The Global Environment and Theory of Happiness

Yoichi Kawada

1. Introduction—Lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake

DAMAGE caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 originated from the enormous quake itself and devastating tsunami that followed, but also included widespread radiation contamination that resulted from the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.

This triple-disaster has left a deep impression on the hearts of all Japanese people, and one of the first manifestations of an internal change on a national scale appeared in the form of a drastic shift in attitudes toward the definition of happiness. Many of those who had previously emphasized the pursuit of materialistic happiness have come to seek a more spiritual happiness. In other words, the standards for happiness have become much less dependent on financial gain and the acquisition of goods, and more centered on spiritual and psychological forms of happiness such as enrichment of the heart and cherishing the bonds between individuals.

As often is the case following a large disaster such as this, the incidence of those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the aggravation of other "ailments of the heart," including depression, tend to increase greatly. In order to restore the mental health of those affected, and to establish a sense of happiness and security, the warm spiritual support of others are vital.

The people of Japan, having experienced its biggest natural calamity to date, are 1) beginning to realize the fleeting nature of materialistic happiness and yearn to enrich the heart, 2) realizing the importance of developing warm relationships with those around them, and 3) feeling an urgent need to replace the current materialistic civilization that attempts to rule over nature, with an ecological civilization that respects the dignity of the spirit and culture. All of these lessons are of critical importance for the future of human society.

2. In Search of True Happiness

A broad range of wants is inherent within human life from materialistic desires to spiritual, psychological, societal and religious aspirations, and the degree of fulfillment of those wants impacts our experience of happiness.

Therefore, I would like to turn the discussion toward the psychological aspects of happiness using Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs as one model of organization of the desires and aspirations within human beings.

3. Beyond Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow organizes into tiers, various desires within all human beings.

The first tier is composed of "physiological needs." The second tier is composed of "safety needs." The third tier is composed of "belongingness and love needs." The fourth tier is composed of "esteem needs." Maslow groups the first four tiers as basic needs of human beings. Then, when these basic needs are met, a fifth tier composed of the "self-actualization need," is activated. Later in life, Maslow proposed one more tier above self-actualization, called the "need for self-transcendence," and together with Stanislav Grof, he helped establish a new field of psychology called, "transpersonal psychology."

Using Maslow's model as a base, I would like to extend on the regions beyond the individual level by borrowing from Buddhist thought and propose two more tiers above the self-actualization tier when considering the human desire for growth—i.e. the sixth tier, the need for symbiosis of humanity, and the seventh tier, the need to connect to a primordial-cosmic source.

4. Creating a Society of Sustainable Well-being

Buddhist texts reveal a principle needed for human beings to attain happiness and a true sense of wealth in life.

In the *Legacy Teachings Sutra*, a passage reads, "observe the lesson of 'contentment,' as it is the source of wealth, joy and peace. A contented person is happy, if he be lying down on the ground,"[1] and conversely states, "the discontented are poor, having great wealth."[2] This can be taken to mean that "to know contentment" (知足) is to enjoy affluence and happiness, whereas "to be discontented" is to be poor in heart and unhappy, despite possessing abundant material wealth. If we take this

principle of knowing contentment is happiness and wealth, and being discontented is unhappiness and poverty, and apply it to the seven tiers of the needs hierarchy mentioned earlier, the following analysis will result.

Knowing contentment means to lead a life in which all seven tiers of needs from the depths of our lives are completely fulfilled.

Next, I would like to think about and discuss the seven conditions necessary for creating a society where well-being can be continuously sustained.

First, in order for society to fulfill the most fundamental physiological needs, food, water, clothing and shelter must be guaranteed.

Second, meeting safety needs involves providing medical, health care and welfare needs (freedom from illness), as well as freedom from the fear of terrorist attack and crime.

Third, to fulfill love and belongingness needs, a society must guarantee basic education, the freedom to choose one's occupation, and assistance in receiving the necessary training to develop skills for work. Essential for this is the creation of a society of mutual trust.

In the fourth tier esteem needs, individuals awaken to their own dignity, have pride in themselves and enter a phase in which they assert freedom, equality and other basic human rights.

In order to create a society that supports, activates and strengthens the fulfillment of the fifth tier self-actualization need, a system to protect the unique spiritual legacy of that particular society or ethnic group is needed. The rich heritage of views on the way of living, value systems, approaches to life, sense of ethics and morals that are contained within a society's culture, art, thinking, philosophy and ethics are all sources of inspiration for self-actualization. This is why it is necessary for a society to respect spirituality and morality in general. In addition, the natural surroundings of one's immediate environment or a nation are also sources of inspiration for human life.

The sixth tier of needs, which supports actions for the need for symbiosis of humanity or the need to contribute to others, is based on the mutual respect of diverse cultures, ethnic groups, civilizations and religions, and requires a society rich in tolerance, as tolerance is what allows symbiosis and co-existence to take place. On this earth, humanity has created vibrant and diverse ethnic cultures and civilizations, and as they interacted and intermingled with one another, parts of those cultures mutually assimilated, but each also maintained their uniqueness.

When a society lives in symbiosis with nature and communes with it,

and also mutually respects the diversity of cultures, ethnic groups and civilizations of all its citizens, a "multicultural symbiotic society" can be created. Then, upon this base, when a network of goodness expands among the people, the sixth tier need for symbiosis of humanity/the need to contribute to others can be fulfilled.

And finally, the growth need that manifests from the depths of our lives expands past the realm of humanity to the realm of the natural environment and then to the realm of the greater cosmos. This leads to the fulfillment of the seventh tier need, the need to connect to a primordial-cosmic source. It is religion that fulfills this ultimate need. Therefore, a society which respects religious sentiment and guarantees religious freedom is a society that has a basis for sustainable happiness.

"The eternal," or Dharma (Law), which Shakyamuni Buddha awakened to is described in the Life Span of the Thus Come One Chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* as the Eternal Law which is at one with the Eternal Buddha. Nichiren expressed this ultimate law as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

In the Life Span of the Thus Come One Chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, appears the phrase, "living beings enjoy themselves at ease,"[3] describing a state of life where one has the freedom to fully "enjoy" this life. From the standpoint of the theory of happiness in contemporary society, this phrase can be interpreted as living a life of freedom in which all seven tiers of needs are manifested.

In the same chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, appears another phrase, "this, my land, remains safe and tranquil,"[4] which in contemporary terms takes form as "guaranteed security" for human beings. In other words, this phrase can be interpreted to mean a society for the common people which is free from threats that impede the fulfilling of the seven tiers of needs and promotes the fulfillment of those needs—which can further be interpreted to mean a cultural and societal life that is in harmony with the natural environment.

Within the realities of contemporary materialistic and scientific civilization, global citizens work to expand the circle of goodness by making concrete efforts to establish a civilization where "living beings enjoy themselves at ease," and "this, my land, remains safe and tranquil." These efforts transform the foundation of civilization to an altruistic one, which then manifests as a sustainable society of well-being rich in spirituality and morality.

In modern society, the SGI has endeavored to create a society of well-being for all people in the areas of peace, culture and education as an NGO of the United Nations.

As part of those efforts, the SGI has offered humanitarian aid through relief money to victims of the Great Sichuan Earthquake and Cyclone Nargis which struck Myanmar. In Japan, assistance was offered in the form of opening Soka Gakkai community centers as temporary shelter to members of the general public and functioning as a distribution center for relief goods. Members of the Doctor's Division and Nurse's Division were dispatched to affected areas and other members helped by transporting relief goods during the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Chuetsu Offshore Earthquake.

Religious organizations throughout Japan mobilized after the Great East Japan Earthquake to provide relief assistance in various capacities from offering memorial services for the deceased, collecting financial donations, engaging in rescue activities, providing temporary housing and resupplying emergency provisions, to providing mental and emotional support to victims of the disaster. The Soka Gakkai also participated in all the activities mentioned above.[5]

In physical and psychological ways, support for earthquake victims took the form of humanitarian aid, prayers for the deceased, the fulfillment of basic needs and providing of mental health care.

Of the seven tiers of needs, the Great East Japan Earthquake deprived survivors of the basic first tier physiological needs and second tier safety needs.

However, despite this, people helped each other, believed in each other, strengthened their mutual bonds of trust and stood up together to rebuild what was lost. The third tier love and belongingness needs and the fourth tier esteem needs were fulfilled by mutually activating those tiers within each other. There were many who themselves had lost their homes, their loved ones and did not have their basic needs met, but strove to contribute to others. In addition, guided by the need for self-actualization and self-transcendence, there were people all over the world who awakened to altruistic action. This helped create a network of goodness, connecting people throughout Japan as well as the world.

Through this experience of working together, the Japanese have rediscovered the importance of building a society based on trust and respecting the bonds between people and also recognize the transience of materialistic happiness.

NOTES

[1] *The Sutra of Buddha's Last Instruction,* ed. and trans. Kaiten Nukariya (Tokyo: Morie Shouten, 1897), p.10 http://kindai.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/817596 (accessed on July 29, 2013)

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, trans. by Watson, B. (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2009) p. 272.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] See *Higashi Nihon Daishinsai—Soka Gakkai Wa Dou Ugoitaka* [The Great East Japan Earthquake—How the Soka Gakkai Responded], ed. Ushio editorial staff (Tokyo: Ushio Press, 2011).