

Commemorative Lecture of the 46th Soka University Festival and 32nd Soka Women's College Swan Festival "Soka Glory Meeting"

Ved P. Nanda

Konnichiwa! Thank you very much, Mr. Minoru Harada, Senior Advisor of the Board of Trustees and Mr. Yasunori Tashiro, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. My wife, Katharine, and I are deeply honored to be with you. Our heartfelt gratitude to President Yoshihisa Baba of Soka University and President Keiko Ishikawa of Soka Women's College for such a warm welcome. It was a special joy to watch the Soka University Festival!

We have just returned from Hiroshima, where we visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum, and spoke with *hibakusha*. This was such a moving and uplifting experience. I had the privilege of addressing the Hiroshima Study Lecture Series. Everyone we met had a message of peace and I will take that message everywhere I go.

Twice previously I have had the pleasure of speaking at your prestigious university, including at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. During my first visit almost 22 years ago, in December 1994, I was here at the kind invitation of SGI President Ikeda and was thrilled to attend the brilliant performance by the Soka University Orchestra and Choir of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9, the "Ode to Joy." I can still hear that sweet music and vividly recall that experience of overwhelming beauty!

But what added immensely to that pleasure was what preceded it, for, as I have mentioned, the visit to Tokyo was to meet with President Ikeda. My dear friend, Dr. Maria Guajardo, now the Deputy Vice-President of Soka University, who was then serving on the Board of Trustees of the University of Denver, accompanied me to introduce me to President Ikeda. Although she had told me about SGI and President Ikeda, I could not fully anticipate what I would encounter when I first met him.

In our first extended conversation I found him to be most welcoming – warm, gracious, curious,

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open, and most eloquent. I could clearly sense that this was a visionary world leader. As I reflected later, I realized what a wide range of topics we had touched upon. I could clearly identify his firm dedication to peace, his passionate belief in the role of education, and his fearless resolve to pursue the end of nuclear armament – indeed all armament.

Subsequently, Dr. Guajardo and I were pleased that President Ikeda accepted an honorary Doctorate that the University of Denver Trustees decided to confer on him. It is one of many such honorary degrees that Dr. Ikeda has received. He was, as usual, eloquent and inspiring, and for me it was a thrill to hear his clarion call to students and scholars everywhere. Katharine and I and our daughter, Anjali, were most honored that President and Mrs. Ikeda visited our home for tea and he even played a cherished piece for us on our piano.

I was overjoyed when President Ikeda invited me to participate in a dialogue with him. I had been inspired by his earlier dialogues – with some of the world's most influential decision-makers in the political arena, illustrious and most accomplished scholars from academia, and important opinion-makers; thus began a wonderful journey culminating in the publication of *Our World To Make*.

In our dialogue we discussed numerous topics concerning the challenges and opportunities humanity currently faces. However, we mostly focused on the role of Buddhism and Hinduism, which is my own faith tradition, and that of global civil society, in addressing these numerous challenges.

I knew that President Ikeda was extremely knowledgeable, but I was often surprised and delighted by his profound understanding of Hinduism – not simply the basic and fundamental tenets of Hinduism, but even the deeper layers of the doctrine. I was deeply impressed by the extent of his familiarity with Hindu religious and spiritual leaders, both historical and modern. He often talked about Mahatma Gandhi, whose birthday was last week on October 2, the International Day of Non-violence, and who is seen as an apostle of nonviolence. I have deep admiration for Dr. Ikeda and have learned a lot from him. Through our conversations we have formed what I consider to be a good and strong friendship.

I will briefly touch here upon the three aspects I mentioned earlier: education, disarmament, and peace. As an educator who has spent his entire life in the teaching profession, I found it refreshing to learn about the Soka education system, a student-centered value-creating educational

approach. I saw this philosophy in action when I visited the Soka School and when I heard President Ikeda speak to the students. I think I had never seen such interaction between a teacher and his students, as he related to them – hundreds of them – as if he was speaking to each one of them individually. As a teacher, I can appreciate when there is such a meeting of minds. Each student seemingly responded to President Ikeda as if he or she was saying, “I not only heard every word you have uttered, but I intend to follow it to the letter.”

I have heard the same message in speaking with several of my SGI friends. They have consistently and enthusiastically expressed that President Ikeda, through his exemplary life and the spirit of Oneness, has most effectively touched countless lives and that he is intensely concerned with the happiness and growth of others, which he considers the essential spirit of education. He guides the recipients of his teaching with love, empathy, and compassion, empowering them to dedicate their lives to world peace while they enjoy true, profound happiness.

Several times during our dialogue President Ikeda referred to the founding president of Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose idea of humanistic education was to empower people to lead happy and creative lives. President Ikeda told me that the current Soka education system, in a nutshell, is aimed at applying Makiguchi’s ideas – that students must be empowered to work for their happiness as well as for society and for peace for all humanity. To accomplish these objectives, as you know, he has founded educational institutions such as the Soka school system in Japan and Brazil, Soka Universities in Japan and the U.S., and Soka kindergartens in several countries.

My visit to Hiroshima two days ago again reminded me of President Ikeda’s deep concern with the threat of nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation. It is well known that he has repeatedly urged the world leaders to conclude a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. In his most recent Peace Proposal he calls on the states that have not yet ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to do so promptly, and also to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, which seeks to regulate the trade in conventional weapons. He initiated the exhibition, “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World,” and also initiated campaigns that gathered over 10 million signatures for nuclear abolition and submitted proposals to the United Nations to bring an end to nuclear weapons.

In his call to the Open-ended Working Group established by the U.N. General Assembly to address effective measures to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, President Ikeda proposed that the Group deliberate on the removal of nuclear retaliatory forces from high-alert status and on a halt to the modernization of nuclear weapons. The Group did address these

proposals in its three meetings this year and adopted the recommendations suggested by President Ikeda.

Among some recent encouraging developments, a resolution has been introduced by six non-nuclear states in the current General Assembly session, urging the commencement of negotiations next year for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons, and the U.N. Security Council has adopted a resolution against nuclear testing.

Everyone working for world peace must admire President Ikeda's impassioned call for the creation of a Culture of Peace. Since 1983 he has annually issued a Peace Proposal addressing a variety of global problems and proposing solutions for them. The role and effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing critical challenges facing humanity has been a common theme over all these 33 years. As a visionary, he has founded several institutions to bring the peoples of the world together. These include the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue, in Boston, USA, and the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, Honolulu, also in Tokyo. Securing world peace, based on the Buddhist world view, is President Ikeda's enduring aspiration and legacy. It is fitting that he received the U.N. Peace Medal in 1983 and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

As I conclude sharing my thoughts with you this afternoon, I must say the obvious: the future, indeed, belongs to young people who, with your idealism, energy, and dedication, wish to rid the world of hatred, injustice, and inequality and work for a peaceful world where people do not simply tolerate differences but respect and appreciate diversity. I know that you at Soka University will fulfill the noble objectives set by President Ikeda, your loving and beloved Sensei. Let us invent that glorious future we all seek!

Arigato Gozaimasu!