

Special Series:

The Humanist Principle—Compassion and Tolerance (2)

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ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION

Humanity and the Global Environment

Ikeda: Because the loss of harmony means the destruction of the foundation of our existence, you consistently insist on the need for harmony in three sets of relationships: between humanity and nature, among humanity, and between humanity and the spirit. Before the emergence of modern science, human beings derived essential nourishment from the natural environment, which they altered only to make living space for themselves. They maintained a sense of oneness with nature, for which they never lost their sense of awe. But, owing to the Industrial Revolution and advances in scientific technology, while deriving great benefits from development, human beings allowed development to get out of hand and to affect the environment. By the twentieth century, the seriously aggravated pollution problem made us realize that, although we exploit it, we are still a part of nature. Pollution of the atmosphere and water harmed agricultural crops and resulted in illnesses threatening our own physical well-being. What are your thoughts on the imbalance between humanity and the natural environment that confronts the world today?

Unger: Our relations to our Earth are shocking. We must understand the extent to which our planet is being exploited, how greatly we squander our natural resources, and how much we pollute the water and contaminate the air.

Ikeda: I agree. We urgently need policies to deal with the global environment. By the second half of the twentieth century, when the problem had become serious all over the planet, we finally grasped the scale of pollution. We realized that the natural resources we were squandering are not limitless after all. The alarm was sounded, warning that industrially-produced carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere was causing global warming and imperiling the ecology. We realized that atmospher-

ic pollution was threatening the ozone layer, which protects us from harmful cosmic radiation. Awareness of these problems led to the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002.

Unger: We have only one Earth—only one environment to live in—and we all share concern about its possible destruction. Greater awareness of the global crisis can improve our sense of responsibility for the future. To save the planet means to save all life. We must not, however, be unjust. Over the past 15 years a tremendous amount has been accomplished in Europe. I am thinking of the greater respect now being shown to animals. I also have in mind the halting of pollution, especially water pollution. Once gravely-polluted bodies of water are now clean enough for human beings to bathe in them.

Ikeda: A highly symbolic example. Recently, in Japan too, water quality has improved to the point that fish have returned to many formerly-polluted rivers.

Unger: But we still have one gigantic concern: poverty in the whole global environment. The only way to combat it is to cancel the debts of the poor and never exploit them again. This is, incidentally, an ancient Biblical recommendation.

Balancing Development and the Environment

Ikeda: One of the most important problems in halting current global environmental destruction is dealing with the unplanned felling of forests in developing countries and the increasing exhaustion of arable lands. Conflicts of interests between developing and industrialized nations further complicate the situation.

At the 2002 summit in Johannesburg, developing nations questioned industrialized nations' right to glorify the consumption culture while telling them to put up with poverty. In other words, a conflict arose over ways to balance economic growth and environmental conservation.

Unger: What annoys me terribly is the enormous gap between the affluent North and the impoverished South. Africa is a human tragedy to which the West has contributed. As the Johannesburg conference indicated, effort to do something about it remains no more than lip service as long as overexploitation proceeds unrestrained.

Ikeda: The only way to solve the problem of development-environment imbalance is for the industrialized nations to see beyond their own interests and adopt a global viewpoint.

Unger: I agree. But the hegemonic, authoritarian views the West has held to the present prevent industrialized nations from taking a global view toward improving the environment and dealing with economic reconstruction of the developing nations. Some Western nations still desire to dominate everything left over from the colonial period.

Ikeda: Certainly as long as the industrial nations fail to change their way of operating, the global environmental problem will only become increasingly grave.

Unger: Yes. But I believe a fundamental paradigm change will take place in the twenty-first century to transform our values from lust for power and domination to willingness to act meaningfully.

Ikeda: Instead of being controlled by desire, we must adopt loftier values and seek for the revolution and perfection of humanity itself.

Unger: Yes, that is true. By “meaningfully” I intend the creation of a humane foundation by avoiding obsession with ephemeral interests and material desires and willingly ennobling and tempering the self. When the industrialized nations embrace these values and address both environmental problems and the economic recovery of the developing nations on a global scale, the global environment will improve significantly.

Ikeda: No doubt. Nichiren Buddhism speaks of three kinds of treasures: treasures in the storehouse (economic affluence), treasures of the body (talents and physical abilities), and the treasures of the heart (virtuous fortune) and teaches that accumulating the last kind through altruistic actions is most important. Personal wealth and social position bring no true happiness. Our goal should be the happiness of others as well as that of ourselves, which we can promote by refining and elevating our humane characteristics and overcoming the lust for power and material desires.

In his *A Geography of Human Life*, published in 1903, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, first president of Soka Gakkai, was looking a century ahead when he proposed that humanity should advance from military, econom-

ic, and political competition to an age of humanitarian competition. What he had in mind agrees closely with the change in value paradigm you mention.

Unger: Yes. In the West we observe a reflection of godlessness and hardheaded materialism that takes no thought for tomorrow.

Ikeda: In connection with relations between humanity and the environment, Nichiren Buddhism teaches “if the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land.”¹ To extrapolate, if human life is sullied with greed, antagonism, and egoism, these evils will disturb the social environment and destroy the ecology. If, on the other hand, the human mind is filled with love, nonviolence, and reverence for nature, these good traits will harmonize human actions with the natural world and create a symbiotic social environment. Faith supplies the power enabling the good mind to triumph.

As you say, rejecting faith amounts to rejecting the transcendent and sacred. Making us powerless to control our internal evil, this leads to environmental destruction. Materialism that takes no thought of the morrow amounts to a rejection of the spirit and of ethics, thereby weakening the good and strengthening the evil.

Attitudes toward the Environment: Shared Buddhist and Christian Ideas

Unger: I see parallels between Christianity and Buddhism not only in terms of their deep concern and moderate attitude toward the Earth. Both deal strictly with the human being in the sense of a therapeutic approach to man on his way to salvation.

Ikeda: Speaking of environmental attitudes shared by Buddhism and Christianity calls to mind certain historical figures. One of them is St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226), who, as you know, had close relations not only with humans, but also with all creatures, whom he joyfully called his brothers and sisters. His great compassion for nonhuman creatures is illustrated by Giotto’s famous picture of him preaching to the birds. Believing that human life and the natural environment are indivisible, he cautioned that exploiting nature is a manifestation of greed. He had awe and compassionate affection for all creatures. In Saint Francis, I see something of the Buddhist bodhisattva.

Unger: That is an interesting comparison. The expulsion of humanity

from the Garden of Eden should serve as a collective warning to us all: if, obsessed with the pleasures of the moment, we neglect to take sufficient care of it, the Earth will become uninhabitable.

Ikeda: Precisely. But, if we control greed, have love toward humanity and regard nature with respect and if all society shares these values, we can create a symbiotic civilization that harmonizes with the Earth's ecology.

Unger: We must once again turn our eyes to the value of God's Creation and keep in mind the need for science to ensure a tolerable basis for life for all human beings.

Ikeda: Buddhism teaches how to live in symbiosis with and respect for nature. This way of life abides by the philosophy of the Middle Way, avoiding extremes of both asceticism and hedonism. In other words, the Buddhist view of nature and life is of a harmoniously symbiotic relation between human beings and nonhuman nature.

Unger: I agree completely with that philosophy. The excessively prosperous 20 percent of the global population now consumes 80 percent of the planet's natural resources. The remaining 80 percent of the population starve. In keeping with the Buddhist teachings, we must seek a way to control our own greed and live in communal prosperity with the peoples of the developing countries and with the natural environment. The Christians claim their mission to be going out in the world to learn while motivating themselves. This seems to me to approach the Buddhist ethos.

Ikeda: Buddhism conceives of bodhisattvas as active people concentrating on the salvation of others. Mahayana bodhisattvas take what are called the Four Universal Vows. First, they vow to save all sentient beings; that is, to empathize with all suffering people. Second, they vow to abandon all worldly passions. This means they vow to control all earthly desires and reform them into such good attitudes as nonviolence, compassion, and hope. Third, they vow to learn all Buddhist teachings. In today's terms, this means learning Buddhism and the whole human spiritual heritage, including all fields of learning, philosophy, and religion. Fourth and finally, they vow to train themselves in Buddhism until they attain the realm of enlightenment. In other terms, this means developing their own happiness as they save others. These Four Universal

Vows well up from within the bodhisattvas themselves. By proclaiming them, they manifest the goodness that directs them to their own and to others' happiness and salvation. Surely the goodness itself generates an ethic making possible symbiosis with nature.

Unger: There is no sense in developing global or environmental ethics, unless they arise from the human heart. The desire to contribute to humanity and society arises from within us and can influence education. I believe that we must constantly be motivated by education. In this way, we will be able to steer society. We can discover the value of dialogue and education only when we accept material things like science and economics as what they are: means to serve human existence.

Ikeda: You indicate an important point. The strength born from within humanity is indispensable to orienting our values to ensure that science, economics, politics, and all human endeavours are actually undertaken for the sake of humanity. Essentially, education, religion, and philosophy should evoke inwardly-generated human spirituality. I discussed the importance of inner-motivated philosophy in a speech entitled "The Age of Soft Power and Inner-Motivated Philosophy," which I delivered at Harvard University in September, 1991.

Unger: In the twenty-first century, the task of finding a way to ensure that humanity can develop and grow together confronts us. To ensure this, we must harmonize three sets of relations—with nature, among ourselves, and with the spiritual. Humanity occupies the center of the triangle. But the individual human being is materially limited and capable of exerting little dramatic influence on the lives of others. Humanity in general, on the other hand, continues to live indefinitely in our progeny. It is therefore important that we globalize the value of individual service to the eternally-continuing life of the whole human race.

Ikeda: I am in full agreement. In the *Suttanipata* (*Karaniya Metta Sutta*), Shakyamuni expresses his desire that all things should be happy:

"The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born —
May all beings be at ease!"²²

In this passage, he is expressing a biological and generational ethics.

Humanity is required to live together in harmony with everything now living on the planet. That is to say, we coexist with all beings visible and invisible, distant or near. Also, those already born are bound to improve and enrich the Earth and the social environment before passing it on to posterity. We must never allow the rich current of eternal human life to dry up or be blocked. This is why the key to dealing with our environmental problems is, as you mentioned, the globalization of the value of serving the eternally-continuing life of the human race.

Environmental Education

Ikeda: Earlier, you mentioned the importance of education to environmental problems when you said that it can steer society. Undeniably, education is both a starting point and a driving force for establishing global and environmental ethics. What kind of environmental education should we promote?

Unger: Environmental education isolated from other fields of learning is impossible. We can, however, try to create awareness about the environment. In this sense, we can foster ideas of sustainability. We must always ponder the extent to which our deeds burden the world and to which we consume un-renewable natural resources.

Ikeda: The first step in environmental education is a firm grasp of present conditions: the amount of the world's forests already lost; the extent to which pollution of the atmosphere, the water, and the soil has already advanced; their ecological effects on the earth, and so on. In connection with this point, I stressed in my proposal to the 2002 Global Summit the importance of comprehensively addressing the UN's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. As part of this undertaking, in cooperation with the Earth Charter Commission, Soka Gakkai International sponsors an exhibition entitled "A Quiet Revolution: The Earth Charter and Human Potential." It has already been shown in ten countries and, in 2006, will be presented in Japan under the tentative title "The Earth Charter—In Pursuit of a new Global Ethic."

Unger: I am sure great things will come of the hard work the members of SGI are devoting to environmental education. The major problem in Europe is our highly secularized way of life, which generates enormous materialism enabling, as Nietzsche said, every person to be his or her own God. In other words, tremendous advances in the natural sciences

have enabled us to exercise control over many things in ways that once would have been inconceivable. Our present situation can be compared to that of Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice, who, enchanting a broomstick to fetch water but not knowing the magic word to stop it, is lost in a massive flood. The spirits we once called on, are no longer available. The new era we are entering compels us to make completely novel considerations to control science. We must learn to use the new instruments science puts at our disposal better than we have in the past. At the same time, our scientific research must become more intensive.

Ikeda: Insatiable intellectual curiosity and the spirit of inquiry have inspired research and technological innovation in many scientific areas. The pace of these changes is likely to accelerate in the years to come. Science and medical therapy have already entered realms once reserved to God, for instance, in such things as cloning technology and advanced genetic engineering. Now we are forced to draw a line between the technically feasible and the ethically permissible. How far should we be allowed to interfere in the manipulation of human life and nature? Where should we apply ethical brakes? These are some of the basic issues now confronting us. We will be unable to put our new scientific tools to use for the betterment of humanity unless we establish ethical models based on the philosophy of respect for the dignity of life.

Unger: Culture and science can survive only if they demonstrate respect for life and the environment. As is evident from many psychological sicknesses, exploiting nature means exploiting ourselves too, thus generating internal psychosomatic illnesses.

Ikeda: I have discussed nonviolence toward the environment with the Indian agricultural scientist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, who, referring to Gandhi on this topic, said human beings will use violence toward nature as long as they use it among themselves. Teaching nonviolence is the most important aspect of environmental education, which itself must be founded on respect for the dignity of life. Education must always deal with the potential of each irreplaceable life and the dignity of all life that is their mainstay.

Unger: I agree. Culture is born, not of exploitation, but of respect. Education can be environmental in nature only if it teaches respect for life.

In this millennium we must determine whether introducing people to sustainable environmental education is possible. Our major starting

point must be harmonious coexistence on a global social scale. Environmental education culminates in providing our neighbours with habitats as pleasant as our own. When we disregard these things and concentrate on our own environment alone, we lose our point of reference with the transcendental. And without it we cannot conduct environmental education in the fullest sense.

Environmental Education for Children

Ikeda: Children, who bear the responsibility for the future, must be taught about respect for the dignity of life and reverence for the transcendental as part of environmental education. In his *A Geography of Human Life*, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first president of Soka Gakkai, pointed out two things we must be aware of in relation to the environment. First, we can intellectually recognize the laws and order of nature, but we must remember that the laws and order of nature are not the products of human intelligence. Second, on the emotional plane, we must be aware of the need of a sense of piety and awe toward the religious entity on which these natural laws are founded. Intellectual elements alone can lead to the arrogant idea that science is omniscient. Emotional elements alone can lead to disassociation from the realities of life. Mr. Makiguchi argued that the correct attitude toward nature combines the intellectual elements of rule and order with the emotional element of awe toward the religious entity, or the transcendental.

Unger: Such an attitude toward the natural environment is important to enabling children to grow up with mind, body, and spirit in a state of balance.

Ikeda: When you visited the Kansai Soka schools, in July, 1997, you said that work must be done with the head, the heart, and the hands. You remarked that done with the head and the intellect alone, it can be cold. Done with the emotions alone, it loses touch with reality. But, done without the intellect, without the emotions, and with the hands alone, work can destroy the planet. That is why we must live in a way in which all three are balanced. In these clear terms, you pinpointed the origin of the present global crisis and humanity's loss of harmony. I am grateful for the way you taught our young people the importance of growing up as total human beings in which cool minds, warm hearts, and speedy action are harmonized.

Unger: No philosophy or way of thought has meaning if it fails to convey itself to others. Because I wanted to convey my meaning to the Soka schools students who are responsible for the new century, I spoke simply. I was greatly impressed by the animation of the students I have met on my visits to the Kansai Soka schools and Soka University in Tokyo. I wanted to help them become—to borrow your words—total, well-balanced beings.

Ikeda: Mr. Makiguchi thought that the aim of education is not to cram students' heads with fragmentary information but to develop their whole beings to enable them to use absorbed knowledge for the sake of humanity. He proposed what he called the half-day school system for the sake of cultivating all-round personalities capable of using head, heart, and actions. According to his system, students did classroom work during half the school day and practical work during the other half. The cultivation of the all-round personality is one reason why Soka University of America was founded as a liberal arts college.

Unger: We expect the Soka schools and Soka University to turn out large numbers of well-rounded human beings qualified to improve the environment and create a brighter future.

Humane Education

Ikeda: Now I should like to discuss humane education, the foundation of environmental education. A cause of great concern in Japan during these past years has been the rise of atrocious crimes and the increasingly younger people involved in them. Behind these developments is a tendency to undervalue life in a society concerned mainly with efficiency and materialism. The power of education is of great importance to achieving the imperative goal of halting the worrying trends of heinous crime and prevalent violence.

Unger: The situation in Europe is exactly as you describe conditions in Japan. As I have already said, we are experiencing powerful secularization, which marginalizes the church and makes its voice much weaker than it used to be. People have forgotten “Thou shalt not kill.” The value criteria shared by all religions are being lost and replaced by prevailing materialistic values. Globalization of the mass media and world homogenization add impetus to the trend. The outcome is disregard for the value of life and frequent killings. All of this relates to education.

Ikedai: I agree entirely. Education provides power to create the future for young people, the community, and whole nations. But Japanese education today faces mountainous problems like student absenteeism, withdrawal and the breakdown of the system of classes. What are your thoughts on these problems, which are probably common to many countries?

Unger: As a medical scholar, I have a very simple approach to education. I think of my students as my children. Fathers and mothers want their children to experience the best things possible. Such an experience nourishes growth. Therefore, as the more experienced, their greatest role is to lead their children in ways enabling them to have such experiences.

Ikedai: The best kinds of experiences are playing out of doors and bonding with other children. In modern industrialized nations, however, too much time given over to things like computer games deprives children of opportunities for such experiences.

Unger: That is true. In today's information society many things, especially the mass media, have a tremendous effect on children. The daily recurrence of televised scenes of horrible violence clearly takes an educational toll. The appearance on the television screen of terrorist acts and serial murders is taken for granted. Murder seems the only thing people derive from such media.

Ikedai: Undeniably some high-quality television programs cultivate and enrich children's sensitivities. But, by stimulating hostility and anger, violently aggressive visual stimulation dulls imagination and empathy with suffering. Allowing children to confine themselves in environments where they do nothing but passively receive images weakens their abilities to think, judge, love, and sympathize actively. Family life and good reading, including the classics, can form a barrier protecting children from the corrupting influences of prevalent virtual reality. Reading greatly enriches children's spiritual world. It helps them pick and choose from the vast masses of media information and develop their own powers of active judgement and the imagination to empathize.

Unger: Children today experience a society of intolerance, war, and aggression in which it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of contacts with good books that cultivate sound judgment and imaginative powers. Strengthening the family is one way of reducing the bad influ-

ence of the mass media. Because in some ways the media are more influential than parents and family, my comment may seem unrealistic. But we parents must serve as models and not give up on education.

Ikeda: Children are the mirror of society, the era writ small. Today's problems with their abnormal behaviors are rooted in the weakening of educational power that family, community, and school ought to exercise. In thinking of educational issue, we adults must see ourselves reflected in that mirror and be always on the lookout for ways to correct ourselves. As you say, good adult examples have a bearing on improving powers of education.

The Origin of Soka Education

Unger: What are the origins of Soka Education?

Ikeda: Soka Education began with the humane education proposed by President Makiguchi. Putting it into practice while serving as principal of an elementary schools, he developed a system that he called pedagogy for value creation. He constantly insisted that children's happiness must be the goal of education. This was in the heyday of Japanese militarism, which mobilized all forces for the training of imperial and militaristic-nationalist youth. Nonetheless, he wanted to avoid sacrificing children to society and to help every child live a happy life of limitlessly-expanded potentialities. This wish is the basis of all aspects of the value-creative education.

In his *A Geography of Human Life*, Mr. Makiguchi wrote, "The important thing is the setting of a goal of well being and protection of all people, including oneself but not at the increase of self interest alone. In other words, the aim is the betterment of others and in doing so, one chooses ways that will yield personal benefit as well as benefit to others. It is a conscious effort to create a more harmonious community life, and it will take considerable time for us to achieve."³ The fundamental aim of Soka Education, then, is to promote the happiness of both the self and the other.

Unger: I see. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder of Soka Gakkai, advocated the value-creative education and demonstrated how faith can overcome the problems of life. His kind of humane education is essential to the cultivation of world citizens; that is, citizens who think and act on the global scale. How does the worldwide Soka Education network pro-

mote such education?

Ikeda: The high school known as Soka Gakuen, the starting point of today's Soka Education network, was opened in 1968. On that occasion, I set the following five precepts as goals for humane education.

1. Be a person of wisdom and passion, always pursuing truth and creating value.
2. Never cause problems for others, and be responsible for your actions.
3. Be kind and polite to others, rejecting violence, and value trust and harmony.
4. Express and courageously act on your convictions for the cause of justice.
5. Cherish a liberal, adventurous spirit, and grow to become honourable leaders in Japan and in the world.

Then, for the sake of the twenty-first century, I proposed five other principles.

1. Recognition of the unique dignity inherent in every life.
2. Respect for character.
3. Profound friendship enduring throughout life.
4. Rejection of violence.
5. The importance of the intellect and the need to be intellectual.

To my profound gratification, thanks to the unstinting efforts of all our faculty members and the self-awareness of our students, these precepts and principles are being realized.

Unger: All of them are important guidelines.

Ikeda: From the time it was first opened, the students of Tokyo Soka Gakuen have sung a school song whose title translates as "The Plants Are Sprouting." Its lyrics ask about purposes.

1. For what purpose do we refine our wisdom?
2. For what purpose are we passionate?
3. For what purpose do we love others?
4. For what purpose do we strive for glory?
5. For what purpose do we work for peace?

Ignoring the profound goals embodied in these purposes can cause human beings and society to run wild. The tradition of the Soka schools entails deepening one's philosophy by constantly questioning purposes, creating a personal history through the actions of one's youth, and pioneering a path of human life. At the initial matriculation ceremonies of the Kansai Soka High School for girls I set another guideline: it is impossible to be happy at the cost of others' unhappiness. I also said that, in comparison with the wide world, the Soka schools may be as small as a poppy seed, but that if our students remain true to value-creative ideas and practice schools' guidelines, our effect will ultimately be felt all over the globe. This is true because there is but one theory of peace. I said these things because I want our students to become strong and wise and create universal happiness and peace wherever they go.

Unger: I see.

The Teacher Is the Educational Environment

Ikeda: I expect faculty members of the Soka schools and of Soka University to be first rate both academically and in character, and determined to improve themselves. I also expect that they create an educational institution where the students come first. From the students' viewpoint, the teachers themselves constitute the greatest educational environment. It is a fundamental of Soka education that, as humane educational leaders, teachers prize their students on a par with their own children. I want them to be the kind of teachers that students will be glad to have known, whose warmth they will appreciate, who will win their devotion, and to whom they will attribute their own achievements.

Unger: On the basis of my own experience, I know how important having wonderful teachers is to young students' humane education. Total-personality contact with good teachers refines the balance among children's brains, bodies, and hearts.

Ikeda: Thomas Arnold (1795–1842), headmaster of the famous English public school Rugby, wrote that it was not a name, but the quality of the faculty that made a school good or bad. He also believed that teacher influence and mutual student-to-student influence fostered by teachers determine student personalities. Humane education is character formation and refinement as a result of personality interactions between students and teachers who regard their charges with greater than parental

affection. Because teachers define education, educational revolution must entail faculty revolution.

Unger: Your words help me understand why the eyes of the Soka schools and Soka University students shine with hope. Because children are the most valuable things we have, we must choose teachers for them very carefully. Today, schools seem too negligent in this connection.

Personally, if I were in charge, I would lay the greatest emphasis on schools. We must train children to adopt a global viewpoint. Humane education enables them to perceive the whole world keenly. This means not only seeing the material, visible things between heaven and Earth, but also intuitively sensing many spiritual entities. Children who can understand things as a whole can learn to contribute to the well-being of all humanity. It is precisely because of humane education that the important ideas resulting from ordinary natural-scientific education take on new meanings in our lives, thus making science useful to humanity.

Ikeda: I agree. Without the wisdom to use it for human happiness, the most sophisticated knowledge is not only useless, but also potentially perilous. Josei Toda, the second president of Soka Gakkai, used to say that the greatest delusion of modern humanity is to mistake knowledge for wisdom. On one level, knowledge can lead to weapons of mass destruction. It is undeniably true, however, that it can also lead to enormous convenience and industrial wealth. Humane education is in great demand as a way of guiding knowledge toward happiness and peace. In the years to come, the task of developing the wisdom to employ immense amounts of knowledge and information for the sake of human happiness through humane education is going to become increasingly essential.

Nuclear Weapons and Evil

Ikeda: Nuclear weapons are the product of scientific knowledge. In considering how human beings should deal with them, the issue of knowledge and wisdom becomes acute. The end of the Cold War provided an excellent opportunity for getting rid of them entirely; and indeed, during the final decade of the twentieth century, the movement to abolish them made some headway and moved beyond nuclear-arms reduction toward the creation of an international order in which their use would be banned. For instance, the International Court of Justice issued the advisory opinion that use of nuclear weapons violates international

law. In 2000, in its final document, a review conference for the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty called for a clear promise to eliminate nuclear weapons completely. But then the United States' concept of missile defence opened the door to destruction of the nuclear balance and the start of competitive nuclear expansion into space. Furthermore both the United States and Russia are conducting critical nuclear experiments not specifically forbidden by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. How do you think humanity should confront the still persisting threat of nuclear weapons?

Unger: I am truly no friend of weaponry. It frightens me. Today humanity already has sufficient weapons to wipe out the whole world. As it advances globally, though hypocritically describing itself as peace-oriented, the weapons industry actually becomes increasingly-deeply involved in war. I have learned, however, that nations need weapons to defend themselves. Still I am very disturbed by atomic, biological, and chemical weapons. Using them or nuclear weapons is the most cowardly thing human beings could do. My personal opinion is that Hiroshima and Nagasaki should have taught us that using atomic weapons is wrong.

Ikeda: The nuclear, like the environmental, question boils down to whether we prefer the interests of nations over the advantage of all humanity and the whole planet. There can be no mistake: the vital issue is between humanity and nuclear weapons. In this connection, I must once again refer to Josei Toda's Declaration against Nuclear Weapons, in which he said, "Even if a country should conquer the world through the use of nuclear weapons, the conquerors must be viewed as devils, as evil incarnate." This statement breaks through political and military ideas to reach the fundamental dimension of the dignity of life itself. Buddhism teaches that inherent in life is evil, striving to fulfil selfish desires at the cost of destroying others' lives and even the natural environment. The state controlled by this evil is called the Realm of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others. For nations, ethnic groups, or people in authority to attempt to dominate others by means of nuclear weapons represents this evil in its purest form. This is the evil that Mr. Toda said we must crush completely.

Unger: I agree with him. I have a simple answer to the nuclear question: nuclear weapons must be eliminated.

Earth and Cosmos

Ikeda: In the midst of economic and cultural globalization, the existence of nuclear weapons still threatens the annihilation of humanity and the destruction of the planet. We face other grave problems as well, for instance regional conflict, terrorism, famine, HIV Aids, environmental pollution, and so on. The famous Russian cosmonaut Dr. Alexandre Serebrov, with whom I have published a dialogue entitled *The Cosmos, the Earth, and Humanity*, told me that viewing the Earth from space not only provides a valuable and philosophically-pious experience, but also stimulates a sense of mission to do something for our precious planet. The American astronaut Dr. Donald K. Slayton once told me that his similar experience taught him that the cosmos provides a unifying context for the Earth and that the cosmos is the very place for human unity. Today we must think first of the advantages of humanity and the Earth. To do this, we need to adopt the viewpoint of these men who have observed the planet from space. What hopes do you have for the space age in the twenty-first century?

Unger: When we draw up rules for its use, we must consider that space belongs to everyone and is the foundation of our existence. As our only possible habitat, it demands our eternal cooperation. Indeed, it is the starting point of human cooperation. Consequently, at the beginning of this new age we must not misuse space development.

Ikeda: Specific nations must not be allowed to monopolize space development in their own interests. Especially, competitive arms races must never be permitted. In all major religions, prayer amounts to dialogue and resonance with the eternal universe, the progenitor of both human and nonhuman life. In this sense, as you say, the cosmos is the foundation of our existence. Today, as globalization advances, the powerful influences of narrow nationalism and national egos make the role of spiritual exchanges with the cosmos immeasurably important.

Unger: I agree. It is especially vital for young people, who are responsible for the future, to have chances for cosmic spiritual exchanges and to develop a cosmic viewpoint. I believe the Kansai Soka schools participate in an educational program inspiring a sense of intimacy with the cosmos.

Ikeda: Yes. They participate in the American NASA program called

Earth Knowledge Acquired by Middle School Students (Earth KAM). This program makes it possible to take photographic images of any part of the Earth's surface using digital cameras mounted on the international space station. Students calculate the space station orbit and the locus and time of the photograph and then transmit photographic instructions in English. These instructions are transmitted to the space station via an organization like NASA, and the photograph is taken. This system enables students to perceive visually aspects of the face of the planet that are difficult to grasp in ordinary class work. The Kansai Soka schools hold the world record for numbers of times participating in Earth KAM. The Tokyo school, too, is conducting education about space in cooperation with a world-famous observatory. These opportunities enable students to see the world as a small planet in space totally without national boundaries and in need of our diligent care.

Unger: These wonderful opportunities to see the Earth from space extend your kind of environmental education outward into space.

Ikeda: For the coming era, we must rework the famous admonition from “think globally, act locally” to “think cosmically, act globally.” The human race must realize that we children of Earth are all fated to live together on our planet. Our times require humane education teaching us to consider the cosmic approach and to act as citizens of the cosmos in our attempts to deal with the global issues confronting us.

MEDICINE AND BIOETHICS

Health and Longevity

Ikeda: We all hope the twenty-first will be a century of life, one in which good health, illness, life and death, and respect for life will be focal points of increasing attention. In this connection, I should like to discuss life and bioethics with you.

Unger: As bioscience develops rapidly, we need to look more deeply into life itself. I am delighted to have this opportunity to learn of the philosophy of life through this dialogue with you.

Ikeda: You are now a world authority in cardiac surgery. Why did you select this field?

Unger: I always wanted to be a doctor. When I was a medical student, cardiac surgery was still difficult and dangerous. And I decided to do something to improve the situation.

Ikeda: Having chosen this difficult path, you have saved many precious lives. I understand you have performed surgery on more than seven thousand patients.

Unger: About that many major surgical operations.

Ikeda: How do you think we can stay in good health?

Unger: Two conditions determine good health. First is to be free from the possible presence of genetic abnormalities. Second is the effort the individual makes to remain healthy. This means observing dangers to good health and dealing with them. The person who cannot do this runs the risk of sickness. Beyond the age of forty, each person must be his or her own doctor.

Ikeda: Very useful and valuable advice. In other words, we require the wisdom and resourcefulness to protect our good health by being our own doctors and nurses. What is your opinion of the currently held idea that a stressful society causes sickness?

Unger: Stress has two aspects: a positive and a negative. Challenge stimulates positive stress. By overcoming it, human beings develop psychologically and physically. Without it we would grow lazy. Negative stress, on the other hand, is dangerous. When dominated by it, people become dispirited and pessimistic, losing even the will to accept challenges and ultimately falling ill.

Ikeda: I see. Whether stress operates positively or negatively is determined by the way how we confront it. That is why it is important to have goals and bravely confront challenges. We must find ways to ignite the life force inherent in us. Associating with people in whom life force is abundant and making contacts with a world rich in those forces is important. What kinds of people live longest?

Unger: Of course, none of us can live forever. But chances are good for greater longevity in people who have already lived beyond the age of sixty.

Ikeda: In the Orient, the age of sixty—called *kanreki* in Japanese—has long been afforded special significance as a major stage in the life cycle. From the many people I have known, I sense that sixty is in fact a milestone.

With your great experience in cardiac surgery, are you able to identify hearts that promise longevity?

Unger: Each human heart is different. During surgery, examination of contraction and color may lead us to assume that, after successful surgery, a heart that has been operated on may live at least another twenty years. Some people are genetically conditioned to live long. Beyond genetics, however, physical and spiritual exercise is necessary to longevity. Indeed, the latter is the key.

Ikeda: I assume you mean that activity on the mental level, like faith and convictions, influence long life. Is that correct?

Unger: Of course. Faith and convictions are the opposite of fear. Having a foundation of faith means knowing no fear. And this is important to tolerance. Faith enables people to make correct judgments and gives them stability.

Ikeda: Firm faith and convictions put us on the track to good health and long life. In medical terms, how long can life be extended?

Unger: Unless there are obstacles, I think a person can live a maximum of one hundred and twenty years. The end of life is determined by our genes.

Ikeda: Really! By a wonderful coincidence, the same age is given as a possibility in the Buddhist scripture called “Words and Phrases of the Golden Light Sutra.”

Unger: Human cells are said to be renewable in one form or another until the age of 120; thereafter they lose the ability.

Ikeda: Buddhist teachings and modern medical science agree on human longevity in a remarkable way. Although human beings are naturally greatly interested in how long they will live, actually quality of life is far more important than its length. In the *Sahassavagga*, occurs this passage: “And if anyone were to live for one hundred years, lazy and lack-

ing in energy, living for one day would be better for him strenuously putting forth energy.”⁴ In “The Three Kinds of Treasures,” Nichiren Daishonin wrote, “But it is better to live a single day with honor than to live to 120 and die in disgrace.”⁵

In Japan, where the average life expectancy is longest in the world, cardiac illnesses come second after cancer as a cause of death. What can we do in daily life to minimize the danger of heart disease?

Unger: Nutrition is a primary concern. In rural Japanese villages, cancer—especially of the esophagus—causes many deaths, whereas cases of cardiac illness are comparatively few. In Tokyo—as in other big cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco—where people eat rich diets heavy in meat, deaths from heart disease are numerous.

Ikeda: Until about the 1970s, the leading cause of death in Japanese rural villages was cerebrovascular disease followed by cancer and cases of cardiac illness were relatively rare. At present, however, as rural people, too, eat more meat, cardiac illness is on the increase. In his *Great Concentration and Insight*, the Chinese priest and scholar Tiantai (538–97) listed disorderly dietary habits as a cause of illness. Other Buddhist scriptures list the following effects of overeating:

1. Laziness.
2. Oversleeping that causes other people trouble.
3. Upset physical condition and sickness.

(*Nigantha Nataputta Sutta*)

Unger: Stated simply, the way to prevent cardiac sickness is to follow these three rules:

1. No smoking.
2. Reduce intake of foods high in cholesterol.
3. In diabetics, scrupulous monitoring of blood sugar.

Ikeda: Very clearly set forth! I have heard that a drink of water before sleep prevents dehydration, promotes good circulation of the blood, and contributes to good health. Is that so?

Unger: Improving the circulation protects the brain. Getting plenty of water is important. It is said that people free of heart or kidney problems should drink about two liters a day. We should be cautious not to drink

too much mineral water because it is high in sodium, which contributes to hypertension.

Ikeda: What foods do you recommend as good for the heart?

Unger: The best thing is to eat only half of everything. Cut back on meat to only about once a week. But eat fish, fruits, and grains and vegetables. A glass of good wine is fine, too. But balance is all-important. Overeating and over-drinking must lead to sickness.

Ikeda: Moderation in diet is the key. The *Dharma Analysis Treasury* explains four categories of nourishment.

1. Foods actually put in the mouth like meat, fish, and vegetables.
2. Things that give joy and pleasure on contact like good music and fine art.
3. Things that invigorate by inspiring thought and giving hope.
4. Mental power inspiring the will to live.

The mutual interrelation of these four sources of energy maintains good health. What kind of exercise is best for the heart?

Unger: Walking every day. Climbing stairs, too, is good. I generally do not ride in elevators. I believe climbing three flights of stairs is better than jogging for an hour or going to a gymnasium.

Ikeda: A Buddhist walking training called *kyogyo* (*kinhin*) that consists of walking back and forth in a fixed space regulates the physical condition. The *Vinaya* attributes five effects to it.

1. Increases the ability to walk far.
2. Promotes reflection.
3. Reduces the likelihood of illness.
4. Promotes digestion.
5. Prolongs the steadiness of mind.

Gandhi said that, for even the busiest person, exercise time is as important as meal time. He asserted that exercise does not take away time from work; on the contrary, it produces time for work.

What is the best time of day for exercise?

Unger: Morning, because it stimulates circulation. A little morning exercise raises the pulse. This makes it easier to deal with the various stresses encountered throughout the day.

Ikeda: What ways of combating stress are good for the heart?

Unger: Again, walking a little. Getting the right amount of sleep, too, is important, as are loving others and being loved by others.

Ikeda: A simple statement of important truths. Although individuals differ, what is the ideal amount of per-day sleep time?

Unger: It varies with age and physical needs. Older people require less. Active people in the prime of life require more. On the other hand, the young can go without sleep for a little while. A short nap after lunch is effective. This is why Mediterranean peoples customarily take a siesta. Other adjustments should be made to the activities of the day. For instance, in hot weather it is better to work during the cool morning hours and rest in the heat of the day. When adjusting the temperature is impossible, we can make adjustments in our schedules. It is important not to rush but to work as slowly as possible.

Ikeda: Your words about good health reflect sound wisdom.

Life and Bioethics

Ikeda: All terrestrial life forms are composed of proteins genetically determined through DNA. They are all descendants of the first DNA on earth which over a period of four billion years has ramified into myriad forms, some of which are now extinct. This is the way modern medical science and molecular biology explain the origins of life and the mechanism of evolution. How do you evaluate it?

Unger: In the course of human development, we have come up with many biological evolutionary models. In the twentieth century, molecular biology taught us genetic information is inscribed as a DNA sequence on the four amino acids of which DNA is composed. The discovery of DNA enabled us to explain biological evolution on the basis of genetic engineering. We know that all life forms on Earth descend from the original DNA and, at the molecular level, are made in the same way. Developments in today's genetic engineering provide the basis for

explaining biological evolution genetically. Traditional biology could not explain the origin and evolution of life. Genetic engineering gives us new knowledge doing so. No doubt further genetic-engineering developments will result in still more detailed elucidation.

Genetic Technology and Human Life

Ikeda: Symbolic of the results of genetic engineering, the decoding of the human genome in 2003 showed that human beings have about 30 thousand genes.

Unger: Yes. There can be no doubt that month by month advances in genetic engineering are increasing their impact on biology. In the future, genome decoding will enable us to discover genes, thus permitting us to develop diagnoses and therapies for genetically-related illnesses. We will be able to prevent or retard illnesses. Genetic engineering will be indispensable in the pharmaceutical industry, which will be able to use it in the development of many pharmaceuticals like the insulin required by diabetics.

Ikeda: Undeniably humanity can look forward to many advantages from genetic engineering. But there are people who consider rapid advances in this area dangerous manipulation of life itself. Because of its central importance to human existence we must cautiously discuss the negative aspects of genetic research. As some people point out, the discovery of a gene predisposing a person to a certain illness might prejudice that person's chances for employment or acceptance in an insurance plan. What are your opinions on this situation?

Unger: The European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Salzburg organized a research conference on this topic with the National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C. in 2001. The topic of this conference has been "The Impact of Gene Technology on the Human Dimension." There have been two parts. In the first part, specialists discussed the most recent results in gene technology. In the second part, philosophers, theologians, and economists showed the human dimension. To be honest, genetic technology leads us into an entirely new world and has a significant impact on our life. It helps to understand the Creation, too.

Ikeda: For genetic technology to serve the cause of human happiness it is vitally important to take into consideration the opinions of—as you

say—philosophers, theologians, and economists and others.

Unger: Genetic technology affects all fields. Our conference showed grave negative factors and expectations and hopes. One of the hopes is that genetic technology will give birth to a new industry to recompense the industrial world for the considerable investments it made in the genome project.

Ikeda: What is your position in the discussion?

Unger: I represent the natural-scientific viewpoint that human beings should study everything that exists. Science provides us with plenty of information helpful in overcoming diseases and enriching human life. Genetic engineering has the power to revolutionize our way of thinking and benefiting humanity.

Genetic Therapy and Human Dignity

Ikeda: Focal issues in the future will be how to relate genetic engineering to human happiness and how to control its negative aspects. In the medical field, genetic engineering opens up advanced possibilities in both diagnosis and therapy.

Unger: Yes. Genetic engineering is contributing to the development of new diagnostic and therapeutic methods. But not all genetic information has been completely decoded. As you point out, decoding of the genetic information can become, not enhancing, but threatening. For instance, conceivably a person with a gene making cancer by the age of sixty a likelihood might be refused insurance or rejected by a prospective employer. At our present stage of knowledge, such a diagnosis is premature and mistaken.

Ikeda: I agree. Using genetic information to invade privacy and serve as a cause of rejection for insurance, employment, or marriage is putting the cart before the horse. A blueprint of a life, genetic information is the ultimate area of human privacy. That is why protecting it and using it effectively must always be taken into consideration in genetic diagnostics. Science must protect human dignity.

Reproductive Therapy and the Use of Embryos

Ikeda: Today medical science goes beyond therapy and prevention to manipulate human life itself. The first in-vitro human birth occurred in 1978. Since then reproductive therapy has advanced with astonishing speed.

Unger: Yes, it has. Originally developed for veterinarian use, in-vitro fertilization is now fulfilling the hopes of many couples who, though wanting them, have been unable to have children. In-vitro fertilization itself is an assistance technique whereby a process that normally takes place within a woman's body is conducted outside it.

Ikeda: As you say, it has been a great blessing to many apparently-infertile women. But it has also opened the door to therapeutic invasion of the early stage of life. It is now possible to select fertilized ova and manipulate cryogenically preserved embryos. The doctors and scientists who employ such techniques must be respectful of the dignity of life and concentrate on human happiness in the form of overcoming infertility.

Unger: I, too, am opposed to limitless intervention in the origins of life. On the other hand, a bigger problem today entails fertilization, not for reproduction, but for recycling therapies in other medical fields. For instance, a technology has been researched to produce various other kinds of cells from the fertilized ovum at the stage of blastocyst or from the cells of an embryo removed from the woman's body by abortion.

Ikeda: This field is promising in connection with the treatment of intractable pathologies and in recycling therapy. But the inevitable destruction of embryos entails ethical problems. The Japanese Council for Science and Technology Policy (CSTP) is currently debating the issue of embryo use. Unfortunately, however, they adopt as their criterion the usefulness of embryonic research instead of the proper treatment of life itself.

Unger: But we must remember that many embryos fail to reach the stage at which they can be called life. Not all artificially-inseminated ova are returned to the mothers' bodies. A certain number of them must be discarded. Even many naturally-inseminated ova are never implanted and are wasted. I believe human life starts when the embryo is settled in

the mother's uterus. Therefore I see no great problem in using as research material inseminated ova that are not returned to the mothers' bodies. Still we must remember what the late Franz Cardinal König, who was honorary chairman of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, said: Researchers must do research, but they must also abide by the voice of conscience.

Ikeda: Although it can be a great blessing, stem-cell research can also threaten respect for the dignity of life. We must, therefore, be very wary. Tampering with the embryo, the bud of life, runs the danger of regarding human beings as means to ends, which relates directly to the loss of human dignity. As it proceeds, embryo research must always bear in mind the nature of the embryo as the bud of human life.

Brain Death and Organ Transplants

Ikeda: Brain death occurs when the brain has irremediably ceased functioning and the heart is kept beating on artificial support systems. In Japan, opinion is divided as to whether this state constitutes death.

Unger: I hesitate to use the term *brain death* because people tend to think that a person in this condition is in fact already dead. If such is the case, discontinuing intensive care becomes permissible. I prefer the term "*coma depasse*" excellently defined by a French neurologist. In this state, the brain is disordered, the body temperature drops, the heart still functions but circulation drops, and the nails turn bluish-black. Somehow or other *coma depasse* was mistranslated into English as brain death, and the term has stuck.

Ikeda: The focal point of the brain-death issue lies in relation to organ transplants, because they often depend on people in the so-called brain-dead condition, which artificial support systems can extend for long periods. What are your opinions on the topic?

Unger: Brain death is determined with a purpose in mind—organ transplants for instance. In such cases, whether to discontinue intensive care must be decided. This determination serves as justification for removing organs from donors. Some people fear that organs may be removed from still living subjects. Actually, however, international practice has established certain relatively objective standards for judging brain death. These must be strictly adhered to.

Ikeda: Some time ago, I proposed stringent criteria which, with the addition of the condition of absence of circulation in the brain, should alleviate the anxiety suffered by patients' families. Because of the acute scarcity of donors in Japan, a movement is underway to revise conditions for transplants from the brain dead. Until now, transplants have been authorized on the strength of both signed donor cards and family consent. The revised system would authorize them on the basis of family consent only. I believe, however, that the spontaneous, un-coerced wish of the patient should be the premise of brain-death organ transplants. Different people define death differently. Authorizing organ donation solely on the basis of family consent might mean that organs are removed from the bodies of people who do not equate brain death with death. Furthermore, in many instances today, families afflicted by having a member sick enough to become brain dead find it difficult to give their full consent on the basis of doctors' explanations which, owing to time restrictions, may be unsatisfyingly brief. When it is impossible to know the patient's attitude toward brain death, death, and organ donation, the most serious consideration must be made of the great burden the revised standards put on surviving family members.

Unger: Some people are afraid that organ transplants from the brain dead reduce the patient from a subject deserving therapy to an object from which organs may be harvested. Personally, however, I believe that the wording "*coma depasse*" preserves the dignity of the spontaneous donor; one subject is giving another subject his organs. Donation of organs is an act of life. The practice of selling organs for transplants—which is said to occur in some countries—must be strictly rejected as it seriously damages trust in medical treatment.

Ikeda: I agree completely. To compensate for the scarcity of human organs, transplanting organs from nonhuman animals is under consideration. For instance, pig-heart transplantation is being discussed. How do you react?

Unger: This is a very complicated issue. I react negatively because of the high likelihood of transplanting the animal's viruses along with the organ.

Ikeda: We must then put our hopes in artificial organs. In 1986, you began developing the smallest artificial heart and have become world famous as a pioneer in the field. The project must have been arduous.

Unger: I started developing an artificial-heart (Ellipsoid heart) in 1975 and implanted it in 1986 clinically as a bridge toward transplantation. This was a pioneering step and 20 years later this step turned out to be a large one. The artificial heart must be very simple; otherwise it fails to function as it should. Subsequent technological innovations led to the development of an artificial heart for clinical use. The future looks bright. The artificial heart will someday become as easy to use as the pacemaker is today.

Euthanasia

Ikeda: The legalization of euthanasia in Holland in 2001 and in Belgium in 2002 has cast death-related bioethics in sharp relief. The salient point is determining whether it is permissible deliberately to shorten life in order to terminate the suffering of an incurable patient. What are your opinions?

Unger: Personally I oppose euthanasia. It is impermissible from both the medical and the humane standpoints. The doctor's job is to use therapy to prolong, not to destroy life. The debate about euthanasia really did not arise in the clinic. It is a discussion of whether to recognize the value of the lives of people with protracted consciousness disorder (the so-called vegetative state) or of those with grave intellectual disorders. In other words, it is a discussion of whether it is permissible to curtail lives that are not worth living. This was the theoretical basis of the Nazi euthanasia plan. It is not the doctor's job to judge the quality of life. This is why I feel it is mistaken for doctors to talk glibly about euthanasia. They should discuss how to free terminally ill patients from pain, not ways of killing them.

Ikeda: I agree with you. Doctors should make every effort to relieve pain through the use of anaesthesia and analgesic therapy. Therapy that overextends life is thought by some to worsen the patient's suffering and diminish his or her dignity. This was one of the ideas behind the recent legalization of euthanasia. Actually, however, at present considerations of human dignity miss the mark. They tend to concentrate on the intellect or on the personality as a function of the intellect. Consequently, intellectual regression or irremediable loss of the psychosomatic functions is thought to detract from human dignity. On the basis of this approach, euthanasia may be forced on weak patients with intractable illnesses. Such a situation should not be allowed to occur.

The Near-death Experience

Ikeda: On the many occasions when you have witnessed patients confront death have you had any experiences indicative of the wondrous nature of life and the greatness of the strength to live?

Unger: On several occasions I have observed in awe while life has left the tissues when a patient has died during surgery. One senses the soul leaving the body.

Ikeda: Scholarly reports compiled in the United States on near-death experiences speak of seeing rings of light, of being drawn into a dark tunnel, and of departing from the physical body and observing oneself during surgery. Have any of your patients had similar near-death experiences? What are your ideas on them?

Unger: I have known many patients who after several days in a coma state have come back to life after having been pronounced unlikely to regain consciousness. All of them have said that, during the coma, they were bathed in a wonderful warm light as they traveled a long, narrow tube and that they were reluctant to return to this world. I think these near-death experiences reveal to us the meaning of our existence. Perhaps being bathed in light we profoundly long to approach is the meaning of existence.

Ikeda: The American psychologist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross describes her own experience of having left her body and of having stood over the bed looking down on herself. She also speaks of approaching and melding with a light. Her description has much in common with the near-death experiences you mention.

The mention of a light brings to mind Tolstoy's story "The Death of Ivan Ilyich," in which an ordinary government official falls fatally ill and struggles with the fear of dying until ultimately he reaches the pure happiness of eternal light. Transcending time, light symbolizes the leap to eternal life.

The Buddhist teaching of the Nine Consciousnesses deals with deep-level awareness and indicates that after death, the individual life unites with the eternal life force at the origins of the universe.

Because they are shared by peoples of totally different backgrounds, near-death experiences include common, universal elements transcending culture and religion. Though much about them remains unexplained,

they are nonetheless fascinating.

The Eternal Nature of Life

Ikeda: Together with the question of death we confront the difficult issue of the eternal nature of life. Buddhism deals with it on the basis of the teaching of cycles of birth and death. What are your ideas about the eternal nature of life?

Unger: This is a very difficult issue. Christianity teaches that the soul with the spirit is in the body until death, when it is liberated to rise and sublimate with eternal life. Development in gene technology do not interfere with this way of thinking.

From a physical point of view, let us assume that an abnormality for blindness occurs in the chromosomes of a fly. The offspring of that fly, too, will be blind. The same kind of thing happens in all animals and plants, including human beings. Our religion teaches that the Creator, God, gives us life. But if life is determined by genes, or even by chains of proteins, how are we to know where we came from and where we are headed? Once again we bump into the old fundamental problem. Perhaps we can only sense the eternity of life with both our conscious and our subconscious. Perhaps the only way to find clues about eternal life is to refine our instinctive intuition.

What does the doctrine of the Nine Consciousnesses teach about eternal life?

Ikeda: The first five of the nine consist of sensory perceptions received through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. The sixth consciousness compiles, analyzes, and makes judgement about information received perceptually. On still deeper levels are the seventh, or *mana*, consciousness and the eighth, or *alaya*, consciousness. At this point we are dealing with depth consciousness or the subconscious.

Unger: The interplay of the conscious and the subconscious has become an important field of research. Recent cerebral science has clarified cranial-nerve activities that precede consciousness and free will. Measurements of cerebral structures make it necessary to suppose a subconscious intent behind conscious acts. I understand that our living in this world arises from the subconscious to expand widely into the conscious.

Ikeda: That is a very stimulating idea. In modern terms, the karma that Buddhism teaches as continuing through life-death cycles could be called potential life energy. The eighth, *alaya* consciousness deals with the continuity of karma. At the death of the individual, the operations of all seven other consciousnesses become latent in the eighth, which is said to continue to operate. When we discussed this issue, the world-famous physicist and former rector of Moscow State University Anatoli A. Logunov expressed great interest in the eternal nature of karma.

On a level still deeper than the *alaya* consciousness, Buddhism postulates a ninth, fundamental, pure consciousness, which can be thought of as universal life itself. Death makes the individual life latent in cosmic life. Birth represents manifestation in the *mana* and other consciousnesses from the *alaya* consciousness (subconscious).

Medical Ethics

Ikeda: All doctors swear to abide by the Hippocratic Oath, which binds them to apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick, keep them from harm and injustice, give no deadly drugs, use harmless principles, guard patients' confidentiality, give no abortion-inducing medicines, and so on. What is your idea of the ideal physician?

Unger: The Hippocratic Oath is a universal ethic for doctors because it teaches us our duties to relieve pain, heal, and cure illness. As to the ideal, I always say we need doctors, not medical technicians. By doctor I mean a person whose personality is radiant in totality. A person who is warmly humane. A person who has a balanced sense enabling him or her to discriminate between the important and the trivial. Such a doctor must always have in mind the usual ethical admonitions to honor parents, not to kill or steal, and so on. As medical science progresses, doctors are required to possess various kinds of knowledge and technical skills. Therapeutic facilities grow increasingly complex. This is why fundamental ethics of life are so important.

Ikeda: What conditions must doctors fulfill?

Unger: Day and night, doctors must protect and work for their patients.

Ikeda: You state it pithily and with a ring of philosophical conviction. The Buddhist scripture called *Sovereign Kings of the Golden Light Sutra* teaches that in all cases doctors must be compassionate and free from

lust for profit. Doctors exist to relieve patient suffering, never to profit from it. They must therefore always have a compassionate heart. You embody the meaning of working for the sake of patients.

Unger: You are kind to say so. Striving to be that way has become a part of my life.

Ikeda: I imagine that you approach each surgical operation in that frame of mind and that each is a battlefield where the struggle for victory is continuous. Are there points you keep in mind to ensure you are in perfect condition for each operation?

Unger: In a natural way, I always remind myself that being a doctor is the foundation of my work. Through daily consultation and surgery I can help my patients directly. Meeting them strengthens me, consulting with them is the source of my energy.

Ikeda: Jivaka was a celebrated doctor who lived in the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. His name in Sanskrit means full of life or life-giver. I am sure that your own life-giving attitude sets your patient's minds at rest. You once said that the patient is the doctor's king and that all a doctor's knowledge and technical skill must be used for the patient's good. This is a very important assertion.

Unger: The doctor's duty and goal are to serve the patient as his or her lord. The doctor must never regard the patient as a mere object or a means to an end. Each individual is a subject. I believe that patients' rights and position must be restored to their proper prominence.

Ikeda: People in leadership positions in any field, not just medicine, have a primary duty to serve the people. The goal of the SGI movement is to create an age in which the ordinary people play the leading role and leaders serve them.

As an issue related to medical ethics, I am interested to learn your thoughts on the patient's right of self-determination. Greater emphasis on self-determination seems to have established patients' rights in therapy and equalized the patient-doctor relationship.

Unger: Yes, that is true. As those rights come into greater prominence, people speak out against their violation and against treating patients as objects. We must act based on the recognition that patients are subjects

receiving treatment. It is completely appropriate for them to understand proposed therapies fully and to participate in judgments and decisions in connection with them.

Ikeda: Yes, emphasis should be put on patients' rights of self-determination. Still the nature of decisions that must be made in modern therapy is highly diverse and demands consideration from many angles. For instance, surrogate parenthood, sale of organs for transplants, terminally ill patients' wish for euthanasia, and so on. What are your thoughts on this expanded range of things patients must decide?

Unger: A good doctor will do his utmost to explain the situation and motivate his patients. I think patients have the right to refuse a therapy even when as a doctor I would recommend it. The doctor-patient dialogue is of central importance. Unfortunately, medicine today is losing the chance for the kind of dialogue a doctor can use to explain conditions and motivate patients. My thirty years of experience have taught me that, given the right explanation and allowed to consider things completely, patients make the right choices. When people are ready to talk things over, many problems can be solved in ways satisfactory to both sides.

Ikeda: Today it is standard medical practice for doctors to explain therapy to patients thoroughly enough for them to understand and volitionally give what is called informed consent. This, of course, is premised on the ability of the patient to grant consent. How do you regard the situation when it involves the under-aged?

Unger: When young children are involved, the issue of self-determination is somewhat different. In such cases, their parents and adults must be allowed to decide. A child is in no position to decide what is best for him or her. The same must be said of the severely mentally-disabled. In such cases, intense individual examinations are essential. A doctor who feels obliged to respect the patient's rights will perform them as a matter of course. As I have said and as deserves repeating, dialogue and trust are the indispensable basis of medical treatment.

Medical Mishaps

Ikeda: I agree completely. Patients have the right to know and the right to be convinced about the therapy they are to undergo. Doctors have the

obligation to explain the situation to them.

In Japan, increasing numbers of mistakes on doctors' parts—mistaken surgery, wrong drug administration, and so on—have become a serious social problem. How do you think we can best prevent such mistakes?

Unger: Doctors are human beings liable to make mistakes. That is why it is essential that every error be exhaustively researched to clarify its causes. Medicine today clings hard and fast to the defensive approach to the problem and starts to deal with each problem only after it has become serious. Moreover, the mountains of documents and the bureaucracy found in our hospitals. Computerization of information like patient records means that doctors spend more time in front of computers and much less with patients.

Ikeda: That is a worrying situation. Although undeniably medicine in general grows more complex and doctors' work increases, the more medical technology advances, the more the doctor must diligently strive to be humane.

Unger: That is why I constantly insist that our hospital must never become bureaucratic. A hospital bureaucracy works well only after patient numbers dwindle down to nothing. I do not want that to happen to our hospital. Our health system must be patient oriented.

Ikeda: You make an important point that applies to more than just hospitals. From their very origins, organizations must decide for whom and to what purpose they exist. Observing you reminds me of the Hippocratic Oath and its insistence that knowledge and skills be used, not to exploit, but to serve humanity. This embodies the spirit of your Academy. Hippocrates also states that a physician who is a lover of wisdom is the equal of a god.⁶ As a famous physician, the saver of many lives, and a great contributor to European intellectual growth, I pray that you will continue your activities with renewed fervor.

Unger: True value comes from the heart and can be transmitted from heart to heart. In this dialogue I have been deeply moved by your heartfelt words. I believe that on the basis of our many shared ideas we have created something very fruitful. I hope that you and I can continue to spread the spirit of tolerance throughout the world for the sake of peace.

Notes

¹ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (Soka Gakkai, 1999: Tokyo), p. 4.

² Karaniya Metta Sutta, *The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness*, trans. from the Pali by the Amaravati Sangha, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.9.amar.html> (accessed August 22, 2006)

³ Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *A Geography of Human Life* (Caddo Gap Press: San Francisco), p. 286.

⁴ Pali Translation Series No. 46, *The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)*, trans. with an introduction and notes by K. R. Norman (The Pali Text Society, 2000: Oxford), p. 17.

⁵ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851.

⁶ *Hippocrates*, trans. W.H.S. Jones (Willian Heinemann Ltd., 1923: London) II, p. 287.

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Born in 1928. Honorary President of Soka Gakkai. President of Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Founder of The Institute of Oriental Philosophy. Established educational institutions such as Soka University, Soka University of America and Soka Schools; cultural institutions such as the Min-On Concert Association and the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum; as well as academic and peace-research institutions such as Toda Institute for Global Peace & Policy Research and the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. Authored numerous literary works such as *“The Human Revolution”* (12 volumes), *“The New Human Revolution”* (in progress), and *“The Intimate Talks with Global Pioneers,”* and *“Recollections of My Meetings with Leading World Figures.”* Furthermore, there are many collections of dialogues with intelligentsia from around the world, *“Choose Life”* (A. Toynbee), *“Moral Lessons of the Twentieth Century”* (M.S. Gorbachev), *“Choose Peace”* (Johan Galtung), etc. He has received 200 honorary doctorates and honorary professorships from universities and institutes around the world, such as Moscow State University, University of Glasgow and Beijing University.

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