

A New Era of the People: Forging a Global Network of Robust Individuals

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On the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), I would like to present some ideas that can contribute to humanity's shared quest for a global society of peace and creative coexistence.

Responding to Worldwide Crises

The year 2005 was a historic one, marking the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II. It was also a year in which a variety of severe threats, each capable of thrusting people's daily lives into crisis, became manifest.

Nowhere was this more shockingly visible than in the series of natural disasters that struck different parts of the world. Before the wounds of the calamitous Sumatra earthquake and tsunami had begun to heal, India was hit in July 2005 by widespread flooding and, at the end of August, hurricanes inflicted enormous damage on the southern Gulf Coast of the United States. Large parts of Western Africa continue to suffer from severe food shortages and famine resulting from drought and locust infestations, and in October a massive earthquake in northern Kashmir left more than 73,000 dead and approximately 3 million people homeless.

The impact of Hurricane Katrina in the United States, the sight of a major American city paralyzed by the effects of flooding and its citizens left to fend for themselves in the most appalling conditions, brought into painfully sharp relief the vulnerability of even advanced industrial societies to natural disaster.

Likewise, continued terror attacks throughout the world--attacks which have killed and injured large numbers of innocent civilians--projected a deep insecurity into people's lives throughout 2005. In July, suicide bombings on London's public transport system killed dozens and injured hundreds of people. The shocking impact of these attacks was compounded by the fact that they were perpetrated in the face of heightened security measures in place for the G8 Summit. As part of a disturbing trend, increasingly indiscriminate violence--in Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq and elsewhere--claimed the lives of

many ordinary citizens.

In addition, intolerance based on ethnic or national differences, often aggravated by international movements of population, has been the cause of conflict and criminal violence, and many societies are experiencing severe divisions. In the Darfur region of western Sudan, attacks by the so-called Janjaweed militia against the local population have claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced some 1.9 million people. Conditions there, which UN investigators have termed "the world's worst humanitarian crisis," [\[1\]](#) have not improved, nor have the underlying causes been resolved.

Hate crimes have increased in the wake of the September 2001 terror attacks, in particular with a growing incidence of violence and discrimination against Muslims. Meanwhile, in October and November of last year, disaffected young people took to the streets as riots broke out throughout France, leading to the imposition of curfews in many cities and towns.

Spanish Influenza

The influenza pandemic of 1918-19 was the most devastating epidemic in recorded world history, killing somewhere between 20 and 40 million people, more than died in World War I. The name Spanish Flu came from the outbreak in Spain where it killed about 8 million in May 1918. The pandemic, thought to have originated in China, circled the globe, spreading along trade and shipping routes to strike North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, Brazil and the South Pacific.

The pandemic infected one-fifth of the world's population and was most deadly for people aged 20 to 40. This pattern of morbidity is unusual for influenza, which is usually a killer of the elderly and young children. The virus had a mortality rate of 2.5 percent, compared to less than 0.1 percent for previous influenza epidemics.

Further, the rapidly advancing pace of globalization has increased the risk of infectious diseases spreading to epidemic proportion. The ongoing AIDS pandemic continues to strike sub-Saharan Africa particularly hard. Worldwide, AIDS is said to have claimed more than 25 million lives and left behind some 15 million orphans. Currently, approximately 40 million people are infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS. There are also strong concerns about the emergence of new and virulent forms of influenza. The mutation of animal influenza viruses to permit human-to-human transmission could inflict casualties on the scale of the Spanish Influenza, the great influenza pandemic of 1918-19.

The examples cited above are all representative of global issues that, directly or indirectly, affect us all. In no instance can we afford to regard them as unrelated to us, a fire on the other bank of the river as the Japanese expression has it. And, like global warming and the continued poverty that can serve as a breeding ground for terrorism, these issues are organically linked with the processes of globalization. They should be seen as its intrinsic products, just as much as the revolutionary changes on the economic, financial and information technology (IT) fronts with which it is

more commonly associated. A holistic response that deals with both the positive and negative aspects of globalization is urgently required.

These issues go to the very heart of human history and are integral to the effort to create a new global civilization. Given the scale of this challenge, a rushed search for quick

results could easily backfire, plunging people into an even deeper state of helplessness and despair. This sense of creeping and unnamable anxiety contrasts starkly with the spirit of hope we would like to associate with the start of a new century. In countering it, we would do well to abide by the admonition, made famous by the environmental movement: Think globally, act locally.

Indeed, perhaps nothing is more effective, when faced with a deadlock of this scale, than to first turn our attention from the macro to the micro--from events of such a vast and overwhelming scale to those that are more immediate and therefore amenable to action. When we translate global issues back into the tangible realities of everyday life, even the most grave and massive among them can be understood in its essence. This approach holds the greatest promise of opening the path to sustainable and productive responses.

The Free Individual and Unbridled Individualism

Last autumn, a review in the *Seikyo Shimbun* (the Soka Gakkai's daily paper) brought to my attention a book by Bill McKibben, *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. In this book, McKibben deals with the fundamental challenges to our humanity posed by certain types of cutting-edge technology--the potential, for example, to engage in genetic manipulation of the human germline. He warns that unless confronted, the use of such technology could invite our demise as human beings.

Reviewing the progress of modern civilization since the Industrial Revolution, McKibben writes: "What's important is that all these changes went in the same direction: they traded context for individual freedom." [2] As we now approach the terminus of this process, he warns: "But now--and finally, here's the heart of the argument--*we stand on the edge of disappearing even as individuals*" [3] (his emphasis).

Seeking maximum freedom for the individual, modern civilization has focused on cutting people loose from the restrictions and restraints of our various "contexts." Our gains in material wealth and convenience have been great indeed. But what is the actuality of the "free individual" stripped of all context--the bonds and ties of family and neighborhood; regional, occupational and national communities; religious and other affiliations; and of nature itself? Is this idealized free individual not, in the end, but a fiction? Is the logical outcome of this pursuit of freedom anything other than unbridled individualism, the naked embodiment of unrestrained desire?

We live in an era filled with unpredictable hazards, what the sociologist Ulrich Beck has called the "risk society." By translating these issues into the dimension of the individual, it is possible to clarify their essence. Unless this is fully understood, we will remain incapable of finding our way out of the overwhelming deadlock of our global realities. Everything comes down to the individual.

In recent years in Japan there has been a series of brutal crimes committed by young children, and many other previously unthinkable horrors. We constantly hear expressions of shock at these incidents, with people referring to them as "unbelievable" and "incomprehensible." These laments express the way people attempt to grapple with and

understand abnormal events that fall outside the trajectory of traditional common sense.

In 1997, the Japanese city of Kobe was the scene of a series of vicious murders of young children by a boy, himself only fourteen years old. As it turned out, this was only the start of a spate of grim crimes committed by children and adolescents. The writer and critic Kunio Yanagida has studied these incidents and their causes, and offers this analysis: "While it may not yet be possible to arrive at the true cause, a fact that I feel is extremely close to the ultimate cause is this. Virtually all of the children who committed these horrific crimes exhibit a spiritual structuring that is self-centered to the degree that they have a perfect indifference to the pain of others." [\[4\]](#)

These incidents make starkly visible a certain defining characteristic of contemporary crime, and I wonder if it isn't here that we can find the underlying reason for the unease and dread that we feel in our own lives?

By way of contrast, it might be instructive to reference a very different time and place--the world described by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81) in his classic *The House of the Dead*, which chronicles his experiences during his four years of hard labor in Siberia.

What Dostoyevsky expresses in this work is the sympathy extended by the residents of this land of exile to the criminals among them. While recognizing the evil of the offenses committed, these local residents seem to possess the kind of empathy that enables them to imagine how someone--themselves included--might end up committing a horrible crime if placed in the same circumstances as the criminal. Because of this, these deeds are not "incomprehensible" but can in fact be understood--almost as a felt, corporeal reality. Thus they refer to crimes as "misfortunes" and their perpetrators as "the unfortunate." Dostoyevsky offers a vivid and compelling portrait of heart-to-heart communication across the barriers of high walls and barbed wire.

Compare this to the pathology of contemporary society, of which youth crime represents only the proverbial tip of the iceberg; its chief symptom is the near-total absence of empathetic capacity. All too often in Japan we are treated to the televised images of people in positions of responsibility struggling to explain away their misdeeds. When

Genetic Engineering

Genetic engineering makes it possible to add or delete specific genetic information in living cells.

Somatic genetic engineering seeks to change the genetic makeup of specific body cells that comprise the organs and tissues--liver, brain, bones--of a particular individual. It may be possible to treat diseases like cystic fibrosis by inserting a corrective gene into malfunctioning cells. The changes affect only that individual and are not passed on to children.

Germline genetic engineering targets the genes in eggs, sperm or the undifferentiated cells of an early embryo. The alterations affect every cell in the body of the resulting individual, and are passed on to all future generations. While germline engineering is sometimes suggested as a way to prevent transmission of genetic diseases, the fact that it would permanently alter the genetic make-up of the human species makes its long-term impact impossible to predict.

Scientific, religious and political leaders overwhelmingly oppose manipulation of the human germline.

finally cornered, they bow their heads in apology--as if that sufficed to redeem their willful acts. What hint of compassion or caring could any young person possibly glean from the ugly, slack expressions on the faces of these adults? It is the failure to sense or feel the pain of others that is so deeply and inexpressibly disturbing.

If our humanity is found and developed within the context of relations with other people, unbridled individualism is a condition stripped of these connections. The respectful acknowledgment of the existence of others is always predicated on the ability to master and rein in one's private desires, and this cannot be developed except within the framework of human interaction. There is thus an intolerable vacuity at the heart of such extreme individualism, an instability and insecurity that haunts it and proves the extent to which it is estranged from any normal, healthy way of being. It is ultimately incompatible with our striving to be human.

This reality has not escaped the attention of perceptive observers of society. The writer and former cabinet minister Taichi Sakaiya, for example, has noted the lapsing of traditional bonds, such as those of family relations, locality and the workplace, and has envisaged a society organized around shared and sympathetic interests. Likewise, the playwright and critic Masakazu Yamazaki portrays the intense feelings of isolation that globalization can provoke--the sense of existing in an infinite void where "one calls out, but there is no response." [\[5\]](#) He advocates the development of social relations based on trust and the sharing of the burden of life's inevitable insecurities. As these commentators reconfirm for us, we can only live within the context of relatedness; it is only there that we can be truly human.

The Consistent Core and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai

These ideas are of great interest, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the protagonists of any creative restructuring of society will be individual citizens. If indeed we have reached the point where we are threatened, as McKibben says, with "disappearing even as individuals," then only by reconsidering what it means to be an individual can we find a way forward out of the darkness. It is through the strong will and desire of each of us to actively participate in social relations that society coalesces and can exist as a functional whole.

It is here that the crucial need arises for a framework that will prevent free individuals from descending into unbridled individualism. We must find the fulcrum on which people can develop the strength of will required to be proactive, robust and engaged. Unleashing the vitality of ordinary citizens--one by one--is the only certain way to bring into sight the horizons of a new civilization, a new era of the people. This has been my constant conviction for many decades.

The activities of the SGI constitute a humanistic movement based on Buddhism that seeks to develop robust individuals who can respond to the challenges of our age. Few have described this more incisively than Dr. Jan Swyngedouw, professor emeritus of Nanzan University, in an interview carried in the *Seikyo Shimbun* in the early 1980s.

From a perspective of more than twenty years of experience with Japanese society and religion, Dr. Swyngedouw expressed his sense of the way in which the Soka Gakkai members differ in their attitudes toward religious faith and practice from those typically held by Japanese people.

The first point he noted was how genuine and deeply held the members' convictions regarding their faith appear to be. Secondly, he commented that the vital religious core of the Soka Gakkai's philosophy functions to awaken people to their inner value as human beings. Dr. Swyngedouw suggested that it is in fostering and forming this kind of "backbone" of character that the Soka Gakkai raises people capable of making a real contribution to world peace.

Japanese society is said to value "harmony" (Jpn. *wa*), but this harmony cannot be limited only to Japan. The harmony toward which President Ikeda and the members of the Soka Gakkai are working has as its object the peace of the entire world, and this I believe represents an important change in Japanese religious attitudes. (trans.)

This observation goes to the very essence of our movement. Historically, religion in Japan has had a tendency to be subordinate to the state, and this was particularly true of Buddhism in the Edo period (1603-1867) when it was effectively consecrated to slavish service of the authorities. One of the leading intellectuals of the early years of Westernization in Japan, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901), decried this state of affairs: "It could even be said that religion has disappeared from Japan." [6] I imagine that Dr. Swyngedouw sensed the possibility that our movement, which is rooted in Nichiren Buddhism and asserts its beliefs unhesitatingly, could serve as an effective antithesis to this subservience.

If the primary mission of religion is to forge robust and engaged individuals capable of creative responses to life's challenges, then now, more than ever, it must rise to this task as the winds of uncertainty and change lash every corner of the world, every aspect of our lives.

Montaigne: A Model of Humanism

Over the past several years I have sought in these proposals to shed light on the outlines of a Buddhist-based humanism. Continuing in that vein, this year I would like to examine the life and ideas of the sixteenth-century writer Michel de Montaigne (1533–92), known as the father of the French Moralistic tradition. Montaigne is relevant in this regard because, despite having no verifiable ties to or influences from Buddhism, his ideas are astonishingly cognate with the humanism manifested in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, especially that which originates in the Lotus Sutra and was developed by Nichiren (1222–82).

In the first of his *Essays*, the work for which he is best known, Montaigne makes this statement: "Man is indeed an object miraculously vain, various and wavering. It is difficult to found a judgement on him which is steady and uniform." [7] Starting with this deeply

felt declaration--resonant with the Buddhist view of impermanence--Montaigne's entire work is imbued with a sense of the relativity and mutability of phenomena.

French Moralism Tradition

The French moralist tradition is generally seen to have its origins in Montaigne's *Essays*. In the second half of the 17th century, such writers as Pascal (1623-62), La Rochefoucauld (1613-80) and Nicole (1625-95) brought this tradition of humanist engagement with the world to full flower. In the 18th century, the classical French moralist writers were ranked as philosophers by readers in England, Scotland and America--although the French tended to view them mainly as great stylists--and this Anglo-American interpretation gave rise to what came to be known as moral philosophy.

Although this tone would later be typified as "Oriental," Montaigne did not seek the kind of life that would be suggested by later Western images of Buddhism--of being propelled by distaste for the evanescent, fleeting nature of life to cloistered withdrawal in an isolated mountain retreat. While confessing that he felt most comfortable when writing in his chateau, he engaged in public service in a range of posts--as an officer of the law courts, as the Mayor of Bordeaux and as an adviser to several Kings of France. And he clearly enjoyed and sought out contact with the common people of his time. As befits a representative of the Moralism tradition, he had no objection to being covered with the dust of this world.

Montaigne's life coincided nearly entirely with the religious wars that wracked Europe in the sixteenth century. Against this bloody backdrop, the measured tone and language of his *Essays* takes on a particular weight and brilliance. His words are indeed like the lotus flower whose pure

white blooms emerge from the depths of the muddy waters.

I earlier stressed the importance of approaching global challenges through the lens of our immediate, personal realities. Such was indeed the heart of Montaigne's project, and this is what makes Montaigne such a superb thinker for bringing into focus the kind of humanism--the ethos of world citizenship--that is appropriate to an era of globalization.

A Universal Vision

We cannot escape from the immediate and quintessentially personal reality of our own lives. If we do attempt to flee, there is an unavoidable price to be paid. As Montaigne puts it:

They want to be beside themselves, want to escape from their humanity. That *is* madness: instead of changing their Form into an angel's they change it into a beast's; they crash down instead of winding high. Those humours soaring to transcendency terrify me as do great unapproachable heights... [8]

In the teachings of Buddhism we find this statement: "This example of a single individual applies equally to all living beings." [9] In like manner, through an uncompromising exploration of the humanity of a single individual--himself--Montaigne uncovered a

universal vision of all humankind. He was thus able to see past the differences and discriminations of religion, starting with the bitter conflict between Catholic and Protestant. "Then compare our behaviour," he wrote, "with a Moslem's or a pagan's: you always remain lower than they are." [10] "Christians excel at hating enemies. ... Our religion was made to root out vices: now it cloaks them, nurses them, stimulates them." [11]

Although Montaigne identified himself as a Catholic, he was entirely free from sectarianism. Measured and gentle in all matters, he was unsparing in his condemnation of those who would look down upon their fellow humans in the name of religion. Some 200 years before the French Revolution and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, in an era when the concept of "freedom of religion" had not been articulated, he included in his book an essay titled "On Freedom of Conscience," a profoundly courageous act for the time.

Montaigne's universality crossed the bounds of culture and ethnicity with equal ease. The distinction between the civilized and the barbarous that would underlay centuries of colonialism and which was an indisputable truth in the eyes of most Europeans was, for him, a nonsensical fabrication. His description of the native inhabitants of Brazil is bold, fair-minded and at the same time filled with warmth. "So we can indeed call those folk barbarians by the rules of reason but not in comparison with ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarism." [12]

Montaigne was utterly free from the discrimination and prejudice based on national and ethnic differences that continue, even today, to ensnare so many people. This freedom of spirit gave rise to his heartfelt appreciation for that other world citizen, Socrates.

When they asked Socrates where he came from he did not say "From Athens," but "From the world." He, whose thoughts were fuller and wider, embraced the universal world as his City, scattered his acquaintances, his fellowship and his affections throughout the whole human race... [13]

Montaigne's universalist outlook likewise rendered him thoroughly unimpressed by differences of rank or social standing, as the following passages clearly attest. "... [W]hen we come to consider a peasant or a monarch, a nobleman or a commoner, a statesman or a private citizen, a rich man or a poor man, we find therefore an immense disparity between men who, it could be said, differ only by their breeches." [14] And: "I have seen in my time hundreds of craftsmen and ploughmen wiser and happier than University Rectors--and whom I would rather be like." [15]

Montaigne was able in this way to dismiss feudal class distinctions with a laugh. But that does not mean that he was an anarchist. He was not about to deny the social order to which he, as an aristocrat, belonged. Montaigne was thus a person of embracing liberality and generosity of spirit and at the same time a dyed-in-the-wool conservative. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he seems never to have felt the slightest twinge of contradiction.

In Nichiren's writings we find this passage: "Even if it seems that, because I was born in

the ruler's domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart." [16] Montaigne makes statements to similar effect. He seems to have considered this the best means of coping with reality, of gradually advancing one's cause while avoiding the horrors of violence and bloodshed.

Another unique aspect of Montaigne's thinking is that his penetrating gaze was not directed only at human beings, but also at the natural world, at animal and plant life.

... I am led to abase our presumption considerably and am ready to lay aside that imaginary kingship over other creatures which is attributed to us. ... [T]here is a kind of respect and a duty in man as a genus which link us not merely to the beasts, which have life and feelings, but even to trees and plants. [17]

Montaigne's thinking here is clearly different from the established views of his time that drew sharp hierarchical distinctions between humans and the rest of nature. His outlook shares a deep similarity with the teachings of Buddhism that all living beings possess Buddha nature and that plants and trees are capable of enlightenment. I believe this perspective on the relationship between humans and nature can help us in resolving the global environmental crisis.

There is another interesting passage that demonstrates how Montaigne's skepticism led him to reexamine even the most everyday events. In the longest of his essays, written in defense of the theologian Raymond Sebond, we find the following: "When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?" [18] From this lighthearted statement can be gleaned an awareness of the contingent nature of reality and an acute sensitivity to life, not to mention an insight into the relationship between humans and our pets.

In these ways Montaigne illustrates the ethos of world citizenship that I consider to be the very essence of humanism. Humanism includes practical norms and guides to behavior, and in this regard also, Montaigne, writing more than 400 years ago, offers an inspiring example.

There are, I believe, three crucial aspects to the practice and norms of a humanism that is rooted in Buddhism: (1) A gradualist approach; (2) An emphasis on dialogue; and (3) A focus on personal character or integrity as a pivotal value. This is something I have stressed for years and which I addressed in a January 1993 speech at Claremont McKenna College in the United States. These are also themes running through Montaigne's philosophy.

A Gradualist Approach

In reading through the *Essays*, one quickly notes the weight that Montaigne accords habit and custom--the power and importance of their role in human affairs--perhaps to the point of overstatement. "To sum up then, the impression I have is that there is nothing that custom may not do and cannot do; and Pindar rightly calls her (so I have been told) the

Queen and Empress of the World." [19] "It is for custom to give shape to our lives, such shape as it will--in such matters it can do anything. It is the cup of Circe which changes our nature as it pleases." [20]

A consistent focus on the personal is the hallmark of Montaigne's philosophy. This is because our personal realities are varied in all respects; they can never be identical for two different people. They may contrast completely. And in large measure, they will be decisively influenced and shaped by the traditions and customs particular to a given locality. "Since we suck them in with our mothers' milk and since the face of the world is presented thus to our infant gaze, it seems to us that we were really born with the property of continuing to act that way." [21]

This again points to the fallacious nature of the free individual unencumbered by all ties or bonds. People can never be simply "reset" to a condition of emptiness, like a blank sheet of paper patiently awaiting the author's pen. "We may have the right to use any means to arrange them [people] and set them up afresh, but we can hardly ever wrench them out of their acquired bent without destroying everything." [22]

When dealing with the macro realities of, for example, nation or state, we must remember that this represents the complex interplay of many personal, local and cultural realities. As such, it may be possible to derive gradualist and specific measures from past experience and apply these carefully. But any attempt to tear down and rebuild the state in its entirety according to "descriptions of fictional and artificial polities" [23] is an expression of human arrogance and doomed ultimately to failure.

This was a lesson inscribed in the very depths of Montaigne's being by the hellish wars of religion raging around him and which made him intensely skeptical of any effort at radical reform.

But to undertake to recast such a huge lump [contrivance], to shift the foundations of so great an edifice, is a task for those for whom cleaning means effacing, who seek to emend individual defects by universal disorder and to cure illness by death, "*non tam commutandarum quam evertendarum rerum cupidi* (yearning not so much to change as to overthrow the constitution)." [24]

This is the same man who expressed ideas that prefigure, by some 200 years, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*. As I noted earlier, Montaigne had a unique capacity to embrace ideas that we would today place on opposite ends of the liberal-conservative spectrum.

Montaigne declared: "I abhor novelty, no matter what visage it presents...." [25] In his somewhat extreme distrust of change, Montaigne was no doubt reacting to the carnage and upheaval he had witnessed. We may agree or disagree with him on this point, much depending on our opinion of revolutionary change, such as the French and Russian revolutions of later centuries. But on one point there can be little dispute, namely that the modern proponents of revolutionary change have been overoptimistic in their assessment of the malleability of human nature and society. Arrogance of this kind has driven a hasty,

unthinking radicalism and led to indiscriminate violence, torture and massacres--leaving behind a trail steeped in blood.

Here I would like to reference the chapter of the *Essays* where Montaigne, based on his own experience of public service, discusses political virtue. I feel this passage offers a detailed blueprint of the gradualist approach.

The virtue allotted to this world's affairs is a virtue with many angles, crinkles and corners so that it can be applied and joined to our human frailty; it is complex and artificial, not straight, clear-cut, constant, nor purely innocent. ... Anyone who goes into the throng must be prepared to side-step, to squeeze in his elbows, to dodge to and fro and, indeed, to abandon the straight path according to what he encounters; he must live not so much by his norms but by those of others; not so much according to what he prescribes to himself but to what others prescribe to him, and according to the time, according to the men, according to the negotiations... [26]

As he indicates, it is worth remembering that politics is a matter of skill and technique, of give and take, of striking a balance between conflicting interests, bringing together various opinions. It is the art of compromise and finding middle ground where unrealistically high expectations can lead to disaster. A careful reading of the *Essays* allows us to appreciate the suffering, patience and endurance of Montaigne as a public figure who asserted that "[t]he way of the law is weighty, cold, and constrained," which he contrasted with the violence and power of "ways which are lawless and wild." [27] This formula contains important lessons, which I hope will be heeded in Japan and throughout the world.

An Emphasis on Dialogue

In pursuing a gradualist approach, the most effective means at our disposal is dialogue. Montaigne expressed his heartfelt love of dialogue in this way: "To my taste the most fruitful and most natural exercise of our minds is conversation. I find the practice of it the most delightful activity in our lives." [28] In this chapter, Montaigne enters into a detailed examination of the spirit with which we should approach a dialogic engagement with others. In particular I would like here to focus on two points.

The first is that, although Montaigne himself was a member of the aristocracy, as mentioned, he considered the difference between the high- and low-born to be essentially irrelevant--little more than a matter of the breeches they wear. A committed humanist, he declared he would rather be a good groom than a good logician. [29] He preferred discussion with the common people, for it was there that he found genuinely truthful dialogue and refinement of character.

What I would praise would be a soul with many storeys, one of which knew how to strain and relax; a soul at ease wherever fortune led it; which could chat with a neighbour about whatever he is building, his hunting or his legal action, and take pleasure in conversing with a carpenter or a

gardener. [30]

A gradualist approach that is grounded in our immediate personal realities can only be truly effective when practiced by someone who is composed and magnanimous, someone who has an unswerving focus on the human being.

Montaigne admired Socrates as the "Master of masters." [31] This was because "Socrates makes his soul move with the natural motion of the common people...." [32] In other words, the man lauded as humanity's first teacher had no need for specialized philosophical terms as he effortlessly negotiated the ocean of language, the ocean of the people, sharing his wisdom with whomever he encountered, wherever this might be.

Next, Montaigne declares that when engaging in dialogue, "What he undertakes is vain if a man should presume to embrace both causes and consequences and to lead the progress of his action by the hand...." [33] Here, Montaigne urges us to set aside human arrogance, and to engage correctly with those forces that surpass our powers of rational discernment and understanding.

My thought sketches out the matter for a while and dwells lightly on the first aspects of it: then I usually leave the principal thrust of the task to heaven. [34]

In religious terms, this attitude might be compared to prayer. If we lose sight of this kind of humility, investing undue faith in the power of words, we can easily be plunged into a destructive cynicism when our attempts at dialogue reach a deadlock. From there it is only a single step to a rejection of the possibility of dialogue. This is something we experience in daily life, and of course on the macro scale its end product can be war and revolution, violence and conflict.

Montaigne's admonition against vanity is today more relevant than ever. The impulse to shape even our own children to our desires, through such technologies as germline genetic engineering, is an example of the most ugly and catastrophic kind of human arrogance.

Character as a Pivotal Value

Next I would like to take up the idea of character as a pivotal value. As noted, the *Essays* are strewn with expressions of a worldview that is in many ways analogous to the Eastern understanding of the impermanence and transience of all things. But this is not the kind of emotional or sentimental view of impermanence that one so often encounters in Japan. It is not a yearning for salvation through submerging oneself into some vast and inscrutable entity--such as "heaven" or "nature"--that overwhelms our individual being. Rather, it is informed with a concrete sense of the realities of daily existence.

Virtually all of the 107 chapters of the three volumes of the *Essays* have titles that constitute advice on how best to live in the world, themes and admonitions that are in tune with the sensibilities of people's everyday lives. Here we see the true essence of

Montaigne, the seminal French Moralist who took unsurpassed pride in being an engaged participant in the realities of daily living.

Montaigne opens the *Essays* with this phrase: "Reader, I myself am the subject of my book?," [35] and continues: "Every man bears the whole Form of the human condition." [36] "Yet I want to be in every way master of myself." [37] "I, who am monarch of the subject which I treat...," [38] and "I see myself and explore myself right into my inwards; I know what pertains to me." [39]

Thus, while Montaigne had the clear insight to recognize that everything, including himself, was impermanent and subject to change, he continued to take a persistent, even obsessive, interest in himself. His central concern was his pursuit of personal character and integrity. "Our most great and glorious achievement is to live our life fittingly. Everything else--reigning, building, laying up treasure--are at most tiny props and small accessories." [40]

With his famous motto of "*Que sais-je?*" (What do I know?), Montaigne took up the Socratic challenge to engage in a ceaseless process of self-questioning and interrogation. What was the inner state of life, the relation to truth, that Montaigne--the skeptic and relativist--attained through this obsessive pursuit and uncompromising inquiry? In the final chapter of the *Essays* we encounter these words:

It is an accomplishment, absolute and as it were God-like, to know how to enjoy our being as we ought. We seek other attributes because we do not understand the use of our own; and, having no knowledge of what is within, we sally forth outside ourselves. A fine thing to get up on stilts: for even on stilts we must ever walk with our legs! And upon the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, upon our arses. [41]

By dedicating himself to the relentless process of doubting and questioning, Montaigne uprooted dogmatism and fanaticism: He shredded arrogant hypocrisy. Because his grasp of the absolute was something that issued from within--that was cultivated by bringing the relative into confrontation with the relative, by piling doubt upon doubt--he was able to avoid the pitfall of treating as absolute those processes that are by their very nature relative (as many Marxists, for example, would later do).

It is here that we find his framework, the fulcrum of his convictions. And it was this that enabled him to continue to direct scathing criticism at the wars of religion, the rapacious exploitation of colonial lands, the class system--the evils that threaten life and dignity.

Religion in the Service of Humanity

The writer and poet Shigeharu Nakano (1902–79) once wrote an essay in which he compared Soseki Natsume (1867–1916) and Lu Xun (1881–1936), the giants of modern Japanese and Chinese literature, respectively. While noting that both are "profoundly, humanly moving," Nakano concludes that Lu Xun goes beyond this and "arrives at the point of proactively battling against evil; a point of truly hating evil. Even if he is not able to

win in this battle, he [Lu Xun] is determined to politically brand his opponents; he will not leave them unmarked." [\[42\]](#)

In their very different cultural and historical settings, and despite their differences of temperament, both Lu Xun and Montaigne were outstanding moralists. The limitation that Nakano identifies in Soseki Natsume is no doubt a reflection of the Japanese sense of impermanence, which has tended to encourage passivity or even resignation. In a similar vein, Dr. Jan Swyngedouw, the Belgian sociologist of religion I mentioned earlier, indicated that the Japanese concern for harmony typically limits itself to Japan; in contrast, the Soka Gakkai's movement embodies the aspiration to a larger, global harmony. In this, I wonder if he was sensing a moralist commitment to dialogue, a spirit of confronting evil that is undergirded by strength of character. The mission of religious faith is to temper and strengthen people's inner lives. Throughout the *Essays*, Montaigne issues his clarion call for just this: religion in the service of humanity.

The Buddha, in his final admonition to his followers, urged them and, by implication, us: "[L]ive as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge." [\[43\]](#)

In this way, Buddhism stresses self-reliance, unmediated trust in the Dharma truth, as the basis for bringing human character to the state of absolute fruition that is known as enlightenment. This is the pivot on which everything revolves.

It is my heartfelt desire that such an awakening, the flowering of individual character, will become the core and conviction of people throughout the world as they step forward to take up their rightful role as engaged and proactive world citizens.

Freedom, Security and Dignity

Next, I would like to discuss specific areas in which ordinary citizens--robust, engaged people acting as individuals and in solidarity--can work to build a global society of peace and creative coexistence.

The United Nations must serve as the key venue and focus for our efforts. Humanity faces a range of complex issues that show no regard for national borders--threats such as terrorism, armed conflict, poverty, environmental degradation, hunger and disease. A reformed and strengthened UN is essential to mustering effective responses to the global challenges of the new era.

The year 2005 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the UN, and this provided additional momentum to the debate on reform. In March, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a report "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All." In it he laid out a broad vision of the UN's mission and the aims of reform: freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity.

The report spells out, in stark and powerful terms, the interdependent relationship among

these three freedoms: "Humanity will not enjoy security without development, it will not enjoy development without security, and it will not enjoy either without respect for human rights."

For my part, I have consistently stressed that human development, human security and human rights must serve as the guiding principles for UN reform. The UN's fundamental mission is symbolized in the opening words of the Charter: "We the peoples?." It must be dedicated to the welfare of all the citizens of the world and the elimination of needless suffering from the face of Earth.

Following sustained debate of the Secretary-General's and other proposals, the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly held in September adopted the 2005 World Summit outcome document. It is truly regrettable that the difficult and protracted negotiations over its contents resulted in deletion of all mention of nuclear disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation and saw only the most general agreement on a number of issues.

Regarding the Security Council, the world's leaders could only express support for "early reform" and failed to touch on any of the long-debated proposals such as expansion of its membership. For my part, I support the overall direction of Security Council reform--aiming for a broader sharing of responsibility with a more global perspective.

Further discussions are needed to build consensus on the kind of reforms that will fundamentally equip the UN to meet the challenges of our world. One crucial aspect of laying this foundation is solidifying the UN's revenue base. In addition to financial contributions from member states, measures such as the people's fund for the UN, which I suggested in my 2001 proposal, should be considered.

Despite these deficiencies, the summit saw progress in other areas. Most notable were agreements on measures to establish a UN Human Rights Council to replace the present Commission on Human Rights, to create a new Peacebuilding Commission, and to revamp the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to enable more effective rapid-response to humanitarian crises.

It is the sad reality of the UN, as an intergovernmental organization, that innovative reform ideas and undertakings will inevitably face the stubborn impediments of conflicting national interests. Nevertheless, pessimism accomplishes nothing, and we should instead focus on how best to implement the agreed-on plans and establish effective mechanisms to protect and improve the lives of the vulnerable members of the human family.

Protecting Human Rights

The activities of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights as currently constituted include: addressing human rights issues in specific countries as well as issues common to diverse countries and regions; debating and examining means for enhancing human rights; making recommendations through the adoption of resolutions;

and publicizing abuses in order to shame those responsible into desisting.

There has been, however, a strong tendency to politicize human rights issues, a direct reflection of the diplomatic dynamics among states represented on the commission, and the persistent impeachment of particular governments has generated stalemate. Thus there has been a long-standing recognition of the need to restore confidence in the commission and its work.

I would like to make some suggestions regarding the functions and structures of the new Human Rights Council, which world leaders committed to establish at the summit as a replacement for the commission.

First, human rights education and public information should be a standing agenda item.

Examining specific abuses and seeking redress for victims are among the important tasks to be inherited from the Human Rights Commission. But in addition, sustained efforts are needed to change the social paradigms and political culture that would condone or tolerate human rights violations. This is the only way to prevent abuses from occurring and break entrenched patterns of recurrence.

The World Programme for Human Rights Education was initiated last year. Making human rights education a standing agenda item of the Human Rights Council would ensure its consistent engagement with the program and encourage it to actively monitor implementation.

Second, I wish to urge that representatives of civil society have ample opportunity to participate in the work of the new Human Rights Council. It is a fact that the UN's efforts to promote human rights have been importantly sustained by the active involvement of many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations. As one of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Human Rights Commission has had official working relationships with NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC. It is my earnest hope that the Human Rights Council will maintain and enhance this structure so NGOs can continue to speak at plenary meetings and engage in vigorous consultations with state and UN representatives.

Third, I wish to support calls for a consultative body of human rights experts under the Human Rights Council.

Specifically, either the existing Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights may be continued, or an organ with equivalent functions be created. In addition to its investigative and research functions in support of the deliberative processes of the new Human Rights Council, the body as I envisage it should serve to reflect the views and concerns of civil society. I would also urge that any such consultative body carry forward the mechanisms, which evolved under the sub-commission, of special rapporteurs and working groups on specific human rights concerns, such as those of indigenous peoples, minorities, etc.

Building Peace

According to the UN, about half of the countries emerging from conflict find themselves enmeshed in it again within five years. It is imperative that these deadly cycles of violence be broken. To this end, in the final days of 2005, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council acted in concert to establish a Peacebuilding Commission. This body will provide advice and recommendations to both the General Assembly and the Security Council to support a sustained, coordinated and integrated approach to international assistance for all stages of recovery from violent conflict--from post-conflict peacebuilding to reconstruction.

I thoroughly welcome the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission, which will assume functions similar to those of the peace rehabilitation council I outlined in my 2004 proposal.

The UN has charged the Peacebuilding Commission with a variety of tasks. I believe the following three roles are of particular importance, and I hope all efforts will be made to realize these aims:

1. To engage not only the leaders of the governments or groups involved in a conflict but also the men and women living in afflicted areas, and to focus on removing the threats and fears they face.
2. To consult and coordinate with civil society and NGOs in order to secure sustained assistance from the international community for the full length of time required for the peacebuilding process.
3. To open the door for people from countries with experience of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding to make a contribution to people in other countries suffering in the aftermath of conflict.

Post-conflict peacebuilding and rehabilitation tends to be considered in terms of the headline aspects of national reconstruction such as holding elections, forming a new government or drafting a constitution. But the experience of the twentieth century attests to the fact that the tragic noose of history can never be loosened unless the recovery process is grounded in the perspectives and concerns of ordinary people. With this lesson in mind, I think the Peacebuilding Commission should see its role as ensuring that international cooperation has bolder goals--that it embraces the rebuilding of people's daily lives, the reconstruction of their happiness.

Engaging Civil Society

As we search for the kind of UN reform that will reflect the perspectives and concerns of ordinary citizens, I would like to focus on a revitalization of the General Assembly.

While it goes without saying that the Security Council will continue to play a central role in maintaining global peace and security, the General Assembly is crucially important as the only universal forum for dialogue where all member states can participate and develop responses to global challenges. I am convinced that efforts to increase the accessibility of

this assembly of humankind would lead to a strengthening of the entire UN system.

Secretary-General Annan's report "In Larger Freedom" cited earlier clarifies the direction of General Assembly reform as follows: "It should concentrate on the major substantive issues of the day, *and establish mechanisms to engage fully and systematically with civil society*" (emphasis added). While it is again truly disappointing that no specific measures were agreed upon at the 2005 World Summit, this approach undoubtedly holds the key to re-empowerment of the General Assembly. Thus I would suggest that, to further establish effective collaborative relationships with civil society, frequent opportunities be created for the General Assembly President and the members of each of its committees to closely consult with NGOs.

In June 2005, the General Assembly organized two days of informal hearings with civil society, creating an opportunity for NGO representatives and experts from around the world to express a broad range of opinions toward the 2005 World Summit. The first such attempt in the UN's history, and one that was later welcomed by the summit participants as a step toward an interactive engagement between civil society and member states, this was indeed a groundbreaking development.

At the same time, NGOs have undertaken the bold initiative of organizing the Millenium+5 NGO Network. This informal grouping of NGOs active at the UN will bring together the input of civil society and liaise with the UN. I believe that such efforts to establish forums of dialogue between the world's ordinary citizens and the UN will help consolidate the UN's foundations as an international body that is underpinned by the twin pillars of its member states and civil society.

Based on the philosophy of Buddhist humanism, the SGI has consistently supported the activities of the UN. As an NGO, we have been active in a wide variety of ways, one recent example being the election of our representative as president of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN in June of last year.

Also, in February this year, in commemoration of its tenth anniversary, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research will host an international conference in Los Angeles focused on reform and strengthening of the UN. Building on the success of the institute's research projects in such areas as human security and global governance and dialogue among civilizations, the conference will explore initiatives toward transforming the UN into an organization that is truly of, for and by the people.

Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN

The Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN is composed of the representatives of national and international organizations which define their work as religious, spiritual or ethical in nature and are accredited to the United Nations. The committee has been meeting regularly since 1972 to share information and insights about complex issues and events at the UN. The committee's focus is twofold. It serves as a forum to inform and educate religious constituencies about current global challenges and the constructive role that the UN can play in addressing those issues. It also serves as a forum for exchanging and promoting shared religious and ethical values in the deliberations of the world organization.

www.rngo.org

Combating Climate Change

Next, I would like to turn attention to the environmental crisis that looms over our planet.

Green Belt Movement

Biologist and environmentalist Professor Wangari Maathai established the Green Belt Movement (GBM) in Kenya in 1977 as a grassroots nongovernmental organization that organized rural women in Kenya to plant trees with the goals of combating deforestation, restoring their main source of fuel for cooking and preventing soil erosion. The GBM has developed a program that incorporates four core projects: tree planting on public lands; promotion of food security at household level; advocacy and networking; and civic and environmental education. The GBM has more than 3,000 nurseries, giving job opportunities to about 80,000 people.

Since 1977, over 30 million trees have been planted and more than 30,000 women trained in forestry, food-processing and various trades that help them earn income while preserving their lands and resources. The movement has expanded beyond Kenya, with a Pan African Green Network reaching 36 organizations in 15 African countries, and a Green Belt Movement International.

Professor Maathai received the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, in part for her work with the GBM.

www.greenbeltmovement.org

In February 2005, I met with Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Wangari Maathai who was visiting Japan on the occasion of the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol. During our meeting, Professor Maathai talked about the millions of people involved in the environmental movement worldwide, and stated that her Nobel Peace Prize served to convey a strong message that protecting the environment is crucially important for the realization of peace. Indeed, resolving the global environmental crisis is an integral part of meeting the challenge of building a peaceful world.

As is widely known, Professor Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement to fight against the desertification of her homeland, Kenya. Over the past thirty years, the many women involved in the movement have planted 30 million trees throughout Africa.

Desertification is a serious and growing problem, particularly in the dry and arid regions of Africa and Asia. There is strong evidence that anthropogenic climate change is exacerbating the problem and its impact. Desertification was one of the subjects of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment conducted under the auspices of the UN. The livelihoods of the almost 2 billion people living in drylands worldwide are potentially at risk if global warming continues to aggravate desertification at the current pace.

It was against this background that the UN declared 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification to promote international cooperation to address this challenge. While supporting the goals of the International Year, I would like to urge continued efforts to find new approaches in the response to climate change.

Climate change is an area in which, like acid rain and ozone layer depletion before it, international efforts have coalesced. The Kyoto Protocol, which finally entered into force in 2005, obliges its industrialized signatories to

reduce, by 2012, their emissions of greenhouse gasses by at least 5 percent compared to 1990 levels.

There is, however, scientific consensus that these measures are insufficient, and emissions need to be reduced to at least half the current level in order to control global warming. Now the primary challenge has become how to reengage the United States and bring developing countries such as China and India, whose emissions are rapidly increasing, into some framework of international cooperation. This question was raised at the G8 Summit held at Gleneagles in July 2005.

At the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the 1992 Climate Change Convention, which was held in conjunction with the first Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol in December 2005 in Montreal, Canada, a working group was created to discuss over the next two years successor frameworks to the protocol for the period after 2012. It was significant that the conference provided a venue where representatives of all countries could meet and talk. The participation of the United States and the major developing countries--although conditioned on the nonbinding nature of the talks--was enough to save the convention from collapse, which once seemed imminent.

As the country that, as host, made a significant contribution to the completion of the Kyoto Protocol, I believe Japan has a special role to play in developing a successor framework. It can no doubt be most effective in this by working with countries with strong commitment to environmental issues.

The Kyoto Protocol commits all parties to improve energy efficiency, promote afforestation and take other measures to reduce emissions and increase the removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. To facilitate these efforts, it also makes use of a scheme called the Kyoto Mechanism that allows the absorption of carbon by forests acting as carbon sinks to be factored into the achievement of emission reduction targets. In addition to exerting maximum effort toward achieving its own targets, Japan should take the initiative in assisting other countries in preserving and restoring forests and the introduction of renewable energy sources.

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) was launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in June 2001 and completed in March 2005. It constitutes "the first comprehensive audit of the status of Earth's natural capital." It focuses on the "services" (benefits) ecosystems provide to people and also analyzes how changes in the quality of these services can affect human well-being now and in the future. It also examines responses that can be adopted at local, national or global levels to improve ecosystem management.

The MA Synthesis Report released in March 2005 revealed that approximately 60 percent of the ecosystem "services" that support life on Earth are being degraded or used unsustainably. It warns that the harmful consequences of this degradation could grow significantly in the next 50 years. This includes the emergence of new diseases, sudden changes in water quality, creation of "dead zones" along coasts, the collapse of fisheries and shifts in regional climate patterns.

www.maweb.org/en/index.aspx

Clean Development Mechanism

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is one of the three so-called "Flexibility Mechanisms" of the Kyoto Protocol, along with Emissions Trading (trading of emission allowances between developed nations) and Joint Implementation (transferring emission allowances between developed nations). These mechanisms are designed to make it easier and cheaper for industrialized countries to meet the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets that they agreed to under the Protocol. The CDM is the only flexibility mechanism that involves developing countries, and is also mandated to "assist developing countries in achieving sustainable development." At present, developing countries have no obligations to constrain their GHG emissions, but the CDM enables them to contribute to global emission reductions on a voluntary basis.

Under the CDM, an industrialized country with a GHG reduction target can invest in a project in a developing country without a target, and claim credit for the emissions that have been avoided, using these credits to meet its own target. Typical examples are projects in developing countries that reduce emissions or remove CO₂ from the atmosphere.

<http://cdm.unfccc.int/>

In addition to the Kyoto Mechanism there is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which enables developed countries to invest in projects that reduce greenhouse gasses in developing countries. The proposals made by developing countries at the Montreal Climate Change Conference to add forest conservation programs to those covered in the CDM merit support.

I am convinced that it is crucial to encourage developing countries to participate in the framework of emission reduction programs by offering constructive mechanisms that respond to their specific needs and demands.

It is estimated that deforestation is responsible for 10–20 percent of the world's total rise in greenhouse gas emissions. There is an acute need to build a global network of cooperation for forest conservation. It was with these considerations in mind that I called, in my 2002 proposal, for the adoption of an international treaty for the promotion of renewable energy and the establishment of a global green fund.

Education for Sustainable Development

Parallel with these efforts to combat global warming, I believe Japan has an important role to play in the field of education. The UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) began last year. The idea, originally put forward by the SGI and other NGOs, was proposed by the Japanese government at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. It was later formally adopted by the UN General Assembly.

As an advocate of the DESD, the SGI will continue to work to promote it, for example, through the exhibition "Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter

and Human Potential" and the documentary film *A Quiet Revolution*, whose production we supported.

In October 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) drew up the International Implementation Scheme for the DESD. It defined the overall goal as "to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development in all aspects of education and learning," [44] and through this it aims to change patterns of behavior and thus create a more sustainable future. It also called on governments to formulate national implementation schemes and structures to promote the DESD in order to raise awareness about sustainable development.

As sponsor of the DESD, Japan has a particular responsibility to provide a model for implementation at home and abroad. This should take the form of cooperation and assistance extended to Asian and African countries where lives and livelihoods are impacted by the effects of desertification and other forms of environmental degradation.

I have stressed on many occasions that the way forward for Japan in the twenty-first century is to make environmental and humanitarian commitments its very *raison-d'être*. These commitments come together in efforts to provide aid and assistance that will enable people and societies to advance on the path of sustainable development.

Building an East Asian Community

Next, I would like to focus on Asia, where relations are still very much colored by the conflicts and tensions of the Cold War.

In December 2005, the first East Asian Summit was held in Malaysia attended by the leaders of sixteen countries: the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) joined by Japan, China, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand. By far the greatest achievement of this summit was to initiate a process of dialogue among heads of government in the region aimed toward the formation of an East Asian Community (EAC).

At the ASEAN+3 (Japan, China, South Korea) Summit convened immediately prior to the East Asia Summit, participants adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, committing among other things to: (1) hold the ASEAN+3 Summit annually in conjunction with the ASEAN Summit, to provide political

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on August 8, 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on January 8, 1984, Vietnam on July 28, 1995, Laos and Myanmar on July 23, 1997 and Cambodia on April 30, 1999. Today, the ASEAN region has a population of about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square kilometers and a combined gross domestic product of US\$737 billion.

The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia was signed at the first ASEAN summit on February 24, 1976. Among its key principles are mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations. China, South Korea and Japan (the "+3" countries) joined the ASEAN leaders for an expanded summit for the first time in 2001.

www.aseansec.org

momentum to the formation of an East Asian Community, and (2) commence collaborative efforts to prepare a second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation in 2007 to set out the future direction for the formation of an East Asian Community.

To someone who has long worked to promote peace and friendship in Asia, this consensus could hardly be more welcome. I sincerely hope that all involved will be able to see beyond the limits of national interest and make a concerted effort to build a community of nations free from the reality or threat of war.

The foundations for this are already being laid. As a condition for participation in the East Asia Summit, China, Japan, South Korea, India, New Zealand and Australia were required to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). This extended the zone of countries committed to the principles of TAC, which include "settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means" and "renunciation of the threat or use of force." [\[45\]](#) The same principles are enshrined in the UN Charter, and if by further consolidating these principles on a regional basis countries can help build peaceful, cooperative relationships, the way will be opened for eventually institutionalizing the renunciation of war in the region.

To solidify progress in this direction, a regularized process of dialogue among heads of government will be essential, along with a secretariat to handle the practicalities of promoting regional cooperation. The agreement to stage the ASEAN+3 Summit and East Asia Summit on a regular basis goes far toward fulfilling the first of these conditions. Regarding the secretariat, the group tasked to debate the content and develop the language for the second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation could develop into a standing East Asian commission in the future. An alternative would be to reorganize the ASEAN Standing Committee and Secretariat now responsible for the day-to-day running of ASEAN to fulfill this larger function.

Such a commission could serve as a vehicle for developing regional structures for addressing shared cross-border issues. These would include: combating the spread of new strains of influenza and other threats in the sphere of public health and hygiene; fully implementing the lessons of the December 2004 Sumatra earthquake and tsunami to enhance regional cooperation for disaster prevention and reconstruction; and preventing further destruction and degradation of the environment.

Working together in this way on matters of shared interest would undoubtedly help build trust in the region, strengthening the foundations of any future community. Linking such regional cooperation to political initiative emerging from summit-level dialogue will surely accelerate progress toward the realization of an East Asian Community.

An Ethos of Coexistence

Next year will mark fifty years since the launch of the European Economic Community (EEC), the forerunner to the current European Union (EU). In Europe, half a century of ongoing dialogue and cooperation has built a solid foundation for a regional community in

which war is virtually unthinkable, a process which continues through such challenges as the quest for ratification of the EU constitution in individual member states.

So is it not time for the countries of East Asia to deal definitively with the legacy of conflict and tension that continues to plague the region despite the end of the Cold War, to join hands and take the first step toward building such a community? Efforts to build an East Asian Community should be grounded in a long-term vision of fifty or even a hundred years hence, of a "United States of Asia" similar to the "United States of Europe" envisaged by Victor Hugo (1802–85). In such a union, higher levels of regional integration would provide a backdrop for each nation and culture to shine more brightly with its own unique qualities and individuality while enjoying the fruits of peaceful coexistence and mutual flourishing.

Of course, we must remember that the process of European integration has been facilitated by a common spiritual foundation, the legacy of Christian civilization. What then is the East Asian equivalent? Historical attempts to claim some underlying shared identity, such as the assertion of Japanese author Tenshin Okakura (1863–1913) that "Asia is one," [\[46\]](#) may be criticized as a rhetorical fancy, devoid of real substance.

In the past I have noted (in an October 1992 speech to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) that in East Asia different peoples have developed their own cultures and traditions, and thus cannot easily be bundled together. On that same occasion, however, I also expressed my belief that running through all these cultures and traditions is something that might be called an "ethos of coexistence."

By this I mean that living in a region much of which enjoys a relatively hospitable natural environment, and sharing a view of human nature that, in contrast to the Western emphasis on individualism, experiences personal identity through intimate engagement with others, we have a psychological tendency to see cooperation rather than conflict, unity rather than fragmentation, and "us" rather than "me."

Past experience suggests that any kind of integration in East Asia is unlikely to be achieved overnight, and would prove extremely difficult to sustain without mutual understanding, common values and a shared philosophical grounding--which is precisely why I have poured so much energy into encouraging connections among peoples at the individual level. I have always felt that this was the most certain path toward achieving lasting peace in Asia.

Enduring Friendship between China and Japan

I believe that relations between Japan, China and South Korea constitute one critical factor in building a larger community in East Asia. Regrettably, in recent years bilateral relations among the three countries, in particular Sino-Japanese relations, have chilled considerably. They urgently need to be put back on track.

There is a saying to the effect that when one reaches an impasse, it is time to return to first principles. In order to find a way past the current deadlock in Sino-Japanese

relations, perhaps the best way to start is by recalling and reaffirming the spirit that prevailed when diplomatic relations were first normalized between the two countries in the early 1970s.

Just a few years before, when I called in 1968 for the normalization of relations, among the Japanese people there was a fear and mistrust of the Chinese that extended to the personal level, a climate exacerbated by the shock of the Cultural Revolution. I was criticized in many quarters for taking that stand, but I firmly believed then, as I do now, that without amicable Sino-Japanese relations there can never be peace in Asia, or the world.

The Sino-Japanese summit I called for eventually came to pass in 1972, clearing the way for the historic joint communiqué announcing the normalization of relations that September. In May 1974, I visited China for the first time, at the invitation of the China-Japan Friendship Association.

When I returned that December, Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976), who was battling ill health, insisted on meeting with me against the advice of his doctors. Our discussions covered a wide range of topics but had one underlying theme: the fate of Asia and the world in the twenty-first century. "Now is the time to build friendship between China and Japan that will span the generations," he told me. "The last quarter of the twentieth century will be the most critical period in the history of the world. All nations must stand as equals and help each other."

Sadly, Premier Zhou died barely a year later, but over the years his words at that meeting have inspired my efforts to build cultural and educational ties at the citizen level, to foster an enduring friendship between China and Japan.

If one likens political and economic relations to ships, connections between ordinary people are like the ocean itself. So long as the ocean of mutual understanding and friendship continues to link peoples, amicable interactions will be maintained even through crises in which the ships risk running aground. This faith in the importance of people-to-people connections is the basis for all my actions.

Last year, designated Japan-Korea Friendship Year, I published a second volume of dialogues with Cho Moon-Boo, former President of South Korea's Cheju National University. At present, I am engaged in a dialogue with Zhang Kaiyuan, professor at the Central China Normal University and one of China's leading historians.

When he visited Japan in December 2005, Professor Zhang noted that many Japanese had given aid and support to the revolutionary movement of Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), which overthrew China's last imperial dynasty to establish a republic in 1912. He shared the following thoughts, with which I concur fully:

While we should respect history, we must also move beyond it. Most of the 2,000 years that China and Japan have been in contact have been characterized by friendship. If these two great nations separated by just a narrow stretch of water can be at peace, both will prosper; if they come

into conflict, both will be the worse for it. A normal, stable relationship of amicable cooperation is good for China and Japan, for Asia, and for the world.

The top priority of Japanese diplomacy since World War II has been to maintain a cooperative relationship with the United States, but perhaps the time has come, while maintaining this overall framework, to develop another foreign relations dynamic, centered on Asia.

The recent agreement by the Chinese and Japanese governments for a series of reciprocal educational exchanges involving over 2,000 high school students annually is therefore all the more significant. Having repeatedly called for more educational exchanges between the youth of China and Japan as a way of looking to the future while confronting the lessons of the past, I find this development very welcome indeed. I strongly urge Japan to recognize that building lasting friendships spanning the generations is indeed the best course to follow in the twenty-first century. Japan, China and South Korea should work together to address the common challenges we face, forging cooperative relations that will open the way toward the creation of an East Asian Community.

Facing the Future

Six-Party Talks

The Six-Party Talks is the name given to meetings of representatives of the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea), South Korea, Russia, Japan and the United States, seeking a resolution of the crisis over the North Korean nuclear weapons program. There have been five rounds of talks to date: in August 2003; February 2004; June 2004; July, August and September 2005; and November 2005. In their September 2005 joint statement, the parties unanimously reaffirmed that the goal of the talks is "the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner."

One issue that Japan, China and South Korea are presently working together to resolve is that of North Korean nuclear development. Since the six-party talks process started in August 2003, it has moved forward in fits and starts with five rounds of government-level discussions being held so far.

Finally, at the fourth round of negotiations conducted last year, the first joint statement aimed at resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem was adopted and issued. In this statement, North Korea "committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards." For its part, the United States "affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons."

This joint statement at last gave the six parties to the talks a common starting point. Taking the next step, however, has proven far more difficult: No time-frame or specific

procedures have been established for North Korea's actual abandonment of its program for the development of nuclear weapons. The critical question of establishing a verification regime also remains. The talks themselves, moreover, have been suspended since last November.

The implications of allowing this situation to drift at a time when there is growing concern about Iran's nuclear development program are potentially dire. I therefore suggest that to move the talks to the next stage, a summit of the heads of government of the six parties be held with the participation of high-level representatives from the UN and IAEA, to discuss how best to make a breakthrough.

An agreement reached between heads of government would have such weight as to generate an irreversible momentum. Having reached consensus, the parties could then form working committees to tackle specific issues, setting deadlines for each stage of the process until the verifiable relinquishment of the nuclear weapons program is achieved. Breaking the problem into discrete steps with concrete time-frames would seem the best way to achieve progress on this seemingly intractable problem.

The six-party talks thus provide a framework for the resolution of problems through discussions at the regional level, using soft power based on dialogue and the fostering of trust to find a solution, without recourse to the hard power of military force. Once this approach has proven effective, the prospects not only of achieving stability in East Asia but also of preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in other regions will be greatly enhanced.

Having consistently advocated that the six-party talks develop into a permanent and constructive forum for dialogue aimed at maintaining peace in Northeast Asia, I was particularly gratified to see that the aforementioned joint statement included the words: "The Six Parties agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia." From a Japanese perspective, one must hope that an easing of tensions in the region would also bring progress on the outstanding issue of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea, and negotiations toward normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Education for Peace

Finally, I would like to stress the importance of disarmament education as a means of transforming the paradigms of society to move from a culture of war characterized by conflict and confrontation, to a culture of peace based on cooperation and creative coexistence.

Last year, the world twice missed the opportunity to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with positive progress on nuclear disarmament; first, in the lack of results from the NPT Review Conference in May, and then in the failure to make any mention of nuclear weapons in the outcome document of the World Summit at the UN General Assembly in September.

Amidst fiercely divided opinion over the relative merits of nuclear disarmament versus nonproliferation, the Review Conference achieved no substantive progress; in fact the Conference could not even agree upon a chairman's summary, let alone a consensus document. This conflict of opinion persisted at the World Summit, with the result that all references to nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation were deleted from the outcome document.

This twofold failure is all the more tragic in light of the following three disturbing trends identified by IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei--the emergence of a nuclear black market, the determined efforts by more countries to acquire technology to produce the fissile material usable in nuclear weapons, and the clear desire of terrorists to acquire weapons of mass destruction. The danger posed by nuclear weapons has cast deep shadows over the international community, highlighting the fact that the world's disarmament efforts stand at an absolutely critical juncture.

This can be attributed in part to a lack of political will, but also significant is the absence of a strong groundswell of world opinion calling for disarmament. While there is an urgent need to bolster the international legal framework, for example, by resuscitating the NPT regime, at the same time the public must raise their voices. In concrete terms this will require a fundamental change in people's attitudes, which can be realized through peace and disarmament education. In recent years the UN has come to recognize this, and in 2002 the General Assembly adopted an expert report on the issue, "The United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education."

In my view, the crucial need is for a radical change in ideas and a search for new approaches. Rallying public opinion to the cause of disarmament requires not just experts or those already involved in the peace movement, but people from all walks of life. Rather than concentrating on the technical and physical facts of disarmament, there needs to be a revolutionary transformation in the way people think about peace, so that it is felt as an immediate and personal reality.

Peace is not simply the absence of war. A truly peaceful society is one in which everyone can maximize their potential and build fulfilling lives free from threats to their dignity.

As a practical initiative, I believe we must fully integrate disarmament education, in this expanded sense I have described, into the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001–10), and develop activities to this end throughout civil society.

The basis for these initiatives must be a shift in our frame of reference from national to human sovereignty. Disarmament education needs to be a grassroots movement that helps to raise world citizens who are firmly committed to the interests of humankind and the planet, and to strengthen the solidarity among them. In this sense, disseminating knowledge and information about disarmament should not be an end in itself: Our greatest priority should be changing people's mindset and behavior so that they are grounded in a culture of peace.

For our part, the SGI has sponsored exhibitions such as "Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World," and last year we opened Culture of Peace Resource Centers

within our SGI-USA centers in New York and Los Angeles to support this effort. Next year, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the call made by Josei Toda (1900–58), second president of the Soka Gakkai, for the abolition of nuclear weapons, we will promote peace activities at the community level throughout the world as we seek to transform the global culture from one of war to one of peace.

Working Together for a World Without War

A transformation in the inner life of a single individual can spur and encourage similar changes in others, and as this extends into society, it generates a powerful vortex for peace that can steadily shape the direction of events. The collective impact of "ordinary citizens," awakened and empowered, can propel humankind toward the twin goals of genuine disarmament and a flourishing culture of peace.

It was one of my great pleasures to have met and held in-depth discussions with Dr. Joseph Rotblat, emeritus president of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, who sadly passed away last year. I will never forget one of the remarks he shared with me on ridding the world of nuclear weapons, ridding the world of war:

When a small stone is thrown into a pond, the ripples travel widely out from the center. Though the ripples may become less powerful, they still do not completely disappear. Every person has the power to create ripples that can change society. If these efforts are concentrated and channeled through NGOs, inevitably the power to influence society will grow. ... If we unite, we can change the world. It might take some time, but viewed from a long-term perspective, the people will be victorious in the end.

This solidarity of awakened citizens for which Dr. Rotblat had such great hopes is what drives the SGI's movement of Buddhist humanism in 190 countries and territories. The next five years to 2010 are a critical opportunity; with courage and hope we look forward to working with like-minded people around the world to build the foundations of a global society of peace and creative coexistence.

Notes:

1. Pronk 2005, "Briefing to the Security Council."
2. McKibben 2003, p. 45.
3. Ibid., p. 46.
4. Trans. of Yanagida 2005, p. 157.
5. Trans. of Yamazaki 2003, pp. 311-12.
6. Trans. of Fukuzawa 1997, p. 227.
7. Montaigne 2003, *Essays*, "We reach the same end by discrepant means," p. 5.
8. Ibid., "On experience," p. 1268.
9. Trans. of Nichiren 1952, p. 564.
10. Montaigne 2003, *Essays*, "An apology for Raymond Sebond," p. 493.

11. Ibid., "An apology for Raymond Sebond," p. 495.
12. Ibid., "On the Cannibals," p. 236.
13. Ibid., "On educating children," p. 176.
14. Ibid., "On the inequality there is between us," p. 291.
15. Ibid., "An apology for Raymond Sebond," p. 542.
16. Nichiren 1999, p. 579.
17. Montaigne 2003, *Essays*, "On cruelty," pp. 487–88.
18. Ibid., "An apology for Raymond Sebond," p. 505.
19. Ibid., "On habit: and on never easily changing a traditional law," p. 129.
20. Ibid., "On experience," p. 1226.
21. Ibid., "On habit: and on never easily changing a traditional law," p. 130.
22. Ibid., "On vanity," p. 1083.
23. Ibid., "On vanity," p. 1083.
24. Ibid., "On vanity," p. 1085.
25. Ibid., "On habit: and on never easily changing a traditional law," p. 134.
26. Ibid., "On vanity," pp. 1121–22.
27. Ibid., "On habit: and on never easily changing a traditional law," p. 138.
28. Ibid., "On the art of conversation," p. 1045.
29. Cf. Ibid., "On vanity," p. 1077.
30. Ibid., "On three kinds of social intercourse," p. 925.
31. Ibid., "On experience," p. 1221.
32. Ibid., "On physiognomy," p. 1173.
33. Ibid., "On the art of conversation," p. 1058.
34. Ibid., "On the art of conversation," p. 1058.
35. Ibid., "To the Reader," p. lix.
36. Ibid., "On repenting," p. 908.
37. Ibid., "On some lines of Virgil," p. 948.
38. Ibid., "On the art of conversation," p. 1068.
39. Ibid., "On some lines of Virgil," p. 956.
40. Ibid., "On experience," pp. 1258–59.
41. Ibid., "On experience," pp. 1268–69.
42. Trans. of Nakano 1996, p. 35.
43. Walshe 1995, p. 245.
44. UNESCO 2005, p. 6.
45. Treaty 1976, Article 2.
46. Okakura 1903, p. 1.

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