

From the Symposium Cosponsored with the Institute of Oriental Studies (St. Petersburg) of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Message

Daisaku Ikeda

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the opening of this symposium, sponsored jointly by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy of Tokyo, to be held here in St. Petersburg, the city of waterways and palaces.

Since 1996, when the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences entered into an agreement on academic exchanges with the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, which I founded some years ago, these two institutions have carried out various activities in the field of cultural exchange. Of particular note among these was the exhibition entitled “The Lotus Sutra and Its World,” held in Tokyo in 1998, at which the Petrovsky manuscript of the Lotus Sutra, as well as other manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra in the possession of the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies, items that ordinarily never leave the institute, were exhibited to the public. I would like here to express once more my sincere thanks to all the members of the Russian institute for the kind understanding and cooperation that made that exhibition possible.

As I examined each one of the manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra in “The Lotus Sutra and Its World” exhibition, I was deeply moved—the sacred texts seemed to resound to the underlying rhythm of the universe. The glow of inner spirit that shone from them stirred me profoundly in a way I will never forget. The same exhibition of sutra texts later moved on to Austria and Germany and was highly received in those countries as well. Last year, the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies made available to us the manuscripts and other materials relating to the Xixia Lotus Sutra, thus making it possible for Soka Gakkai to publish its photo plate

edition of *The Xixia Version of the Lotus Sutra* (with facing text of the Kumārajīva Chinese translation). Once more I extend my thanks to your institute for its cooperation in this undertaking.

The present symposium, jointly sponsored, is being held just ten full years since our initial agreement on academic exchange, and I anticipate that it will yield many important results. To mark the opening of this symposium, I wish to announce that I am contributing some 220 volumes, mainly works that I have written, to become part of the Ikeda Collection in the Russian Center of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy.

When I received word of the success of the Summit Meeting held in St. Petersburg in July of 2006, the first one chaired by Russia since it joined the group, I recalled with nostalgia how, thirty-two years ago, in September of 1974, I paid my first visit to St. Petersburg, a city of deep cultural significance for the entire world. During World War Two, the savage forces of the Nazi regime day after day laid siege to the city, subjecting it to ferocious attack for a period of nine hundred days. But though a great many of its citizens fell victim to the attack, the city refused to surrender and in the end emerged victorious. At that time, many scholars of your academic institute, determined to preserve from harm the manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra and the other invaluable cultural items in its possession, guarded them with their very lives. The dedication they showed in such action has won them a place of lasting honor in the history of humankind.

When I visited the Piskariovskoye Memorial Cemetery, where the 475,000 citizens of St. Petersburg who lost their lives in that heroic struggle are buried, I and the others in my party found, when we prepared to present our tribute of memorial flowers, that the graves were already decorated with numerous floral offerings. It was not any particular day for honoring the dead, and yet when I saw with my own eyes how many visitors had come to the graves, I realized more strongly than ever just how many people there are who hate war and earnestly pray for peace. The firm determination that the desires of all these unknown masses of common people for peace shall not have been in vain has been the motivating factor in my activities down to the present day.

The present symposium is entitled “Themes of Humankind and Religion.” Its aim is to take up various problems faced by humanity at the present day, such as peace, and questions related to environmental and gender issues, and to determine how the Lotus Sutra, Buddhism in general, and other religions or systems of thought such as Confucianism or Christianity deal with them. Since entering the twenty-first century, vari-

ous areas of the world have been confronted by repeated acts of terror, beginning with the simultaneous terrorist attacks in America in 2001. There seems to be no end to violence and terror, and humanity finds itself gripped by the fear of warfare, violence, or the outbreak of nuclear conflict. Lurking behind these overt acts of terrorism are the vast problems of structural violence in society. Extremes of poverty and famine, differences of race, ethnicity, culture, religion or gender, or suppressions of human rights have forced people to flee their native regions, and destruction of the environment advances on a worldwide scale. My mentor, Josei Toda, the second president of Soka Gakkai, once said, "Buddhism is a doctrine for all humanity, one designed to bring happiness to all the people of the world. For that reason, each and every concern that confronts humanity must become an inescapable theme to be taken up by Buddhist believers." Moreover, Nichiren, the founder of the Buddhism embraced by Soka Gakkai, in his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," declared, "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*, vol. 1, p. 24.)

Today the problem of how to confront and overcome the ills facing humanity is the concern not of Buddhism alone, but is shared by all the religions of the world. Now, in the twenty-first century, the question is whether religion will become a source for engendering a global society that ensures peaceful coexistence for all, or whether it will act as a negative force that invites division and confrontation.

Within human nature there are to be found evil forces such as violence, hatred, greed, or egotism, and there are at the same time good forces that struggle against these, such as nonviolence, compassion, altruism, and impulses that work to control desire. The original aim of religion is to nurture these forces of good, bringing them into operation as potently as possible, and thereby to create an era of peace and human happiness, one that embraces the relations between human beings and other human beings, between human beings and society, and between human beings and the natural world.

For that reason, in order to overcome the evil forces that inflict disension and ruin upon present day civilization, the various religions of the world are coming together to broaden their solidarity in the fulfilling of their human mission. The dialogue among religions, which draws forth the good forces from the depths of human nature and causes them to shine in mutually beneficial coexistence and creativity, is what will, for young people of the future, open up a royal road to the advancement

of human society. This is particularly true when the different religions of the world are deeply involved in the conditions that confront humanity today. At such a time, dialogue among the various religions must be the axis about which dialogue among different cultures takes place and must play a key role in such dialogue. I fully expect that the present symposium, which has as its aim the peace and mutually beneficial coexistence of humanity and which will address issues relating to the proper role of religion in society and the mission of human beings, will not only contribute to the advancement of cultural and academic relations between our two countries, but will serve as a beacon of wisdom for the culture and society of the twenty-first century.