

REVITALISING THE SPIRIT

SGI AUSTRALIA STUDY COURSE

SESSION 3.

SOKA GAKKAI – REVITALISING THE ONENESS OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE

Bringing one's potential to bloom, bringing happiness to bloom – this is a characteristic of an expansive spiritual realm. It is quite the opposite of the narrow and closed mental states of fear, timidity, anguish and envy. The goal of our movement is to enable people to lead the very best possible lives they can live as human beings. Our organisation aims to create immeasurable joy. (SGI Newsletter, 7623)

The Soka Gakkai is founded on the courageous stance of the three presidents who have all fought against political and religious authority to create a humanistic movement for peace based on the Buddha's teachings and the practice of proof. The emergence of Soka Gakkai in Japan, and its unprecedented growth, has been set against a backdrop of war, nationalism and the turmoil of a collapsed society. To rebuild itself in the latter half of the 20th century, Japan as a nation had to shed beliefs that had brought about its complete destruction physically and spiritually. Shinto had been the state religion of Japan; the Emperor of Japan, it was believed, was a descendant of the Sun god. From

the perspective of Japan's history, western democracy is relatively recent and may not yet be a fully matured concept of governance. The idea of people as citizens of a democracy, as opposed to being the emperor's subjects, was completely foreign to an oppressed culture. Moreover, Japan's ultra-nationalism, was a driving force in policies of military imperialism. Lacking gratitude, the Japanese Militarist Empire overlooked the fact that much of its cultural heritage derived from its neighbours, in particular from China. Soka Gakkai, focusing on individual happiness, societal harmony through promoting dialogue, cultural exchange and education, has been a driving force for transforming an inward-looking culture to one open to the cultures of the world. The oneness of mentor and disciple, as demonstrated by the three presidents, has been the heart of the movement for a practical expression of Buddhist humanism. It is based on the individual reformation of one individual planting the seeds for peace in the community.

When the mentor and disciple relationship is lost, each new generation needs to re-learn the harsh lessons of history, and the opportunity for creativity is diminished. The spiritual foundation for a courageous,

OF BUDDHIST HUMANISM

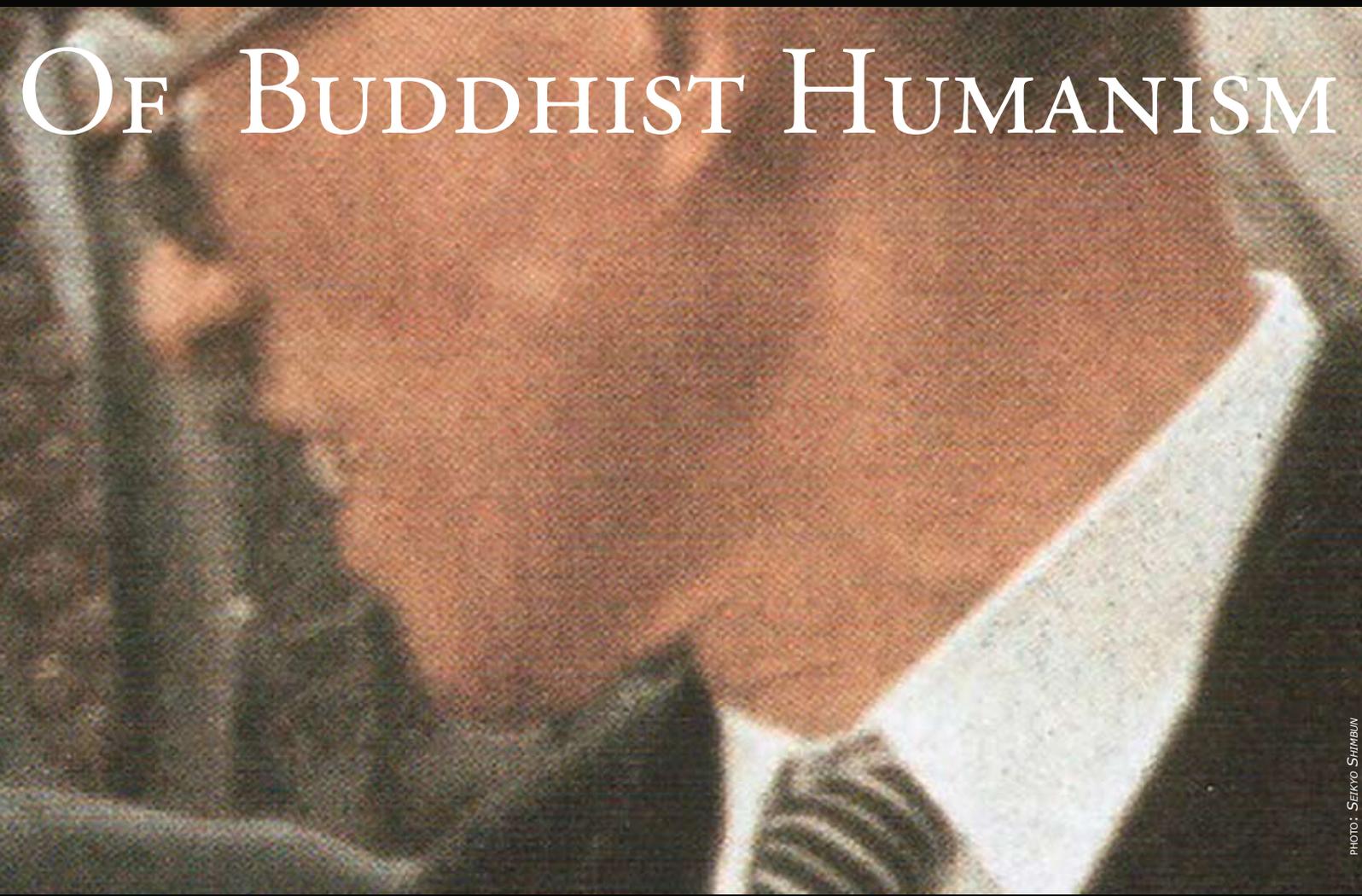


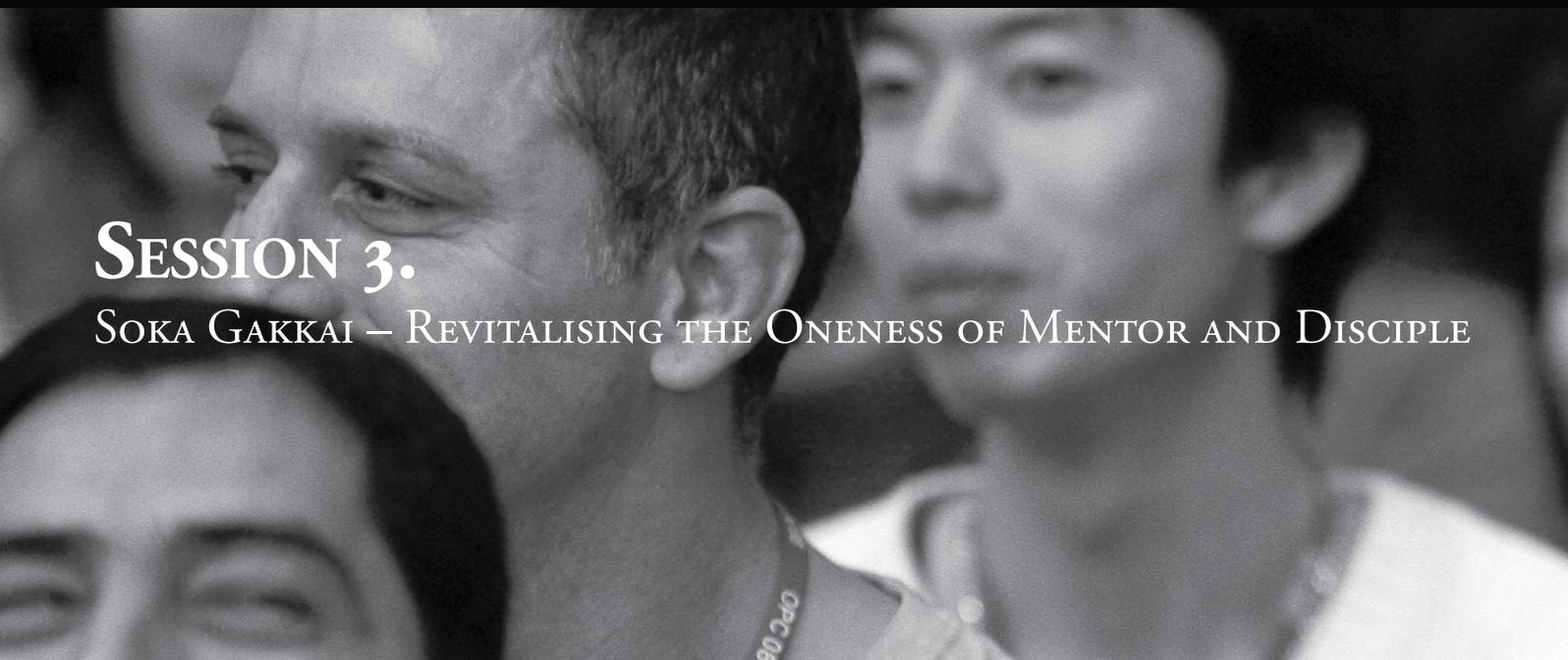
PHOTO: SEIKYO SHIMBUN

creative life of happiness is made possible as a result of the disciple learning the art of the mentor, which in the case of Buddhism is the art of living. The dramatic expression of a harmonious community life defined by creative living is made possible. In modern expression, this symbiosis SGI President Daisaku Ikeda speaks about hinges on the resilience and the inner cultivation of each individual. However, its heritage lies in the ongoing evolution of Buddhist thought and practice. In stark contrast, modern politics is clearly no longer a great visionary drama of protecting democracy for the people; it often appears more like a soap opera of pettiness and self-interest. Promises are made with each new leadership to make change, yet little seems to be learnt from the viewpoint of actual proof or any heritage of ethics. Without a sound philosophy centred on the people, political change can amount to nothing more than the fight between differing opinions. Realms of society where there is no mentorship based on the standard of actual proof, those who are the most persuasive will generally come out on top.

The mentor and disciple relationship allows every individual to shine in society. Those who seek to learn from the mentor's actual proof and combine this with

their own unique potential can apply their learning as an expression of creativity at each moment. This may seem impossible to imagine when plagued by the modern phenomena of stress. In contemporary society, we live with a pervasive aura of fear; our stress and anxiety is heightened; yet we have more comfort than ever with modern conveniences. We are aware of this unnatural state but often confused by it and feel trapped within. Our vulnerability exposes us to myriad outcomes, conversely building our inner strength to face our circumstances with clarity and hope. The three presidents of SGI have revitalised the oneness of the mentor and disciple, paving the way for the possibility of a creative cultivation of the self and society based on the lineage of humanistic Buddhist thought and practice. The expansion of SGI, the arena where people can joyfully engage in challenging their circumstances and experience transformation of the self in a supportive environment, is creating a groundswell of hope for humanity. This is the completion of the three great secret Laws – the Law of the *daimoku* of the essential teaching; the object of devotion for practice and the sanctuary of the community of believers.

All photos, except where otherwise stated, by Wayne Wong. They were taken at the SGI Oceania Peace Conference, Gold Coast, August 2008



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TSUNESABURO MAKIGUCHI – THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) was born during a time of social change and competing ideas. Nationalism and Shintoism were dominant ideas for building a “new Japan” during his youth. Also born in a harsh geographical environment, he taught poor students, struggled against elite educated academics and found himself in trouble with the educational bureaucracy when he did not favour wealthy students. An active reformer in education, Makiguchi was involved in debates of the time that were concerned with whether:

“a strong Japan could be built, finally, only by citizens, only by people educated to be independent and self-assured. Those who favoured this course hoped that people thus educated would be so little, the servile subject that they would not hesitate to defend their freedom, even if the entire government should be against them. Others, however, believed that only obedient and loyal men could construct the new Japan. Education, therefore, should have as its aim the building of loyal subjects. The latter group won the debate. Consequently, the new Japan “was to be built by subjects, citizens. It would be built under careful direction from above ... The best builder was a man trained to be loyal and obedient, not free and equal.” (Bethel, *Makiguchi: The Value Creator*, p29)

This debate of the creation of subjects or citizens had the biggest impact on the nurturing and development of young minds and hearts in a restrictive, almost militaristic education system. Makiguchi was a strident critic of Japan’s educational system, which he viewed as stifling the creative potential of children and only encouraging rote learning. As Bethel states, “It is clear in Makiguchi’s writings that he was completely egalitarian in his view of human potential.” (ibid. p62)

Belief in his individual students’ capacity to fulfil their full potential and become happy gave Makiguchi his sense of mission. He believed happiness was, in fact, the ultimate goal of human life. The happiness Makiguchi spoke of was not happiness achieved by pursuing it in isolation or from family inheritance like financial wealth. Makiguchi’s idea of happiness was linked to value creation by the individual in the community. Thus education played a crucial role in an individual’s ability to combine personal and social happiness, which Makiguchi viewed as inseparable. President Makiguchi saw beauty, good and benefit as the cornerstones of a creative life, replacing the previous ideal of truth with that of benefit or gain as part of these three values. Bethel gives a simple distinction of the significance when he says truth is discovered; beauty, good and benefit is created. Today, in Australia, we can see Makiguchi’s view of the importance of community studies and students learning the very practical elements of living in society as an on-going, relevant debate. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Dr Timothy Hawkes, a headmaster of a private boy’s school, suggests the following topics are missing from the current education systems in Australia; “to live in community and forge



good relationships; to communicate well; know yourself and what you believe; handle intimacy and sex; control emotions and impulses; manage financial matters; practical cleaning, cooking, making and mending; manners and etiquette; to accept responsibility; and be resilient and deal with grief and loss”.¹

Makiguchi was the founding president of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai. Initially its associates were mainly fellow educators but as the emphasis shifted from pedagogy to the religious practice of Nichiren Buddhism, people from all walks of life began to join. Japan then fell into its disastrous and ultra-nationalistic descent into war. Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was under constant scrutiny by the military government and according to Dayle Bethel, author of *Makiguchi: the Value Creator*, the organisation’s monthly publication was banned as any perceived or real opposition was quashed. On 6 July 1943, Makiguchi, Toda and 19 other senior leaders of the organisation were arrested for their stance against the incorporation of state Shintoism into the doctrine of Nichiren Buddhism. Many of the senior leaders recanted their faith in order to be released from prison. Only Makiguchi and his direct disciple, Josei Toda, remained firm in their beliefs. Makiguchi died in gaol on 18 November 1944 from malnutrition. His courageous, unerring belief in the face of persecution remains the spiritual foundation of Soka Gakkai.

JOSEI TODA – THE DRIVING FORCE

Accompanying Makiguchi to gaol, a courageous expression of the oneness of mentor and disciple, Toda had a profound realisation while in prison through his seeking to understand the Law of life. President Ikeda

has written 12 volumes of *The Human Revolution*, as a testimonial to Toda’s life and character. Angry and passionate about fighting injustice and with an avid distaste for any form of hypocrisy, Toda’s conviction in the essence of the *Lotus Sutra* was deeply embedded into his spirit while he was imprisoned. *The Human Revolution* (vol 2) describes the scene of Toda’s struggle to comprehend the true entity of life as life-force.

And in that instant he deciphered the mystery of the verses:

‘Life force is neither being nor non-being;
Neither cause nor effect;
Neither itself nor another;
Neither square nor round; neither short nor long ...’

The problem was not incomprehensible. The entity, the Buddha, is life force itself. For a brief time, Toda was transported into a realm of pure joy. He understood that the Buddha is life force existing in the life of the individual and outside individual lives as the very essence of cosmic life force. The walls of his cell could not confine his happiness. A thrilling wave of rapture rose from deep within him and made him want to share this blessed knowledge and assurance with all mankind. He saw himself standing in a vast and infinite space filled with life force, and he wanted to bring everyone to that same plane of enlightenment. But the flaming rapture gradually subsided. Toda found himself once again in his



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cramped, barred cell; but somehow it all seemed insignificant in the face of the knowledge he had attained, knowledge that no one could take from him. ... In a brief moment of enlightenment, Toda reached the threshold of a thought development that would someday revolutionise the philosophy of the world. The achievement was his, for no direct mention of life force as such is to be found in the *Lotus Sutra*. By uncovering the meaning of the 12 enigmatic lines of verse, Toda grasped the true substance of Buddhahood as life force existing in the cosmic life and in the phenomenal lives of human beings. This universal life force pervades all things in all three stages of existence – past, present and future. By instilling into Buddhist thought a fresh interpretation, he proved two immensely significant things. First, he showed that the life force philosophy of Buddhism is more than an equal match for modern scientific thought. Second, he revealed the life force philosophy set forth by Nichiren Daishonin is superior to all other philosophies of the ancient and modern worlds. In the process of doing these things, Toda himself caught a glimpse of life force in its purest, most exalted form.”

(*The Human Revolution*, vol 2, p134)

Released from prison on 3 July 1945, grief-stricken from the death of his mentor, Toda was vehement in his determination to build Soka Gakkai as a testimony to Makiguchi's life. Prior to being gaoled, Toda was a successful businessman. Economic events prior to the war played no small part in the financial collapse of

many businesses in Japan, including his. Toda left prison facing heavy debt, which he worked to repay by initially concentrating on reigniting his business entrepreneurial skills. He did this with the aim of having a foundation so as to re-establish contact with former members of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai. He initiated a study on the *Lotus Sutra* but found the few former colleagues he could gather were more interested in the social aspect of getting together rather than seriously studying and reforming their lives. Gradually, however, more people began to appear, people who were genuinely seeking guidance on how to improve their lives, which in post-war Japan, were often devastated and completely lacking hope. Toda's response was sometimes strict and he held an uncompromising view on the benefit of conducting propagation. From his perspective, this compassionate act was required for people to expand their lives beyond their own suffering. A community of believers was officially re-formed and renamed Soka Gakkai.

At a time when cynicism, confusion and suspicion reigned among a population that had felt betrayed and was experiencing a complete spiritual vacuum, the post-war period in Japan has been described as the “rush hour of the gods”. The Soka Gakkai, under Toda's leadership, set itself apart as an organisation that achieved results. The capacity of each person to achieve personal happiness and benefit was linked to the personal responsibility of human revolution, thus contributing to world peace. This separated it from many movements that took advantage of the harsh circumstances and made claims of reaping impossible benefits with no concept of personal responsibility. The intensity of growth led to much criticism of Soka



Gakkai's methods, however, as Bethel states, "In any objective analysis of Soka Gakkai, the inescapable conclusion is that a great deal of the credit for the success of the post-war movement must go to Toda's skilful blending of organisational and doctrinal elements and to his ability as a strategist." (Bethel, D *Makiguchi: The Value Creator*, p108) A wider sociological phenomenon Bethel refers to, was the urbanisation of large segments of the population, releasing them from taking on their extended families' religion out of tradition and force of habit. However, as the Soka Gakkai steadily developed, Toda experienced business failure. He stepped down as Soka Gakkai General Director and refused the presidency so as not to leave Soka Gakkai open to criticism based on his personal circumstance. The person who stood by his side with pride at this time was his most dedicated disciple, Daisaku Ikeda. After these issues were resolved, Toda was appointed as second president of Soka Gakkai in 1951.

Toda raised and nurtured the community of believers in Japan – initially from a few hundred after World War II to 750,000 prior to his death in 1958. His greatest achievement could be said to be his skill in empowering individual people to believe that they could overcome their own suffering and attain an unimaginable state of life. This active pursuit of happiness through self-transformation, Toda coined as human revolution. Drawing on the life force inherent in each individual and the universe by chanting abundant *daimoku*, taking responsibility to initiate positive action and compassionately encouraging others to do the same, became the formula for the great driving force of the *kosen-rufu* movement in Japan. As Toda continued his

activities of individual guidance, lectures and travels throughout Japan, this new generation of Soka Gakkai members actively supported Toda's goals, inviting guests and friends continuously to any place where Toda spoke, including one significant guest who would change history.

The person who made Toda's spirited action his own, was Ikeda who took faith in 1947. On 16 March 1958 an event was held at the Taiseki-ji temple with 6000 youth members of Soka Gakkai in attendance. It was during this event that President Toda handed the task of further advancing the *kosen-rufu* movement to the youth members present, specifically to his direct disciple Ikeda. Two weeks later, on 2 April 1958, Toda passed away having achieved his lifetime goal of achieving 750,000 household memberships of Soka Gakkai. He told Ikeda about his dream of visiting Mexico in his last days. Ikeda saw the significance of this, one of the last exchanges they had, as his own mission to spread *kosen-rufu* beyond Japan to the world.

DAISAKU IKEDA – CULTIVATING THE HEART OF GLOBAL PEACE

The most significant encounter between Toda and Ikeda occurred on 14 August 1947 when 19-year-old Daisaku Ikeda was invited to attend a local discussion meeting with President Toda leading the meeting. President Ikeda describes the life-changing event with clarity.

On the evening of August 14, 60 years ago (in 1947), I met President Toda at a discussion meeting in the Kojiya area of Kamata in Tokyo.



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My mentor was 47 at the time, and I was 19. When I entered the room on that fateful day, President Toda was giving a lecture on the Daishonin's treatise *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*. He declared, "I want to rid the world of all suffering and misery. Won't you join me?" That was the first time I heard Mr Toda speak. I believe his words were also a cry heralding the dawn of a great new people's movement.

On that day, I asked him what was the true way of life for a human being. President Toda's response was entirely free of any intellectual game-playing or deceit. Each of his answers shone with genuine humanity. He was truly a person who was grounded in the *Lotus Sutra* and had risen above the sufferings of birth, ageing, sickness, and death.

That day marked the start of my journey of shared commitment with my mentor. Mr Toda taught me about the true nature of life and death. And as time went by, I began to feel it was my duty as a disciple to clarify and show actual proof of overcoming the sufferings of birth and death.

When disciples strive in a spirit of oneness with the mentor, sharing the same commitment to *kosen-rufu*, they can bring forth infinite strength. The mentor, based on a profound understanding of the fundamental question of life and death, ponders deeply and takes action to help everyone manifest their innate potential and lead happy and successful lives.

I learned the way of faith in Nichiren

Daishonin's Buddhism, the key to absolute victory, from Mr Toda. Mr Toda learned it from Mr Makiguchi. And Mr Makiguchi learned it from the Daishonin and chanting to the Gohonzon. This is the heritage of mentor and disciple in the Soka Gakkai." (*The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life*, Instalment 13)

The relationship that developed between Toda and Ikeda was the pinnacle of the oneness of mentor and disciple, the positive effects of which are impossible to measure. They worked side by side and President Ikeda learnt from Toda the spirit of selfless devotion to the members' happiness. Ikeda gave up night school and attended instead "Toda University". The recent instalment of the *New Human Revolution* elucidates on President Ikeda's gratitude to his mentor:

When Shin'ichi left night school so that he could fully support Toda's faltering business ventures, Toda offered to personally instruct Shin'ichi in a wide variety of subjects. Shin'ichi would later affectionately refer to this instruction as 'Toda University'. He studied diligently and absorbed every lesson imparted by his mentor. One time after Shin'ichi had completed a course, Toda took a flower from a vase on his desk and inserted it in his pupil's lapel. 'This is your award for completing this course with top honours,' declared Toda. 'You've done a great job. I'd like to give you a gold watch, but this is all I have. I'm sorry, it will have to do.' The flower represented the most heartfelt praise from this



great mentor of *kosen-rufu*. To Shin'ichi, that flower was the most wonderful medal of honour in the entire world. Deeply moved, he felt like the most fortunate person on earth. Years later, Shin'ichi would become the recipient of national medals from many countries, and he would also be lauded with more than 200 academic honours from universities and institutions of higher learning around the world, an unprecedented achievement. He was firmly convinced that, in the light of the law of cause and effect governing life, the fundamental cause behind this recognition lay in the gratitude he felt in accepting that flower from his mentor and the resolve it stirred in him to make an even greater effort. (SGI Newsletter, NL7565)

President Ikeda has repeatedly emphasised the essence of the oneness of the mentor and disciple relationship as driven by gratitude, again speaking fondly of this period of working and studying with Toda about the essence of faith:

He taught and trained me a little every morning, and on Sundays as well. Sometimes he'd ask questions, and I'd have to answer. When we completed our study of this writing, Mr Toda gave me a certificate indicating that I had completed this course of instruction under him. This certificate was just a simple piece of paper, but I regarded it as one of my most precious treasures. I believed that it would become a symbol of the

highest intellectual excellence, and I'm sure Mr Toda had the same conviction. The Buddhist Law is truly wondrous in its workings, and now I have been privileged to receive numerous academic honours from around the globe. In contrast, those who have scorned certificates or awards bestowed on them in the realm of *kosen-rufu* have all ended up miserable. As the Daishonin writes: 'It is the heart that is important' (WND1p1000).

Though public opinion may seem a matter of great importance, it is something created by human beings. The Mystic Law, on the other hand, is the principle that governs the entire universe. It is of a totally different scale. When we understand this, we can attain the state of a Buddha. This is hard to fully grasp, however, which is why faith is crucial. It all comes down to having faith. The Daishonin cites the words [of T'ien-t'ai], 'Belief means to be without doubt' (OTTp54). When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo without doubt in the Gohonzon and make steadfast efforts for *kosen-rufu*, we can realise eternal happiness in our lives." (SGI Newsletter, 7582)

President Ikeda is now 80. He still writes prolifically and still takes the lead in SGI, but it is impossible to merely evaluate his life analytically, without understanding the heart of his efforts for humanity. The list of actual proof is beyond the physical achievements and statistical proof available. President Ikeda has encouraged and inspired millions of people, directly and indirectly. His legacy is the global SGI movement for world peace; enabling once again common people

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beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, gender and social status, access to an empowering philosophy and practice of happiness. President Ikeda's mastery of drawing from the wisdom of the *Lotus Sutra*; conveying the essence of the Daishonin's teaching and practice; and embarking on responding to fulfilling his mentor's vision for *kosen-rufu* is in actual fact the heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death.

CONCLUSION

The three presidents' legacy is one of creative expansion. Enacting the oneness of the mentor and disciple creates hope for the spiritual evolution of humanity. As a result of their efforts the ongoing struggle to revitalise Buddhist humanism and make it relevant for common people to practice is a reality across the globe. It has been a struggle driven by courageous actual proof and the skill of each key figure in the art of dialogue. The following passage from one of President Ikeda's dialogues illustrates the compassion to consistently make efforts to express Buddhist Humanism in a contemporary and relevant way and how he never ignores its lineage of the oneness of mentor and disciple:

The traditional mode of character training centres on fortitude and endurance. Shakyamuni's last words were, 'Do not fail to complete your training'. Training of the inner person has always been a primary task in the Buddhist way of life. Many of Nichiren's pronouncements speak directly to the theme, 'Iron, when heated in the

flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword.' (WND1p303) 'Even a tarnished mirror will shine like a jewel if it is polished. A mind that is presently clouded by illusions originating from the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but once it is polished, it will become clear, reflecting the enlightenment of immutable truth. Have deep faith and polish your mirror night and day.' (WNDp4) And, 'But still I am not discouraged. The *Lotus Sutra* is like the seed, the Buddha is like the sower, and the people are like the field.' (WND1p748)

You should note that each of these recommendations on how to refine one's inner self is framed in terms of a simile using concrete things – sword, mirror and planting fields. The world of farming and manual labour is distinct from other worlds, such as that of the printed word. To grow crops and perform work successfully with one's hands allows no skimping on labour, no shortcuts or easy substitutes for arduous procedures. Growing rice, for example, involves as many as eighty-eight steps until the harvest is in and stored. To omit any of them could bring less than satisfactory results. The same is true of tempering a high-quality sword of polishing a mirror. We can think of cultivating character and discipline, one's inner world, with just the same logic. It is a demanding process that permits no omissions or shortcuts.

Nonetheless, the 'spoiled brats' produced by modern civilisation turned their backs on the



wise imperative of inner cultivation. So eager to live comfortable lives, always to choose the path of least resistance or rush to get quick results, they sometimes seem to be a different species, humans whose lives are played out in total indifference to what Ortega described as the ‘Herculean’ tasks that fall to people with rich, disciplined inner words.

So it is that both the former socialist countries and the countries of the free world, the ostensible winners in the old battle of ideologies, have drifted into a thoughtless age of no philosophy except cynicism or mammonism (wealth regarded as an evil influence or false object of worship and devotion). Somewhere in the deep layers of human beings and their history, I am certain that there is a conjunction between the untrained, undisciplined, flabby inner world of modern people and the mind-numbing, genocidal horror this century has witnessed. It is for this reason that we at Soka Gakkai are so adamant about the importance of human revolution, for it is another name for inner cultivation. We sail an uncharted course towards the dawn of a new century of humanity.

To recapitulate, I have put before you three major themes that promise to be crucial if we are to make the twenty-first century light and positive. They are autonomy, symbiosis and inner cultivation. Only history will be able to judge whether these qualities offered a beam of hope to the Faustian agony of purgatory. Whatever

happens, no step can be taken without making the first step. To me, as one Buddhist devotee and a man of these times born to endure the trials of history, there is no choice but to work together with everyone else committed to the same objectives, doing all I can to help with the unprecedented task ahead.” (Ricardo Diez-Hochleitner and Daisaku Ikeda, *A Dialogue between East and West: Looking to a Human Revolution*, p124)

KEY POINTS SESSION 3

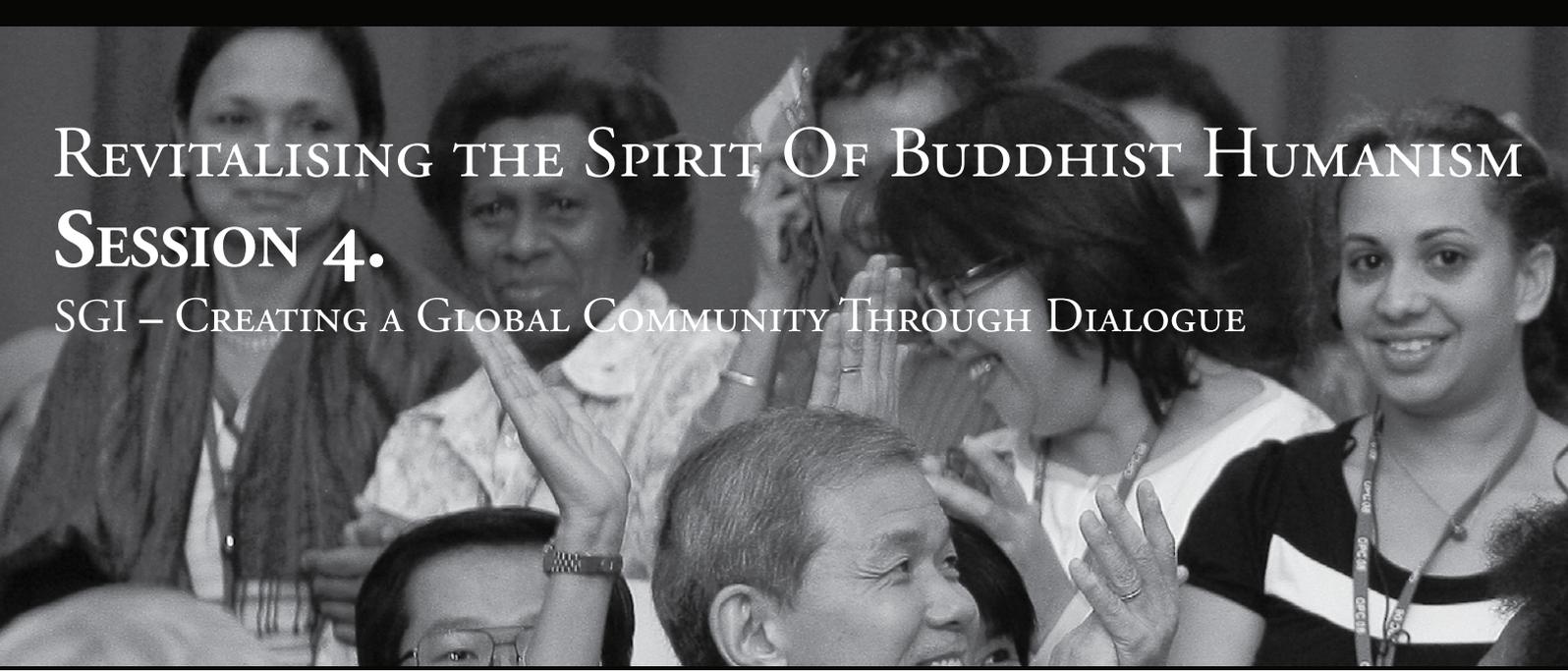
❁ The mentor and disciple relationship allows us to learn from history through self-reflection and self-transformation, rather than through emotionalism.

❁ The mentor’s spirit is enacted by taking responsibility for our own happiness while contributing to the happiness of other people in our present circumstance.

❁ Embracing the mentor’s conviction for the happiness of humanity means taking responsibility to make a significant and positive impact on every area of our life: family, work and society. This cause to create value and happiness is a profound endeavour for the future of humanity.

END SESSION 3

¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/10-key-skills-schools-must-start-teaching/2008/09/08/1220725904072.html>



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THE STRUGGLE TO RELIEVE SUFFERING

This was the subject of *The Crisis of the Mind*, penned by Paul Valéry (1871–1945) in the aftermath of World War I. This 1919 essay sets out with urgency the spiritual crisis wrought by the world's first “total war”. There was indeed a sense of foreboding that European civilisation, which had seemed to be in its glory, might be verging on demise (23).

The issues that Valéry stressed were the impotence of knowledge, the cruel purposes to which science had been applied, and a sense of directionlessness. These problems are all still with us; Valéry's profound insights into the spiritual bankruptcy of Western modernity describe a trajectory that would continue into the final years of the twentieth century.

The progress of modern science has been premised on a mechanistic view of nature as the object of manipulation and control, essentially separate from humanity.

In the final 25 years of the 20th century, however, certain issues began to exert inexorable pressure for a paradigm shift in our approach to science. These include the dramatic emergence of the global environmental crisis and the dangers inherent in cloning technology – a technology that represents an important intellectual frontier but which, if misapplied, could undermine the very foundations of our humanity. Our fundamental understanding of nature and of life must be an acknowledgment of the fact that the subjective

and objective realms are inseparable and that humanity is an integral part of nature.

Takafumi Matsui, professor at the University of Tokyo, has argued that Descartes's famous *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) should today be supplanted with something more along the lines of “I interact, therefore I am,” or “I engage with, therefore I am” (131). This is an assertion with which I am in full agreement. For it accords with the statement that I feel represents the essence of the philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), one that I referenced in my peace proposal of four years ago; “I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself” (Meditations 45) (Ikeda, UN Peace Proposal, 2001)

The spread of Nichiren Buddhism throughout the world has been due to the emphasis on engaged dialogue promoted by the Soka Gakkai that has the group dialogue movement as its basis. One of the negative trends in modern culture has been a tendency towards isolationism. There is a decline in public interaction, live cultural activities etc and a gravitation towards electronic means of communication and entertainment. This trend may be counterproductive in terms of the loss of the necessary relationship between people and their environment for healthy development and expression. The promotion of sincere dialogue, in particular, one to one dialogue, re-emphasises the connection to each other, giving rise to creative interaction and a sense of self-worth. Perhaps the Soka Gakkai is the epitome of the model for promoting matters of greatest significance



within the lives of the common population. These are matters of the heart that are of most relevance to common people as revealed in Nichiren Buddhism and discussed within the group dialogue movement.

In the family and in society in general, it is sometimes difficult to engage others in hopeful discussions of individual suffering, social problems, politics, religion, or other issues. There is in fact in our society an underlying reluctance to talk about such issues because it may cause arguments. Perhaps we need to challenge this fear so that we can engage in meaningful discussion and progress towards a better understanding of the issues that we all face.

It would seem that a religion for the modern times, one that has the flexibility and resilience to be relevant to all people, would need to deal with the crisis and confusion established in history without reverting to blind faith or the insistence on all people agreeing with a certain dogma. Such a philosophy needs to be based squarely in the reality of the struggles of the human condition and devoid of abstract idealism and fantasy. The challenge of such a philosophy is to allow the individual the capacity to express themselves freely without negatively impacting on the environment or at the expense of other people's happiness. What is clear is that systems of thought cannot be purely a construct of the mind and be successful. It must arise from the nature of the universe itself and not be driven to create a new reality for the sake of its own needs if it is to remain uncorrupted and responsive to the ever-changing needs of humanity.

“All things are connected.” Buddhism echoes and extends this awareness voiced by Chief Seattle. At the same time, it takes as its highest imperative the work of removing such barriers in the effort to approach the reality, the genuine aspect of life itself. This is expressed in the idea of a life moment embracing both sentient and non-sentient existence. In other words, an essential life moment (*ichinen*) contains within it all phenomenal realms (*sanzen*). (WND1p355) This encompasses not only sentient beings, such as human and animal life, but non-sentient life such as grass and trees, and even the seemingly lifeless mountains and rivers. Likewise, Buddhism teaches that Buddhahood – the potential for ultimate joy, wisdom and compassion – exists in all things. (WND1p848)

While there are more precise definitions of “life moment” and “Buddhahood,” for present purposes it probably suffices to say that they are basically equivalent to the expansive sense of the word “life” that I have been employing. While Buddhism shares the direct appreciation of life that characterises animism, its approach differs in the following regard. Buddhism regards life in its most profound sense not as something that is simply conferred upon us without effort, but as a luminous and fertile realm that can be entered and experienced fully only through the most strenuous spiritual effort. (Ikeda, UN Peace Proposal, 2001)

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While many religions have created a dualism that removes humanity from the environment, making humans more important or sacred than the natural universe, Buddhism has examined the natural world and the dependence and integration of humanity within it.

Nichiren revealed a method to practice harmonising life through fusing the subjective self with the objective reality of the environment thus breaking the barriers of illusion that have plagued humans and sent them in a direction of arrogance, isolationism and suffering. This methodology, based on human revolution, clarifies through experience a belief in humanity as fundamentally equal in status and potential. By removing the power of hierarchy and authoritarianism over the individual, Nichiren has opened the possibility for all people to transform themselves within any environment or circumstance.

The things that make good headlines attract our attention because they are on the surface of the stream of life, and they distract our attention from the slower, impalpable, imponderable movements that work below the surface and penetrate to the depths. But of course it is really these deeper, slower movements that, in the end, make history, and it is they that stand out huge in retrospect, when the sensational passing events have dwindled, in perspective, to their true proportions. (Toynbee, *Civilisation on Trial*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1948, p213)

The slower 'movements' in life are the focus of the Soka Gakkai. Through the dialogue of people who are

genuinely concerned for the wellbeing of each other, a tremendous source of hope arises. When we share belief in the slower movement, the deeper regions of our life, we are drawn to the conclusion that we share a life without separation. Since this movement is based firmly in the belief in life's reality, it has a quality of sustainability that can be likened to a mighty river. As it gains momentum it becomes unstoppable, nourishing the vast plains and tablelands of society.

THE VOW TO SHARE HAPPINESS

The multifaceted expressions of culture in Australia seem to accelerate with each generation. Youth culture transforms and reinvents itself every few years. New trends give way to newer trends and the life span of generations such as 'x' and 'y'¹ seem to shorten in their influence. Amongst these fast-paced transformations the 'relics' of older cultures rarely see centre stage and even the 'baby boomers' seem like something from ages past. This faster pace is not necessarily a negative, however it can limit our appreciation for the more subtle aspects of our environment and relationships. The practice of Nichiren Buddhism in the SGI that includes study, chanting and dialogue acts to increase our appreciation for our life and environment that drives an increase in our ability to fully engage in the moment.

Within this setting the SGI is offering a new type of culture, a culture of humanism. This culture is one that has its basis in the reality of an ever-changing universe. Rather than hold onto human behaviours until they become formality, the SGI celebrates the transformations that evolve from the compassionate and creative expression of humanity within any society.



The emphasis on youth within SGI reveals a willingness to embrace change, to respond to life's challenges with vigour and to promote a confidence in the future potential of society.

Although the internet and other powerful tools of information sharing offer a degree of distraction that is hard to resist, it is the deeper, more profound communication that arises from the heartfelt sharing of life's struggles with another individual that soothes the suffering and anxiety of living. Ironically, the victim of this unlimited communication revolution seems to be the individual. While straining to consume information from all corners of the earth the individual grapples with meaning trying to 'fit' themselves into a vast diversity that often skims the surface of reality offering only abstract concepts. In contrast the value of the individual is realised in actuality through the seemingly mundane day-to-day existence that is the reality of human life.

This is the world of the Soka Gakkai discussion meeting and home visitation activities. Anyone who has felt the pain of loss or loneliness that derives from some of life's harsh experiences knows that when we experience the sincere care of someone who will listen with their heart and not their judgment, we can transform ourselves and re-determine to face our circumstances with renewed commitment.

This celebration of the individual's significance through the opening of our heart is the enactment of Buddhist unity that forges a portal for hope within the whole of humanity. When we are able to confidently engage with the intent to allow another person an opportunity to reveal their enlightened potential from the very struggles they are facing, we are creating a direction for humanity

that will gather a momentum driven from within the life of each individual. When this heart-to-heart connection is made it is both the inheritance of the ultimate Law of life (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo) and the perfect enactment of the oneness of mentor and disciple relationship. This engagement is enacting the vow of the mentor, the vow of *kosen-rufu*.

"Accordingly, the great vow of the Buddha and the wish of the mentor for the enlightenment of all people and the happiness of self and others are none other than the great vow, or wish, for *kosen-rufu* itself." (Ikeda, *The Heritage of The Ultimate Law of Life and Death*, Instalment 9).

THE BEHAVIOUR OF PROOF

Hugo declared that solidarity is the heart of democracy.¹ Solidarity is also a perfect description of the Soka Gakkai. Hugo continued, "Humanity is in solidarity with the planet, the planet is in solidarity with the sun, the sun is in solidarity with the stars, the stars are in solidarity with nebulae, and nebulae, galaxies, are in solidarity with the infinite. ... The solidarity of humanity is the invincible corollary of the solidarity of the universe." (SGI Newsletter, NL7541)

This idea of celebration of the individual and of diversity opens a new possibility going forward for each person and for humanity as a whole. It cannot be overstated that humanity is in need of a new way forward through the looming results of past behaviours and destructive actions.



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Currently the term dialogue is being devalued by its use within the political sphere that demeans the importance of what is the artistic and profound expression of human relations. International treaties, agreements and pacts founded on political dialogue are rarely brought to fruition. Forums where allies and enemies cloud coercion in formal and ritualistic gatherings that almost never acknowledge the significance of the other party do not reflect the power that is inherent in heartfelt dialogue. Entry into a conversation that is predicated by a determination to only satisfy our own needs is not true dialogue.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda comments on the significance of dialogue, “Genuine dialogue results in the transformation of opposite views, changing them from wedges that drive people apart into bridges that link them together” (Ikeda, *A New Humanism*, p158).

As we glean from Hugo’s quote above, the solidarity we can establish within comes from our will to build solidarity with the universe. His insight resonates with Nichiren’s view that all life is uniform (Law) and its expressions completely unique (manifestations of life). However transient our lives may seem, they are firmly revealed within the reality of existence – our daily life. This reality is the eternal changing expression of the universe, of all life (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo). Here and now is where all the causes for transformation take place. The complete connection to all life, revealed through our ability to affect and be affected by the environment, is our shared existence. The interactions that we enjoy (or not) are the way we can develop a profound appreciation for, and determination to, reveal all the potential that our life offers.

Creative life is devoted entirely to transcending the individual self by continually reaching beyond the limits of space and time in pursuit of the universal self. The creative life makes new breakthroughs, achieves self renewal, every day, always attuned to the original rhythm of the universe, and by so doing it brings about complete transformation ... In one respect creative life is free of the bounds of time and space, free to expand and grow. At the same time creative life in all its expansiveness is contained within a single moment of an individual life ... On the level of everyday activities creative life propels us to the uninhibited realisation of self-perfection. What sets the *Lotus Sutra* apart from other sutras is its immediate focus; it places the quest to realise the Way of the Bodhisattva right here in the midst of the troubled, mundane world. (Ikeda, *A New Humanism*, pp8-9)

As with any other artistic pursuit there needs to be training and effort to polish our own skills and gain valuable experience. Engaging in the ‘art of dialogue’ in our daily life provides us with the opportunity to continually improve our expression. When this is coupled with the vow of *kosen-rufu* it becomes the transformative expression that illuminates the profound potential of each interaction – like a beautiful canvas brought to life by striking colours.

Open-hearted dialogue is the means to reveal our belief in our own and other people’s significance. When we wish to embrace other people’s suffering and share our conviction toward their potential we also learn



about ourselves and therefore owe a debt of gratitude to the other person for that lesson, even when they give us difficulty.

This is the very core of the Soka Gakkai movement across the world – the willingness to transform ourselves with appreciation for that opportunity based on our conviction to inspire and appreciate others. This is called the human revolution and it is possibly the most confronting of all challenges facing humanity this century. Facing the reality that all of the struggles of humanity are the shared responsibility of humanity is a sobering thought. If this is not to become an abstract ideal it must be enacted on a personal level – that of the individual. The courage of Nichiren Daishonin and the three presidents of the Soka Gakkai has provided an eternal aspiration for all people who embrace the challenge of the progress of humanity. This aspiration they have created is to fully embrace the responsibility for the happiness of humanity and offer a clear practical and spiritual foundation and example for future generations.

THE HERITAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

In this age common people are now in the position to be aware of the grandeur of the challenge facing the whole of humanity. This is simultaneously beneficial and terrifying. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin offers a clear and complete insight into the nature of reality and points to the creative response that is open for humanity to the commonly-shared sufferings of life. This profound expression of compassion informs each generation of the potential underlying the common challenges facing humanity and opens a possibility

of continuous evolution of the human condition by building on the experience of each age. The common goal of peace through the happiness of each individual (*kosen-rufu*) unites communities around this common good without discarding the essential need to respect the individual. The activating movement that facilitates the transformation from theory into reality is dialogue based on human revolution. The determination to enact this movement is to inherit and share the mission of the mentor, the mission of *kosen-rufu*.

In our country, current generations have little or no memory of war. This can be a blessing or a curse. Lack of experience may shield one from reality and make one foolhardy or unaware of dangers. However, it may also open the way to new understandings untainted by preconceived negative views provided the lessons of history are not ignored. In Buddhist terms this means that our past (karma) can either entrap us or, through its transformation into mission, form the basis for a new possibility. However, examining the history of humanity does not instil hope in our ability to learn the lessons needed to transform our behaviour. The 20th century was our most violent century to date. This does not bode well for a future without conflict. Certainly the beginnings of this century witnessed an act of evil genius with the response being another act of evil genius. That is, the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York causing the war on terror. This war, that functions to keep the earth's population in a constant state of fear and anxiety, offers no end point.

The SGI offers an alternative response to the failings of humanity. Through courageous dialogue at the grassroots level, SGI continues to enact faith in the

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transformative powers of humanity on an individual basis while sharing this belief with people from 192 countries. This 'long slow movement' is the opposite of quick fixes or the patching up of damage. It is, however, the fastest and most direct way of transforming history into a valuable lesson for each generation.

President Ikeda has devoted his life to inspiring in humanity a belief in itself – that it possesses the practical and profound capability to reveal the creative potential of life through day-to-day behaviour. This unequivocal conduct has provided a realistic platform for common people to contribute to the peaceful transformation of the planet and qualifies him as the mentor of humanity. Although this may not be for the faint-hearted, it is possible, due to the Nichiren's compassionate practice of chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, to reveal from within, the wisdom and action necessary to achieve this wonderful goal. Nichiren and the three presidents have opened, through their courageous lives, a new possibility driven by practical example and profound wisdom revealed in their heartfelt dialogue with humanity. But what of the time after President Ikeda?

It was made clear recently by President Ikeda that the 'Second Phase' of *kosen-rufu* has begun. This is the age of the disciple. Referring to guidance by second president Josei Toda, President Ikeda encourages us that our mission to unite to single-mindedly work for the happiness of others is the future he has devoted his life to awaken in us. By inheriting the spirit of the mentor with the unified conviction to perform our own individual human revolution for the sake of *kosen-rufu*, the Soka Gakkai becomes Soka Gakkai Buddha – the mentor for society.

CONCLUSION

In our development or human revolution we, while sharing common challenges, also are enacting a unique mission. This is true as an individual, a family, a street, a town etc. The development of Buddhism has been an evolution of expression played out within the context of each unique age, country and circumstance. This will be the eternal truth of the development of humanity. As each of us strives to express our life through fulfilling our unique mission and role we are influenced, encouraged, challenged and inspired by those circumstances that surround us. Both ourselves and our circumstances are particular and therefore rules cannot apply to the spiritual revolution required by each person throughout the changing times. This is why the spirit of humanism embodied by Nichiren's philosophy emphasises the individual human revolution as key to the constant transformation needed by humanity as a whole. The responsibility for our own behaviour in any circumstance becomes the freedom required to release the spirit of Buddhist humanism during difficult or painful times.

When we each determine in this way and practice to embrace the mission of the mentor we can express ourselves freely, inspiring others while embracing the challenges that shape our life. Our constant, creative transformation establishes a depth of joy unassailable by life's harsh realities.

John Dewey in *A Common Faith*, asserts that it is "the religious", rather than specific religions, that is of vital importance. While religions all too quickly fall into dogmatism and fanaticism,



“that which is religious” has the power to “unify interests and energies” and to “direct action and generate the heat of emotion and the light of intelligence.” Likewise, the religious enables the realisation of those benefits that Dewey identifies as “the values of art in all its forms, of knowledge, of effort, and of rest after striving, of education and fellowship, of friendship and love, of growth in mind and body.” ... As Dewey understood, and as the sad outcome of people’s self worship in modern times has demonstrated, without assistance we are incapable of living up to our potential. Only by relying on and merging with the eternal can we fully activate all our capabilities. Thus, we need help, but our human potential does not come from outside; it is, and always has been, of us and within us. How any given religious tradition handles the balance between interior and exterior forces will, I believe, decisively affect its long-term viability. Anyone involved in religion must constantly work on keeping the balance, if we do not want to repeat history. For if we are not attentive, religion can enslave us to dogma and to its own authority just as easily as the religious impulse can serve as a vehicle for human restoration and rejuvenation. (Ikeda, *A New Humanism*, pp158-159)

END SESSION 4

Study course prepared by the SGIA Study Department,
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KEY POINTS SESSION 4

- ❁ SGI is creating a new history for humanity by raising generations who can build on past experience, without having to repeat past mistakes.
- ❁ Equally valuing the individual and the collective, the expression of enlightenment in SGI is a continuing spiritual evolution that can provide the foundation for a non-judgemental and egalitarian society.
- ❁ Even though it is a slower process, when we connect to other people through creative and courageous dialogue, with a willingness to reflect on and develop ourselves rather than change the other, we are engaged in the spiritual evolution of humanity.

¹ The accepted definition between Baby Boomer and Generation X was that, in western society, Generation X broke away from many of the social traditions, for example, living together/sex before marriage, changing civil rights, breaking from traditional religions. Generation Y adds to these changes the tech savvy, instant communication, information sharing aspect of recent years.

² Translated from French. Victor Hugo, *Philosophie, commencement d'un livre (Philosophy, at the Beginning of a Book, in Oeuvres Complètes (Complete Works)*, edited by Jean Massin (Paris: Le Club Français du Livre, 1969), vol 12, p49.