

## **Bodhisattvas for the Earth – the Buddhist response to the climate crisis**

Talk by Robert Harrap, SGI-UK General Director

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 at 7.00pm

### **1 Introduction**

Thank you very much for joining this webinar to hear about the Buddhist response to the climate crisis. There are, of course, many important issues we are all facing in this year when our activities have been transformed by Covid-19, and our awareness of prejudice and privilege has rightly been put under the spotlight by the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement which merits its own consideration on another occasion.

I am giving this particular talk now in October 2020 because in a little over a year's time the UK will be hosting COP26, the climate change conference in Glasgow in November 2021. This is going to be a very important event for our future, and SGI-UK as well as other faith organisations will have an important role in contributing to the discourse, and hopefully influencing any decisions which the global policy makers make on behalf of all humanity. This is the time, then, to deepen our understanding of the contribution that Buddhist philosophy can make to discussions on the environment and the climate crisis and to share it more widely.

First of all, I should acknowledge that I am not a climate scientist, so I will avoid making pronouncements on current perspectives on the state of the planet, although I do feel very strongly about the state of the world as I understand it. And when I make references in this talk to Buddhist philosophy it will be from the Nichiren Buddhist tradition as understood by Soka Gakkai International. I have tried to avoid jargon, both scientific and Buddhist, but I will be trying to explain some important Buddhist principles which I believe are relevant and useful to understand. And although I will cover a lot in forty minutes, I may not cover everything. There is a lot written on this issue, so if you are interested to find out more, there are more materials for you to read.

Recently on the BBC, David Attenborough presented another hour-long prime-time tv documentary about the loss of biodiversity in a programme called 'Extinction – the facts'<sup>1</sup>. In it he explained how various factors have led to the current loss of biodiversity with an enormous number of species already extinct or threatened with extinction, and the causes he mentioned included the

growing human population and increased consumption, over-fishing, degraded soil, pollution, destruction of habitats, and climate change. Unless there are significant changes, we are on track for a catastrophic global rise in temperatures. The evidence is clear that melting ice caps cause sea levels to rise, and other factors such as the reduction in pollinators and other insects affect the food chain around the planet. It's also accepted that in the 200 years since the industrial revolution, levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere have dramatically increased higher than at any time in human history. We are being encouraged to acknowledge that there is global heating, rather than global warming, and recognise that we are facing a genuine, serious and urgent crisis about the future of the planet which could, if they carry on, become a hothouse. We have seen extreme weather events around the world and even in the UK this year, including flooding in Wales and Yorkshire and elsewhere.

In this talk I will set out the Buddhist ideas which give us the philosophical and ethical framework for understanding our relationship with the natural environment, why things have got out of harmony, and then I will talk about actions for the present and future based on that understanding.

## **2 The Significance of *The Taplow Court Declaration of April 1992* (Pre-UNCED Conference with UNESCO and CHEC)**

First, though, what are our credentials for SGI-UK to be discussing this topic? Buddhism has always looked at the interconnectedness of all things, and the Buddha taught that there would be problems if we do not care for the environment. Respect for the environment is a principle that goes back to the beginning of Buddhism: Shakyamuni Buddha taught people not to cut down trees unnecessarily and also not to destroy seeds.

The founder of the Soka Gakkai, an educator called Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, wrote a book published in 1903 called *A Geography of Human Life*<sup>ii</sup>, which described an ethical and spiritual relationship between humanity and our environment. He also suggested a new approach which he called humanitarian competition, where individuals and social groups would compete amongst themselves to see who could bring the most benefit to others and the wider world. Daisaku Ikeda, the third president, and honorary president of Soka Gakkai International, has been contributing articles, papers and proposals on this issue for decades, and his writings have been a huge influence in this talk tonight. Finally, SGI has been actively raising awareness of these issues in different ways,

but particularly through exhibitions, such as the 'Seeds of Hope' exhibition<sup>iii</sup> which has been shown around the world.

As well as the points from Buddhist philosophy which we will explore shortly, there is also one event from the 1990s which we in SGI-UK should be aware of. In April 1992, ahead of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that took place in Rio in August of the same year, SGI-UK, together with UNESCO and the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, hosted a Pre-UNCED Conference on Sustainable Development at our national headquarters, Taplow Court, in Buckinghamshire.

The Conference's conclusions on the issues of the influences of ecology, economics, education, ethics and culture on sustainable development are embraced in what was called The Taplow Court Declaration which was presented at the United Nations Conference on Environment (UNCED) in Rio. Points in the Declaration stressed the absolute necessity of the inclusion of the voices of women, indigenous peoples and youth in the discourse around ecology and environmental issues. The Taplow Court Declaration states that 'recognition of the interdependence of all life forms with the unity and solidarity of humankind must be the basis on which the environment is protected and development sustained.' This declaration helped to orient the basic spirit of the entire Rio Declaration and found concrete expression in its action plan as set forth in Agenda 21. These points also contributed to the eventual creation of the Earth Charter. It urges the instigation of a law of ecocide and an international framework of laws and regulations. Some of these points have since been implemented, but not all of them. The full text of the Taplow Court Declaration can be read on SGI-UK's members' website. For this talk, among other sources, I will be drawing on some of the papers which formed part of that conference.

### **3 Philosophy and ethics around Nichiren Buddhist views on the environment, and the climate crisis**

Now I will start looking at the main Buddhist principles which help us to understand what our relationship is with the environment, how our actions affect the environment, and how we are affected by negative influences in the environment. There is a reading list which you will find on the SGI-UK website which will suggest more information about all of these topics.

There are two approaches in this part of the talk. There are the ethics which we as Buddhists aspire to bring to life in our actions, and then there is the problem

when other people in the world live by different standards. The issue is this – while we may be doing our best to make a positive contribution to the situation, there are others who seem oblivious to the urgency of the issue. How can we respond in this situation?

### **The Three Poisons of Greed, Anger and Foolishness**

Buddhism teaches us about the Three Poisons<sup>iv</sup>, which are not substances or chemicals, but human responses to life which have a negative effect. They are greed, anger and foolishness. A greedy person may acquire a lot of material wealth, but the teachings of Buddhism tell us that this doesn't mean that he or she is happy. What are called 'the treasures of the storehouse' are a lot less important than 'the treasures of the body' and even these are in turn less important than the spiritual 'treasures of the heart.'<sup>v</sup>

Greed is a desire for more that leads to over-consumption, anger leads to conflict, aggression and violence, and foolishness results in short-sighted and deluded decision-making. Each of them can easily result in excess, unwanted pollution. We see that when a person or a society is dominated by greed, egotistic anger and foolishness there will be a harmful effect not only on those people and others around them, but also on the natural environment. Unless we restrain and cleanse ourselves of the three poisons through a process of self-mastery, they will just become even more rampant and spiral out of control. However, we believe that when someone instead bases their life on positive ethics, their approach to nature cannot fail to become a gentle one, causing the least possible disturbance to the ecosystem and developing the aspiration to live in harmony with it.

So an important part of this talk is about this idea of self-mastery: how we can recognise the three poisons in ourselves, as well as minimising them in our own lives, and do what we can to minimise them throughout society until we create a tipping point in favour of more positive human qualities: compassion, wisdom and courage, as well as gratitude and humility? One of the Buddhist teachings called the 'Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra' lists four debts of gratitude which humans should consider repaying: they are the debt to one's parents who enabled one's birth, the debt to the sovereign who should be ensuring that one's country is safe and harmonious, the debt to the treasures of Buddhism which enable a person to attain enlightenment, and the debt to all living beings – not just humans, but all living beings of all types<sup>vi</sup>. Showing this kind of gratitude is evidence that the process of self-mastery is underway.

## **Interconnectedness – the metaphor of Indra’s net**

Soon after his enlightenment the Buddha explained how all phenomena are connected in a great and complex web of overlapping and mutually interacting elements. This connection is explained in different ways, through principles such as dependent origination<sup>vii</sup>, which is also sometimes called interdependent arising, and the metaphor of Indra’s net<sup>viii</sup>. Indra is the Buddhist god who represents the natural forces which protect and nurture life. The parable in the Buddhist teachings where this is described tell us that above Indra’s palace there is an enormous net, where at every knot there is tied a brightly coloured jewel. Perhaps you can imagine that in your mind. An enormous net shimmering with the brilliant colours of the jewels tied at every knot. Each jewel contains and reflects the image of all the other jewels in the net which sparkles in the magnificence of its totality. When a single cord is pulled, each and every jewel throughout the net sparkles beautifully. No part of the net is not affected. This metaphor tells us that in life, we are all connected, and our relationship with the environment is also intimately close. Buddhism sees the relationships of all things in the universe not as a still, static image, but as the dynamic pulsing of creative life. This principle is also used to explain that one person can positively affect the whole web of interconnected life and how one person can affect a change on a variety of levels in society, across humanity and in nature.

## **Oneness of self and the environment – *esho funi***

Our relationship with the environment is often explained through the principle with the principle called in Japanese *esho funi*<sup>ix</sup>, or the oneness of self (or life) and the environment. Nichiren Daishonin wrote that:

‘Environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body, no shadow can exist, and without life, no environment. In the same way, life is shaped by its environment.’<sup>x</sup>

We should be clear that this is not suggesting a hierarchy – that the body is superior and the shadow inferior. The point this simile is making is that when the body moves, the shadow immediately responds. Looking at my own life, I can see that I am me, and I find myself in a particular place. I can move around, and if I want to I can move to a different place. On one level, I am one thing and the environment is another. I am supported and influenced by the environment and my actions have an effect on the environment. This is one of the main aspects of dependent origination.

So from a basic perspective the environment and I are two things. But the Buddhist view is that there on a deeper level there is oneness. We might see this as something like a symbiotic relationship between the self and the environment. Symbiosis means a mutually beneficial relationship. But Buddhism suggests that it is more than just mutually beneficial, and that both of these two apparently different things have the same source.

The 'e' of *esho* stands for *eho* or the objective environment, which means the place where I find myself. 'Sho' of *esho* stands for *shoho* or subjective life entity. This can mean one individual person, or collectively all living beings making up a community or society. *Funi* is short for a longer phrase which translates as 'two but not two'. This expression therefore means that self and the environment appear to be two but they are actually so profoundly connected there is a oneness. If you're hearing this for the first time, what I'm about to say may be the hardest part of this talk to grasp. A principle called 'three thousand realms in a single moment of life' tells us that both the individual and the environment are inherent in a single moment, so each contains the other, and at the same time each pervades the other<sup>xi</sup>.

In fact, the Buddhist view is that both the self and the environment arise out of what it calls the universal law, or cosmic life force. While they appear to be two separate phenomena, they are one in essence because they both emerge out of the same core universal life.

To put these complicated ideas more simply, we are taught that the environment mirrors what is going on in our lives, and our lives are deeply affected by what happens in the environment. The positive message from this principle of *esho funi* is it shows us that people can influence and reform their environment through an inner change, or by elevating their inner life condition. Nichiren Daishonin, the founder of this Buddhist tradition, says:

The Vimalakīrti Sutra ... also states that, if the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.<sup>xii</sup>

To explain the question of whether our minds are good or evil, and if they are negative, what we can do about it, Nichiren Buddhism emphasises the importance of the life state of the individual, and collectively, the life state of a society. This is explained in a principle called the Ten Worlds which I will briefly

mention here and expand on later<sup>xiii</sup>. It explains that each of us is capable of responding to what is going in life through one of ten different psychological responses, or life states. While we are capable of negative and destructive actions when motivated by greed, anger and foolishness as mentioned a moment ago, with our Buddhist practice we can also raise our life state and reveal the compassionate and altruistic state of the Bodhisattva and the dynamically positive state of the Buddha.

### **The Dignity of Life**

This leads me to talk about a phrase which my mentor, Daisaku Ikeda, has used in a secular sense to explain the life state of the Buddha: the dignity of life. In 1972 and 1973 Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International came to London to have a series of conversations with British historian Arnold Toynbee, and their dialogue was published under the title 'Choose Life'<sup>xiv</sup>. They looked at lots of different issues that were relevant at the time, such as the Cold War, the Space Race and social matters such as health and medicine. There is a whole chapter where they discuss issues around the environment as they were viewed in the early 1970s. In a section in that chapter called 'Ending Environmental Pollution', Daisaku Ikeda makes this brief statement which is actually a very profound conclusion:

'We must adopt the standpoint that the awareness of the dignity of life must be the basic principle on which all our actions rest.'<sup>xv</sup>

This is such an important line. We must adopt the standpoint that the awareness of the dignity of life must be the basic principle on which all our actions rest. It means that whatever we do in life – in all areas, not just concerning the environment – should be based on the awareness of the existence of the enlightened potential in every other person, including the potential in the world around us, and that therefore our actions must be imbued with unconditional respect for that potential.

In the same section of 'Choose Life,' Daisaku Ikeda also refers to the 'important principle that both life and the dignity that is inherent in it can be supported only in harmony with nature.' Again, this may seem self-evident, but was clearly not a common view in the second half of the twentieth century.

The phrase 'the dignity of life' is an important one in Daisaku Ikeda's work, especially in his dialogues with people from other traditions. While everyone, regardless of their faith perspective would accept the importance of human

dignity, Daisaku Ikeda gives the phrase a specific relevance. He is referring to the principle in Nichiren Buddhism that every single human life has the potential to manifest the qualities of the Buddha, that we all have the Ten Worlds and we all have the Buddha nature, the deepest and most important of what are called the Nine Consciousnesses<sup>xvi</sup>. I will explain more about the Ten Worlds later on.

### **The source of 'the Dignity of Life' in the Lotus Sutra**

To repeat again that phrase from 'Choose Life': We must adopt the standpoint that the awareness of the dignity of life must be the basic principle on which all our actions rest. We find the source of Daisaku Ikeda's understanding of the 'dignity of life' in the Lotus Sutra<sup>xvii</sup>. In The Lotus Sutra, the Mahayana teaching which is the foundation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the Buddha Shakyamuni explains a deeper understanding of the Law or Dharma than he has taught before. This 'never before revealed Law' is not named, but its qualities and attributes are set out. The Buddha says that the Law is 'the true aspect of all phenomena' or 'shoho jisso' in the Kumarajiva translation into classical Chinese. He lists ten factors of 'shoho jisso,' each of which is a function of the law: it has appearance, nature and entity. A life entity has power and thereby has influence on the world around it, and operates making causes and receiving effects. From 'shoho jisso' we see not only an explanation of the workings of life, but also the beginnings of an ethical and moral framework.

The passage of the Lotus Sutra which is the basis for an understanding of the dignity of life is in the middle of the 'Expedient Means' second chapter. It makes it clear that all living beings have the potential to be Buddhas already in their lives:

The buddhas, the world-honoured ones, wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, to allow them to attain purity. That is why they appear in the world. They wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to cause living beings to awaken to the Buddha wisdom and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. Shariputra, this is the one great reason for which the buddhas appear in the world.<sup>xviii</sup>

If people didn't have the Buddha wisdom or Buddha nature already in their lives, it would not be possible to open it, be shown it, awaken to it, or enter the path

based on it. And everyone, whether they are a Buddhist or not, has this latent Buddha wisdom. This is the dignity of life.

Going back to the earlier principle, if 'shoho jisso' is the true aspect of all phenomena, then it is the Law that explains not only the workings of our lives, but also how society works, and indeed with great relevance for this talk, the workings of the external environment, the planet we live on, and the wider universe. While Shakyamuni explained what the Law does and can do, it was Nichiren Daishonin in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Japan who specifically named the Law as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and enabled people to harness the Law in their lives, drawing out their enlightened potential<sup>xix</sup>. Through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo we believe that we tap the reservoir of the Buddha nature and naturally draw on the innate wisdom, compassion, courage, dynamism and life force of the Buddha which is otherwise latent within our lives.

The influence of revealing our enlightened self is felt personally, and also by those around us. It also affects the place we are located. This refers to what we call the Three Realms: the individual self, society and the environment.<sup>xx</sup>

In Daisaku Ikeda's dialogue with Hazel Henderson, called 'Planetary Citizenship,'<sup>xxi</sup> he brings together these principles: the Buddha nature, the oneness of the inner life within us and the outer life in the environment and the principle of dependent origination. He says,

Buddhism locates a vast cosmos deep within human life. This cosmos contains a boundless treasure or goodness, reverently called the 'Buddha nature'. This radiant nature is inherent in all living things. Each inner cosmos is one with the evolving greater external universe. In Buddhist terms, the great universe and the self – the great macrocosm and the microcosm – are one. Since the self and all phenomena are one, all things are inter-related. Termed *dependent origination*, this teaching explains that all things weave a single whole in which individuals live in relation to all others.

In other words, all beings and phenomena exist or occur because of their relationship with other beings and phenomena, and nothing in either the human or the nonhuman world exists in isolation. All things are mutually related to and interdependent with all other things. They all form a great cosmos maintaining the rhythms of life.<sup>xxii</sup>

This is echoed in the series of books called *The New Human Revolution*<sup>xxiii</sup>, where Shin'ichi Yamamoto (the pen name for Daisaku Ikeda in this novelised account of the development of the Soka Gakkai International movement) is asked in 1961 by a German businessman how Buddhist humanism is different to the European tradition of humanism and he explains:

“That's a very astute question,” Shin'ichi replied. “They are the same in that both respect and value the human being. One difference, however, is that Buddhism does not regard human beings as masters of the Earth destined to conquer and subjugate Nature and all other life. Instead, it views the universe as a single living entity, of which humans are only a small part – a microcosm within the macrocosm, so to speak. Buddhism perceives human beings and all other life, as well as the environment and phenomena surrounding them, as linked in a web of mutually interdependent and harmonious relationships, all of which serve to support and maintain life.

“What would happen if human beings, out of their arrogance in believing themselves masters of the planet, were to use their vast technological knowledge to level all our forests, drive all animals into extinction, pollute the oceans and destroy our natural environment? It would then be very difficult for people to sustain their own existence. One characteristic feature of Buddhist humanism, therefore, is that it does not polarize relationships into such adversarial pairs such as ‘us’ and ‘them,’ or human beings versus the environment, us versus our surroundings, including all other animals and plants. It views everything as interrelated and seeks to create human happiness based on harmonizing these relationships. In that respect, Buddhism could perhaps be called a kind of cosmic humanism.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

### **The Ten Worlds – transforming from the Three Poisons to Bodhisattva action and Buddhahood**

This talk's title includes the world ‘bodhisattva’ and this word describes close followers of the Buddha. They were trained to become experts in taking compassionate action towards other people and the environment. They could see suffering, and they knew how to soothe people's suffering and replace that painful condition with something positive.

In his 1990 paper *The Environmental Problem and Buddhism*, Daisaku Ikeda explains that:

In Buddhist terminology, the way human beings ought to live in order to fulfil our universe-entrusted mission is called the way of the bodhisattva. Human beings live in many ways diversified as a result of different value criteria. We can allow egoism and greed to drive us into acts that harm others and destroy the natural ecology. At the same time, we are capable of leading altruistic, compassionate and wise lives.<sup>xxv</sup>

Daisaku Ikeda then goes on to describe the Ten Worlds, or states of life which we all have as potentials within us, with particular emphasis on the effect of each on the environment. We are all capable of manifesting these conditions, if we experience the stimulus to do so. Hell he describes as 'a state dominated by hatred and destructive impulses.' Hunger is 'a state in which the individual is incapable of self-control and driven by excessive and rampant greed. Animality is where the individual acts on instinct and is spiritually short-sighted and devoid of powers of rational judgment. Anger is where the ego has grown to vast proportions and is engulfed by desire for control, power and fame. Daisaku Ikeda says:

People in these four states lack the mental energy to see things from other people's viewpoints and find value only in living for the satisfaction of their own greedy desires.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Earlier, we referred to the Three Poisons of greed, anger and foolishness. These emerge when our lives operate from the worlds of Hunger, Anger and Animality.

The next two states are not so negative, but have both good and bad aspects. Humanity is characterised by affection for relatives and friends and by the desire to live in peace and in accordance with ethical precepts. In Heaven or Rapture joy is experienced as a consequence of the fulfilment of all desire for material well-being, position and fame. Daisaku Ikeda says of these first six of the ten worlds:

The Six Paths centre on desire and are marked by no awareness of the meaning of the natural ecological system or humanity's essential mission.<sup>xxvii</sup>

While desire has contributed to the development of material civilisation, and brings relief from poverty and hunger, today in the industrialised nations, desire

frequently manifests its negative aspects in ways that exert profound global influences.

Daisaku Ikeda describes the extreme – note, extreme – aspect of desire as found in the world of Heaven in accord with Buddhism’s description of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven:

[The life state of] heaven is characterised by the evil will to control and conquer other beings and the world of nature and by self-centred greed which leads to the destruction of life for both the self and the other. Modern scientific-technological civilisation is darkly dyed with a similar evil will that confronts humanity and the natural ecology with the threat of annihilation.<sup>xxviii</sup>

We have looked at the six lower worlds, and we can defeat these negative aspects of life by raising our life state to what are known as the four higher worlds.

The next pair of life states are Learning and Realisation where individuals strive to remain free of the control of desires but do not make deliberate efforts to perform altruistic acts. In a sense although they require effort, and are in some senses are better than the first six, these are states of personal tranquillity isolated from the real world.

Bodhisattvas though, manifesting the ninth world, delight in taking positive action. Daisaku Ikeda explains that:

Bodhisattvas confront the crises of human life in actual society and live for the sake of the happiness of others as well as for their own happiness. They are profoundly aware of their own meaning within the complexities and interweavings of the Humanity-Nature ecological system. From the viewpoint of the life that is the source of the universe – called the Buddha nature – they observe the dignity of the lives of all beings as they grow and develop in the vastness of the phenomenal world unfolding in space and time.<sup>xxix</sup>

This Bodhisattva/Buddha approach, based on the dignity of life, is the ideal which will benefit not only the individual, but also society and the environment. When we earlier talked about the three poisons which include greed, hopefully we could see this is excessive desire. Nichiren Buddhism teaches not that we should eradicate desires, but that from the enlightened perspective we can

harness and sublimate them for a greater, higher purpose. This happens when we are able to stimulate and activate our Buddha nature, the fundamental energy of life to secure not only a benefit for ourselves but also for others and the wider world.

Daisaku Ikeda goes on to say that:

Bodhisattvas react in a moral and sympathetic way not merely with human beings, but also with the whole natural ecology. Controlling egoism and delusion for the sake of all living beings, they consider creating value for the lives of others and for the global biosphere their own reason for living and indeed the supreme way of life. For this reason, their actions are always altruistically inspired.

Bodhisattvas live for the sake of the future, which they strive to understand ahead of time through compassion and wisdom. They work to amplify the creative vitality of the Earth's biosphere and to make full use of scientific technology and our social systems for the sake of our children and of still unborn emissaries from the universal life force.

Ideas arising from that universal life force and from the future are characteristic qualities of bodhisattva-like human beings. Since this is the case, surely each individual on Earth today should be encouraged to follow the bodhisattva approach to life. Such bodhisattvas could unite to form a solidarity of citizens of the Earth. And a mass movement of wise, compassionate people who keep posterity always in mind could build a society that respects human dignity and rights, and prizes creativity in its scientific, economic and legal systems. The birth of such a society would signal the dawn of a brilliant century of life.<sup>xxx</sup>

Here then is a key part of the answer: increasing the number of people around the world who take action as bodhisattvas, and create a solidarity of citizens of the Earth who respect the dignity of life.

### **Global Prayer, Inner Transformation and Dialogue – from ‘On Establishing the Correct Teaching...’**

This summer SGI-UK members have been studying Nichiren Daishonin's seminal treatise ‘On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land’ or in Japanese, *Rissho Ankoku Ron*.<sup>xxxii</sup> This text, written in 1260 Japan as a dialogue, explains how the underlying philosophy of the government had failed to protect

the ordinary people. By replacing that failed way of governing with one based on the dignity of life, Nichiren explains, the people will become happier and the land will become safer. We can see in this writing a three stage process that Nichiren wishes us to absorb and apply.

Having explained the misery of the people who have experienced pestilence, extreme weather events, earthquakes and the threat of invasion, Nichiren talks about a remedy which has three stages: prayer, inner transformation and the power of dialogue to have a positive influence on others. This text shows us through a dialogue how someone concerned about the state of the world is persuaded to find the depths of their own inner potential, and to then encourage others in turn.

Nichiren Daishonin starts the process of transformation by explaining how important it is to have a broad – even a global – focus. About prayer he writes:

If the nation is destroyed and people's homes are wiped out, then where can one flee for safety? If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?<sup>xxxii</sup>

Rather than just being focussed on ourselves, or our families or our own local area, we should stretch our awareness and pray for the four quarters – the whole world. About the process of inner transformation, he explains what is necessary to do, and then describes the impact on the world around us:

Therefore, you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine [of the Lotus Sutra]. If you do so, then the threefold world will become the Buddha land, and how could a Buddha land ever decline? The regions in the ten directions will all become treasure realms, and how could a treasure realm ever suffer harm? If you live in a country that knows no decline or diminution, in a land that suffers no harm or disruption, then your body will find peace and security, and your mind will be calm and untroubled. You must believe my words; heed what I say!<sup>xxxiii</sup>

## **Human Revolution**

'Reforming the tenets that we hold in our hearts' describes the process of inner transformation which we in the SGI now call 'human revolution'. Daisaku Ikeda has said of this process:

A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, can even enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In 'Planetary Citizenship', the dialogue with Hazel Henderson, Daisaku Ikeda quotes Aurelio Peccei, the founder of the Club of Rome who said:

Although our external resources are limited, the inner wealth of humanity is boundless and the process of human revolution is the key to positive action leading to the adoption of a new course and the revival of human fortunes. ... Dr Peccei and I were of one accord in believing that only a human revolution that reforms our views of the natural world, life and even our values has the power to alter human destiny.<sup>xxxv</sup>

How do we do this 'human revolution'? In 'Choose Life', the dialogue with Arnold Toynbee, Daisaku Ikeda said that one must devise a way of tapping the power that lies deeper than consciousness. The deep meaning of human revolution is for us to tap the reservoir of the Buddha nature and reveal the qualities of the Buddha through our actions in our daily lives. In the Nichiren Buddhist tradition, the way to do this is to chant the phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo which Nichiren taught is the key to summon and manifest the positive power that is at the deepest level of life. When we chant this phrase with a determination to see a transformation in the world around us, we draw out the qualities of the Buddha so they imbue our actions in our daily lives.

And the conclusion of the dialogue in *Rissho Ankoku Ron* results in the person who is most confused about the situation they all face developing a deep understanding, undergoing a profound change, and then seeing that he needs to take action as a result. He says:

The texts you have cited are perfectly clear on this point, and their arguments are detailed—they leave no room for doubt. From now on, with your kind instruction to guide me, I wish to continue dispelling the ignorance from my mind. I hope we may set about as quickly as possible taking measures to deal with these slanders against the Law and to bring peace to the world without delay, thus insuring that we may live in safety in this life and enjoy good fortune in the life to come. But it is not enough that I alone should accept and have faith in your words—we must see to it that others as well are warned of their errors.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The reference to ‘slanders against the Law’ means anything which denies the dignity of life, whether it applies to a person, or to the world we live in. This whole writing is about the power of dialogue. At the end, the person who started anxious and confused about what is happening in the world is aware of his own inner potential to affect change, and is keen to encourage others to see what they can do too.

So we have looked at some Buddhist principles: the three poisons, interconnectedness, oneness of self and the environment, the dignity of life, the ten worlds, and then guidance from 13<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist reformer Nichiren Daishonin on expanding our scope, focus or prayer, undergoing an inner transformation by reforming the tenets or principles by which we live our lives, and using dialogue as the process to raise awareness in the world around us. With these resources, let’s look at what we might actually do.

#### **4 Actions and Behaviours – how angry should we be?**

The Lotus Sutra includes a parable which describes a burning house which represents the world being engulfed by the flames of the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness.<sup>xxxvii</sup> It’s useful to have this image of something that is happening to our beautiful planet and could get irreparably worse if we don’t all make a change to our attitudes and our behaviour. It’s an image which I am sure will spur all of us to be proactive.

There has been a very clear message from people concerned about planet Earth for at least fifty years. In the late 1960s, people like Aurelio Peccei were noticing that the greedy desire for growth in the industrial nations would one day outstrip the planet’s finite resources. Peccei founded the Club of Rome in order to bring together people from different areas of life: business, politics, economics, science and so on in order to look what he called the world *problématique*. It was clear that the resolution would not just take place in one discipline, but required a cross-disciplinary approach. A book, ‘Limits to Growth’ was published by the Club of Rome in 1972, the same year that Daisaku Ikeda came to London to meet with Arnold Toynbee for the first of two occasions. The dialogue that Daisaku Ikeda held with Aurelio Peccei in the early 1980s is published under the title ‘Before it is too late’ and is a very detailed and useful resource for understanding the contribution Buddhism can make.<sup>xxxviii</sup> As a result of the dialogue, Peccei adopted the idea of ‘human revolution’ as a key part of the necessary remedy. (Interestingly, the current co-president of the Club of Rome, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, has also advocated the need for ‘human

revolution, equating it with 'ubuntu,' the transformative South African spirit of humanist equality and respect.)

And other people, James Lovelock, Rachel Carson, EF Schumacher and others – not least David Attenborough - have been raising concerns for many years, many decades. Shouldn't we be angry that these people, and others whose careful research and conclusions have been ignored so flagrantly by governments, businesses and others in positions of influence?

Yes, we should be angry.

But what sort of angry response should we manifest? Earlier we talked about the Ten Worlds and anger was one of those. A development of that principle teaches us that each of the life states in the ten worlds contains the potential to manifest the other nine, and this is called the Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds.<sup>xxxix</sup> We all have a basic or default life condition, which is one of the ten worlds. We then experience the other worlds through the lens of that life condition. If someone is basically tranquil, their anger will be a calm, laid back anger. If someone is mainly in hell state, their anger will be rage, destructive towards not only the environment but also self-damaging. If an angry person, dominated by their ego is angry, then their anger will be based on a sense of superiority, that the object of anger has lesser value – this will also be destructive. None of these are useful, or value creating responses to the crisis we face.

If we are going to be angry, in order for our message to create value and be heard we need to manifest our anger as Bodhisattvas, or ideally from the state of Buddhahood. The Buddha does get angry, but it is an anger that creates value. The enlightened anger of the Buddha speaks out against injustice, and is heard. It uses dialogue to shine a light on all aspects of a discussion and enables all parties to see to the heart of the matter. In this year's Peace Proposal to the United Nations<sup>xl</sup>, Daisaku Ikeda refers to Christiana Figueres, who played a key role in the Paris climate conference (COP21) as executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and who now heads Mission 2020, an initiative aimed at ensuring the Paris Agreement goals are met, and in the Proposal quotes her as saying:

Young people know that change is not impossible and that is why they are expressing outrage at the slow pace of efforts to prevent global warming;

and that moving forward, if the outrage is married with optimism, we can expect something even more powerful to emerge.<sup>xli</sup>

Christiana Figueres visited the Soka Gakkai headquarters in February of last year. In an article she subsequently contributed to the Seikyo Shimbun newspaper, she reflected on the process of bringing the Paris Agreement into being, even though many had thought this would be impossible. She stressed: “There is no way you can deliver victory without optimism.” Daisaku Ikeda comments:

I can't help but feel that when young people's will to transform reality merges with an indomitable optimism, the possibilities are limitless.<sup>xlii</sup>

Buddhist philosophy provides us with the view that if humans have the power to degrade the earth through their greed and foolishness, then the other side of the coin is that it is also possible for us to take things in a positive direction, with the powerful energy of our wisdom, compassion, courage, life force and creativity.

Regarding the higher worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddha. Daisaku Ikeda in his dialogue with Hazel Henderson, ‘Planetary Citizenship’, describes the action a Bodhisattva would take:

‘The Bodhisattva nature can be interpreted from many angles, but most important is the willing and spontaneous vow, summoned forth from one's entire being, to set others on the road to happiness. This vow is not just wishful thinking; it is a lofty declaration of volunteerism. The bodhisattva remains active in the ordinary world, watching over the unhappy and suffering. The bodhisattva is ready to plunge into the rough waves to save the drowning and put them all on the great vessel that will carry them to safety. In this sense, the bodhisattva is the ultimate humanist. As is said in the Lotus Sutra, the bodhisattva is like a lotus flower blooming in purity out of the muddy water.’<sup>xliii</sup>

So we need to consider again the principles we have talked about this evening. An understanding of the web that connects us and the planet, the dignity of life, the potential to change our life state to the enlightened bodhisattva and for that to be reflected in the three realms. A broad focus or prayer that covers the four quarters of the globe, inner transformation and dialogue to bring others with us. And we must have confidence that as we transform, then these waves of transformation propagate through the web of interconnectedness, and potently impact our immediate surroundings and society as a whole.

We need to be the lotus flower blooming out of the muddy water.

At the end of the parable which describes the burning house, the resolution happens when people adopt the principles set out in the Lotus Sutra.

I'll finish the talk by talking about what we can do as individuals, as SGI-UK collectively and then with other organisations in the wider world.

The starting point of course is the awareness that we are Bodhisattvas for the earth. This means doing what we can to keep our life condition as high as possible.

As individuals we can follow René Dubos' suggestion to 'Think globally, and act locally.'<sup>xliv</sup> We can be careful with our consumption, source our food and consumables carefully, responsibly and sustainably. We can waste less, reduce, reuse and recycle. We can follow the ten actions for individuals recommended by the United Nations on their 'act now' website<sup>xlv</sup> – and if we are already doing them then we can be confident we are making a difference – but let's let our families and friends know about them as well. They include things like recycling and reusing, but also spending shorter time in the shower, and unplugging electrical devices, and thinking about where we source our clothes.

It's also really valuable to get the reassuring perspective we get when we read Daisaku Ikeda's annual peace proposals. They are aimed at the UN, but they also suggest things each of us can do about the important issues of the day. They are also incredibly hope-filled, positive and inspiring documents.

As individuals we have a voice. We can lobby politicians both local and national and encourage positive policies, and challenge unreasonable ones. We can encourage the development of transition towns, and other local initiatives. And there are many other things too.

As SGI-UK we can and will raise awareness of these issues through events like this and other talks which will be arranged, aiming towards COP26 in November 2021. We will continue to promote events like Buddhist Action Month (or BAM!). At Taplow Court and our other centres we are considering how everything we do contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The gardens at Taplow Court are a beautiful example of these principles in action, and we are developing a tree planting programme over the next few years to plant native trees and develop the woodland which will be good for the local wildlife as well as contributing to the lungs of our part of the world.

SGI as an international organisation is working hard to make and develop links with different organisations, such as Earth Charter International, Faith for the Climate, the Club of Rome.

We shouldn't think it's just about SGI or SGI-UK. Many of us are also involved in other organisations in different ways. I attend meetings of organisations like ICAN and the Club of Rome. In his 2015 Peace Proposal, in a section on the rehumanisation of politics and economics, Daisaku Ikeda talked about the power of people when we act together in solidarity. He refers to his friendship with the peace scholar, the late Elise Boulding. He refers to her saying that it is important to devote all-out effort to developing each member of the community. We may worry though that not enough people seem to care. In this very reassuring statement he then says this:

Elise Boulding maintained that the future direction of society is in fact determined by the five per cent who are active and committed. This five per cent ultimately transforms the culture in its entirety. I draw great hope from her confidence.<sup>xlvi</sup>

And I also draw great hope from this confidence. We only need five per cent to be active and committed to transform future direction of society. We may need to go out and find others who share our concerns and our determination to take wise and compassionate action.

There is a lot of work to be done so it is for each of us to think what we can do as an individual, as part of our civil society groups, and together with likeminded individuals and groups.

And let's deepen the confidence that an understanding of these Buddhist principles gives us. We can cause a change, and we can make a positive difference.

Thank you very much for your attention.

#### Endnotes and Links to Further References:

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000mn4n> (link valid to August 2021)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://shop.sgi-uk.org/shop/book/geography-human-life>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.sgi.org/in-focus/2010/seeds-of-hope.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/T/159>

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v More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart! The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, volume 1, p851

vi <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/C/110>

vii <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/D/29>

viii <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/I/28>

ix <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/O/24>

x WND-1, p644

xi <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/T/176>

xii WND-1, p4

xiii <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/T/82>

xiv <https://shop.sgi-uk.org/shop/book/er-series-choose-life>

xv Choose Life, chapter 2

xvi <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/N/62>

xvii <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/lsoc/toc/>

xviii LSOC, p64

xix <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/N/11>

xx <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/T/165>

xxi <https://shop.sgi-uk.org/shop/book/planetary-citizenship>

xxii PC p123

xxiii <https://shop.sgi-uk.org/shop/book/new-human-revolution-volume-1>

xxiv NHR vol 5 Trailblazing Chapter 17

xxv The Journal of Oriental Studies, Vol 3, 1990, Institute of Oriental Philosophy

xxvi *ibid*

xxvii *ibid*

xxviii *ibid*

xxix *ibid*

xxx *ibid*

xxxi <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/wnd-1/Content/2>

xxxii WND-1, p24

xxxiii WND-1, p25

xxxiv <https://www.sgi.org/about-us/president-ikedas-writings/human-revolution.html>

xxxv PC p82

xxxvi WND-1, p26

xxxvii <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/B/114>

xxxviii <https://shop.sgi-uk.org/shop/book/er-series-it-too-late>

xxxix <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/M/143>

xl <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/props/2020-peace-proposal.html>

xli *ibid*

xlii *ibid*

xliiii PC p46-7

xliiv Quoted in PC p65

xlv <https://www.un.org/en/actnow/https://www.un.org/en/actnow/>

xlvi <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/props/2015-peace-proposal.html>