he saw it and share this truth with the masses. It was not for his own benefit, but rather to carry out the Buddhist Law and aim to emerge victorious for the benefit of humankind.

Socrates wanted to empower young people especially and encourage them to think on their own, but he was persecuted and ended up condemned to drink poison. Nichiren was also persecuted, but I have hardly heard of this happening in India. There is an account of a jealous opponent who attacked Nagarjuna after losing a debate on Nagarjuna's Middle Way doctrine. Yet, there seem to be no cases in which the entirety of public opinion persecuted someone.

Nanda: I don't think there were either. In India, there would be huge gatherings and people engaging in debates and dialogues, and you would have sages and seers sitting as referees and judges to make decisions about who won and who lost. That was the kind of setting in which those centers of higher education prospered. Even though people lost, they would never seek revenge. They would just accept their loss. They would think to themselves, "Oh, I have not been up to the mark. I need to study more, I need to think more. Maybe my ideas are not sound. I'll have to think things through and maybe accept the ideas that are better, for me and for society."

Ikeda: When I think about the historical background you have described of the spirit of India, it seems to me that in order to establish a foundation for true social development it is essential to provide public venues for open dialogue and debate.

Nanda: Yes, indeed. It is essential.

The Fundamental Goals of Life

Ikeda: Of all branches of learning, ancient India particularly excelled in philosophy. There are no major works on history, apart from some epics depicting magnificent legends. By contrast, religious literature abounds, dating back many centuries BCE. This is true of the *Veda* which is the world's oldest poetry epic of a philosophical nature.

It is interesting to compare India with China, a country known for great books of history. Confucianism, the spiritual backbone of China, is distinctly oriented toward secular interests. Confucius himself said, "You cannot know about death before you know about life." Indian scholarship, by comparison, seems to focus on the search for the eternal.

Nanda: That is so well said; it is absolutely true. The Vedas, as you know, are the oldest literature of India, preserved by the people for thousands of years. The term Veda means knowledge, wisdom, or vision. The Upanishads define twofold knowledge: an internal self-knowledge, through which an individual can gain immortality, and an external knowledge, through which one understands the external world. This would include what we today refer to as science and technology. The Vedas teach a way of knowledge that is pluralistic, diverse, and open.

These texts represent the unbroken culture of the people, with an emphasis on Dharma. The traditional name of India, Bharat Varsha, derives from the name of Bharata, a famous Vedic king. The Bharata dynasty were the kings during the Rig Veda period. The Vedas extend to all domains of culture and knowledge. Their branches encompass music, architecture, astronomy, and medicine. The Hindus thought that all disciplines are important and must be mastered, but they also thought that the goal of self-realization must always be kept in sight.

Ikeda: I have heard that in India, all scholarly and spiritual activity aspires to the ideals of benefit, love, the Law, and *moksha* or emancipation from earthly bondage. In contemporary terms, these could be translated as secular prosperity, building a harmonious community, social justice, and liberation of the soul.

Nanda: All these preparations and stages eventually are going to lead to *moksha*, salvation. In Buddhism and Hinduism, the goal remains in essence very similar. The highest goal of any Indian educational process was for the individual ultimately to reach *moksha*, enlightenment, which required education of the entire person, combining all intellectual and

mental ability with experiential thinking. Even in centers of higher education and the universities, meditation and spiritual progress were seen as part of one's overall effort toward self-development.

Ikeda: I suppose this is why the fields of philosophy and religion developed to such a high degree. I am reminded that fields such as grammar and mathematics advanced as supplemental to the philosophy of the *Veda*. The *Veda*, the oldest, voluminous collection of philosophical/religious verses, represents the grandeur of spiritual endeavors in ancient India. It also gave birth to six auxiliary branches of learning: *siksa* (phonology), *chandas* (meter), *vyakarana* (grammar), *nirukta* (etymology), *kalpa* (ceremonial rules), and *jyotisa* (astronomy).

Within the discipline of religious ceremonies, thanks to the construction of religious facilities, the field of architecture progressed, and advanced mathematics such as trigonometry was born. I have even heard that over 3,000 years ago, in a geometry text called the Sulba-sutra, a proposition comparable to the Pythagorean theorem is recorded.

I notice that there were many disciplines which concern language study such as phonology, meter, grammar, and etymology. During the 4th century BCE Panini analyzed and systematized Sanskrit grammar. His meticulous methodology and precise analysis are considered outstanding even by today's standards.

A look at the whole array of Vedic literature shows deep veneration of and firm trust in the "power of words" underlying Indian scholarship. Buddhism posits three categories of human conduct—corporal, linguistic and mental (deeds, words, and thoughts). The spiritual context of Indian life which places strong emphasis on language, as mentioned previously, helped to create an environment that nurtured a free exchange of ideas. This grew out of a strong sense of mission to share the truth with others.

Nanda: President Ikeda, you have eloquently stated the contributions of Vedic scholars, philosophers, and educators. It was Bhaskaracharya who in "*Surya Siddhanta*" calculated the time for the Earth to orbit the Sun to nine decimal places—365.258756484 days! The modern accepted measurement, as you know, is 365.2596 days. Bhaskaracharya also wrote: "objects fall on Earth due to force of attraction by the Earth. Therefore, the Earth, planets, constellations, Moon and Sun are held in orbit by this attraction." Thus was the law of gravity known to ancient India more than 1500 years ago. It is worth recalling that Sir Isaac Newton discovered this principle in 1687, at least 1200 years later.

India gave to the world the concept of the smallest and the largest measure of time: from *Krati* (1/34,000 of one second) to *Kalpa* (4.32 billion years). The ancient Indian astronomers had calculated the circumference of the Earth to be 5,000 *Yojanas*. As one *Yojana* equals 7/2 kilometers, this is 36,000 kilometers, quite close to the actual circumference as we know it today. The astronomer Aryabhata, who lived at least 1,000 years before Copernicus, stated in his treatise, "*Aryabhateem*," that our Earth "is round, rotates on its axis, orbits the Sun and is suspended in space." However, references to the astronomy of ancient India are to be found in the Rig Veda, which dates back to around 6,500 B.C.E.

Indian Mathematics—The Discovery of Zero

Ikeda: Indian civilization's contribution to the field of mathematics is well-known. The concept of zero was invented in India. In terms of numerical units, as well, Indians were way ahead of the Greeks, whose maximum unit was *milliard* (10,000) and the Romans for whom *mille* (1,000) was the largest unit. Ancient Indians had names for all the numbers up to ten raised to the eighteenth power (10^{18}). The numerals designated for these numbers made their way to Europe from Arabia, and so they came to be called Arabic numerals, but if we follow the trail back to its source, we find that they actually came from India.

Nanda: Zero—yes, that was a significant contribution. The words "*Aditi*" (infinite) and "*Kham*" (zero) are found in the Vedic literature, the Rig Veda and other Vedas. Going back to 6,500 BCE, the beginning of the decimal system is found. Actually, as early as 100 BCE there is record of a number as high as 10 to the power of 140. In Indian antiquity there is also reference to binary numbers.

Ikeda: This is indeed a tremendous contribution. From one perspective, Zero means "nothing," but if we did not have zero, we would not be able to indicate 10, 100, or 1000, or have the decimal system. Also, the binary system used in computer technology would not exist. From this totally different perspective, the meaning of zero implies "full of possibility." No quantity but great quality. That is the marvelous nature of the invention of zero.

Indian Medicine - Famous Surgeon

Ikeda: India was also advanced in the medical field, wasn't it?

Nanda: Yes, Hindu sages and seers studied many other disciplines encompassing science and mathematics. India has had the Ayurveda system of medicine since ancient times.

Ikeda: I understand that "Ayurveda" means "knowledge of life." *Caraka-samhita* compiled in the 2nd century by Caraka, King Kanishka's court physician, contains a detailed discussion of physiology, therapy, pharmacology, dietetics, and other medical theories and techniques.

When Alexander the Great and his army invaded India by crossing the Indus in the 4th century BCE, they found an international city named Taxila to be a large academic center. Indian doctors in that city are said to have successfully treated some of the Greek soldiers whom their army surgeons found incurable. A legend goes that Jivaka, an Indian physician who treated Shakyamuni himself in the 6th century BCE, performed brain surgery. The account of this story is found in The Fourfold Rules of Discipline (vol. 40). A certain man from the king's palace in Râjagaha (pali) (also called Râjagriha) was suffering from a severe headache and was seen by various physicians. The physicians all knew that the man had a serious disease and did not have long to live. One physician told him that he had seven years to live. Another told him that he had only one year. And yet another claimed that he had but six months left. Then, however, he was seen by the famous physician Jivaka, who immediately operated on him. But first, Jivaka gave the man spicy hot food to eat. This was to increase his body's ability to absorb fluid. Then he was made to drink liquor, and he became intoxicated.

Nanda: This was to anesthetize him, I presume.

Ikeda: Yes. Then, Jivaka opened up the man's skull, removed the diseased area, used a disinfectant, and sewed him back up. It is speculated that perhaps the man had a brain tumor.

Nanda: This means, then, that Ancient Indian medicine had become so advanced that it included the knowledge and techniques of performing open brain surgery. It is not surprising that the ancient Indian and other traditional arts of healing are being re-evaluated today as possible alternatives to modern Western medicine. Today, the West has now recognized the effectiveness of ayurvedic medicine, which originated in India thousands of years ago. This traditional knowledge does not simply treat the symptoms but reaches to the very core and essence, searching out the cause of a malady. It encompasses physical, mental, and psychologi-

cal elements and addresses the basic problem and also is effective in prevention.

Ikeda: Can you give us some specific examples?

Nanda: For many centuries in ancient India the effort was to treat the human body, mind and physiology in an integrated fashion. It is very holistic. Charaka, whom you mentioned earlier, described anatomy of the human body with methods of diagnosis and treatment. He listed plant, mineral and animal substances required for the preparation of medicines. He prescribed a method for purifying the blood, and he explained how heat and light rays could be used to treat a patient and cure him or her without surgery.

Ikeda: Today, Indian traditional medicine is being examined as a complement to modern medicine which too narrowly views the pathology while overlooking the patient.

Political science is another field in which ancient India bequeathed some outstanding literature. Especially well known is Kautilya's *Arthasastra*, which is considered comparable to Aristotle's *Politica*. In its in-depth analysis of strategems, *Arthasastra* is said to be more comprehensive than even Machiavelli's work.

As we have seen thus far, Indian culture has exerted manifold influences in the rest of the world. Of these numerous contributions, which do you think are especially important?

The Achievements of Indian Civilization—A Spirit of Tolerance and Compassion

Nanda: Pluralism stands as one of the great contributions of Indian culture. The philosophy that all paths lead to the same goal, that there is no exclusivity, that we need to be inclusive is a special feature of Vedic tradition. This stems from the traditional Hindu tenet that the Divine is One, and sages call It by different names. Further, as I mentioned before, Vedic culture asserts that the entire human race is one family. So if any part of that family anywhere is uncomfortable or unhappy, then the entire family grieves. So the thought here is that whether it's poverty, ignorance, hunger, or any other malady that hurts human beings in any part of the world, the consequence is that all of us suffer.

Ikeda: I understand that sentiment very well. In Buddhist terminology, we call that "dôku" which means having empathy and compassion for

others. Shakyamuni expressed this idea when he told his disciples, "Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of devas and men. . . . And I, monks, will go along to Uruvela, to the township of Senâ, in order to teach *dhamma*." (Book of Discipline, volume IV, Mahâvagga I–12–1, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 2000. Translated by I. B. Horner.)

Nanda: Seen from the perspective of the Indian spirit of compassion, a violation of human rights anywhere is a violation of human rights everywhere.

Ikeda: Yes. An attitude of indifference or derision leads to evil. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, our first president, admonished us sternly, saying, "To observe evil without responding is the same as committing that same evil." If someone's human rights are violated, his dignity as a human being has been infringed upon. This, in turn, means that your own dignity has been violated.

Nanda: We must be sensitive to the needs of people, to their concerns, and their difficulties. To me, this is a critical feature of Hindu culture and a major contribution.

Ikeda: Yes. This is definitely true. I agree completely.

Nanda: Another defining feature of Indian culture is that all beings in the world are interconnected.

Ikeda: This relates closely to the concepts of dependent origination and transmigration that we have considered previously.

Nanda: Yes. For example, when we talk about endangered species and the environment, although we are not speaking of human beings or discussing issues pertaining to humanity, we feel an innate respect for the sanctity of nature and the environment. Thus, Hindu thought is not focused exclusively on human beings but on all creation.

I would like to reiterate that Hinduism considers all human beings to have the same aspirations—the same goals, to reach enlightenment. So it is not simply tolerance of others that is the ideal, but it is embracing others. Consequently, diversity is celebrated.

Ikeda: Yes. That is very clear. Hidden within the term "tolerant" is a sense of arrogance, holding oneself above and looking down on others. However, this concept in Indian culture is not tinged with this meaning. Rather, it carries a sense of compassion for all living creatures and a desire to coexist in harmony with them. What do you believe are the major factors that account for concepts such as these and for the development of such a highly advanced culture in ancient India?

Nanda: It may be an accident of history, but the fact is that in ancient India, sages and seers had the time to think and contemplate. They believed that the experiential part of human activity is equally important. They had come to realize that there are some fundamental principles applicable to everyone. One can profess any religion, believe in God, a deity, a book, or a thought process, but there are basic natural laws, common principles. Thus, the belief in Hindu philosophy that all human beings belong to one family, that diversity needs to be embraced, that there is an interconnectedness between different species, emanates from that basic principle.

It is no accident that in Hindu society the highest status was that of the teacher thinker, the Brahmin. The Brahmin was considered to be the repository of knowledge and wisdom. Thus, even if he had no possessions, was simply wearing a saffron-colored robe, but was a spiritual and religious teacher, the king, on seeing him, would rise from his throne, touch the Brahmin's feet, ask him to sit on the throne, and would sit before him in order to partake of the wisdom he would bestow. This was the traditional practice that gave Hindu thought its vitality, humility, and dynamism.

India's Spiritual Contribution to Building Peace

Ikeda: We have considered Indian culture's contribution to humanity as stemming largely from aspects of its spiritual culture, i.e., its philosophy and religion. More specifically, however, in terms of its value to contemporary society, Indian culture has provided humanity with concrete examples for creating peace. Models of peace abound in the history of India. The best model from the ancient period is King Ashoka (r.c. 268–232 BCE). He continues to be admired as an ideal monarch even by people today. The king was called the "guardian of the dharma (law)"; in Greek he was referred to as the "protector of justice (*dikaiosyne*)." *Dharma* was sometimes rendered as *eusebeious* (piety) in Greek translations of Ashoka's royal decrees. This is because piety toward some transcendental being and commitment to the protection of justice were

considered inseparable.

In the *Makabharata*, known as the longest epic in the world, one of the heroes, Arjuna, is urged to carry out dharma, the highest virtue each person was expected to practice without regard to self-interest or personal likes and dislikes.

Nanda: This epic embodies for me the highest ideal in the form of a ruler and the government. Before Emperor Ashoka, the period known for its ideal government was what we usually call Ram Rajya (the rule of Lord Rama). The people at that time not only were prosperous but were exercising their full human rights and performing their ideal obligations and duties toward society. The period during which Lord Rama ruled came centuries before Emperor Ashoka's reign. Dr. Ikeda, as you yourself mentioned, indeed, Ashoka should be our model today, for his approach to government was an ideal approach.

Ikeda: In the modern period, too, Indian culture has given humanity an outstanding example.

This would be Mahatma Gandhi, the modern representative of Indian pacifism. His nonviolent resistance movement has exerted a great influence on many leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King of the civil rights movement in the U.S. and President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and will continue to affect the course of history. Mahatma Gandhi's movement was called "*Satyagraha*." "*Satya*" (truth) here means "human dignity," does it not? And, can we not interpret "Satyagraha" to mean "unlimited trust in the dignity of humanity"?

Nanda: That is exactly right. That is how "Satyagraha" should be interpreted and it is indeed an excellent crystallization of Hindu philosophy.

Ikeda: Buddhist truth, too, is called "satya." The Lotus Sutra, the quintessence of Mahayana Buddhism, teaches that all people are equally endowed with dignity and calls for the flowering of the unlimited potential within.

Nanda: As you probably know, in the Indian setting the lotus is a beautiful plant. It remains pure even in a muddy pond; nothing can contaminate it.

Ikeda: It is said that Henry David Thoreau was the first person to introduce the Lotus Sutra to American society. A part of it was pub-

lished in the *Dial*, the magazine that Thoreau and his teacher Emerson published (January 1844 issue). It may have been translated from a French version. This was perhaps the world's first English introduction to the Lotus Sutra. The part of the Lotus Sutra that he picked for the publication was the chapter "Parable of Medicinal Herbs." The story told in this chapter is about how all the plants grow in the same soil and receive an equal amount of rain to grow. But the way they grow is completely different. The parable resoundingly celebrates the diversity of humanity and the compassion to treat all people equally.

Even if this translation were not Thoreau's, there is no doubt that he edited the issue. The ideas presented in the chapter, "Parable of Medicinal Herbs," resonated with Thoreau's own philosophy which held that all living creatures support each other in the harmonious web of life.

Nanda: It's fascinating that the philosophers of the American Renaissance were attracted to the Lotus Sutra, and that they especially focused on the "Parable of Medicinal Herbs" chapter. I, too, would like to become more familiar with the Lotus Sutra.

THE RELIGIOUS WAY OF LIFE (1)
A HINDU PERSPECTIVE

Faith and Life Today

Ikeda: Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to attend the graduation ceremonies of the Soka schools and Soka University. Also, your lectures at the seminar and academic conference sponsored by the Institute of Oriental Studies have been widely appreciated.

Nanda: You are quite welcome. Both my wife and I feel that this visit has greatly enlightened us and lifted our spirits. We were especially moved by the graduation ceremonies of the Soka schools and Soka University. We were profoundly impressed by the desire of your students for learning and their determination to contribute to world peace. I clearly sensed that these sentiments were a reflection of the value creation philosophy.

Most of all, I was thrilled, as a legal scholar, to hear the wonderful news that you will establish a school of law at Soka University. To have students researching and studying law that is based on a foundation of respect for life will, in and of itself, yield a tremendous benefit to society.

Ikeda: The students of the Soka schools and Soka University are as precious to me as life itself. I am so pleased that you hold such high hopes and expectations for them.

Nanda: As I listened to your address to the graduates at the commencement ceremony, it seemed as if you were engaging and reaching out to each person with heartfelt warmth and sincerity. I felt as if I were viewing the primary reason for the progress and success of the Soka schools and the university in the way you spoke to your beloved students. It was clear to me then that you put your students first above anything else in your life.

Ikeda: Thank you. I consider you a distinguished champion for humanity and peace, and we are privileged to have you and your wife as our guests. It is a magnificent farewell gift to the students as they leave our institution to go out into the world.

Nanda: Indeed, Mr. Ikeda, you embody the spirit of value creation which in turn pulses in the hearts of each and every member of your organization throughout the world. I believe this to be the case because each time I encounter members of Soka Gakkai, I feel spiritually uplifted.

Some religions are exclusionary in nature, while others encourage introspection and reflection. I believe that religion, by its very nature, must contribute to society. This is precisely why I view your leadership, Mr. Ikeda, as exemplary in presenting a model for the proper role of religion in society. You yourself embody religious faith in the best way. Because your faith is built on a firm foundation, you are able to accept and appreciate the virtue in the faith of others with an open and receptive mind. You do this without a trace of self-righteousness or superiority in your outlook. You show an open-hearted attitude of compassion, understanding, and respect for other faiths, and you live the ideal that there are many paths that can lead to the same goal.

Ikeda: Thank you for your generous comments. I sincerely appreciate the depth of your understanding of these matters. As you so aptly pointed out, people are increasingly questioning the appropriate role and contribution of religion in society. Now is the time that religious institutions must respond to this call.

In this portion of our discussion, it would be helpful if you could give us some idea of the basic tenets and traditions of the Hindu religion

which form the rich soil of Indian spiritual culture so that we will be able to understand the background of your views and way of life. India, a land that I think of as a spiritual place, is also known as the great "land of religion," but how do the people of India perceive religion?

Nanda: I think it would be most appropriate to begin this discussion with an historical overview of the period from the Middle Ages onward.

Ikeda: Yes. After the Middle Ages, we enter a period in India of domination by Muslims and the English.

Nanda: That is correct. This is a discussion that relates directly to the importance of religion in Indian history. Specifically, for hundreds of years, Hindus were subjected to a great deal of oppression and their religion was under siege. As the Muslims invaded India, their message was clear: Hindus must convert to Islam or face death.

Ikeda: Yes. I am familiar with the harsh circumstances facing the Indian people at that time.

Nanda: Consequently, the impact of this domination was expressed by the variety of segments of Indian society in three primary ways. First of all, many Indians were converted to Islam through coercion. A second group deeply resented the Muslim domination and took up arms to fight Islam. This group felt strongly about using violence as a response to violence, yet underlying their actions was also a fervent desire to keep their Hindu faith alive. In the third category were those who hoped that the intense repression the Hindus were facing would ultimately end and they would be able to observe their own faith in peace.

Ikeda: What influence did these historical events have on the faith of the Indian people?

Nanda: One visible impact of the repression imposed by the Muslims was that the advances made by the Hindus in the arts, sciences, mathematics, medicine, and literature were halted. This cultural stagnation was accompanied by a period of darkness—a "dark age" had descended upon India.

Ikeda: Culture is the light that illuminates and gives hope to society. In a period of spiritual stagnation when culture loses its vitality, darkness

and gloom rule society. How did religion survive in the midst of such darkness?

Nanda: Religion survived by building cultural walls around itself. During this period, Hinduism hid, as if under a veil, and did not show itself in public at all. Also, extremely rigid norms were created governing social behavior. For example, Hindu women did not mix in society, but rather it was understood that they were to be confined to the home. Also, they were required to wear a mark on their foreheads indicating that they were married, so as to avoid abduction by Muslims. Also during this time, the caste system became rigidified, leading to a highly inflexible and stratified social system.

When Muslim control finally waned, it was replaced by British rule. The British did not use coercion, but rather their method was more subtle, trying to convince Hindus that their religion was not forward-looking, that because of their religious faith Hindus had been dominated by others, and that the tenets of Hinduism such as the concept of karma were responsible for the Hindus' sense of defeatism and loss of self-esteem.

Indian pride was assaulted, Hindus further lost self-confidence, and they started questioning their belief system. However, during this same period, the *Bhakti* movement began to spread, with people worshipping with a great deal of intensity and singing *bhajans* en masse, aimed at countering cultural and religious attacks against them.

Ikeda: The resistance movements of the Sikh and of the Maratha in central and southern India are also well-known. These groups were defeated by the Muslims as well as the British, but their fighting spirit flowed like a swift undercurrent through the spiritual consciousness of the Indian people and served as a powerful source of inspiration for the subsequent Indian independence movement.

Nanda: Yes. And ever since India gained her independence in 1947, the Indian people have been rediscovering their culture.

Ikeda: This was a period during which your country awakened to its profound spiritual heritage and began to share this valuable cultural asset with the entire world.

Nanda: Yes. Since India's independence, the country has gone through a remarkable period of introspection. A large number of Hindus have

rediscovered the elegance of the Sanskrit language; they have gone back to learning and reciting the Veda and Ayurveda sacred hymns in the Vedas and ancient scriptures which proclaim highly evolved philosophical concepts such as the transcendent nature of life. A renaissance of Hinduism is presently taking place. Intellectuals and scholars are rediscovering their spiritual heritage and the beauty and significance of the Hindu religion. This revival of Hindu consciousness has spread in India as well as in Hindus living abroad in so many countries.

Hindu teachings and Vedas

Ikeda: Now let me ask you more specifically about Hinduism. In Japan Hinduism is associated with the special respect accorded to the "sacred cow." Some are familiar with the concept of the *avatar* (incarnations of the Deity), the fervent followers of the *bhakti* faith, and the way people use pictures of the gods as talismans to hang in their cars, on their storefronts, and so on. Little is known, however, about Hindu teachings. If you could give a brief introduction, I think it would help us gain a deeper understanding of India.

Nanda: I would be happy to, but I would rather think of us as considering these issues together, because I look forward to learning a great deal from you as well, Dr. Ikeda. Hindu scriptures and history provide a rich spiritual landscape, as you appropriately pointed out. I hope you will allow me to briefly present the historical context.

Ikeda: Yes, please.

Nanda: The most ancient and best known scriptures, accepted as the source of all other Hindu sacred books, are the Vedas. They are: *Rg Veda*, addressing issues of general knowledge; *Yajur Veda*, addressing knowledge of action; *Sama Veda*, addressing knowledge of worship; and *Atharva Veda*, addressing knowledge of science. Together the Vedas contain more than 20,000 *mantras* (hymns).

Ikeda: In the Hindu faith, are these sacred texts considered to be the teachings of the sages or are they thought to be the divine word of God?

Nanda: The Hindus believe that the Vedas contain the word of God. Sometime around 1,500 BCE, Rishi Veda Vyas compiled the original hymns into three categories—prose, poetry, and song. According to the great Indologist, Max Muller, the Vedas are the oldest books in the

library of mankind. *Veda* itself means "knowledge."

Ikeda: Some of Max Muller's theories have been examined and challenged, but there is no doubt that the Vedic scriptures belong to humankind's oldest sacred texts.

Nanda: The essence of the Vedas is considered to be the *Vedanta*, a term that means the last part or summary or fulfillment of the Vedas.

Vedanta Philosophy

Ikeda: I believe this refers to the philosophy of the Upanishads. It is found in the last part of the Vedic literature where it attained its ultimate form.

Nanda: Yes. It is believed to be the most enlightening part of the Vedas. This Upanishadic philosophy asserts that beneath the appearance which we perceive with our senses is an unchanging reality called *Brahman*, the all-pervading Godhead, which is the ultimate reality. This reality is Absolute Being (*Sat*), Absolute Knowledge (*Chit*), and Absolute Bliss (*Ananda*). It is believed to be both personal and impersonal. Within each one of us (*Atman*) and within each creature and object this is seen to be pure consciousness.

Ikeda: In the following generations, didn't the study and examination of Upanishadic philosophy lead to the establishment of the school of Vedanta philosophy?

Nanda: Yes. And, in turn, Vedanta philosophy is the foundation of Hinduism. In essence it states that happiness is the natural state of human beings. Shankaracharya, one of the great Hindu scholars who lived in the eighth century, spread the doctrine of *Advaita* (non-dual) *Vedanta* throughout all of India.

Ikeda: I have heard that Shankaracharya was well-versed in Buddhism as well. The doctrine of *Advaita* (non-duality) received its name from the belief that the Brahman or fundamental principle of the universe is the true reality while other representations are nothing more than illusions.

Nanda: Yes. That is correct. Among other Vedanta proponents are Ramanuja and Madhva, the former living around 1,000 CE and the latter

around 1,200 CE.

Ikeda: Who are the major thinkers of the modern and contemporary periods?

Nanda: These would be Aurobindo Ghosh and Swami Vivekananda, whom you have mentioned before, Dr. Ikeda. Also, Ramana Maharshi, one of the most influential modern sages, revered by Hindus along with Aurobindo Ghosh and Vivekananda, once said: "Man's real nature is happiness. All men, without exception, are consciously or unconsciously seeking it. They ever want happiness unstained by sorrow, a happiness which will not come to an end. This instinct is a true one. Really, his search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true Self."

Ikeda: The phrase "search for happiness" does not mean the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction, but rather it describes the piercing desire to ascertain the nature of true happiness and the true meaning of life. I have a sense that this is the fundamental theme underlying Indian spirituality.

Nanda: You are right on the mark. It is precisely the basic foundation of Indian spirituality.

Ikeda: Next, please discuss the specific forms of worship practiced by Hindus toward their gods.

Nanda: Historically speaking, the Vedas are the foundation of the Vedic system of religious practice. This system underlies Hinduism and may be considered its more expansive form. Its deities may be seen as more "primitive" in concept, but in fact it contains many layers of great complexity.

Ikeda: I believe it is said that the origins of the Vedas are the hymns offered up to the many nature deities worshipped by the Aryan people.

Nanda: For instance, the God of Lightning, a basic force of nature experienced by early civilizations and appearing in Vedic mythology, is Indra. But the worship of Indra in Hinduism is more than a primitive form of religious practice. The worshipper addresses the senses, and also the *Kundalini*, the psycho-physical energy of the nervous system that can be harnessed in higher states of consciousness.

Ikeda: Indra, therefore, was elevated from being a powerful force of nature to a sophisticated philosophical construct. So, the workings of Indra became the Shakra (Taishaku) which were also adopted by Buddhism. Indra serves an important function together with Brahma (Bonten) in the Buddhist belief system.

Nanda: *Vaishnava*, faith in the God Vishnu, and *Shaiva*, faith in the God Shiva, are two traditional branches of Hinduism. There is, in addition, the Vedic or Brahmanical tradition, which is usually divided according to which of the four Vedas one follows. These divisions are simply a convenient differentiation, different branches of the eternal religion or *Sanatana Dharma*. They may differ in the sense that the focus is on one or another aspect of the divine—the benign and approachable form in Vishnu or the transcendent and transformative in Shiva.

Some groups may see a degree of duality between the soul and the divine, while others see pure unity. Indeed, such distinctions are very subtle. The features that they all hold in common include, among so many others, the worship of the Earth as a Goddess and divine Mother, the rule of karma, and reincarnation.

Ikeda: In the area of worship, what forms of worship do Hindus practice?

Nanda: Worship by Hindus can be personal or can be offered in public. Personal worship has three aspects: prayer, Yoga, and *Japa*. Prayer is said to serve several purposes:

1) to cultivate godly attributes in oneself;
2) to rid oneself of evil thoughts and desires by meditating on God; and
3) to express gratitude to God.

Prayer is said to be of a higher or lower level, according to whether the seeker is asking for goals such as health, wealth, and happiness, or for spiritual knowledge and divine love. And the highest form of prayer is for the benefit of others and for universal peace.

Ikeda: Religion provides a valuable perspective on the meaning of existence. Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, as well as Nichiren, whom we revere, also stated that the purpose of prayer is to seek the happiness of others and enduring peace for all humankind. What form does Yoga, which aspires to practice this kind of prayer, take in its reli-

gious observances?

Nanda: Yoga provides the eight-fold path of self-realization and Japa has three forms—physical, verbal, and mental—that is, external worship, invocation by praises and prayers, and meditation.

The most typical daily practice is worship at the home altar or shrine. A ceremony of worship or *puja* is simple, invoking the deity's presence in a *murti* or another symbolic form and offering of fruit, flowers, flame, symbolic or actual bathing and dressing, incense and prayers or meditation. Hinduism is not a congregational religion, as such, but thousands of temples have priests who constantly serve the deities and receive the public for ordinary daily prayers and festivals or extraordinary *pujas*. An example of the extraordinary is the *maha yagya*, or great fire ritual, often involving several priests and hundreds or thousands of worshippers, for the purpose of invoking some great blessing.

The main thought behind the practice of deity worship is the idea that when the devotee invokes the presence of the God into the form, that God is actually present. This is called *darshan*, which refers to the individual actually seeing and being seen by the eyes of God.

Ikeda: Thank you for that very vivid description of the practice of Hinduism in daily life. The French scholar of Indian studies Louis Renou says, "One does not become a Hindu after birth, but is born a Hindu." As this phrase indicates, Hinduism and the life of Indian people constitute a complete whole. The distance between human beings and the gods in Hinduism seems to be extremely close.

The distinguished French scholar of Asian studies Sylvain Lévi in his work *L'Inde et le monde* writes, "India did not give it [Hinduism] a name. It is simply religion as natural as the air, water, and sky." (*L'Inde et le monde*, 1926.)

To the Indian people, Hinduism is so closely integrated into their lives that it does not require a special appellation. This unity is epitomized by the fact that there is no Indian term that accurately corresponds to the word "Hinduism." So, this may be one of Hinduism's major characteristics. What do you think, Dr. Nanda?

Nanda: Yes. This is indeed the case. Hinduism is such a deeply rooted part of Indian daily life. This is illustrated, for example, in the uncertainty experienced by Hindus who have left India and moved to the West. When they begin to raise a family and wish to teach their children about Hinduism, they are at a loss.

Ikeda: It must be so integrated into the Indian way of life.

Nanda: Yes. It is an odd quality of the Hindu religion that it is so common and ingrained a feature of our lives that we have very little need—and hence few tools—to describe it in language. This has serious drawbacks, particularly in the face of modern cultural challenges to the life of faith, and especially so in those families that come to the West from India and find it difficult to teach their children the imperceptible, sublime truths they have always taken for granted. Having no dogma, nor strict tenets, nor central text or personality, Hinduism can and does take a lifetime to teach and to learn.

Ikeda: Very interesting. No wonder the world finds itself knocking on India's spiritual doors whenever it faces the need to find a way out of chaos. From beyond the door that is readily opened are the smiling and welcoming faces of "a people who have left a strong impression on other Asians without violence or selfishness," as Renou describes them in his foreword to the Lévi book. (Ibid.)

What Renou refers to as Asia could well be replaced with "world." India has made a profound impression on world history, not with violence but through the power of the spirit.

Nanda: Dr. Ikeda, you have raised a very important issue. Indeed, I am always deeply impressed by your penetrating grasp of not only Buddhism, but Hinduism as well. Hinduism is well known for the external representations of its tenets, for example, the "sacred cow," but there is also a more profound expression of timeless internal values—the role of the individual in society, the responsibility of the individual to the natural world, and the role of individuals in their own salvation. These values express the core beliefs of Hinduism.

Ikeda: So, the spiritual values of Hinduism and Indian spirituality focus on the place of humankind or, in other words, the purpose of life and the reason that we were born. As in the past, when we face confusion, the path ahead is obscured, we are searching for meaning, and we will again surely knock on the door of Indian spirituality and be enlightened and nourished by its vast store of wisdom.

Next, I would like to ask about *purushartha* (the goals or purposes of humanity or human life).

Nanda: In traditional Hindu discourse, the purpose of human life is per-

ceived in terms of *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Moksha*.

Ikeda: In this case, *Dharma* means morality or norms. *Artha* means possessions or gain, and *Moksha* means salvation. Together with *Kama*, meaning love or attachment, these are the four main purposes of life in the Hindu view of personal development.

The four stages of life, which shift from "selfish" to socially and morally centered ways of life and end with the spiritually centered life, offer much that we, who are products of contemporary civilization, can learn from.

Again, in contemporary terms, *Kama* may be seen as fulfillment in family relationships, *Artha* is material prosperity, and *Dharma* is societal fulfillment. When spiritual fulfillment is added, and this multi-layered happiness is achieved, we can interpret this to mean that one has attained a degree of contentment in life.

In the classical Indian literature, *Kama* and *Artha* as well as *Dharma*, which means "norms" rather than "truth" as is taught in Buddhism, are explained repeatedly. As a preface to these explanations, a statement always describes salvation as the ultimate goal. In any case, these four *Purusharthas* (efforts or actions) are relevant for people in modern times as well.

Nanda: Yes. These goals express universal values and are as relevant and valuable for people today as in the past.

Ikeda: It is said that the era overshadowed by the threat of nuclear apocalypse has more or less passed, although the possibility of use of nuclear arms has not been totally eliminated. In its stead, I feel strongly that an unrestrained "greed" and a strange and oppressive "uncertainty" have become the prevailing moods of our day. The various problems that plague the world today—whether they involve the environment, or global economic change, issues of bioethics, and nationalism—cannot be blamed on certain "dictators" or power elites, but must also be attributed to the "greed" of individual, ordinary people. What to do about this greed or desire is a vital question that we need to address now.

In modern times, many products and services are produced in the service of convenience, and a system has been created that stimulates consumer acquisitiveness. As we observe the state of today's *kama*- and *artha*-obsessed civilization, we realize that what the world needs is the principle of the *purushartha* ("four goals of life") by which the energy of "desire" is enhanced—rather than rejected—into *dharma* and

moksha. This is what we call "value creation."

Nanda: Exactly. In this modern society, where the focus is primarily on *Artha* and *Kama*, we need to be reminded that *Dharma* and *Moksha* are essential goals that all of us, as human beings, should pursue, and not just Hindus or Indians. However, as you mentioned, Dr. Ikeda, *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kama*, are common experiences that human beings have in their lives. In this sense, Hinduism places no taboos on them. After all, to achieve economic prosperity is one aspect of life.

Ikeda: Yes. I believe so, too. It is natural for people to desire economic prosperity, love and worldly abundance. To deny this is to deny society a vital aspect of its existence.

Nanda: However, as you mentioned previously, the most important point is that Moksha or salvation is the ultimate objective of our lives. We pass through a variety of life stages in our development as human beings.

Ikeda: For example, we perceive the lifespan as being composed of the stages of infancy, childhood, youth, mature adulthood, and old age. In childhood and youth, children and young people are students of primary, middle, and high school and college. Upon entering into society, one learns about one's work, then later in life teaches that knowledge and experience to one's subordinates in the workplace.

Nanda: The objective of the process of personal development represented in the life stages is Moksha or salvation. Moksha is not possible if one arbitrarily skips or leaves a stage. Also, Dharma is the compass that guides us through each life stage. It is the principle of doing what must be done, at the appropriate time, in any situation. If I may, I would like to discuss these life goals and give a general overview of each.

Ikeda: Please go ahead.

Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha

Nanda: As you know, *Dharma* has many meanings, such as "laws of nature," "reason," "truth," or "that which keeps all together." This is one of the most intractable terms found in the Hindu philosophy. It is derived from the root "*dhru*," meaning to uphold, sustain, or support.

When we speak of the *Purushartha*, or objectives of life, the most apt

meaning in this context would be that of "duties" and right behavior.

Ikeda: Professor Nanda, to add to the various significant aspects of Dharma that you have touched upon, let me introduce the thoughts of the Japanese Buddhist scholar, Dr. Hajime Nakamura. Dr. Nakamura explains the significance of *Dharma* in terms of "truth," "matter," "the manifestation of humanness," and the "ethical standards on which to base institutional law." (The Thought of Early Buddhism, p. 588.) If I understand correctly, Professor Nanda, you emphasize the significance of pursuing these life goals because, as social beings, our personal development occurs within a social context.

Nanda: Yes. By means of a disciplined life, one can reach the ultimate Reality. All actions are to be aimed at fulfilling one's *Dharma*. Truth, honesty, justice, compassion, and love are the virtues that, according to Hinduism, humans should practice in life. Fulfilling one's *Dharma* would mean that a judge should dispense justice to all, a doctor should treat a patient irrespective of who the patient is, and a teacher should teach his or her pupils no matter who they are, and each of these to the best of the actor's ability.

Another sense of *Dharma* is based on the idea of debt. In the literature on *Dharma*, the laws of *Dharma* dictate the ways of repaying our debts: we show gratitude to the gods for their blessings by performing the appropriate rituals; we repay the goodness and care of our parents by honoring and supporting them and passing on their knowledge in turn to our own children; we have a debt to all other humans and to all living things that we repay with respect and good will and compassionate service.

Ikeda: Buddhism also expresses the sentiment of indebtedness to all sentient beings and teaches that all of creation is related through mutually supportive relationships. All living things, including human beings, are mutually dependent on one another. This illustrates the principle of dependent origination. Therefore, our lives are related to and supported by parents, family, friends, community, racial or ethnic group, nation, as well as humanity and the ecosystem of the earth.

Humankind has forgotten the debt it owes to all the living beings making up creation. We have injured others, and even violated the earth's environment. This is why this gratitude and sense of indebtedness must become a norm integrated into the consciousness of every person alive today. Professor Nanda, as you have stated, *Dharma* is our

duty as human beings to respect and serve with compassion everything that enables us to sustain our lives.

Nanda: I agree wholeheartedly. The next goal, *Artha*, concerns the necessity for human beings to have the means or resources to live in this world. Everyone needs the material benefits of food, clothing, and shelter. We need resources, but these should be earned by fair and honest means. Making a large amount of money is entirely appropriate, but one is also reminded that gaining wealth is only one of the objectives among all the duties that one must carry out.

Ikeda: By this you mean that one should not make *Artha* or building wealth a selfish goal.

Nanda: That is exactly right. Next, let us consider *Kama* or enjoyment. Humans have a natural desire to enjoy worldly happiness. It is through the five senses—taste, sight, hearing, smell, and touch—that we best appreciate the blessings of the divine in creation. Human sexual activity, too, is a fully legitimate aspect of our enjoyment of creation. When sexual postures are depicted in temple decorations, the reference is to the material world in eternal blissful union with the divine, and texts often refer to the seeker's quest for truth as the longing of a lover for the beloved.

Ikeda: This is how the Indian scriptures express this thought. Mahayana Buddhism teaches the way to sublimate the "five desires" or sensual desires. The earthly desires of the five senses as expressed in the principle of "earthly desires are enlightenment" are not to be loathed or shunned, but rather sublimated as an avenue to enlightenment. For example, the deity Aisen Myô-ô whose origins are Hindu and whose name means "craving-filled," is, in Buddhism, significant as a guardian deity of Buddhism. The name comes from the belief that his great love has the power to purify earthly desire of all living creatures and help them to attain enlightenment. In the mandala of Nichiren, who carried on the true teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, the Sanskrit characters on the left edge indicate this deity representing the principle "earthly desires are enlightenment."

Nanda: Yes. Very interesting indeed. The last and highest goal of life is *Moksha* or enlightenment and liberation. It is a basic tenet of Hinduism that the individual man or woman can obtain enlightenment—if not in

this lifetime then in a subsequent one. This means the liberation of the soul from the perpetual cycles of death and rebirth through reincarnation. When the soul has reached its perfection in life through the appropriate practices and worked through all the karmic obstacles it has created for itself, then and only then does it reach total union with the divine.

As we proceed through these life stages, we pursue the appropriate *Artha* in each stage. However, we also need to follow the appropriate *Dharma* in each stage as well. *Dharma* is the moral standard which guides us on our path. It shows us the way to achieve our final goal of *Moksha* or enlightenment throughout all the stages of the life cycle.

Moksha or salvation may also be called the enlightenment of eternal life. This is the ultimate goal of human life. It is the future that we must all strive to attain. As we progress through our life stages, *Kama* or enjoyment and *Artha* or the attainment of material prosperity are also necessary. They are not, however, final destinations, but rather milestones along the way.

Ikeda: You have given a very lucid description. My teacher, Mr. Josei Toda, the second president of Soka Gakkai, once said that the concept of happiness includes a relative as well as an absolute state. He asked if one would be happy if one's desire for money or a house is satisfied. Would one be happy when wearing fine clothes? This is not to say that desiring or fulfilling these desires is not good.

Mr. Toda described the relative state as the happiness one feels when the desire for material fulfillment is achieved and absolute happiness as the feeling of each moment of everyday filled with irrepressible joy. It is a happiness that one feels no matter where one finds oneself, whether it be at one's company, or as an employee in a small business, or as a hard-working laborer. It is a feeling that no one can destroy or take away.

Mr. Toda taught that it is necessary to meet the requirements for relative happiness, but the true purpose of human life is to create the state of life within oneself that makes one happy simply to be alive. The purpose of life as taught in Hinduism naturally recognizes the need for happiness that includes meeting one's worldly needs, but this in and of itself is not seen as a life goal. Rather, Hinduism presents an image of individuals achieving worldly happiness, one step at a time, and while experiencing confidence and fulfillment in one's life, seeking to attain a higher plane of spiritual development.

To Overcome Ahamkâra

Nanda: Yes. Ultimately, we must clear away the obstacles in our path. This process may also be called sublimation. In Indian tradition, this refers to *Kama*, *Krodha*, and *Moha* in their least enlightened forms.

Ikeda: In Chinese translations of the sacred texts, *Kama* is translated as greed, *Krodha* as anger, and *Moha* as foolishness. Known as *Ton-Jin-Chi* (in Japanese), greed, anger, and foolishness are known as the Three Poisons. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that these earthly passions must be transformed into the wisdom and compassion of Buddhism. Also, it is written that "When Nichiren and his followers recite Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are burning the firewood of earthly desires, summoning up the wisdom fires of *bodhi* or enlightenment." (*Gosho*, p. 710.)

The Buddhist goal is to attain Buddhahood, but achieving this does not mean that there will be no worries or hardships. The consciousness of the bodhisattva whose goal is to attain Buddhahood is illustrated in the statement by Vimalakirti when he said, "Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick." (*The Vimalakirti sutra*, translated by Dr. Burton Watson.) Vimalakirti teaches that the nature of distress can be transformed. An egoistic happiness comes essentially from the same source as egotistical distress and anguish. If one overcomes these, one is able to withstand acute distress as well as embrace great happiness.

Nanda: I sense a common thread in Buddhist and Hindu concepts in this area. In Hinduism, that which must be overcome is referred to as *Ahamkâra*.

Ikeda: In translations of Chinese Buddhist texts, I believe this is called self-centeredness or attachment to one's own egoistic view.

Nanda: As mentioned previously, *Kama* is one part of life, but it is a lesser state of development that involves attachment to the worldly dimension. Therefore, one must go beyond this state to liberate oneself.

Ikeda: Yes. *Kama* and *Artha* are necessary, but if one becomes attached to them, one mistakes a first step for a life goal.

Nanda: Yes. As you so clearly discerned, Dr. Ikeda, we must avoid creating a civilization dominated primarily, or as it seems to be happening in the West, exclusively by the desire for enjoyment and prosperity.

Ikeda: One of the most remarkable features of a society where religion is alive and vigorous is people's generosity toward the poor.

As taught in the scriptures of different religions, poverty is by no means an evil; it is the poor who must be the first to be saved. Indeed, according to the scriptures, the greatest sin is greed. Today, we are now living in precarious times in a world in which consumption is considered a virtue, and greed is becoming even more virtuous than work.

Nanda: I totally agree. It is unacceptable to make those without material wealth objects of contempt. Similarly, there is no reason to assume that those who possess material wealth are honorable and virtuous human beings. Economic status does not determine the true value and worth of a human being. Indeed, your point, Dr. Ikeda, about the significance of a spiritual consciousness in overcoming greed is extremely important.

Ikeda: Poverty is certainly something that is very hard to bear, but what is even more chilling is the state of mind of those who simply see poverty as contemptible.

Nanda: I concur completely with your very astute observation.

Ikeda: In Hindu tradition, *sadhu* acetics and the *ashrama* fourfold life which you mentioned previously provide us with specific images of holy poverty that has conquered greed.

Nanda: Under the Hindu system—*Sanatana Dharma*—the principal attitude to be cultivated is compassion, and not only toward our fellow humans but toward all creatures. This sentiment is based on the fundamental belief in the oneness of all creation. A person's charity toward another thus comes not from a feeling of superiority or sympathy, but just the opposite—an awareness of the non-separateness between us all.

Ikeda: The commonality between the Hindu and Buddhist systems is the practice of compassion, which in Buddhism is based on the law of dependent origination. As written in the Samyutta-nikaya sutra, "It is just as if, friend, there stood two sheaves of reeds leaning one against the other." (Samyutta-nikaya or Book of the Kindred Sayings. The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1994, 2:7:67.)

As in the words of the scripture, embracing the principle of "dependent origination" is the way for humankind to pursue a path of sharing, mutual respect, and love for one another. An attitude of arrogance and

self-righteousness belittles other people as well as the other creatures of creation and only serves to diminish a respect for their lives as well as for oneself.

Nanda: Yes. In the *ashrama* four-stage scheme of human life articulated in Hindu tradition, there is an appropriate time to retire from the world and abandon all material possessions. In Indian cultural tradition, such a person was accorded great respect, while those who had amassed considerable worldly possessions and material wealth were not necessarily recognized as admirable human beings.

Ikeda: According to the *ashrama* system, a man devoted to religion divides his life into four stages, the first two of which are the "studentship" period (*brahma-carin*) of character building and ethical training and the "householder" period (*grihastha*) when he returns home, gets married, raises a family and fulfills his duties in society. He is also expected to perform various religious rituals.

Nanda: The second stage of studentship is a time of preparation for the householder period. In that period, a person builds wealth and power, while at the same time developing the qualities of a virtuous human being. This is an extremely important aspect of this period.

Ikeda: Accumulating material wealth does not mean greedily pursuing one's own wants and desires, but constantly contributing to the objective of social justice. Furthermore, at the third stage of life, the "forest dwelling" period (*vana-prastha*), a man and his spouse, the smallest unit of the family, abandon their secular life to dwell in the forest. But this is a preliminary training stage leading to the fourth stage. In other words, the first stage is a training period in preparation for the second stage, and the third stage is preparation for the fourth stage. It appears to me to be symbolic of the flexibility and gradualism characteristic of India as a whole.

Nanda: Yes, it is just as you say. It is certainly the case that in the third stage, people gradually put more and more distance between themselves and the hustle-and-bustle of their everyday lives. They continue with their work, but at the same time "retreat into the forest." In modern terms, this means that a person may gradually distance him/herself from the lure of daily life and work, and begin to focus attention beyond the self to the society. This enables them to divorce themselves from what in

Sanskrit is called *moha*. In other words, a person who has become liberated from *moha* is able to abandon attachments to the material world.

Ikeda: The term *moha* is rendered in the Chinese Buddhist texts as "ignorance". Thus in the fourth stage, those who have begun to live a life that transcends secular desires—in other words, those who have become free of attachments to the material world—once again reenter the community and interact with people again.

This return to the secular world at the fourth stage deserves our attention. The frequent sight of the "sage" unencumbered by possessions or home must surely help to elevate the moral consciousness of the community.

Nanda: Yes. In the fourth stage, a person begins to share a lifetime of wisdom with others. If the goal of human life is to be saved and to become enlightened, it is not achieved by accumulating worldly wealth. In other words, material wealth is not the key to achieving these objectives. Thus, the fourth stage is one in which a person shares the philosophy, wisdom, and experience of a lifetime with others in service to society.

Ikeda: Dissociating oneself from greed does not simply mean distancing oneself from secular society. If one merely displays an aversion to worldly things, this is an expression of egoism, and ultimately, just another type of attachment.

Nanda: Very good point. The *ashrama* scheme that you have articulated so well has contributed significantly to creating Hindu society by providing a coherent plan for human beings' lives. It is still quite relevant in our modern society.

Ikeda: By "coherent plan for human beings' lives," I assume you are referring to the aforementioned *purusharthas* or four goals of human development.

Nanda: Yes. The *ashrama* indeed is a plan aimed at achieving the four objectives—*purusharthas*—of life. Your description of the sage "unencumbered by possessions or home" but sharing his wisdom and experience with society is quite apt and powerful in enhancing "the moral level of the community," as you describe it.

Dr. Ikeda, you have elegantly captured the essence of the Hindu tradi-

tion of *ashrama*, the four stages of human life. The *ashrama* scheme facilitates one's developing an attitude of friendliness towards all and learning to live a simpler and less complicated life and to serve society with dedication and devotion.

Bodhisattva Way in Mahayana Buddhism

Ikeda: Mahayana Buddhism does not teach one merely to seek release from the suffering of birth and death or to stop after achieving Nirvana, but rather encourages individuals to follow the Bodhisattva Way by living their lives in the midst of society. This is the fundamental principle of Shakyamuni's life.

In the *Suttanipâta* or *The Group of Discourses*, it is written, "He does not commit any sin at all in the world, having left behind all fetters (and) bonds. He is not attached to anything, being completely released. Such a one is rightly called '*nâga*'." (*Sutta-Nipâta*, Vol. II, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1995, p. 57.)

Shakyamuni Buddha himself lived in the world and through self-discipline remained free of all attachments. Mâtrceta praises Shakyamuni in a Buddhist verse in the One-Hundred and Fifty Hymns, "Uncommissioned you were kind, you were fond without a reason, a friend to strangers, a kinsman where there was no family tie." (*The Satapancasatka of Mâtrceta*, D. R. Shackleton Bailey, ed., Cambridge, 1951, p. 154.)

The bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism transcend the cycle of birth and death, but do not stop there. After having achieved the meditative state of nirvana (*samâdhi*), they follow the ultimate model for living that Shakyamuni himself demonstrated by again returning to this world, to the reality of the suffering of birth and death, to devote themselves to the salvation of all sentient beings. Thus, by providing a refuge for those who have nowhere to turn, they demonstrate the principle of *Mujûshonehan* (not-permanently-fixed nirvana) of Mahayana Buddhism.

Nanda: I deeply appreciate and associate myself with the sentiments you have expressed. Hindu scriptures have laid down the tenets that one should not be greedy, since greed leads to other evils.

Ikeda: If a person negates the desire to improve and to live a better life, life would be devoid of color and society would be dark and gloomy. It is the excess of desire, that is, greed, that is the problem.

Nanda: Yes. In the ancient *Atharva Veda* it is said that one may "amass

wealth with hundreds of hands, but should distribute it with thousands of hands (3:24:5)." Thus, the happiness of the individual is seen to lie in the collective happiness of the society.

Ikeda: Nichiren also commented on this topic. He said, "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 24.) By this he means that personal happiness is inseparable from universal peace. In order to achieve this goal, Nichiren declared, "both oneself and others will together take joy in their possession of wisdom and compassion." (Gosho, p. 761.)

Wisdom and compassion are the essence of the Buddha nature. It is taught that people embody wisdom and compassion, the great strength of the universe, and true happiness is measured by the extent to which one is able to live a happy life in society together with one's fellow human beings.

The Conscience of the World and Religious Value

Nanda: In the Hindu scriptures, poverty is not in the least seen as contemptible. Charity is seen to elevate the lowly, as it enables the poor person to stand on his own feet in the future. And since not only the sages but even the Brahmins, as teachers, have very few worldly possessions, lack of material wealth is not looked down upon. This is why the poor are not scorned. As we mentioned previously, this attitude illustrates the sense of spirituality that pervades Indian culture.

Ikeda: Yes, I am familiar with this wonderful cultural attitude. Mahayana Buddhism teaches the practice of giving alms to those in need as well as giving alms in the sense of teaching the Law. This kind of almsgiving is one kind of practice to break through the greed that people have in their hearts. The practice of giving money or material goods is a kind of distribution of wealth, as you mentioned. Offering the Law is a way to better the life state of others by means of wisdom. Also, the objectives of these kinds of almsgiving are taught in Mahayana Buddhism as a kind of offering of fearlessness. The intent is to inspire independence and an attitude of fearlessness in the face of any difficulty.

Nichiren clearly articulated this sentiment when he said, "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all." (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851.) He sought to emphasize more than any-

thing else the importance of accumulating treasures of the heart for people to lead independent and fearless lives full of courage and hope.

Nanda: Buddhism and Hinduism have in common these profound teachings and the wisdom enshrined in them. Hinduism, as you know, has perennially celebrated "unity in diversity." Human beings belonging to all different strata of society are equally appreciated. The *Maharaja* would step down from his throne to greet and touch the feet of the *sadhu* or sage who has no material wealth but brings the king his blessings, knowledge and wisdom.

We do need the leadership of visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, who highly valued religion and appreciated the value of diversity. These are the sort of wise leaders who can, as you rightly said, lead us in the right direction in our contemporary life.

Ikeda: I have endeavored to engage in conversations with people whom I consider to be "the conscience" of the world. Many of these individuals have placed great importance on their religious values and beliefs. Though they live in the secular world, they transcend the secular, demonstrating the power of their wisdom and compassion. They display a noble sense of humanity each in his or her own way which is akin to the values of the Bodhisattva Way in Mahayana Buddhism. In the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we see the phrase, "unsoiled by worldly things, like the lotus flower in the water," expressing the blossoming of humanity to its full potential in the bodhisattva who is devoted to the salvation of humanity—not leaving the reality of this world but remaining in the midst of it, just as the lotus plant rises up out of the muddy bottom of the pond to produce a beautiful flower. (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 222.) In society, this bodhisattva image of selfless contribution is reflected in the work of many individuals.

Nanda: As you have just mentioned, the example of one who has a religious consciousness and lives in the secular world while transcending the secular is an exemplary life model which we should all emulate. Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda both applied this religious consciousness to their everyday lives.

Solidarity among Awakened Global Citizens

Ikeda: In our contemporary world, where materialism reigns supreme and has become the standard of value, greed is a monster that threatens to swallow up the entire earth. In such a world, persons of wisdom and

insight are sorely needed to provide a model of a disciplined life to overcome greed and the "three poisons," and live according to the ideals of non-violence and altruism. Through the solidarity of such wise individuals, I believe that, as expressed in the Indian spiritual ideal, we must forge a world in which "diverse values flourish."

Nanda: As I think about my own life, I marvel at how you have lived yours in an exemplary manner. I recognize the major contribution you have made to others by living a model life and bringing great value into the lives of many people based on your own life experiences.

In my understanding, Hindu values, as we have just discussed, encourage people to lead a good life through liberation from attachments. I have endeavored to live my life according to these values. Since childhood, I have been fortunate in that Hindu values and a sense of profound spirituality have permeated my life. Of course, I feel that I have a long way to go before I can say that my life is entirely above reproach.

Ikeda: Your generous comments aside, I am well aware of your tireless efforts, spent unbegrudgingly, on behalf of those of lesser economic and social standing.

Nanda: Thank you for being so kind and gracious. Of paramount importance in Indian spiritual belief is to avoid becoming attached to the needs of a weak ego. I have done my utmost to follow this teaching. Also, the point you raised previously about living a life unseduced by wealth and greed is truly important. Dr. Ikeda, you are an inspiration to all of us who aspire to make a mark on the world. When I contemplate my own life, you are truly an exceptional role model.

I have been truly blessed in both my public as well as private life. Hindu faith has indeed been a pillar of strength, providing me constant guidance. I am blessed to have been raised from my childhood to my young adulthood by family and associates who were people of tremendous compassion, devotion, and service.

My passion for human rights, my work on issues of war and peace, my ongoing concern with human survival and well-being—all these emanate to a large extent from my religious heritage. Also, both my personal and professional relations with my family, friends and acquaintances are enriched by my faith, which facilitates my seeing goodness all around me.

Ikeda: You have a wonderful background. Every year, to celebrate SGI

Day on January 26, I publish a detailed and specific proposal in which I strongly urge that bonds of solidarity be forged between individuals throughout the entire world to create a spiritual revolution establishing a foundation for human rights and world peace.

Professor Nanda, in a previous interview you stated "I believe that the United Nations would be well-served by the influence of religious faith. Without the guidance of such a spiritual consciousness, a reform of the UN cannot take place." The international community has never before experienced a period in which religious spirituality that stimulates human virtue and establishes ties between individuals is as needed as it is today.

What is desperately needed is an all-inclusive consciousness—a global citizen's consciousness—based on the wisdom and noble spiritual values of humankind. Such a consciousness will illuminate the darkness of today's bewildering world by cultivating tolerance of diversity and a disciplined way of life that transforms the suffering of birth and death and earthly desires into happiness for oneself and others.

Henceforth, I am determined to do everything I can to educate and encourage solidarity among "awakened global citizens" by joining hands and talking with others such as you, my esteemed Professor Nanda.

Nanda: Dr. Ikeda, your wisdom and insight never fail to enlighten and give courage to me and others. We hope that you will take exceedingly good care of yourself so as to live as long as possible, so that the world may continue to benefit from your contributions. We appreciate the way you illuminate and encourage us in our struggles and hope that you continue to do so.

Ikeda: You, Professor Nanda, have made invaluable contributions to humanity. I hope and pray that you, too, will continue to be actively engaged in your endeavors for the benefit of humanity's future.

Daisaku Ikeda
Born in 1928 in Tokyo. Honorary president of Soka Gakkai. President of Soka Gakkai International (SGI). As a Buddhist, philosopher, educator, author, and poet, has launched numerous initiatives in areas such as peace, the environment and education, lectured at universities on these topics, always with an underlying theme of "humanism" in Buddhism, and engaged in dialogue with many national and cultural leaders and academics worldwide. Founded numerous educational institutions, including Soka University, academic research institutions and peace organizations such as the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, and cultural institutions such as the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum and Min-on Concert Association. Author of over 100 publications including the novel, *The Human Revolution* (in 12 volumes), and collected dialogues including *Choose Life: A Dialogue* (with Arnold Toynbee), *Humanity at the Crossroads* (with Karan Singh), *Spiritual Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (with Mikhail Gorbachev), *Human Rights in the Twenty-First Century* (with Austregésilo de Athayde), *Dialogues on Eastern Wisdom* (with Ji Xianlin, Jiang Zhongxin), and *A Dialogue on Philosophies of the Orient* (with Lokesh Chandra). Awarded United Nations Peace Medal in 1983. Recipient of over 160 honorary professorship doctorates from many universities around the world including the University of Moscow and Delhi University.

Ved P. Nanda
Born in 1934 in Gujranwala, India (currently Pakistan). Vice provost and professor of the University of Denver, director of the International Legal Studies Program in the University of Denver College of Law. Earned the Bachelor's and Master's degree in Economics from Punjab University, and the Bachelor's (LL.B.) and Master's degree (LL.M.) in Law from Delhi University. Earned the Master's degree in Law (LL.M.) from Northwestern University. Graduate Fellow at Yale Law School. Awarded honorary doctorate degrees from Soka University and Bundelkhand University. Professor Nanda has been active in his field of expertise, serving as a counselor for the American Society of International Law, past vice president and current honorary vice president of the U.S. chapter of the International Law Association (ILA), member of the American Law Institute, associate member of the International Academy of Comparative Law, member of the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Institute of America, and former president and current honorary president of the World Jurist Association. Among his many publications are: *Law of Transnational Business Transactions*, *Litigation of International Disputes in U.S. Courts*, *Nuclear Weapons and the World Court*, *Hindu Law and Legal Theory*, *Human Rights and Development*, and *International Environmental Law and Policy*. Recipient of numerous awards including the United Nations Association's Human Rights Award, Anti-Defamation League's Civil Rights Award, and the World Legal Scholar Award.

Feature:
Gandhism and Buddhism

From India-Japan Joint Symposium

On August 30, 2003, a symposium titled "Contemporary Thought on Gandhism and Buddhism" jointly organized by the National Gandhi Museum, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and Soka Gakkai India was held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, India. At the opening ceremony, a message from SGI (Soka Gakkai International) chairman Daisaku Ikeda was read, and speeches by National Gandhi Museum chairman Sh. B.R. Nanda and Dr. Kawada, director of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy were then followed by a special lecture courtesy of former Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral. At the symposium, Chairman Radhakrishnan of the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Nonviolent Development, Director Kawada of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and National Gandhi Museum director Dr. Y.P. Anand gave presentations on the meaning and possibilities of the philosophy of non-violence for today's world. Then on the next day, August 31, "Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Silk Road," and exhibition organized jointly by the International Academy of Indian Culture and Institute of Oriental Philosophy opened at the BSG International Peace Center in New Delhi. The exhibition featured the series of Lotus Sutra manuscripts published by Soka Gakkai, and a wealth of other Lotus Sutra-related publications including translations of the Sutra in Tibetan and Mongolian. For this issue we have put together a special feature including the message from SGI Chairman Daisaku Ikeda presented at the joint symposium and opening ceremony for the Lotus Sutra exhibition, and speech by Chairman Chandra of the International Academy of Indian Culture.