

SGI Australia Prepared by the SGIA Study Department Spring Study Course



PHOTO: WAYNE WONG

Human Security Creating a Culture of Humanism

HOW TO DO THIS COURSE

Please use this introductory session to

- Explain how the course works
- Introduce the aims and objectives of the course
- Emphasise the significance of deepening our expression of Buddhist humanism through dialogue and interaction.

At the introductory session the facilitators are responsible for

- Drawing attention to the purpose and aims of the study course and clarifying any points raised
- Explaining the course is four sessions in addition to this introductory session
- Setting session dates and forming study partners.
- Emphasising the importance of study partners meeting between sessions as part of the course to ensure maximum benefit from the study
- Study partners task is to prepare a question for discussion at each group meeting

Ongoing responsibility of facilitator

- Reminding the group at the conclusion of each session of the next session's topic.
- Reminding each pair of study partners to prepare a question for the next study meeting.
- Suggested meeting format
- Gongyo and chanting
- Facilitator welcome and give brief introduction of topic
- Discussion on the questions raised from study partner meetings
- Senior person to give encouragement or summation
- Facilitator gives reminders for next session

PURPOSE AND AIMS

Human Security – Creating a Culture of Humanism is part of an on-going study programme in Australia of producing discussion material for group meetings. The emphasis is on dialogue to encourage belief in the cause of supporting each other and deepening our friendships in the group meetings. This significant action creates value out of human struggles and transforms all sufferings into opportunities for growth and victory through human revolution. A unique and dynamic activity of SGI Australia, to engage in courageous dialogue in this way allows everyone to manifest their greatest potential and in doing so, experience and contribute to creating a peaceful community, as our sphere of compassion expands to not only include our family and friends but begins to embrace the whole of humanity. This course examines two key themes that are drawn from President Ikeda's annual peace proposal: Humanising Religion and Humanitarian Competition.

Sessions 1 and 2 are devoted to the topic of Humanising Religion, that is religion exists for the sake of the people, not vice versa. Sessions 3 and 4, appearing in November, examine President Ikeda's emphasis on first President of Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's concept of Humanitarian Competition.

Introduction

Part 1 - Humanising Religion

Every year on 26 January since 1983, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has released a peace proposal which is published to the news media, key members of the United Nations and other leading peace organisations.

In his proposals, President Ikeda urges humanity to continue to pursue humanistic goals for the sake of peace and happiness of humankind. He delivers this through presenting Buddhist views on the underlying causes for humanity's struggles to achieve peace and through proposing specific recommendations for multi-national programs centred on the United Nations.

One of the recurring themes President Ikeda has addressed in his proposals is the humanisation of religion; the mission of religion, as a powerful driving force in peoples lives, to cultivate the development of humanism through its teaching and activities. He states in his *2008 Peace Proposal*:

“We must ensure that in the twenty-first century religion always functions to elevate and enhance our humanity, contributing to the realisation of human happiness and peace.”

In this month's study course we examine some key factors related to humanistic religion and relate these to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings and the SGI movement.

Session 1

Religion Centred on the Individual

In this first session we briefly discuss the purpose of religion and examine some important principles that characterise the concept of 'humanised' religion.

The Purpose of Religion

While we acknowledge religion as an important element of human society, how often do we stop to think - "what is the true purpose of religion?" or "how should religion impact people's lives?" President Ikeda urged us to consider this in his 1993 speech at Harvard University entitled *Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilisation*, and again in his *Peace Proposal*:

Does religion make people stronger, or does it weaken them? Does it encourage what is good or what is evil in them? Are they made better and more wise – or less – by religion? These are the questions we need to ask of all religions including of course Buddhism, if we are to succeed in fully 'humanising' them'. (*2008 Peace Proposal*, p6)

The value created by religion can be seen in how much it enables individuals to grow; how the growth and happiness of each individual occupies the focus of its endeavours.

Unfortunately, throughout history there have been a number of, not just religious, but political, social and economic movements that have centred their focus not on the individual but on an ideology or some abstract concept, creating an environment in which, as President Ikeda has stated, "abstract principles and ideas take precedence over living human beings who are in turn forced into a subservient role". (*2008 Peace Proposal*, p3)

While it is easy for us to point to these movements themselves as being dehumanising forces, Buddhism

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teaches us that the source of all such expressions is actually found within the human heart; when our fundamental darkness takes over the centre of our thoughts and actions and we do not recognise, respect or foster the potential and inherent worth of each individual. We see this tendency in our own daily lives when we allow ourselves to judge, discriminate against or try to control others. Whenever we separate the focus of our activities from cultivating individual human relations we lose sight of our shared human mission, leading to a cycle of suffering for ourselves and those we are engaging with.

Buddhism advocates though that the most effective human expression for "waging a successful struggle for the ideals of humanism" (*2008 Peace Proposal*, p9) is dialogue; overcoming our fundamental darkness to engage openly with others, with the sincere intent to share our heart and understand the other person's perspective. In fact, as President Ikeda states, "To abandon dialogue is in effect to abandon our humanity." (*2008 Peace Proposal*, p9)

Inner Universality

One of the key humanist principles President Ikeda has discussed in his peace proposals is that of inner universality; an awareness of the principles that apply to all humanity, developed from within our lives, such as:

- Believing that the same inherent potential exists in all life
- That we do not need to look any further than in our own hearts and in the hearts of those next to us to understand the entire nature of life; as President Ikeda has said, “The ultimate principle and essential nature of all phenomena is to be found nowhere other than in the human heart.” (ibid. p4)

This is an empowering perspective as we face what seems to be an increasingly dehumanised environment, in which as individuals we feel powerless to alter the current of the times. Further, it is in stark contrast to a universality that has been externally imposed; for example, through ideologies, abstract concepts or conformist pressures.

Developing this ‘human-centred’ awareness and sensitivity, however, requires a continual spiritual effort to develop and train ourselves; a constant struggle to challenge our negativity and expand our life to encompass those around us.

Belief in the inherent value and power of the human heart and the ability for humanity to transform itself provides the foundation for us to confidently engage in dialogue with others, confident that this act in itself can change our environment. Our movement of courageous dialogue is born of this belief.

Daishonin’s Universal Teaching

Nichiren Daishonin thoroughly clarified Buddhist principles of how life functions and coexists, and what the behaviour of a ‘Buddha’ means in daily life, providing a concrete philosophical foundation and practice for human-centred religion. This is highlighted by his well-known declaration, “What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behaviour as a human being.” (WND1p852)

Nichiren Daishonin did not expound his teachings

only through intellectual discussion but more importantly, through his own inspiring behaviour as a human being. It was through his struggles to resolutely expand his own life-state and his unrelenting efforts to encourage others, vowing to devote his life to the happiness of all humankind, no matter what confronted him.

One of the important principles of life Nichiren Daishonin clarified was the awareness that all of life’s potential is contained within a single moment of human existence. This is beautifully expressed in the following *Gosho* passage:

Moreover, as life does not go beyond the moment, the Buddha expounded the blessings that come from a single moment of rejoicing (on hearing the *Lotus Sutra*). If two or three moments were required, this could no longer be called the original vow of the Buddha... (WND1p62)

In other words, there is no existence outside of our moment-to-moment human existence and there is no greater potential than our resolve at each moment. In another *Gosho*, Nichiren Daishonin further clarified the relationship between the Buddha nature and this moment-to-moment resolve:

However, as for the matter of becoming a Buddha, ordinary people keep in mind the words ‘earnest resolve’ and thereby become Buddhas. (WND1p1125)

Buddhahood, the ultimate enlightened life-state in Buddhism, is therefore accessible and inherent in all people; it is not revealed via some abstract or other-worldly state of life but revealed naturally by individuals when they pray and take action with the resolve to achieve *kosen-rufu* in the same spirit as Nichiren Daishonin.

Putting into practice this understanding gives us confidence that the key to overcoming suffering and transforming the destiny of humanity lies nowhere else but within the hearts of individuals. It provides us with the practical wisdom for developing the awareness of inner universality discussed earlier. The practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo encompasses perfectly all of the behaviours and abilities of Nichiren making them available within our daily existence. ■

Session 2

The Movement of Humanism

In session two we discuss further the transformative power of dialogue and examine some of the human-centred elements of the SGI movement.

The Power of Dialogue

For any religion to relinquish dialogue is to relinquish its reason for being. For the SGI, this means that in our quest to promote Buddhist humanism, we must never allow the banner of dialogue, the *sine qua non* (essential element) of humanism, to fall – no matter how threatening the rejectionist forces of fanaticism, mistrust or dogmatism may loom. (*2008 Peace Proposal*, p10)

The above passage is a call from President Ikeda to all of us to never abandon the practice of dialogue in our movement of humanism, no matter how confronting the circumstances.

Dialogue is the ultimate creative human activity available to all people. It is the active expression of our belief in humanity, in inner universality, and therefore the most effective ‘weapon’ to counter the dehumanising trends in society, and in religion.

...dialogue takes courage. It challenges us to overcome the impulses that cause us to judge, discriminate against, control or isolate ourselves from others.

However, dialogue takes courage. It challenges us to overcome the impulses that cause us to judge, discriminate against, control or isolate ourselves from others. Abandoning these ‘lesser self’ attachments and engaging openly with others is a truly courageous act; trusting that when we do so, we can open the potential for transformation within ourselves and others. What we find, is that based on this courageous spirit, we are even able to approach seemingly confrontational issues in a creative manner. President Ikeda states in his dialogue with founding Toda Institute director Majid Tehranian:

If one drop of the water of dialogue is allowed to fall upon the wasteland of intolerance, where attitudes of hatred and exclusionism have so long prevailed, there will be a possibility for trust and friendship to spring up. (Ikeda-Tehrani, *A Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue*, 2000)

The Movement of the SGI

Over the last nearly 80 years the development of Soka Gakkai International has not only revitalised Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhist teachings in the modern era but has created a global humanistic movement genuinely centred on the growth and happiness of individuals.

The SGI has evolved the means to convey Nichiren Daishonin’s profound philosophy in a practical, day-to-day manner, in harmony with the changing times and understandable to the broad spectrum of society. President Ikeda highlighted the importance of this evolving expression of Buddhism in his recent interview for the *Tricycle* Buddhist magazine, stating:



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Dialogue is the ultimate creative activity

While staying true to its essence, Buddhism needs to encounter, learn and evolve. In this sense, I am convinced that the work of rediscovery, purification, and universalisation – taken on by the SGI as its core mission – is the very essence of Buddhism. (*Tricycle*, Winter 2008)

strengthening their resolve to live a life committed to humanity's happiness (*kosen-rufu*). Through this human-centred movement, the 'lifeblood' of Nichiren Daishonin's humanistic philosophy is able to flow, empowering ordinary individuals to instinctively express the principle of inner universality and confidently practice the 'art of dialogue'.

Some of the key Buddhist principles the SGI has clarified and given contemporary expression to are:

At the same time, the SGI has established a global organisational movement centred on the growth of individuals, based on a foundation of small group discussions and peace, culture and education activities. The underlying spirit of this movement is the desire to nurture the personal growth and happiness of each individual; deepening their understanding of Buddhist principles as expressed in their daily life, while

- **The Buddha is Life Itself**

Soka Gakkai second President Josei Toda, while imprisoned for resisting military authorities awakened to the groundbreaking insight that the Buddha, described in Shakyamuni's *Lotus Sutra*, was nothing



SGI Australia youth members

other than life itself. This demystified the concept of Buddha and opened access to this profound principle of life to ordinary people. As President Ikeda states:

Through his awakening in prison, Mr Toda developed a universal means of expressing the core message of the *Lotus Sutra* in a way that made it accessible to contemporary humanity, reviving it as something potentially meaningful to daily life in the modern world, regardless of race, religion, or cultural background. (*Tricycle*, Winter, 2008)

This progressive understanding of the nature of life resulting from Toda's fearless dedication to the happiness of humanity emerged from Nichiren Daishonin's teaching, discussed in session one, that all of life's potential is contained in a single moment of human existence.

- **Human Revolution**

President Toda also introduced the phrase "human revolution"; an expression of enlightenment as realised by ordinary people transforming their lives based on

the teachings and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. This phrase crystallises the human-centred practice of the SGI and provides a practical, 'human' understanding of the concept of 'enlightenment', which can otherwise tend to become abstract or mystical or even associated with the afterlife.

Human revolution is however, as its name suggests, revolutionary. It requires us to take responsibility for our own happiness, no matter what the circumstances are. Through this inner spiritual transformation, as President Ikeda states, 'individuals can awaken to a genuine sense of the sanctity of life' (*Tricycle*, Winter 2008). The network of heart-to-heart encouragement found in the movement of the SGI provides the most fertile ground in which to undertake this ongoing revolution of the self.

- **The Shared Vow and Oneness of Mentor and Disciple**

Though the principle of the oneness of mentor and disciple has always been a cornerstone of Buddhist teachings – Shakyamuni's pledge, 'Hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us' (LS2,36; SGINL 7819p1) – the SGI, in particular

the three presidents, have established this principle as the lifeblood of individual members' own transformation and the heritage of the worldwide *kosen-rufu* movement.

This bond of mentor and disciple is not based on subservience or simply 'following the leader' but based on sharing the same sincere vow for the happiness of humanity, driven by the mentor's inspiration and example. In the living network of SGI, each individual establishes in their hearts this relationship of oneness of mentor and disciple, this shared vow, and together as SGI, advances along the path of *kosen-rufu*. Exemplified by his tireless dedication and incontrovertible actual proof, the role of mentor for the current age is unquestionably President Ikeda. The unified movement established internationally by President Ikeda has become a living enactment of Nichiren Daishonin's will or as President Toda suggested, the 'Soka Gakkai Buddha':

President Toda predicted that in the sutras of the future, the Soka Gakkai's name would be recorded as "Soka Gakkai Buddha." The unified gathering of the Soka Gakkai, directly connected to the Daishonin and working to make *kosen-rufu* a reality, is itself a Buddha. (SGINL 7198 p8)

The Spirit of the Group Movement

As stated earlier, the global SGI movement is based on a foundation of small group discussion meetings. The group movement encompasses these group discussions and all the activities required to support each individual SGI member to transform their lives – conduct their own 'human revolution'. The lubricant that keeps these activities moving in a creative direction is dialogue; the one-to-one effort to encourage each other, based on a sincere sense of respect and desire for the other person's happiness.

Ultimately, the sense of how 'humanised' a religious movement is comes down to the enactment of these simple, yet profound acts of human care. As President Ikeda stated in his *Tricycle* interview:

In other words, the most fundamental thing is our action and behaviour as human beings, our ability to care for and treasure a single individual. (*Tricycle*, Winter, 2008)

The group movement provides the ideal environment for individuals to grow limitlessly and at the same time contribute to the happiness of all humanity, answering the call from President Ikeda in his *2008 Peace Proposal*, introduced in session one:

We must ensure that in the twenty-first century religion always functions to elevate and enhance our humanity, contributing to the realisation of human happiness and peace. ■

End Session 2