

Thought Leader



Peace: Nichiren, a 13th century Buddhist priest and philosopher who founded a school of Buddhism based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra

Together we determine destiny

Buddhist humanism offers a way for us to change the destructive path the world is on

COMMENT
Loren Braithwaite Kabosha

In the 20th century humanity experienced a scale of mega-death not suffered since the times of colonisation.

Humankind set a trajectory that will result in the destruction of oceans, nature, climate, soil, of humanity and other living beings. In this decisive decade, we will determine the destiny of humankind — and whether the 21st century will be a century of life or of death.

In this unprecedented time, we must not only be a force of resistance to evil, but a countervailing force for good.

In this time of global distress, we need to set our sights on creating a civilisation based on new values. One way to transform our era is to awaken as many people as possible to the vast potential, power and connection to the infinite with which they are innately endowed.

The Lotus Sutra, the teaching in which the essence of Buddhism is expounded, holds that all people are endowed with the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature—the innate Buddha nature, the wisdom to perceive it and the deeds to develop it — and therefore can attain enlightenment.

In these times it is more important than ever that we each must become our own authority and sovereign champions of our own lives. These times require us to go deep within and lead from the inside out. To navigate the turbulent waters of this age, we must each become great philosophers of life, calling forth countless others to join us in stepping into our power.

Daisaku Ikeda, the president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a global Buddhist movement, crucially reminds us: “As human beings, we cannot be more than human beings, nor do we need to be.”

As aligned with the African philosophy of ubuntu, Buddhist humanism is based on a realisation that our lives are not possible without the support of many others and the proper functioning of society, and that the deeper joys of life are realised through our connections with others.

Such is the power of community. Change will come from the soil of communities. Communities of art and creativity, communities of locality and of common interests, communities of environmental protection, communities of spirituality, communities of food security and of education, communities of solidarity. Through our present-day experience of this global maelstrom of disruption and displacement wrought by the pandemic, many people have come to this realisation.

An interlinked network of communities across the nation will have the power to shift society. When we plant our feet firmly in the actualities of the local community, we can develop all larger perspectives from that starting point.

The problems of the world are deeply and mutually connected; threats and challenges besetting people in distant places have quickly found their way to our local communities. Our life experience in South Africa is the microcosm and the planet the macrocosm. We are all connected and belong to this global macrocosm.

Daisaku Ikeda has urged: “We must find the fulcrum on which people can develop the strength of will required to be proactive, robust and engaged. Unleashing the vitality of citizens — one by one — is the only certain way to bring into sight the

horizons of a new civilisation, a new era of the people ... The activities of the SGI constitute a humanistic movement based on Buddhism that seeks to develop robust individuals who can respond to the challenges of our age.”

Sinking our roots deeply in the soil together with others, we can create a robust network for good which spreads throughout our nation, the continent and the globe.

Living with death in these past years has taught us that the daily choices we make can either empower and save our lives or can enervate us, weakening our life state. Having experienced this time of death, let us choose hope, choose life, in every moment. The grief of suddenly losing family members or being shut out from the things that give meaning to life is the same for people in any country; while the specific circumstances may vary, the tragedy in its essence is the same.

When the experience of life is so rough and raw it is connections of love that help us to choose to remain, to choose to keep fighting for our lives.

I am an older black woman living with several autoimmune diseases and resulting disabilities. Last weekend, after a family ceremony, my partner and I contracted Covid-19. Suffering through Covid on top of many other diseases certainly felt like an advanced level of trial, the outcome of which was uncertain. I had to fight and gather my strength to remain rooted in my life. Moment by moment I had to choose life, again and again.

In the 40 years of my Buddhist practice, I have come to realise, sometimes eventually, that each new trial I faced with firm resolve in my daily Buddhist practice of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo has enabled me to advance on my path towards unshakeable happiness, a path of innumerable levels. Each new level a different opportunity to choose life, to choose love. To not succumb to fear or lose faith under increas-

ingly complex circumstances. In the present moment, Buddhism enables each of us to instantly tap into the life force of the cosmos.

Winning in this Covid world has felt like an important marker; I feel different and renewed.

Achieving, maintaining and fighting for your own happiness, moment by moment, is a practical way to contribute to the overall wellbeing of humankind.

Amplifying your own joy, happiness and love will resonate throughout your community and be reflected back in your own life.

People around the world face a diverse spectrum of problems and there is no simple or encompassing solution. The crucial question we ask ourselves is how each of us can extend our support to those facing hardship, how we can strengthen our relationships and connections and share in each other's joy at having overcome our respective ordeals.

This is our challenge as Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhists. We aim to construct a society in which the palpable sense that it is good to be alive is shared by all.

In these present times when it feels like we are in a dark tunnel with no end in sight, let us live with a powerful resolve to be a light of hope that lights the way for others.

Working with and for the people in our families, society and community, through our efforts participate in discussions, we can encourage many others with genuine care and warmth.

Solidly uniting as robust champions of humanity, champions of the people, champions of life, together we can create a brighter future of hope.

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25 YEARS AGO

The government programme set up two years ago to spearhead land redistribution has failed to hand over more than a few hectares to the landless.

Figures from the department of land affairs show the land-reform pilot programme has spent less than R20-million of its R314-million budget, and that provinces such as the Western Cape, Mpumalanga and the Northern Province [now Limpopo] have spent nothing of the millions they were allotted to give as grants to the landless.

Officials blame red tape and inexperience in the provinces for the mess, and warn that much of the cash — originally from the Reconstruction and Development Programme — will have to be handed back to central government coffers unless it is spent by next March.

The national land affairs department has now taken charge of the programme, arguing that it hopes to learn from past failures and bring new impetus to the scheme.

[...] The scheme is a crucial component of South African land reform, which estimates have suggested could affect up to 3.5 million people who have been dispossessed of land in the past, as well as others with land claims. — *Mail & Guardian*, 11 to 17 April 1997

VERBATIM

“It is better to leave than to be washed away with the house. We understand it is hard to leave your homes, but the priority is to save people's lives.” — eThekweni metro mayor Mxolisi Kaunda, speaking about the heavy rains and flooding that has hit Durban and surrounding areas.

“With all our troubles, frictions and challenges, this is indeed an incredible country where the spirit of ubuntu always takes centre stage and reigns supreme.” — Gift of the Givers' Imtiaz Sooliman, on various corporates provision of goods for people in areas hard hit by the floods in KwaZulu-Natal.

“This was how the apartheid oppressors operated. Let us not become like the ones who oppressed us.” — President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his weekly newsletter, about marches on people's homes to search for immigrants and people being killed because of how they look or because they have a particular accent.

“I warned you Herman Mashaba. By fanning the flames of anti-immigrant hatred, you helped create the environment that led to the burning to ashes of the Zimbabwean Elvis Nyathi. Four terrified children without a father. Don't you dare condemn the attack.” — World renowned educationist Professor Jonathan Jansen, writing on Twitter about the xenophobic mob attack in Diepsloot, Gauteng.

“I don't only have no choice, I have no time. My people are dying, tortured, raped.” — Ukrainian ambassador Liubov Abravivova defending her use of Twitter to request a meeting with President Cyril Ramaphosa and the international relations minister, Naledi Pandor.

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