

## Greetings

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**A**T the outset let me congratulate the Institute of Oriental Philosophy on organizing this very important joint symposium on two of the greatest men of our time who have been promoting peace and nonviolence—Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. They both claimed with single-minded devotion that life on this earth will become impossible if we do not cultivate tolerance, respect, promote coexistence and take care of nature. These concerns form the core of the teachings of the great Shakyamuni Buddha and later Nichiren Daishonin, and much later Gandhi and now Dr. Daisaku Ikeda in his relentless pursuit for world peace.

The very fact that the Institute of Oriental Philosophy took this initiative of organizing a joint symposium on the occasion of Dr. G. Ramachandran's birth centenary shows the institute's commitment to peace, and Soka Gakkai's strivings to promote values and Soka Gakkai International's endeavors to world peace and our own concerns for what is happening around us.

On behalf of the five friends who came with me from India, let me thank the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and more its great founder, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, before whom I bow my head in reverence for all what he is doing to promote peace, happiness all over the world and to send the message of brilliance of life everywhere.

I would like to make a few observations before we go into any serious discussion. This time, I do not have a prepared speech or notes for my speech. I thought I should look at your face and talk to you on what is happening around us and what each one of us could do to enrich the quality of life.

When I look at what is happening around, two figures come to my mind. The first figure is certainly Mahatma Gandhi and the second is Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. My road to Gandhi was through Dr. Ramachandran and my father. I had the privilege to associate myself with Dr. Ramachandran for over 28 years in the University that he founded in the name of Gandhi at Gandhigram in Madurai in South India. And

even after he retired from the University and founded the Madhavi Mandiram Loka Seva Trust in his hometown I continued my association with this great Gandhi disciple. He was a revolutionary thinker, activist and founder of several institutions. There are several centers which he founded where young men and women are taught and trained particularly to be humane. Dr. Ramachandran did not want education to become only a process of accumulation of knowledge. He advocated “education for life, education through life, and education by life.”

Ramachandran comes very close to the founder of Soka Gakkai, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Sensei, who advocated an unique system of education for young men and women which will enable them to look at the realities of life and make them fit instruments of empowerment, fit instruments of society for transformation. If we need change, if we need transformation, if we want awakening, we have to make individuals fit instruments of ahimsa, compassion and love. Long ago, Shakyamuni Buddha gave us this message. There are no higher virtues than nonviolence that is ahimsa. Ahimsa, in the true sense of the term also indicates unbounded love.

Ramachandran was a student of Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate. He had the great privilege of being taught and trained by two of the greatest geniuses of that time—Tagore and Gandhi. As a student under Tagore, Ramachandran imbibed methods to control temper by such political insights which are unique, while economical, social concerns and attitudes were shaped, to a large extent, by Gandhi.

So he became inclusively an advocate of two visions of life, and two visions of education—education for life, education for revolution and education for liberation. This was in sharp contrast to the concept of education for bookish knowledge. The university Dr. Ramachandran started in Gandhigram in South India was the center where he put all these insights and experiences and visions which he got from Tagore and Gandhi. And even today, this center continues to be the greatest, ideal and most dedicated center of rural reconstruction and women’s education in India. Tagore’s and Gandhi’s vision of change through education is realized here.

Now, we will come back to the present time. I see a great similarity between Gandhi’s and Soka Gakkai’s vision of social change. As a scholar and a writer, as well as a teacher, I have been seriously trying to analyse these two world visions. The Soka Gakkai, which was founded on the basis of the vision of the 13 century seer, Nichiren Daishonin who held the revolutionary vision that religion is not something divorced from life has been upholding this position of the Daishonin

over the last 75 years since its inception. Religion is a foundation, it is a spring out of which everything that we need to remain humane should come.

Education should give us what we need to make our life worth living. Education is not for some people to research and write books or take degrees. Degrees would help us, diplomas would help us, certification would help us. But then, we should be able to go beyond degrees and diplomas. There is the life, the hard but beautiful life beyond degrees and diplomas. That is the very reality that we are all interrelated.

If you want to discover humanity, you and I should go beyond. We should learn and practice the art of respecting all forms of life, as the Buddhist edicts insist. And most beautiful thing about human life is the reality of diversity. Unfortunately, the one thing that is missing today in modern, globalized, mechanized, and industrialized technologically tuned society is this awareness.

Gandhi realized this even as earlier as 1904 when he started his activity in South Africa. He believed that a machine based civilization will be very dangerous thing for humanity. He wanted human concerns in conformity with the cosmic law become the focus of all changes. He said science and technology should aid humanity in improving its conditions. Mankind should continue to be the master of them, instead of being consigned to a subordinate role.

But how can we do it unless we bring spirituality, morality, ethics and concern for human being in the larger context of our life in harmony with nature in the center of all over strivings? We should have a new attitude, a new humanism. I am happy to see that fortunately these are the chief concerns of Soka Gakkai, particularly with the present SGI President, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, whom all of us call with respect and affection "Ikeda Sensei."

As a student as well as a writer, I have observed commendable similarities between Gandhi's vision of social change, Gandhi's vision of education and Gandhi's vision of the human being as instruments of change and Dr. Ikeda's strivings to interpret Nichiren's teachings in the context of the emerging scenario. I have been deeply studying about the Soka Gakkai's philosophy and education principles and practice. And Dr. Ikeda has been in the forefront of a series of highly commendable initiatives to promote values. Gandhi's vision and Soka Gakkai's movement appear to be two great liberating forces.

Ramachandran started fighting against oppression, against injustice, even when he was a student of Shanti Niketan under Tagore. Right from his childhood young Ramachandran respected the equality of sexes.

Once at Shantiniketan he said in a speech to a group of students, “I love everything here. But I don’t understand why men should feel that they are superior to women.” All his life, Dr. Ramachandran strove to promote gender equality and initiating welfare activities for women empowerment was the core of his major concerns. Three persons who influenced him in this are Gandhi, Gandhi’s wife Kasturba and his own saintly mother, Madhavi Thankachi.

Respecting women and offering equal opportunities to them have been the bases of the Gandhian philosophy. Treating women as equals and empowering them to stand up and face courageously the challenges of everyday life have become the focus of this endeavor. Gandhi said that education philosophy and social activities for women are very important. In Gandhi’s words the quality of a society can be seen not in its technological advancement, nor in its material progress, or in its tall buildings, but in the freedom that women enjoy in its society. He was trying to liberate women from the clutches of age-old prejudices. I see the same concern with the Soka Gakkai. Even in today’s symposium, I see more women than men. Yesterday I had a meeting at which about 80% of the participants were women. In April, when I visited South America, I had occasions to talk at three or four places, the halls were full of women.

Gandhi believed that the only way if you want to make social change a reality and make revolution possible is to encourage women, trust them and give them leadership. In the Centuries we have left behind men have been leading, in the 21 century let women be leaders. In my place, my home, my wife and my mother manage the home, take care of us much better than the way my father and myself could imagine.

Dr. Ikeda’s commitment to women’s empowerment takes him closer to Gandhi. It is something I always admire and respect in Dr. Ikeda.

Another important aspect that connects Gandhi and Ikeda is how they viewed social change as such. Both played the role of liberators. If you want to play the role of a liberator, you have to liberate yourself. We are all victims of prejudice, hatred, our own egoism, our own philosophy. How many of us consider that life is the most precious gift? There is nothing more precious than life. So in order to be a liberators, we have to realize the value of life.

Gandhi started his fight on social and political issues. He wanted the British people who were ruling India get out of India and leave India to Indians. But at the same time, please understand, Gandhi was educating Indians also to respect those people who were ruling India. He said, “I don’t want freedom of India over the blood of the poor English people

who are in India as bread-earners for their families. My fight is directed to educate the English as well as the Indians. My fight is directed to tell the English people: look here, this is not your country, England is your Country. Go back. You go back peacefully.” At the same time, he told, “Look here, these poor British people who are here should not be harmed. You become conscious of your rights, create such situation, you educate yourself, you try to become responsible citizens. By that time, the English people will feel that it is impossible to continue ruling India, they will go.”

The Bible teaches “Hate the evil, hate not the evil-doer.” Evil is to be isolated and fought. But evil doer is an instrument. Sometimes evil doer does not know what he is doing. So separate the evil from the evil doer, you hate the evil, but not the evil doer. Because the evil doer is also a human being, and the creation of the ultimate reality, the God, the creator. That is something fantastic. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who came to know how Gandhi was reinterpreting some of these concepts said, “I have never seen better explanation of the principle of the Bible more suitably than this.” That is how Martin Luther King became a great admirer of Gandhi. In American continent, he adapted Gandhian practices in his fight for civil liberties.

I see in contemporary times, Soka Gakkai is doing the same thing in their understanding of the principle of nonviolence for social action. To Soka Gakkai, and to Buddhists in general, nonviolence is not anything new. Nonviolence and their faith in the concept of ahimsa is an integral part of the total philosophy of the Buddhist vision of life. Respect for life, respect for nature and keenness for developing a social order based on justice and equality are the corner stones of the Buddhist philosophy.

When Gandhi started his campaign for freedom and justice by educating people, he knew one thing very clearly. He found the biggest obstacles coming from orthodoxy represented by those who have hijacked religion for their agenda. Priests particularly believed that religion was their personal property. They have made religion as prison houses. Gandhi realized that religion should be released, liberated from the clutches of the priests. And religion must be made a fit instrument of social change. It has to become the institute of common people. Do you think priests would allow that? No priests. Gandhi had to face quite a lot of opposition. But he was optimistic. Optimism is the highest virtue for any human beings. Gandhi fought courageously. Ultimately Gandhi gained the Victory.

In Japan also, I know, Soka Gakkai leadership has been trying to liberate religion from the priests and make it an institution of the common

people. And I hope the SGI, Soka Gakkai, and all of you will be victorious just like Gandhi was victorious. And I wish you all success.

This joint symposium is a great step towards the understanding of the contribution of great champions of peace like Dr. Ramachandran and Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. We pray for them and let me wish you best of luck. Thank you for listening in patience.