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The SGI Quarterly brings together voices of a diverse range of individuals and groups exploring creative responses to the shared challenges of our time.

The Forum aims to generate dialogue and interest in topics related to building a culture of peace and to stimulate a growing network of global citizens active for the betterment of society. To view an archive of past articles and join the discussion, visit Common Threads, a tumblr page hosted by the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), at commonthreads.sgi.org.

In Focus highlights activities of SGI organizations and affiliate institutions around the world; People & Perspectives presents stories and reflections on a Buddhist approach to life; and Buddhism in Daily Life explores Buddhist principles and their application to modern living.

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“Somehow I was able to believe in myself. ‘Yes, I will do it! I will live!’”

Jharna Narang

“Well-resourced universal health systems can be one stabilizing element in both preventing and responding to violence.”

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Looking Upstream for a Healthier Society

Ryan Meili

Peace is often overlooked when discussing the social determinants of health. Ryan Meili talks about the necessity of working to establish the conditions of peace in order to secure health and the power of connecting the stories of real people to the larger political conversation around policy.

Imagine for a moment that you are standing on the banks of a swift-flowing river. You look out and see a small child sputtering and struggling to keep afloat. Without a second thought you dive in, swim out and guide the child to shore. It’s an incredible moment—you’ve saved a life and should be very proud.

But before you even have time to dry off, you look out and see that there’s another child floating down the river. You swim out and rescue her as well. Then another child drifts into sight, and another and another. You call out for help, recruiting everyone you can to come pull kids out of the river. Amidst the panic and the urgency, hopefully someone will stop for a moment and ask a crucial question: “Who keeps chucking these kids in the river?” And they’ll head upstream to find out.

This is a classic public health story, often told to show the difference between a reactive, treatment-based approach to health and one that seeks to prevent illness before it happens. The river metaphor can be further broken down by looking at various levels of treatment and prevention.

Well-resourced universal health systems can be one stabilizing element in both preventing and responding to violence.

Doctors and hospitals, nurses and pharmacies: these are examples of downstream responses to ill health—essential, but reactive. A midstream approach might be a focus on individual behaviors such as smoking, diet and exercise. These are also very important but can be where a lot of prevention efforts get stalled. There is a temptation to look only at the direct behavioral causes of illness and to avoid the more challenging question of addressing what are sometimes referred to as the “causes of the causes.”

In order to think and act upstream, we need to understand the factors with the biggest influence on health outcomes. Income, education, employment, housing, food security and the wider environment—these “social determinants of health” are the real root causes of illness, and any serious effort to improve our health as nations, communities and individuals needs to focus on creating the conditions for good health. The upstream analogy helps bring a visual, story-based lens to these different stages in efforts to improve health outcomes and to shine a light on the need for systemic action beyond what is traditionally included in health care services or health promotion.

A Human Story

On September 2, 2015, a photo was published that captured the world’s attention. It was a photo of the body of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian refugee who, along with his mother and brother, drowned off the coast of Turkey. Here is a real child that wasn’t pulled out of the water in time, and his tragic end brings a new urgency to the upstream story. His story shows the power of human connection in effecting social change. It has taken a vast problem—a tale of years of violent conflict and hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes—and made it personal in a way that has motivated action around the world in support of Syrian refugees.

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The story of the Kurdi family, along with the plight of so many others still struggling to find safety, compels us once more to think deeply about how we prevent and mitigate these threats to health and well-being. Dangers to the health and safety of migrants and refugees start in their home countries, escalate during migration and often persist upon arrival in a host country. In order to improve the health and well-being of the world’s people, we need to focus our efforts on creating the conditions for health. This means working for peace, responding appropriately and quickly when violent conflicts occur, and ensuring a welcoming and supportive resettlement environment.

A Two-Way Relationship

In 1986, Canada hosted the World Health Organization conference that led to the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion in which “peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity” were listed as essential prerequisites for health. Peace is often overlooked when we discuss social determinants of health, perhaps because the focus tends to be on domestic policy change. But when one considers the absence of peace and the resultant death, injury or displacement of large portions of the population, the danger to the health of all in a society becomes clear.

In addition, the relationship between peace and health is not unidirectional; a healthy society is less likely to find itself fighting. The same conditions that lead to higher levels of illness—economic inequality, food insecurity and labor unrest—can also lead to dangerous political instability. Conversely, as the Peace Through Health movement has demonstrated, humanitarian health initiatives can also serve as a bridge to peaceful conflict resolution. Well-resourced universal health systems can be one stabilizing element in both preventing and responding to violence.

When people do need to leave their homes in search of asylum, a new set of challenges emerges. The makeshift housing, inadequate nutrition and high levels of stress that characterize refugee camps increase susceptibility to the infectious diseases that thrive in crowded conditions. For those who leave the camps in efforts to migrate, there are new dangers in the form of treacherous passage and unscrupulous human smugglers.

Even when people do manage to arrive in a host country, their experience of migration and marginalization means they are...
more likely to suffer from various kinds of illness, both mental and physical. Therefore, one of the key supports for new arrivals is adequate medical care.

My home country of Canada has had a reputation as a welcoming country for refugees. One element of this has been the provision of ample health support. For the past 50 years, refugees arriving here in Canada have received access to health care services, including coverage for dental care, optometry and prescription medications.

In 2012, however, the federal government made sweeping cuts to the coverage, drastically reducing services for all refugees and completely eliminating health services for certain categories except in cases of public health risk. This meant that a refugee with tuberculosis might receive treatment but not one with diabetes or one who was having a heart attack or needed prenatal care. This approach is not only unkind and unwelcoming; it’s also unwise, as delayed access to care ultimately results in worse outcomes, greater public risk and higher costs.

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**Building a Healthier Society**

Beyond health care, refugees need support in learning a new language and culture, obtaining the skills to find employment or pursue an education and accessing nutritious food and safe and stable housing. These are the same things we all need in order to be healthy, but they can be challenging to access for someone newly arrived in a strange land after a very difficult experience. Addressing these social determinants of health can make the difference between struggling with illness and social dysfunction or thriving and contributing to a healthier society.

It’s that idea of building a healthier society that led to the development of Upstream. This Canadian organization, launched in 2013, seeks to bring forward a new way of talking about politics through a focus on health. Health is a concern that crosses political lines and concerns everyone.

Upstream works with two key ingredients—evidence and story. We gather the facts about what policy decisions are likely to have the greatest impact on improving health outcomes. We then share stories through social media, editorials and other public communications. These stories are
directed at the general public as well as political leaders with the ability to change policy. This helps us build an audience and a community of individuals and organizations using “Upstream” language and thinking in their approach to social challenges.

We focus on story because all the facts in the world mean nothing if they aren’t connected to feeling. Just as Alan Kurdi’s story has brought the Syrian refugee crisis into focus, stories and images that connect the stories of real patients to the larger political conversation can help guide change for greater health. This sort of reframing effort is necessary if we’re to make the mainstream look upstream, opening up the space to discuss policies that would make real differences in income inequality, access to quality education and affordable housing, and help maintain sufficient environmental integrity to safeguard human life. This is what is needed to improve the living conditions of marginalized populations such as refugees and Indigenous people. It is also what will improve the health of all people, decrease the cost of social interventions and lead, ultimately, to a healthier and more peaceful existence.

Ryan Meili, founding director of Upstream, is a family doctor, author and assistant professor at the College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan, Canada, where he serves as head of the Division of Social Accountability, director of the Making the Links Certificate in Global Health and coleader of the Saskatchewan HIV/AIDS Research Endeavour. He is also vice-chair of Canadian Doctors for Medicare. For more information on Upstream, please visit www.thinkupstream.net.
Benjamin Ferencz in the courtroom at the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg, Germany, where the Nuremberg trials were held.
Law Not War!
Creating a World of Peace and Tolerance

Benjamin Ferencz

Benjamin Ferencz was just 27 years old when he was appointed chief prosecutor in one of the Nuremberg trials. Conducted at the conclusion of World War II, the trials held Nazi leaders to account for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Today, at 95, Mr. Ferencz is the only surviving Nuremberg prosecutor.

During the war, he served in the US Army in Europe. Having studied law on a scholarship at Harvard, he was recruited to join the army’s War Crimes Branch as combat was concluding. In this capacity he witnessed firsthand the atrocities of the concentration camps.

“Nuremberg taught me,” Mr. Ferencz has written, “that creating a world of tolerance and compassion would be a long and arduous task. And I also learned that if we did not devote ourselves to developing effective world law, the same cruel mentality that made the Holocaust possible might one day destroy the entire human race.” After Nuremberg, Mr. Ferencz was among those responsible for the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998.

His remarks here are edited from a dialogue he engaged in with staff at the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on April 30, 2015.

Can the International Criminal Court (ICC) Succeed?

What are the challenges for the success of the ICC? The challenges are enormous, simply because many people don’t believe in the rule of law. And these are perfectly good people, intelligent people. America is a great democracy and it’s inevitable that there will be people in the United States who have differences of opinion, and that’s as it should be. The opinions deserve to be respected. That doesn’t mean you have to agree with them.

But those who don’t want an ICC feel that the only thing that really counts in the last analysis is power, and that to create a third-party institution to settle disputes or to decide whether what you’re doing is lawful or unlawful is not something that they are ready to accept. They think we have no experience with that, it’s liable to be corrupt, it’s liable to be biased, politically motivated and so on, and therefore we just rely upon the old system. That is their point of view, and as I say, it should be considered. I don’t share that point of view.
On the contrary, I think it’s a very dangerous point of view for many reasons. First of all, it’s based on a thousand-year-old tradition and culture which glorified war-making. It may be that it was glorious for [King Arthur] to take Excalibur out of the rock and fight the foe or for David to throw a rock at Goliath. We’re in a different world now.

**Changing Hearts and Minds**

Our current system is that if two heads of state or leaders of divergent groups are unable to agree, what they do is they take young people and send them out to kill other young people, people who they don’t even know, who have done them no harm, who may never have harmed anyone— and they start to kill each other. And when they get tired of killing each other, they stop. Each one declares a victory, although who has the victory besides Death, I don’t know, and they rest for a while, then they go back and start killing each other again.

**There are always differences of opinion. But reason has to prevail over power. People must see that it’s impossible to go back to a world of killing each other as a way of settling disputes.**

And that requires primarily a change of heart and mind and a willingness to recognize that all human beings are entitled to live in peace and human dignity, regardless of their race or their creed or their religion or their nationality or anything else. This is a human entitlement, which distinguishes us from the wild beasts. And that will take a long time to indoctrinate, but it’s inevitable in my judgment that it will come, because I see there has been, during my lifetime, the awakening of the human conscience.

**The Impossible Is Possible**

When I started in Cambridge at Harvard Law in 1940, there was no such thing as a female even being seen in the dormitory of a male student, because they would be expelled for such a terrible and ignorant thing as to have a woman come to a male dormitory. Tonight, I’m having dinner with the dean of the Harvard Law School. She happens to be a female, and her predecessor was also a female, who now sits on the Supreme Court of the United States. So don’t tell me that things can’t change. Things that were considered impossible when I began have become not only possible; they’ve become the realities of today.

**Reason Over Power**

Our task requires work on all levels. At the legal level, we need to make clear that the illegal use of armed force is in violation of the United Nations Charter, which means that if it’s not in self-defense and not approved by the Security Council, it is a crime for which the individual perpetrator will be held to account, wherever in the world he may be caught. Acts punishable by the ICC, which does have a provision prohibiting inhumane acts such as rape and torture and other things, should also include the illegal use of armed force.

There are always differences of opinion. But reason has to prevail over power. People must see that it’s impossible to go back to a world of killing each other as a way of settling disputes. So we have to reeducate and change hearts and minds. Talk to the people, persuade them, point these things out to them and keep on talking to them, because once is not enough. They have to see it for themselves. They have to feel it for themselves.

They have to think of their children, even those still unborn, and try to create a more humane world. And I think it’s inevitable that it will come. Maybe they must have more suffering before they realize. People learn, I think, more from...
suffering than from reason. But I think everybody who's involved in warfare throughout the world and who are the innocent victims of quarrels they don't even understand should have suffered enough.

And we can spread the word through institutions like this, through lectures like what I'm offering you now in the hope that you will disseminate this information.

**Never Give Up!**

I always give people three pieces of advice. One: Never give up. Two: Never give up. Three: Never give up. And also, never give up hope. Because hope is the engine that drives human endeavor. And if you don’t give up, and you continue to hope, every little bit counts. I have been pushing this rock up a hill. I know I’ll not see the top of the hill. I know that. I may be crazy, but I’m not stupid. I push the rock a little bit further up the hill, knowing that there will be times when I get kicked in the head and it slips back. That happens too. Pick up the rock and keep pushing it. And if there are enough people who keep pushing it long enough, we’ll reach the top of the mountain. Martin Luther King said, “I have seen the mountaintop.” The mountaintop is there. It’s sensible, and I’m a believer that human intelligence will, in the long run, prevail.

So don’t despair. Just do the best you can. That’s been my philosophy. I do the best I can. I want nothing in exchange or nothing in return. But I want to satisfy my own conscience and my own feeling, perhaps inspired by the horrors that I have personally seen, to do whatever I can to make it a more humane world. If I know I’ve done my best, I can’t ask for more. I die in peace.

**Law Not War!**

Just do your best, that’s all. Everybody has a role to play, everybody. Talk to your friends, talk to your parents, talk to your boyfriends, talk to your girlfriends, talk to your enemies, talk to anybody. Make the point. Three words, three words; that’s all you have to remember: Law not war.

Read the full text at www.ikedacenter.org/thinkers-themes/thinkers/interviews/ferencz.
In the late 1840s, in India, a young couple, Savitribai and Jotirao Phule, defied all odds to start a school for girls. In doing so, while Jotirao irked his own father and had to leave home, Savitribai faced threats from angry men on her way to and from school every day. Jotirao’s father was only reflecting the views held by society. Society resented their efforts for two reasons. First, since Jotirao hailed from a “lower caste,” his pursuit of education was unwelcome. Moreover, it was completely unacceptable that along with Savitribai he tried to spread education among the “lower castes” and women. Second, in assuming the role of a teacher and a public figure, Savitribai broke the patriarchal codes that bound women to the home. None of this deterred the young couple. In fact, their struggles would form the bedrock of future efforts to spread education amongst women and Dalits.

The examples of pioneering educators can help us rethink the purpose of education and ensure that classrooms are places where the vision of a just society begins to take root, writes Vivek Vellanki.

Rethinking Education
Voices from the Past, Present and Future

Vivek Vellanki
Around the same time, halfway across the world, a similar struggle was being waged in the US. In the early part of the 19th century, legislation was enacted in the southern states making it a crime to teach enslaved children to read or write. As early as the 1830s, Jane Deveaux, a black woman in Georgia, ran a school hidden away from the slave regime. Although she succeeded in furthering her efforts after the Civil War, the education of ex-slaves and African Americans continued to be contested throughout the century. Writing about such efforts in the US, W. E. B. Du Bois reminds us of a very important facet of educational history: “Public education for all at public expense was, in the South, a Negro idea.”

Putting Our Ears to the Ground

Over a century later, the educational legacy of Deveaux, Savitribai and Jotirao continues to evade us. These individuals and several others like them are the luminary forebears of social justice education. We must learn about them and invoke them if we are to reimagine pedagogic practice and rethink the purpose of education. While on the surface there is an intense dialogue about educational reform, efforts toward enforcing “real change” are hollow. For many children in schools, time is devoted to learning concepts that are far removed from their own needs and experiences. Classrooms have become spaces of boredom and pessimism. At the same time, teachers are confronted with a strictly controlled curriculum, greater surveillance of their work and punitive measures that ensure their adherence to the prescribed curriculum.

Despite all of these hurdles, classrooms continue to be spaces where we can collectively dream of a just society. In order to realize these dreams, however, we must radically alter our notions of education and pedagogic practices. While this task may seem daunting, there is some solace in realizing that several teachers, past and current, from across the world, have succeeded in their efforts to provide such a space. Part of the effort of realigning our schools and classrooms toward social justice entails foregrounding the stories of such teachers (past and present) and their collective struggles to create schools that are welcoming to everyone.

Education as “Trutiya Ratna”

In contemporary times, “education for all” has been repeated ad nauseam, proclaimed as a self-evident truth that has remained unchanged throughout history. However, the two narratives discussed above illustrate that education has been the terrain on which political, cultural and social struggles have been wedged and waged. In his Marathi-language play, Trutiya Ratna (The Third Eye), Jotirao Phule explores ways in which religious and sociocultural practices interact with education to afford dominant groups more power. But Phule doesn’t stop there. For him, the reimagining of education as “Trutiya Ratna” entails empowering people to use their third eye, which enables new modes of perception to understand and critique society. As Sharmila Rege writes in her work on Phule-Ambedkarite feminist pedagogy, this vision of educational practice opens up the
Busts of Jotirao and Savitribai Phule in Pune, India
“possibilities to enable the oppressed to understand and transforms the relation between power and knowledge.”

There is no better testimony to the transformative potential of such an educational practice than the essay written by 14-year-old Mukta Salve, who studied at the school started by Savitribai and Jotirao. Writing with a deep self-consciousness, she strikes blows at the trammels of the caste system in 19th-century India and demonstrates how the pursuit of education as “Trutiya Ratna” enables one to raise questions around power, knowledge and societal practices. She asks, “Do the merciless hearts of these Brahmins, who strut around in their so-called holy clothes, ever feel even a grain of pity for us when we suffer so much grief on account of being branded as untouchables?” And then retorts, “O learned pandits, wind up the selfish prattle of your hollow wisdom and listen to what I have to say.”

Education Reconsidered

These stories provide us an entry point into talking about pedagogic practices and educational visions grounded within history and context; stories that are not wished up by a writer but that are the lived reality, struggles and dreams of several individuals. One of the most crucial aspects that underscore this attempt toward rethinking education is the willingness to open up the classroom and to bring society into it. Mukta Salve’s words make it evident that the purpose of education is not merely limited to literacy but is also to examine unjust practices in society. Often, schools are afraid to confront and talk about the inequities of race, caste, class and gender that are a part of our social fabric. In treating the classroom as an isolated space where the world outside must not be discussed, we are doing students a disservice rather than supporting them. Unfortunately, the truth of the matter is that racial-, gender-, class- and caste-based violence is the everyday reality—within and outside of schools—for most students.

Education cannot limit itself to teaching students to live in this world; it must also entrust itself with the task of creating a just society. Classrooms should become welcoming spaces that allow students to probe the ways their lives (and what they are learning) connect to broader society. The work of teachers would then involve creating classrooms where students feel emotionally and physically safe, where they feel that their opinions are cared for and foregrounded. The curriculum should enable students to examine society and lead them to ask critical questions about themselves and about society:

Who is in a position to make decisions, and who is left out? How do these decisions impact people? Who benefits, and who suffers as a result? This doesn’t mean a devaluing of academic skills but rather is an attempt to hold students to higher expectations while creating spaces for them to question our educational system and societal practices.

However, in creating these classrooms, teachers have to be mindful and accept that they don’t know it all. In some cases, a student may, in fact, know better or share an experience that could be helpful to all. Inviting these voices and others from the community can make classroom life democratic and be the first steps toward aligning our educational practice with our vision for society. For Mukta Salve’s fiery words don’t just bring into question the way our society and educational system has been structured but also lay the ground for our efforts toward building a just society, if only we listen to her call: “O learned pandits, wind up the selfish prattle of your hollow wisdom and listen to what I have to say.”

Vivek Vellanki is a doctoral student at the College of Education at Michigan State University. His research interests include social justice education and exploring transnational influences on educational practices. He initiated the podcast series Dialoging Education, with a focus on education, equity and democracy.
The Energy of Commitment

Interview with Haneen Khalid

Haneen Khalid, from Pakistan, is a South Asia field organizer for the international nuclear disarmament campaign Global Zero. A recent graduate of the National University of Sciences and Technology Islamabad, she is the founder of the Progressive Youth Alliance, a student-run organization targeting three main causes: international nuclear disarmament, the rights of marginalized communities, and climate change and environmental protection.

How did you become involved in peace activism? What sparked your commitment and what keeps you committed?

I grew up and completed my education in Islamabad, Pakistan—one of the spotlights in the global war against terror. Watching death turn into a mere statistic on the evening news, doing drills at school against possible attacks, living under curfew when the government...
launched military operations in the heart of the city—these memories leave a lasting impression. They show you how fear is a force to be reckoned with. What does peace even mean? And how do we get there?

Peace activism has been my way of exploring these questions. Mobilizing young people through talks, events and petitions is just the tip of the iceberg. The real change is in the underlying thought processes we inspire through these activities. Does the world have to be the way we see it? Is violent conflict inevitable? How can I redefine my life and my thinking to reflect a new world that has learned from its mistakes? The thought that I can inspire even one person to consider this keeps me going. It inspires me to keep asking questions and keep painting a new picture. Change happens one conversation, one thought at a time.

What was your motivation for establishing the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA) and for focusing on the specific causes that you have identified?

As a student, I had observed a massive gap in the market for organized activism. Young people wanted to do something meaningful; they wanted to make a difference however they could. They wanted to meet other people who felt the same way. There was no platform to bring them together, to help them put their ideas into action, to tell them that every little bit mattered. There was no student-run organization that stood for social reform, without any political affiliation, that worked simply to encourage members to do their best and to be the change they wanted to see. When we saw a vibrant, committed, enthusiastic team coming together to support Global Zero in Islamabad, PYA was the clear next step.

Our goal is to target ignorance and apathy, to “build an enlightened tomorrow.”

The three issues we focus on, the rights of marginalized communities, climate change and environmental protection, and international nuclear disarmament, are not mainstream in Pakistani society, media and policy—nuclear disarmament least of all. They are also causes where the results of one’s efforts aren’t immediately apparent. Our aim is to draw volunteers and activists into the process rather than see the goal only, to develop the questions rather than be frustrated with a lack of answers. We feel this is the only way we can adapt to the changing environment and build a sustainable effort.

How does PYA carry out its mission?

Our goal is to target ignorance and apathy, to “build an enlightened tomorrow.” We tell our activists that every conversation is important. We encourage activism on campuses through awareness drives,
formal and informal discussion circles and creative projects to sensitize student groups to the challenges faced by the underprivileged and the marginalized. We believe this is a long-term investment shaping new ideas and new thinking for emerging young leaders.

**What has been your experience of PYA’s development—the main challenges and biggest rewards?**

The biggest challenge, I would say, is maintaining a momentum. Where you are working with volunteers, a robust reward and recognition system goes a long way. This is something we still experiment with. The entire operation runs on the energy of the individual activists and their commitment to the cause. With issues that require long-term grassroots organizing such as nuclear disarmament, the single greatest challenge is keeping morale high.

However, the biggest rewards lie here too. Meeting and working with people willing to commit so much to what they believe in is fulfilling in a special way. Sometimes, people you’ve never met come and talk about what they organized at their university to discuss how Pakistan is at risk from climate change or how nuclear disarmament is an issue that concerns every citizen. And you suddenly realize because you dared imagine it. It’s mind-blowing.

**In general, how do youth in Pakistan respond to the three causes PYA champions? Do some causes resonate more strongly than others, and is there one that is more challenging to garner support for?**

The broader peace theme appeals to everybody. Nobody will argue against peace as an end goal; it’s the ways and means that become contentious. So that’s how we open our conversations. Like I said earlier, fear is a force to be reckoned with, and this country has lived in a shadow for a very long time. You can tell that people are frustrated, that they’ve had enough, that they want something vastly different for their children and that they’re willing to do what it takes.

I’ve found that talking about the rights of marginalized communities resonates strongly with the student community. The media has been more active in covering cases concerning violence against women and religious minorities, and as people we can relate to shocking and graphic stories. Climate change and nuclear disarmament are more abstract, and we have to work hard to paint a clear picture of what is at stake. Nuclear disarmament especially is met with a lot of cynicism—with good reason. Few disagree, however, that it is an ideal worth standing up for, for everyone, everywhere.

**What do you feel is key in ensuring that your generation can succeed in nuclear abolition?**

I think we need to believe that we can. We need to recognize our own power. It’s as simple as that.

**What have been your strategies or approaches for mobilizing youth in Pakistan around nuclear disarmament specifically?**

There are a number of peace groups and debating societies active around the country. A lot of our student chapters are acting in partnership with these groups and building an alternative narrative to the mainstream pro-nukes conversation. Very early in our work, we realized that our audience knows very little about the issue or what they stand to lose in the event of a detonation. They do not know how horrific the aftermath could be. They do not know how real the danger of nuclear theft or accident really is. They also do not know the world is pumping a staggering amount of resources into maintaining and expanding nuclear arsenals. We work on developing print and social media material to get this information out there, building teams to help spread it further, and we even rolled out a questionnaire some time back to gauge the general level of awareness. It was shocking. I think that, ultimately, nuclear proliferation or disarmament is less of a political question and more about having all your facts. You cannot protect your people and doom them to madness at the same time. At the very least, it should be a conscious choice between the two, a decision made from a position of awareness. And that is what we do: help people become aware.
The Courage of Application
Daisaku Ikeda

In the following excerpt from his 2016 peace proposal, “Universal Respect for Human Dignity: The Great Path to Peace,” SGI President Daisaku Ikeda considers how education can empower individuals to create positive change. The full text is available at www.sgi.org/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/peace-proposal-2016.html.

The founding president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), was a pioneer of humanistic education. In his 1930 work Soka kyoikugaku taikei (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy)—a work of germinal importance to the SGI—he describes three different ways of life as human beings: dependent, independent and contributive.

In a dependent way of life, a person is typically unable to sense their own potential, giving up on any real possibility of transforming their current situation and instead passively accommodating themselves to others and their immediate surroundings or to the larger trends in society. In an independent way of life, people have the desire to find their own way forward but tend to have little interest in those with whom they are not directly involved. They are quick to assume that however trying the circumstances of another person, it is up to that person to find a solution through their own efforts.

Makiguchi used to illustrate the problematic nature of such a way of life with the following example. Suppose someone has placed a large stone on a railroad track. Needless to say, this is an evil act. But if, despite knowing it is there, one fails to remove the stone, a train will be derailed.

In other words, if one recognizes a danger but does nothing about it because it has no direct impact upon oneself, this failure to do good will produce an evil outcome.
Everyone speaks of the wrongfulness of an evil act, but inexplicably no one is held accountable for the wrongfulness of failure to do good. And thus, fundamental social evils remain unresolved.

Any doubt that failure to do good is equivalent to actively doing evil is dispelled when we imagine ourselves aboard the train heading toward disaster.

In politics, economics and other areas of contemporary thought, we see a tacit acceptance of the sacrifice of certain people’s interests in the pursuit of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The pitfalls of this way of thinking are illustrated by the climate crisis. A willingness to accept other people’s sacrifice can erode the foundations for humanity’s survival; even if one is not at risk at present, over the long run no part of Earth is likely to remain unaffected.

The American political philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum has warned of the dangers of pursuing short-term interests and calls for efforts to foster an awareness of global citizenship.

More than at any time in the past, we all depend on people we have never seen, and they depend on us . . . Nor do any of us stand outside this global interdependency.

Fostering imaginative capacities through education and learning expands grassroots solidarity and action for the resolution of global issues.

For his part, Makiguchi asserted that the way of life to strive for is a contributive one. “Authentic happiness cannot be realized except through sharing the joys and sufferings of the masses as a member of society.” Today, we need to expand such awareness to encompass the entire world: Nothing is more crucial.

A Chain Reaction of Positive Transformation

Buddhism views the world as a web of relationality in which nothing can be completely disassociated from anything else. Moment by moment, the world is formed and shaped through this mutual relatedness. When we understand this and can sense in the depths of our being the fact that we live—that our existence is made possible—within this web of relatedness, we see clearly that there is no happiness that only we enjoy, no suffering that afflicts only others.

In this sense, we ourselves—in the place where we are at this moment—become the starting point for a chain reaction of positive transformation. We are able not only to resolve our personal challenges but also to make a contribution to
Buddhism views the world as a web of relationality in which nothing can be completely disassociated from anything else. Moment by moment, the world is formed and shaped through this mutual relatedness.

moving our immediate environment and even human society in a better direction.

This palpable awareness of interdependence provides a framework or set of coordinates by which to reconsider the relationship between self and other and between ourselves and society as a whole. This is the approach that Buddhism urges us to adopt.

Here, education is vital as it enables us to populate this field of coordinates with the actual experience of empathy felt when encountering the pain of others. Our perceptive capacities are honed by learning about the background and underlying causes of such issues as environmental degradation or human inequality, and this in turn clarifies and strengthens the system of ethical coordinates within which we strive to address these issues.

The second function of learning is to bring forth the courage to persevere in the face of adversity.

The challenges that confront humankind, such as poverty or natural disasters, manifest themselves uniquely depending on location and circumstance. And the impacts of different threats are such that they can affect anyone, anywhere, at any time. That is why day-to-day efforts are needed in each locality to enhance resilience—the capacity to prevent crises or their escalation and the ability to act with wisdom to respond flexibly and energetically to difficult conditions in the aftermath of disaster.

As an educator, Makiguchi focused on enhancing learners’ capacity to grasp the import of events in their environment and to respond proactively, something he termed “the courage of application.” For him, the authentic objective of education is to foster the habit of discovering opportunities to apply the knowledge gained through education and to do so to maximum effect through concrete action.

To this end, what is needed, much more than simply providing students with the right answer, is “to point children to those areas where opportunities to apply what they have learned abound, and to focus their attention on this.”
A Fierce Determination to Live

Interview with Jharna Narang, survivor of the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008

Ten terrorists carried out a series of coordinated shooting and bombing attacks across Mumbai, India, lasting four days from November 26, 2008, killing more than 160 people and leaving hundreds wounded. Bharat Soka Gakkai (SGI-India) member Jharna Narang was dining with her family at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel when it was attacked and placed under siege. Her immediate family members—parents and brother—were killed in the shootings, while she sustained four bullet wounds to the stomach, arms and hips.

For the next two months, 19 doctors from different disciplines worked in constant consultation with each other as Jharna fought to stay alive in the ICU. Her kidneys had failed. She was unable to move her legs because of damage to the spinal cord. There had been extensive nerve damage, blood loss and internal bleeding, and the threat of septicemia was constant. The bullets had missed all her vital organs. She was discharged after eight months of hospitalization.

In this interview, which took place in 2015, seven years after the incident, Jharna, who is almost fully recovered and has regained the use of her legs, talks about the incident, but more so about moving on and the nature of forgiveness.
Can you tell us what happened on that day?

It happened in a split second. We were having dinner, celebrating my brother Gunjan’s 32nd birthday, at a restaurant in the Taj Hotel when we were told we needed to evacuate. We followed the staff through the kitchen and deep into the inner chambers of the premises where there were private banquet rooms. We hid there for many hours. They provided whatever they could manage, some water and crackers, tablecloths to cover ourselves. Nobody knew how serious it was. People from many parts of the Taj gathered, hiding in three or four banquet rooms.

At one point, it was declared safe to leave. We literally stepped out when the firing started again. I was shot and bleeding like a tap. My mom was under me, and she died immediately. I was bleeding all over the place, passing in and out of consciousness. At one point, I pretended to be dead. They were still shooting.

I distinctly remember thinking, “I cannot die, my work is not finished yet!” And I shouted and shouted for help.

I believe this fierce inner determination resulted in the whole universe working to save my life. I was among the first few to be rescued and taken to the hospital. Although I had no identification and doctors could barely feel my pulse, they didn’t give up. (My main surgeon recounted later that he didn’t know what had made him take a chance on me, there were so many people coming in.) I remember giving them my name in the hospital, but they didn’t get it right. I then felt someone removing my earrings and knew they were going to operate immediately.

And the rest of your family?

My sister-in-law and her parents escaped safely. They found my brother’s and parents’ bodies at various morgues, but I was nowhere to be found. Victims had been taken to different hospitals, and the emergency crew had gotten my name wrong. Desperately looking for my whereabouts, my relatives even put it on the news—the headlines read, “Jharna where are you?” They finally found me in Bombay Hospital.

When I regained consciousness, more than a month had passed, but to me it felt like yesterday or just a few days ago. I opened my eyes and knew something had happened, but I didn’t quite know what. That’s when I was told that my parents and brother had not made it.

It must have been really tough to come to terms with their deaths.

Initially, I wondered, “What did I do to incur such negative karma?” I was very bothered about the way my parents died. They were shot dead, literally had their lives taken away like this. I was very disturbed about it and shared my concerns with a leader in the SGI who helped me understand that it is impossible to fathom one’s karma. The concept of karma is not something that can be understood at a superficial level. Further, Buddhism teaches that it isn’t how long we have lived or how we die that determines the victory or failure of our lives; rather it is how we live out our lives while we are alive that matters. The leader went on to share with me that my parents and my brother did not die in vain, and this has stuck with me. Their deaths helped make the world aware of terrorism and transform the karma of the land. No one can forget 26/11. They took on the karma of the land. I truly feel that. Moreover, they died quickly and did not suffer.

Gradually, I have come to feel an inner certainty that my parents and brother are happy wherever they are. Nichiren Buddhism teaches us that the benefits of our efforts to advance peace through our Buddhist practice extend to countless generations of our family. I believe that the benefits of all the causes I create in my Buddhist practice will reach my parents and brother, and that’s very reassuring. I also believe what Nichiren promises in his writings—that I will be born together with them again. In the meantime, I must do my life’s work! I want to use my life as an example to motivate the world to concrete action. So then there is nothing to complain about.

Do you harbor any feelings of blame or resentment toward the terrorists?

They were kids. They were wearing shorts, T-shirts—they were young boys, maybe 16, 17 or 18 at most. They didn’t know what they were doing. They are picked up, taken to camps and trained. Their families are probably told that their children will be taken care of. I saw how young they were. They were not born murderers. They were programmed.
Having experienced in such close proximity the insecurity of the times we live in, how do you wish to live your life moving forward?

A passage from Nichiren’s treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” comes to mind: “You must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart . . . If you do so, then the threefold world will become the Buddha land, and how could a Buddha land ever decline?”

It’s about the sense of urgency in doing our human revolution—a process of inner transformation that brings forth our full human potential. Not everyone can be part of the UN or go out there and do relief activities. What we can all do is win over our negative tendencies and work toward treasuring the person in front of us.

The resentment I feel in my heart, the feelings of being trapped, whatever is pulling me down—these are what I have to win over. Through the change in my heart, I know I can create that ripple effect. This is the “power of one” that SGI President Daisaku Ikeda always talks about. But the thing is, I’ve got to believe in the power of my life. I’ve got to believe and activate and bring forth that power of my life. And if I can do it, I can be an example for others.

What might you share with those who have survived similar circumstances and are struggling to face the future?

I personally apply: one day at a time. One day at a time, move forward. Believe in yourself. Fight. I don’t know how, but since that day there has been this constant inner voice that says: “Okay, move forward. Take it one day at a time.” However hard, however painful, somehow I was able to believe in myself. “Yes. I will do it! I will live!” This kind of determination, this fighting spirit that I have forged through my Buddhist practice, can break through all barriers.

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and activate and bring forth that power of my life. And if I can do it, I can be an example for others.
Like all Ikeda Forums, the 12th annual forum gathered accomplished scholars from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to explore key ideas from Daisaku Ikeda’s philosophy of Buddhist humanism—especially those that illuminate issues and challenges in personal, social and global ethics.

Called “The Practice of Dignity: What It Means Today,” the 2015 forum provides a window into the work and objectives of the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue (originally named the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century), which was founded by Daisaku Ikeda, president of the SGI, in 1993 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The three speakers at the 2015 forum are representative of the mix of scholars that constitute the wider Ikeda Center network of friends who contribute to our programs and publications.

First to speak was Meenakshi Chhabra, associate professor of global interdisciplinary studies at Lesley University. She shared how her experiences growing up in India in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition inform her work as a professor and facilitator of dialogue among people from regions of protracted conflict, including India and Pakistan. She told of how Daisaku Ikeda’s poem “The Sun of Jiyu,” with its call to return to “the primordial ‘roots’ of humankind,” set her on her peacebuilding path. These roots, she said, are the source of our shared dignity.

Mitch Bogen describes the ethos and activities of the Ikeda Center and explains how the 2015 Ikeda Forum for Intercultural Dialogue offers a window into the center’s history.

**Mitch Bogen** describes the ethos and activities of the Ikeda Center and explains how the 2015 Ikeda Forum for Intercultural Dialogue offers a window into the center’s history.
Dialogue during the 2014 Sarah Wider author event

Gail Thomas, left, at the 2015 Ikeda Forum

Gail Thomas is professor of sociology at Soka University of America. She focused on dignity as experienced at the personal level. For example, she talked about the power of language to affect human dignity, especially in the realm of naming. “How individuals are labeled creates expectations and predictions” about them, she said, which, when framed negatively, can harm self-identity and limit potential. Early in her life, said Dr. Thomas, she was met with demeaning labeling, which she transcended with the help of “role models and mentors,” a resonant aspect of Mr. Ikeda’s vision.

Lastly, Peter Stearns, professor of history and provost emeritus at George Mason University, explained that after centuries of colonialism and aggressive assertions of Western superiority, many around the world are rightly suspicious of US claims of concern regarding dignity and human rights within their countries. Therefore, said Dr. Stearns, instead of lecturing other countries about such matters, we should engage more in dialogue and accept that we, as Americans, might learn from other countries as they can from us.

Dr. Stearns recently published the survey book Peace in World History. According to Stearns, his interest in peace education has been influenced significantly by his “experience with the Ikeda Center and the writings of Dr. Ikeda—particularly his statement that each of us as a global citizen should figure out what we can do to promote peace.”

The Ikeda Forum and Our Core Values

The theme of dignity grounds the Ikeda Center’s vision statement, which was created based on Mr. Ikeda’s written messages to the center commemorating important milestones. The opening of the statement reads:

The Ikeda Center envisions a world built on two essential attributes: first, a deep respect for the inherent moral equality and inviolable dignity of all persons; and second, an unshakeable conviction in the infinite potential of individuals to transform themselves and the world for the better.

Dignity also appears in the fourth of our seven Core Convictions: “Respect for human dignity and reverence for the sanctity of life provide a baseline ethical standard.” This wording was drawn in part from Daisaku Ikeda’s 2004 message to the center, written to commemorate the inaugural Ikeda Forum. In it, Mr. Ikeda connected Buddhism with the insights of the American Renaissance, a theme explored in the first three Ikeda Forums.

Every Ikeda Forum addresses some aspect of humanistic education and philosophy. For example, the year 2009 was the 150th anniversary of the birth of John Dewey. Organized to honor this occasion, the 2009 forum created a rare opportunity for top Dewey scholars to explore cross-cultural resonances between Dewey’s naturalistic humanism and Ikeda’s Buddhist humanism.
Getting the Message Out

The late historian Vincent Harding, confidant of Martin Luther King Jr. and mentor to countless people working for inclusive social change, spoke at three Ikeda Forums (in 2008, 2010 and 2013). Like several of our Ikeda Forum speakers, Dr. Harding is the coauthor of a dialogue with Mr. Ikeda published by the center’s Dialogue Path Press (DPP), which was launched in 2009. In America Will Be!: Conversations on Hope, Freedom, and Democracy, which was published in 2013, Ikeda and Harding drew universal lessons from what Dr. Harding called “the movement to expand democracy”—not the more commonly used “civil rights movement.” To date, DPP has published seven titles.

Prior to DPP, the center developed and published books in collaboration with publishers such as Orbis Books and Teachers College Press. As of 2015, these multiauthor volumes, along with DPP titles, have been used in more than 900 courses at more than 275 colleges and universities, injecting important humanistic, peace-oriented concerns into the coursework of thousands of young people in the US and around the world.

Books aren’t our only mode of communication or content origination. The Ikeda Center website is designed to share engaging materials both old and new. The work of peacebuilding is timeless and deep, so a 1997 interview with nuclear abolition leader Joseph Rotblat sits easily alongside a 2014 interview with dignity theorist Donna Hicks. Our video program is especially popular; the format allows our interviewees to communicate with immediacy not accessible via the printed word. And through our Education Fellows Program we are supporting doctoral students producing new research relating to Soka education.

Peacebuilding—Past and Present

The Ikeda Center was founded by Daisaku Ikeda as the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century in 1993 on September 24, the day of his address at Harvard University, “Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-First-Century Civilization.” Speaking at the invitation of eminent Harvard faculty Harvey Cox, John Kenneth Galbraith and Nur Yalman, Mr. Ikeda outlined several teachings and practices from Buddhism that he felt would be especially fruitful in helping humankind transcend “an unreasoning emphasis on difference” that has plagued our world for far too long. Chief among these practices, suggested Ikeda, is dialogue, modeled so well by Shakyamuni from the earliest days of his teaching. It was this commitment to dialogue that inspired Mr. Ikeda to found the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century on the same day as he gave his talk. For this reason, the 1993 Harvard address is called the center’s founding lecture.

On September 24, 1993, Daisaku Ikeda delivered a lecture at Harvard University’s Yenching Institute called “Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-First-Century Civilization.” Speaking at the invitation of eminent Harvard faculty Harvey Cox, John Kenneth Galbraith and Nur Yalman, Mr. Ikeda outlined several teachings and practices from Buddhism that he felt would be especially fruitful in helping humankind transcend “an unreasoning emphasis on difference” that has plagued our world for far too long. Chief among these practices, suggested Ikeda, is dialogue, modeled so well by Shakyamuni from the earliest days of his teaching. It was this commitment to dialogue that inspired Mr. Ikeda to found the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century on the same day as he gave his talk. For this reason, the 1993 Harvard address is called the center’s founding lecture. Like-minded peacebuilders that persist to today. Notable conferences included the 2001 “Economics for Human Well-Being: Advancing a People’s Agenda,” which anticipated issues associated with today’s Occupy movement, and the 2003 Restorative Justice Seminar series, which examined philosophical values crucial to today’s movement to reform our criminal justice system along more humanistic lines.
Among other events and activities too numerous to summarize, one might serve to illustrate the early work: Throughout the late 1990s the center worked with Dr. Steven Rockefeller and various NGOs to draft the Earth Charter, which is both “a universal expression of ethical principles to foster sustainable development” and a global network working today to advance these values. During this process, the center developed its relationship with peace studies pioneer Elise Boulding, a relationship that culminated with the 2010 publication of her dialogue with Daisaku Ikeda, Into Full Flower: Making Peace Cultures Happen—the last publication of her substantial life and career.

Dr. Boulding consistently reminded us that “what exists is possible,” meaning that peace is not a pipe dream; it always has been present and real, if not predominant. Therefore it is unambiguously within our power to change the status quo for the better.

As we head toward our 25th anniversary in 2018, we will continue to employ dialogue and education to facilitate the steady ascent and ever-widening presence of peace.

Mitch Bogen is the Ikeda Center's publications associate. In addition to contributing to book editing and managing book production, he serves as webmaster and lead writer for the center. Mitch has been a writer and editor for a number of educational nonprofits, taught comparative religion and been a contributing writer for the Harvard Education Letter. He holds dual master's degrees from Harvard University, in theology and education.
The essence of Buddhism is the conviction that we have within us at each moment the ability to overcome any problem or difficulty that we may encounter in life; a capacity to transform any suffering. Our lives possess this power because they are inseparable from the fundamental law that underlies the workings of all life and the universe.

Nichiren, the 13th-century Buddhist monk upon whose teachings the SGI is based, awakened to this law, or principle, and named it “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” Through the Buddhist practice he developed, he provided a way for all people to activate it within their own lives and experience the joy that comes from being able to liberate oneself from suffering at the most fundamental level.

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, who lived some 2,500 years ago in India, first awoke to this law out of a compassionate yearning to find the means to enable all people to be free of the inevitable pains of life. It is because of this that he is known as Buddha, or “Awakened One.” Discovering that the capacity to transform suffering was innate within his own life, he saw too that it is innate within all beings.

The record of Shakyamuni’s teachings to awaken others was captured for posterity in numerous Buddhist sutras. The culmination of these teachings is the Lotus Sutra. In Japanese, “Lotus Sutra” is rendered as Myoho-renge-kyo.

Several hundred years after Shakyamuni, amidst the turbulence of 13th-century Japan, Nichiren similarly began a quest to recover the essence of Buddhism for the sake of the suffering masses. Awakening to the law of life himself, Nichiren was able to discern that this fundamental law is contained within Shakyamuni’s Lotus Sutra and that it is encapsulated and concisely expressed in the sutra’s title—Myoho-renge-kyo. Nichiren designated the title of the sutra as the name of the law and established the practice of reciting...
Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a practical way for all people to focus their hearts and minds upon this law and manifest its transformative power in reality. *Nam* comes from the Sanskrit *namas*, meaning to devote or dedicate oneself.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is thus a vow, an expression of determination, to embrace and manifest our Buddha nature. It is a pledge to oneself to never yield to difficulties and to win over one’s suffering. At the same time, it is a vow to help others reveal this law in their own lives and achieve happiness.

**A Profound Meaning**

The individual Chinese characters that make up Myoho-renge-kyo express key characteristics of this law. *Myo* can be translated as mystic or wonderful, and *ho* means law. This law is called mystic because it is difficult to comprehend. What exactly is it that is difficult to comprehend? It is the wonder of ordinary people, beset by delusion and suffering, awakening to the fundamental law in their own lives, bringing forth wisdom and compassion and realizing that they are inherently Buddhas able to solve their own problems and those of others. The Mystic Law transforms the life of anyone—even the unhappiest person, at any time and in any circumstances—into a life of supreme happiness.

*Renge*, meaning lotus blossom, is a metaphor that offers further insight into the qualities of this Mystic Law. The lotus flower is pure and fragrant, unsullied by the muddy water in which it grows. Similarly, the beauty and dignity of our humanity is brought forth amidst the sufferings of daily reality. Further, unlike other plants, the lotus puts forth flowers and fruit at the same time. In most plants, the fruit develops after the flower has bloomed and the petals of the flower have fallen away. The fruit of the lotus plant, however, develops simultaneously with the flower, and when the flower opens, the fruit is there within it. This illustrates the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect; we do not have to wait to become someone perfect in the future, we can bring forth the power of the Mystic Law from within our lives at any time.

The principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect clarifies that our lives are fundamentally equipped with the great life state of the Buddha and that the attainment of Buddhahood is possible by simply opening up and bringing forth this state. Sutras other than the Lotus Sutra taught that people could attain Buddhahood only by carrying out Buddhist practice over several lifetimes, acquiring the traits of the Buddha one by one. The Lotus Sutra overturns this idea, teaching that all the traits of the Buddha are present within our lives from the beginning.

*Kyo* literally means sutra and here indicates the Mystic Law likened to a lotus flower, the fundamental law that permeates life and the universe, the eternal truth. The Chinese character *kyo* also implies the idea of a “thread.” When a fabric is woven, first, the vertical threads are put in place. These represent the basic reality of life. They are the stable framework through which the horizontal threads are woven. These horizontal threads, representing the varied activities of our daily lives, make up the pattern of the fabric, imparting color and variation. The fabric of our lives is comprised of both a fundamental and enduring truth as well as the busy reality of our daily existence with its uniqueness and variety. A life that is only horizontal threads quickly unravels.

These are some of the ways in which the name “Myoho-renge-kyo” describes the Mystic Law, of which our lives are an expression. To chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is an act of faith in the Mystic Law and in the magnitude of life’s inherent possibilities. Throughout his writings, Nichiren emphasizes the primacy of faith. He writes, for instance: “The Lotus Sutra . . . says that one can ‘gain entrance through faith alone’ . . . Thus faith is the basic requirement for entering the way of the Buddha.” The Mystic Law is the unlimited strength inherent in one’s life. To believe in the Mystic Law and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is to have faith in one’s unlimited potential. It is not a mystical phrase that brings forth supernatural power, nor is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo an entity transcending ourselves that we rely upon. It is the principle that those who live normal lives and make consistent efforts will duly triumph.

To chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is to bring forth the pure and fundamental energy of life, honoring the dignity and possibility of our ordinary lives.
Introducing Common Threads, a tumblr page hosted by the SGI, with the aim of generating interest in topics related to the development of a culture of peace and stimulating a growing network of global citizens active in the pursuit of peace. The blog features articles written by a diverse range of contributors in the hope of providing a space for sustained dialogue and for exploring creative responses to a changing world.

Visit Common Threads at commonthreads.sgi.org.

We welcome you to join the conversation by following us on tumblr and liking, reblogging and commenting on posts. If you are interested in contributing an article or recommending a contributor, please contact us at quarterly@sgi.org.
The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a lay Buddhist association promoting peace, culture and education based on the profound respect for the dignity of life. SGI members uphold the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism and are active in 192 countries and territories.

As Buddhists with a shared understanding of the inseparable linkages between individual happiness and the realization of a peaceful world, SGI members strive to actualize their inherent potential while contributing to their local communities and responding to common issues facing humankind. Our efforts toward the creation of a culture of peace are based on a steadfast commitment to dialogue, nonviolence and a sense of global citizenship nurtured through our daily Buddhist practice.

As a nongovernmental organization with formal ties to the United Nations, the SGI also collaborates with other civil society organizations and intergovernmental agencies in the fields of nuclear disarmament, human rights, sustainable development, humanitarian affairs and interfaith dialogue.