

SGI Australia Prepared by the SGIA Study Department Spring Study Course



PHOTO: WAYNE WONG

Human Security Creating a Culture of Humanism



PHOTO: BILL CROSSLAND

SGIA members engaged in a group discussion meeting in NSW

Session 3

Humanitarian Competition

In the previous sessions we learned how: Nichiren Daishonin and the three Soka Gakkai presidents have exemplified through their actions and behaviour that humanity's happiness is most important and that it is religion that exists for the people; that the Soka Gakkai is “an organisation that began from and is deeply rooted in the people.”¹ In this session, we explore how we can apply humanitarian competition in our own lives so it can be a ‘guiding principle for the new era’.

Faced with an economic disaster that has come to be known as the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), it has been difficult, if not impossible, for anyone not to be impacted in some way or other. Immediately the question surfaced: “who was responsible?” And we all wanted answers! Just as immediate as we wanted our dollar returns on the shares ‘I’ invested. Easy as it is to blame the banks and financial institutions for all this mess, so it is just as easy to remove our own responsibilities from the overall picture. Even though we may try to remove ourselves, we are quickly reminded that our friends, work colleagues or families are affected. In these difficult circumstances, it is important to maintain our belief in each other. Humanity requires hope and hope stems from the transformation of a single individual.

It is only by maintaining our convictions throughout our lives, by not abandoning our beliefs, that we can prove them to be genuine; indeed, herein lies the essence of faith. Those who continue to uphold their beliefs through adversity are truly admirable; they are people of the highest calibre.²

Through encouraging a friend or family member, it is possible to transform a seemingly difficult and negative situation into an inspiring and hopeful experience. Challenging to open our hearts in times of adversity is the path to victory. The GFC is a very good example of how competition, when driven by greed and the insatiable appetite for more capital, can lead to suffering and destruction. The opposite of that is the competition that recognises the interrelatedness of human communities where people and countries compete to make the greatest contribution to human happiness. It is for this reason that President Ikeda recommended in his 1999 Peace Proposal the closer examination of the first Soka Gakkai President, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's concept of humanitarian competition, where society endeavours to create value through competition. More recently President Ikeda has re-introduced this concept and the need to “turn our attention to humanitarian competition as a guiding principle for the new era”.³

Humanitarian Competition

In the current environment that we live in, we are bombarded and influenced by many different types of competition. There are usually “winners” or “losers” in the standard way we perceive competition. In fact, on a weekly basis, some of us celebrate or grieve for our favourite football teams because of competition. Not just in the sporting field, we may also experience competition in our work place, at school, an election, or auction just to name a few. However, in any of those situations, when we are engrossed and are a part of it, we cannot deny the anxiety that one feels. For example, in the Olympics when the finals of the 100 metres

track and field race are about to start, there is a sense of energy and pressure that arises and can be felt in the race, not just by the athletes but also the people who are watching! Usually at the elite levels of the sporting field, or with leading scientists or medical researchers, competition is the driving force for advancement. It is not the absence of competition that will allow them to be the best in their respective fields. Rather, it is because of competition that they bring out the best in themselves. In this way, competition can be used for the betterment of humanity (as individuals strive to improve themselves). Competition is a reality that enables humans to strive. How it can be used for the betterment of humanity as a whole is where Makiguchi's ideas come in.

In 1903, at the age of 32 years, Makiguchi first used the term “humanitarian competition” in a book titled *The Geography of Human Life*. Influenced by John Dewey, who was one of the leading education philosophers of the late 19th and 20th century, Makiguchi often shared the same perspective in geography and its impact on human activities. As Dewey wrote in *The School and Society*:

The unity of all the sciences is found in geography. The significance of geography is that it presents the earth as the enduring home of the occupations of man. The world without its relationship to human activity is less than a world.⁴

In *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi envisioned “the power of character and the human qualities of individuals and whole societies – manifested in the creative forces of their cultural achievements – would be a greater force than military prowess, political or economic domination.”⁵ Rather than competing to “beat” or “thrash” the other person, humanitarian competition can be said to be that of people competing to win over themselves to contribute in a greater sense for the happiness of humanity.

The concept of humanitarian competition derived from Makiguchi's desire to break through the endless suffering experienced by ordinary citizens around the world and to shift the avenue of achieving goals that would otherwise be expressed through military might, economic power or political force. Some organisations and companies now are implementing the aspects of

humanitarian competition by not just focusing on profit but also the wellbeing of the staff. For example, Google Australia was voted as the best place to work not just because of the perks but more importantly because of the “the transparency and the trust factors”⁶ that are fostered in the work place. As other companies witness and experience this, they too would benefit from shifting their mindset to focus on qualities that create a lasting worth. Competition to draw out humane qualities is the opposite to the kind of competition that is based on conflict where the powerful prey on the weak.

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The Heart of Support

How do we support another person? We may consider supporting someone as weak and disempowering to the other person – perhaps undermining their confidence because of a tendency to want to “fix” their problem for them. It is also possible for the person who needs support to avoid seeking it for the same reason. Also, we may have concerns that supporting someone could lead to a reliant or dependent relationship where the removal of support will defeat the initial purpose, that is, to enable them to stand tall by themselves. The concept of support in Buddhism is to believe in their potential



SGIA group discussion meeting in Western Australia

for growth amidst their unique circumstances.

In supporting a tree to grow, sometimes a stake is needed to be placed alongside it for support. A tree will become stronger if it gets an opportunity to develop its root mass and trunk. Interestingly if the stake is too tight, not allowing the tree to move around and sway, it will not develop strong roots and trunk. In the same spirit, a friend or family member will develop strength because of our warm encouragement and support. Because we stand by them in difficult circumstances it will give them the confidence to overcome their struggles. More precisely, it is because of our own self reformation to believe in our friend or family member that ensures we will not be defeated.

How is it possible when history has shown the ineffectiveness of armed conflict that humans can still allow it to continue in the 21st century? When you really think about it, it would be extremely difficult to be in “armed conflict” with someone you’ve been consistently supporting. The energy, effort and commitment would require a different awareness of the causes required to create harmony versus destruction, which can be achieved in an instant. Dependent origination is a fundamental concept in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism – that “each individual life contains within itself all the various

laws of the Universe, as well as the fundamental power that underlies all of the phenomena of the Universe and reveals itself through their workings.”⁸ That is to say that we are living in a world where we are not as separated as we would like to imagine. Our lives are intrinsically linked through our actions and behaviours. To separate our lives as distinct from the person next to us would be to abstract our existence. We may be able to learn from the qualities of those who interrelate through co-operation while at the same time harnessing the positive characteristics of competition. Perhaps this is why President Ikeda affirms the 21st century as the century of women. According to a study in psychology, women tend to have communication’s styles that are softer than men. Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge, states that women soften conflict situations “by expressing their opinion in the form of a question rather than an assertion”⁹. They also “express anger less directly and propose compromises more often”¹⁰. It is not necessarily only women who enact these traits as it cannot be said that all men are inherently aggressive. Rather, these are positive traits that both men and women can embrace and strive to deepen in their expression. By doing so, the integration of

positive characteristics of cooperation and competition can be a powerful way to resolve conflicts and move forward together.

Each person no matter how they are behaving has the potential to reveal their Buddhahood. It is possible to create a different course of interaction when we believe in the other person's potential. The consistent causes we make by believing in the other person are the springboard for our own growth. In this way we are helping others to reveal their enlightened self. This transformation from within is the catalyst for the change in humanity. We can sometimes lose hope in our efforts to encourage someone – wondering why “they” have not changed their ways so that “they” can be happy. To be defeated by this way of thinking is to deny the other person's mission. It is because of their profound life that we get an opportunity to transform our own lives. This continual process of improving ourselves at each moment is a form of humanitarian competition. In whatever part of the world we live and no matter what circumstance we are facing right now, this form of competition makes it possible to live in a world where there are no losers but only winners. The focus on humane qualities of humanitarian competition in all aspects of our society is the timely shift in paradigm towards a new current in history.

Herein lies the value of humanitarian competition. As a concept, it compels us to confront the reality of competition while ensuring that it is conducted firmly on the basis of humane values, thus bringing forth a synergistic reaction between humanitarian concerns and competitive energies.¹¹ ■

End Session 3

¹ SGI Newsletter 7762

² SGI Newsletter 7702

³ Daisaku Ikeda, *2009 Peace Proposal – Toward Humanitarian Competition: A New Current in History*

⁴ John Dewey, *The School and Society*

⁵ Daisaku Ikeda, *Soka Education*

⁶ <http://business.smh.com.au/business/staff-go-gaga-for-google-20090429-an0l.html>

⁷ Daisaku Ikeda *1999 Peace Proposal – Toward A Culture of Peace: A Cosmic View*

⁸ Daisaku Ikeda, *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth & Death: Buddhism in the Contemporary World*

⁹ Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Daisaku Ikeda, *2009 Peace Proposal – Toward Humanitarian Competition: A New Current in History*



Session 4

Care and Compassion

PHOTO: HIRO TANAKA

SGIA Women's members in Queensland support the Women's meeting

The common understanding of care and compassion can be varied. Generally we understand care to be an act of compassion. The previous session discussed supporting another person and competing with oneself to continually improve as a form of humanitarian competition. In Buddhism, there are many theories and concepts that speak of care and compassion. Nowadays, there are probably just as many websites as there are books written about it. As much as you read about compassion, talk about it or think about it, it is difficult to demonstrate care and compassion when we don't enact it. It all becomes just empty theories and useless knowledge if it is abstracted from our daily life. To be compassionate is more than having pity on those who are suffering. It is a powerful cause that when enacted has the potential to transform our life by taking responsibility

for the happiness of our friends, families and even our work colleagues! Second Soka Gakkai President, Josei Toda, has said that we “can substitute courage for compassion”¹ when challenged and uncertain as to how to move forward because courage is often required to express compassion. Without courage, it will be impossible to reveal the unlimited potential that exists in every individual – Buddhahood. Our Buddhahood can only be shown through our behaviour. Through consistent courageous efforts to advance our life, we can begin to understand the powerful cause of compassion. When we show actual proof in our lives, we become the source of hope and inspiration for others. This is a significant responsibility, not just for our own benefit, but one which can contribute to the advancement of humanity. The daily practice of the Soka Gakkai International, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo based



PHOTO: WAYNE WONG

SGIA members in Victoria

on the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin, is a practice which activates the inherent Buddha nature that exists in all life to create a positive transformation in one's life and those around them.

The SGI is an organisation that is enacting a dynamic grass root peace movement. The small group discussion meetings have been expressed as a hope for humanity by academics, peace activists, and leaders from nations around the world.

Clark Strand, an American journalist and writer specialising in religious topics, has said that SGI members, who are accustomed to participating in discussion meetings, may not realise just how remarkable these activities really are. He points out that our discussion meetings make religion answerable to life rather than life to religion.²

The movement of the SGI is based on care and sincere one-on-one and group dialogue. To be engaged in a dialogue is an expression of our conviction and belief in the other person's potential.

This is challenging and difficult to enact in our daily life. However, not enacting sincere and open-hearted

dialogue may lead to merely intellectualising theories and abstracting other people. In his 2009 Peace Proposal to the United Nations, President Daisaku Ikeda brings to attention the "spirit of abstraction", a term used by French philosopher Gabriel Marcel. The term is used to describe the ways of thinking and acting that do not consider the other person as someone who has a mother, originates from a country that has a particular culture, experienced heartache or joy and ultimately, is a "human being".

Marcel uses the term "the spirit of abstraction" to define the essentially destructive process by which our conceptions of things are alienated from concrete realities. He notes, for example, that it is only possible to participate in war if we first deny the individual character and humanity of the opponent – reducing him or her to an abstract concept such as a Fascist, Communist, Zionist, Islamic fundamentalist, etc.³

"Living beings and their environments always manifest Myoho-rence-kyo"⁴. In other words, our daily actions and behaviour are the expression of Buddhist

humanism. The act of positive engagement is what reveals our humanity. Buddhism is the practice that allows this to become possible in any circumstance we face. The peace movement of the SGI is effective because the focus is on self-reformation in our immediate circumstances. The transformation from within then creates a different response to, and from, our environment. Rather than waiting for the “right time” or “right person” to inspire us, we become the inspiration for a change in humanity’s expression. That is how significant our actions are to care and support another person. It is so significant that it can transform our suffering to meaningful struggle and help bring about a change in the world. It all starts with our self. What am I determined to do now? Based on the Buddhist concept of 3,000 realms existing in a single moment and the interdependency of our lives, it is only by polishing our own mirror that we enable another person to see their potential reflected in our transformation. Nichiren made it clear that polishing our own “mirror” or life potential required self-transformation based on chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. By polishing ourselves in this way we can clearly see “out” and empathise with the suffering of others while our own confidence reflects others’ potential like a mirror to their heart. Scientists like Albert Einstein and others have confirmed that our causes and our relation to others and environment are completely interdependent.

With the ensuing twists of scientific progress... something you do over here can be instantaneously linked to something happening over there, regardless of distance...researchers confirmed that there can be an instantaneous bond between what happens at widely separated locations.⁵

Therefore, the causes we make to transform our lives can certainly contribute to the positive change for humanity. It is important to not lose hope when we are facing our current struggles but rather cherish the opportunity the struggle presents for us to reflect and continuously improve. Referring back to Makiguchi’s concept of humanitarian competition, we compete with our self to continually improve in order to inspire and appreciate others, and that is what it means to win over oneself.

Creating Dialogue

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder of Soka Gakkai first proposed the idea of “humanitarian competition” in his book titled, “The Geography of Human Life”. As discussed in session 1, the values of “humanitarian competition” are significant in the global issues we are currently challenging. The significance lies in our competition of self-mastery where we continually improve our expression and behaviour. We engage in this competition to show proof from within to create a new paradigm on a daily basis – in fact, moment to moment. As President Ikeda has said, “The opponent with whom you need to compete is the you of yesterday.”

To play the best sound or note from a musical instrument, we would usually be guided by someone who has had extensive experience in playing that instrument or we might be inspired by someone who has mastered that instrument. Similarly, in our mastery of self, the mentor and disciple relationship is a crucial aspect of our practice of Buddhism. This does not mean idolising the mentor, rather the importance lies in sharing the vow with the mentor to reveal Buddhahood in our daily lives. Challenging ourselves to express our Buddhahood for our own sake and that of others is the way we connect to the mentor.

It is certainly our great good fortune to find a mentor in life. Choosing to have a mentor is something we do ourselves. That freedom of choice requires that we take responsibility for our actions. In other words, caring for and supporting another person does not require us to wait until we have special titles or position. Buddhism teaches that we become enlightened just as we are. The enlightenment is in the internal transformative struggle to be creative in our care and support for another.

It is said that the voice does the Buddha’s work. Our voice is important to be creative, to speak to another person and to care for another person. There are 6 billion people worldwide. We are all engaging at the same time, making causes at the same time from one moment to the next. All the joys we feel and the difficulties we are challenged with are intertwined. Everyone, including the person next to you, will certainly experience suffering. Courageous and compassionate dialogue is the creative expression of hope for humanity amidst life’s struggles. That is why President Ikeda has continually emphasised the art of dialogue. He calls

for dialogue as the source of new creativity in the 2009 Peace Proposal:

Dialogue presents infinite possibilities; it is a challenge that can be taken up by anyone – any time – in order to realise the transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.⁶

To care for another person from the depths of our hearts requires no formalities and can be performed by anyone. The only requirement is the removal of our own doubts and self-centredness, that is, fundamental darkness, and to believe in that person's potential to be happy.

Even when the challenges confronting us seem overwhelmingly difficult, the first step must be dialogue. Grounded in a faith in our shared humanity, frank discourse can transcend all differences of background, values and perspectives.⁷

In the SGI, there are many opportunities to engage in dialogue. In fact the whole phenomenal growth of SGI and so many individuals' positive transformation is a result of making the group discussion movement central to our lives. Just as there are many people from different backgrounds in our work place, in our university lectures, or at the local sports fields, the group meeting is a reflection of the society. The peace movement is achieved in the group meetings. It is where people come together to share and encourage each other through dialogue. It is a movement where our struggles are shared and that becomes the source of inspiration for everyone around us. When we open our hearts to share our struggles we no longer abstract our daily life. When we compete within ourselves to be a person of truly humanistic characteristics we naturally celebrate those who are champions of that struggle and we strive to inspire those who lack such confidence to believe in themselves and their significance. In summary, the enactment of humanitarian competition through dialogue is the way we share the common purpose of *kosen-rufu*. Rather than competing to have "my" ideas noticed over and above another's ideas, dialogue and humanitarian competition drive us toward the mutual goal of *kosen-rufu* where we work together to the best of

our ability to harmonise and support each other! Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship. ■

End Session 4

¹ SGI Newsletter No.7784: Women's Division and Young Women's Division Executive Conference

² SGI President Ikeda's Essay – *The Light of the Century of Humanity*

³ Daisaku Ikeda, *2009 Peace Proposal – Toward Humanitarian Competition: A New Current in History*

⁴ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin – The True Aspect of All Phenomena*

⁵ Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*

⁶ Daisaku Ikeda, *2009 Peace Proposal – Toward Humanitarian Competition: A New Current in History*

⁷ Ibid