

# Buddhism: Looking for Hope

*An essay by SGI President Ikeda which summarized the key themes of the January 26, 2003 Peace Proposal, "A Global Ethic of Coexistence: Toward a 'Life-Sized' Paradigm for Our Age."*

Citizens everywhere today are demanding that their leaders make choices to advance the cause of peace. Having seen the end of the Cold War, they are deeply concerned that our world seems poised on the edge of a new and even more ominous "clash"-one based on cultural and religious difference.

They are disturbed by the grotesque imbalance between our powers of destruction and our failing ethical capacity for empathy and self-restraint. They recoil at the bizarre sight of million-dollar missiles flying over the heads of people subsisting on one or two dollars per day. They sense that such a world is dangerously askew.

But I firmly believe that such a clash of civilizations is not inevitable. It can and must be avoided. I believe that people possess immense and untapped resources-including the capacity to bring forth a creative, dynamic harmony from the sometimes baffling diversity of our world.

The key to this is a new ethic of coexistence, one that encourages appreciation of our interconnection, the awareness that what impacts any one member of the human family impacts us all. This in turn requires that we refocus on individual human beings, that we establish a "life-sized" paradigm or approach.

When people are presented with the realities of other people's lives, feelings of connection and empathy naturally arise. This is why war and violence always start with efforts to dehumanize the "enemy." This is why the media in any country will portray "our" suffering in detail, while minimizing or ignoring the misery inflicted on the anonymous mass that is "them."

If we travel in imagination to enemy lands, follow in our minds the lives of those on the other side of the TV screen, we find people no different from ourselves. Like us, they seek the ordinary joys of fellowship and love, celebrate the vibrant growth of children, pray that their parents may enjoy security and health.

This is the reality, the fabric of ordinary lives, that war-that terrorism and all forms of violence-destroys, leaving only gray misery in its wake. For, in the end, we are talking of the violent deaths of loved ones. Behind the computer game-like graphics are real human beings, just like us-someone's son or daughter, someone's best friend or lover. The buildings may be rebuilt, but the wounds and scars of violence never really heal.

Genuine leadership in the 21st century must be based on a solid commitment to protecting the precious fabric of daily life. The ordinary citizens of the world are raising their voices to insist that all decisions-including the political, military and economic-be made with these human realities firmly in view. The common cause of human happiness is the strongest basis for human solidarity. In a world of intimate interconnection, solidarity cannot be limited to just one group or nation. It must embrace all people everywhere.

This is not, I am firmly convinced, empty idealism. I do not believe that the very real differences of culture and worldview need separate us in some insurmountable way.

Such a "life-sized" paradigm is at the same time cosmic in its outlook. When we truly focus on individual human beings, we can see each person as manifesting unique aspects of a universe of human possibility-and doing so in an invaluable and irreplaceable manner. The same can be said of each culture or tradition. Each is a brilliant "wave" dancing on the oceanic depths of our common humanity.

Peace will not come from passive waiting. It must be worked for with energy and focus. The greatest "weapon" of those who would create peace is dialogue, the refusal to abandon the capacity for language that makes us human. Dialogue and communication-whatever the immediate outcome-is in itself an act of faith in our humanity. It is this faith that we must ceaselessly work to strengthen and confirm. The struggle to understand and be understood requires that each of us return to the deepest sources of our humanity, beyond differences of history, culture or creed.

For it is there-and in the quiet aspirations of daily life-that we will find answers to the daunting challenges that face us.

Additional quotes:

"Each of us has infinite power to change the world – the power of hope; the power of imagination; the power of connection; and the power of dialogue. "

"A great revolution in the life of a single individual can change an entire society. It can even make possible a positive transformation in the destiny of humankind."