

## From the Symposium “A New Humanism for World Peace” in India

### Message

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ON the occasion of my first visit to India in February 1961, I travelled to Bodhgaya where Shakyamuni attained enlightenment. Inspired by this historically significant site, I announced plans to establish an institute that would engage in research to advance human happiness and world peace, centered on the philosophy of Buddhism.

I had the following three main goals in mind for this new institute. First, to conduct research on religions in Asia and the world; second, to pursue historical, academic and philosophical research on the Lotus Sutra; and third, to develop theoretical study of Buddhist humanism and pacifism, and to foster individuals who will pursue these undertakings.

In the past fifty years, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) has worked actively to disseminate the spirit and philosophy of Buddhism to the world. It has done this through exchanges with many eminent scholars and important academic institutions in India and the rest of the world. IOP is deeply indebted to the warm support it has received over the years from the many learned experts and academics from India, as well as Asia and the world, who have contributed to its growth and development.

I understand that the theme of today’s symposium is: “A New Humanism for World Peace.” In the dialogue we published together, Dr. Lokesh Chandra describes the path to world peace based on humanism as follows:

Our own being is working within. External culture will desiccate without the internal dimensions of the Spirit, without the underlying consciousness of life beyond selfishness. Mahatma Gandhi stressed that we will not have true independence until we have discovered the power of self-rule within ourselves.

Dr. Chandra further emphasizes that “the latent Buddhahood in the

totality of life can be awakened, so that ecological peace, social peace and spiritual peace is ensured.” From a Buddhist perspective, then, it can be said that both the underlying consciousness of life that transcends selfishness and the power of self-rule within ourselves are aspects of the Buddhahood or Buddha nature that is inherent in all existence.

Like Mahatma Gandhi, Shakyamuni stressed the importance of developing the kind of autonomous self which is capable of controlling selfish or deluded impulses. In *Dhammapada*, Shakyamuni states: “Your own self is your master; who else could be? With yourself well controlled, you gain a master very hard to find.” And in *Udānavarga*, he also states: “He who has become master of himself finds a patron in himself.”

At the closing moments of his life, Shakyamuni left these words of admonition to his disciples: “Therefore, Ānanda, be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.” (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*)

Island and refuge here refer to the “greater self” which is fused with the fundamental cosmic law or Dharma, not the “lesser self” enmeshed in the snares of self-centeredness or earthly desires. The greater self is one with the cosmic life and is the source of what Dr. Chandra refers to as the power of self-rule within ourselves; it is the self which has attained genuine autonomy. This greater self, capable of exercising mastery over earthly desires and destructive impulses, constitutes the prime point for creating peace. This was the message that Shakyamuni shared with his disciples at the time of his death.

The Lotus Sutra, which is considered to express the Dharma to which Shakyamuni was enlightened, includes the chapter, “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower.” It describes an enormous tower adorned with the seven kinds of treasures including gold, silver, lapis lazuli, that emerges from beneath the earth and then hangs suspended in midair. This treasure tower is the manifestation of a life as vast as the cosmos, the symbol of inner spiritual expansiveness.

Nichiren Daishonin refers to the treasure tower, stating that we ourselves are the treasure tower and are Thus Come One Many Treasures. Moreover, Nichiren Daishonin defines the seven kinds of treasures that adorn the tower as: hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself. In more secular terms, these can be understood as the willingness to listen to others, the estab-

lishment of a fundamental sense of trust or faith, the ethical capacity for compassion and non-violence, physical and spiritual focus and clarity, ceaseless effort and exertion, a sense of equality that never succumbs to prejudice or discrimination and a spirit of humility that is capable of reflection on one's own and other's actions. Nichiren Daishonin states that a magnificent tower adorned with these seven virtues, Buddhahood in other words, exists innately in all people, and further, that we are all capable of manifesting this potential.

As Dr. Lokesh Chandra has indicated, the work of building world peace through Buddhist humanism requires, first and foremost, the conquering of egoism, deluded impulses and fundamental ignorance. It is premised on the work of "human revolution" which brings to the fore such human virtues as altruism, compassion, wisdom, faith and courage. It is in the act of establishing inner, spiritual peace, or *shantih*, that a truly autonomous self is shaped.

People who have established this kind of inner peace at the very heart of their being are able to change society, leading humanity in the direction of peace, resolving conflicts and preventing war, combating human rights abuses and working to correct extreme disparities of wealth. An active peace is one that is realized through the solidarity of people who have manifested such positive qualities. It can challenge and transform not only direct and visible violence, but also the underlying "structural violence" from which it grows. It can further change the "cultural violence"—justified by religious and cultural differences—in order to build a world based on cultural coexistence.

Such a society is consistent with the goal of establishing harmonious coexistence with the global ecology. In short, humankind's experience of peace will become even more robust when there is peace and harmony with the natural environment, the ecological system that sustains our lives. In this way, peace through actively engaged Buddhist humanism begins from the inner peace of the heart and the spirit, which then generates the solidarity of virtuous minds; ultimately it aims for the establishment of human, as well as ecological peace on a global scale.

The 20th century was marked by unprecedented war and violence. There were hopes that the 21st century would be a century of peace and nonviolence. But humankind remains obsessed with excessive materialism, and we have lost the vitality to pursue authentic peace and happiness; war, nuclear proliferation and environmental destruction all cast a dark shadow, and the powerful energies of deluded impulses divide people, society and the natural environment.

It is in this light that I wish to express my sincere expectation that this

symposium, upholding the theme of Buddhist humanism, will help us find ways of restoring the positive qualities innate to humanity that have been obscured by the currents of globalization and materialism. I hope that we can usher in a new departure toward hope and solidarity to create genuine global peace—of the heart, in communities and with the global ecology.