

## Special Series:

### Awakening a Great Revival of Our Humanity (1)

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*This issue marks the publication of the first of two installments of Awakening a Great Revival of Our Humanity, a dialogue between Soka Gakkai International (SGI) President Ikeda, founder of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP), and Dr. Axinia D. Djourova, Corresponding Member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS).*

*President Ikeda and Dr. Djourova began their first dialogue in 1982, which was published (in Japanese) in 1999 as Utsukushiki shishi no tamashii (The Beauty of a Lion's Heart). The Bulgarian translation appearing the following year, 2000, was chosen as Best Book of the Year in Bulgaria's national competition. At the end of 2012, Dr. Djourova approached President Ikeda about engaging in a second dialogue, which is presently being conducted through correspondence. In this first installment, they discuss the issues and prospects facing the European Union (EU) in the face of the wave of neoliberalism; the tolerance, elevated spirituality, and other qualities fostered in the Balkan region, a crossroads of civilization; and numerous other topics.*



Joyful reunion at Soka University (Tokyo, March 2006)

## OPENING THE DOOR OF DIALOGUE

**Djourova:** I cannot conceal how glad I am that you have accepted my request, President Ikeda, to renew our dialogue, and I would like to express my deepest gratitude for this opportunity.

Our dialogue, *Utsukushiki shishi no tamashii* (The Beauty of a Lion's Heart), was published in Bulgarian in 2000 by the Elena and Ivan Dujčev Foundation, and it has been widely acclaimed in Bulgaria.

After its publication, I reread our discussions and analyzed the contents. As I was doing so, my colleagues at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) suggested that I engage in another dialogue with you in which we could discuss the present state of the world and the many problems we face from the perspective of a dialogue between civilizations. After deeply considering the proposal, I am eager to speak with you again.

In this dynamic age in which we live, I believe there is great significance in revisiting together some of the issues we raised in our dialogue, particularly those at the forefront of the age, and in searching for new ways forward.

I anticipate that this will be of great interest not only for you and me, but indeed for all the people who are engaged in considering the problems facing humanity and searching for solutions.

**Ikeda:** I would like to thank you sincerely for your heartfelt letter addressing extremely important topics. I am honored by your proposal that we engage in another dialogue.

I remember you telling me that the underlying message of the motto of Sofia University, where you teach, is the call to open through diligence the gateway of the spirit and the way forward.

I find it deeply inspiring that the faculty and staff of Sofia University and the BAS embody that spirit as they earnestly grapple with the various problems of our world and search for new pathways with which to overcome them. I am particularly impressed by their commitment to the people of their beloved homeland of Bulgaria as well as by their service to the peace and well-being of citizens.

The Bulgarian poet Hristo Botev (1848–76) called out to his comrades, with whom he discussed and fought for common ideals, by saying, “Hand in hand now together / Let's forward with firmer tread urge!”<sup>1</sup>

You and I have met on four occasions and exchanged correspondence, during which we shared fundamental values concerning peace, culture,

and the dignity of life. I also share your concerns about the problems you see confronting humanity and the world. I have endeavored in my own humble capacity to draw forth the life force inherent in the human race and open the way to a global civilization promoting harmonious coexistence among all people. I look forward to exchanging thoughts with you and your colleagues in the hope that we may press ahead toward a bright and hope-filled future.

I believe there is no better place to discuss your suggested theme of inter-civilizational dialogue than Bulgaria, a key point along the ancient Silk Road that served as a crossroads of civilizations linking east to west. A Bulgarian proverb says, “A gentle word opens an iron gate.” While physical divides may separate peoples, psychological and mental divides are fundamentally more formidable. Our aim is to remove those divisions and link heart to heart, mind to mind, working together to engender new ideas and innovative solutions. I see the trust in “soft power” in the form of communication and dialogue as a shining element of the Bulgarian spiritual tradition.

### *Fighting against the Threat of the Extinction of Humaneness*

**Djourova:** I would like to once again express my appreciation of your foresight in initiating dialogues starting as far back as the 1960s. It was a time when people were first becoming aware of the alarming signs of the shift from a multipolar world to globalism. They had no clear conception of the terrible spiritual and social cost that would have to be paid—and is still being paid—under the neoliberal economic system. They could not predict how great the conflict would be between traditional value systems and the free-market economy, where anything is permitted.

However, as early as that time, through your published dialogues with Arnold J. Toynbee, André Malraux, René Huyghe, Aurelio Peccei, and others, you raised and discussed the threat of the extinction of humaneness and the global homogenization of history, and you proposed alternatives to those processes. In your dialogues you rescued from oblivion the best achievements of every people and culture, building bridges between tradition and modernity, thus reaffirming for all that the life and the culture of every nation is a part of the world’s history and heritage—a heritage which should not be regarded as an impediment to the development of modern society.

It remains to be seen whether modern society will persist in the direction of the reduction and simplification of the cultural memory, thereby

devaluing our spiritual heritage and rendering obscure the meaning of historic messages.

It takes courage and vision, as well as wisdom, for a person to address the topical issues of the time he or she lives in. Through your activities on the global stage and your dialogues addressing the most pressing issues humanity faces, you have proved that you possess all these virtues and, even more important, have ideas for solutions. This is what gave me courage to humbly ask you to continue our dialogue.

**Ikeda:** You are too kind. When Professor Toynbee and I finished our dialogue, he voiced the hope that I, young as I still was, would spend the rest of my life engaging the world's leading thinkers in dialogue, because there is no other way to a better future for humanity than dialogue.

The British historian had a commanding overview of world history and had carefully observed every area of human endeavor, and his confidence in the power of dialogue served in reinforcing my belief in its worth. As you have stressed yourself, I regard dialogue itself as a precious element in the spiritual and cultural heritage of the human race.

Immediately following World War II, which exacted such incalculable suffering from so many, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) denounced the war and repeatedly emphasized the importance of dialogue to young people. He reminded them that “we belong together”<sup>2</sup> and “we want to learn to talk with each other.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, he discerned in dialogue the supreme perfection of our humanity—the appreciation for, understanding of, and trust in one another as human beings.

Jaspers also pointed out that the act of shutting the door on others, just as it is in daily life, is a form of violence, observing that the closed mind and rejection of dialogue leads to violence that desecrates humanity.<sup>4</sup> He cited Shakyamuni Buddha as embodying the epitome of the spirit of dialogue. The Buddha, he noted, “spoke to individuals and in small circles. Lessons and conversations prepared the way for the insight that each man must attain by his own action.”<sup>5</sup>

We of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) uphold and practice the teachings of Nichiren (1222–82), the Japanese Buddhist thinker and reformer, who inherited the spirit of Shakyamuni. Nichiren dedicated himself to reaching out through dialogue to the largest audience possible, from the leaders of the military regime of his day to ordinary people, with the aim of promoting peace and happiness. He described his efforts, saying: “Unlike most people, in the course of spreading these

doctrines of mine I, Nichiren, have occasion to meet with a great many persons.”<sup>76</sup> “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” one of Nichiren’s major works, is written in the form of a dialogue, which exemplifies his spirit: “Let us discuss the question at length.”<sup>77</sup>

Incidentally, in a 2000 survey conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, a Japanese national daily, “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” ranked second in a list of major Japanese writings that respondents felt should continue to be read in the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup>

Socrates (c. 470–399 BCE) and Plato (c. 428–348 BCE), foundational figures of Western philosophical thought, both valued dialogue. Indeed, dialogue has spawned throughout the world remarkable eras in which people lived in peace and in which cultures were able to flourish. It is an expression of the conviction that we are all equal human beings who can empathize with one another, while affirming the diversity that enables each person to shine their brightest as an individual. To put it another way, dialogue encourages diversity while bringing us together as fellow human beings and promoting mutual inspiration and betterment.

I hope that our messages of the importance of dialogue, which is synonymous with a culture of peace and of a new age, may be heard by the youth of Bulgaria and Japan.

**Djourova:** Globalism, characterized by the absence of respect, justice, and harmony, carries with it the threat of authoritarianism and even the possibility of a new colonialism.

It is in this context that my attention is drawn to Soka University, which provides a humanistic education recognizing the worth of all cultures and the importance of moral and ethical values, as also do you, President Ikeda, and the SGI, as you engage in forging ties of friendship with people around the world. You have shouldered a special mission that no other organization can accomplish—building bridges of friendship connecting people around the world, based on the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

### *Bulgaria and the Pan-Europa Movement*

**Ikeda:** Bulgaria joined the European Union (EU) in 2007. It was the first nation using the Cyrillic alphabet to become an EU member, further augmenting the Union’s cultural diversity.

From 1967, I engaged Count Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi

(1894–1972), one of the staunchest advocates of Pan-Europeanism, in a series of discussions and have followed over the years Europe’s peaceful advance from conflict to unity. At the time we spoke, Count Coudenhove-Kalergi said to me that though the nations of Europe were divided, with the establishment of the European Commission (EC), he believed that Europe had taken a step in the direction of his ideal.

After the two world wars, and though numerous regional associations in Europe have faced many challenges, the drive toward unity has continued to forge ahead to what has become the EU of today.

In June 2016, as a result of a popular referendum, the UK decided to exit the Union, a development that warrants close observation for its future repercussions, but clearly the EU remains a major focus in considering the form our new global society will take.

**Djourova:** With regards to the reference to Count Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi—a fascinating and many faceted individual—I would like to add the following.

Count Coudenhove-Kalergi published an article in the Berlin newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* titled “Pan-Europa—A Proposal.” In 1923, Count Coudenhove-Kalergi published his manifesto “Pan-Europa.” He envisioned new political systems in post-war Europe and formulated new ideas about its future. Numerous thinkers and cultural leaders such as Paul Claudel, Paul Valéry, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, Gerhart Hauptmann, Rainer Maria Rilke, Arthur Schnitzler, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, José Ortega y Gasset, and Richard Strauss supported his ideas.

Among them also was Ivan Shishmanov (1862–1928)—the father of the idea that Bulgaria was a part of Europe. Shishmanov and Coudenhove-Kalergi met, and the State Archive of the BAS preserves information about Shishmanov’s lectures in Freiburg during which he acquainted his students with the ideas of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi.<sup>9</sup>

In 1923 Count Coudenhove-Kalergi established his own Central Office at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, where the head office of the Pan-European Union was located. In 1924 he established and edited the *Paneuropa*, a monthly journal, and on July 9, 1925, the Pan-European Union was established as an independent society.

Representatives of twenty-five countries attended the first Pan-European Congress, held from October 3 to October 6, 1926, at Konzerthaus in Vienna. At the time there were thirty separate countries in Europe. Professor Shishmanov had his place of honor at this congress, and his speech there concluded with the following words: “We

hope that the Pan-European idea shall be not only as a union in the name of interests, but also a union of spirit and of hearts.”<sup>10</sup> Continuing, “Let us make a present to our homelands: a new bell full of peace and consent,” he then quoted Schiller’s famous “Song of the Bell”:

*Therefore now, with the strength of the rope  
Lift the bell out of her tomb for me,  
That into the realm of sound she may  
Rise, into the air of heaven.  
Pull, pull, lift!  
.....  
Peace shall be her first sounding.*<sup>11</sup>

In his notes, preserved in the archives of the BAS, Shishmanov mentions that he had slightly altered the text to read “Joy shall be her first sounding.” Perhaps people do not know now that in 1929 Count Coudenhove-Kalergi proposed that Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, inspired by Schiller’s “Ode to Joy,” should become the anthem of Europe.

At the congress, Shishmanov chaired the committee on “The Role and Equality of Small Nations,” dealing with the cultural diversity of the Pan-European Union. He perceived the creation of Pan-Europa as taking place within the League of Nations, and his dream was to one day see the creation of a United States of Europe.<sup>12</sup> In February 1927 a chapter of the Pan-European Movement was established in Bulgaria at Shishmanov’s home address, 11 Shipka Street, in Sofia. On March 13, 1927, a constitutional convention was convened in the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia, and in addition to the adoption of the bylaws of the Bulgarian chapter, nine trustees were selected. Bulgarian Prime Minister Andrey Lyapchev (1866–1933) applauded this launch of the Bulgaria chapter.

The second congress of the followers of the Pan-European idea was planned for the autumn of 1928, but Shishmanov died on June 23, 1928, in Oslo during the Congress of the Pen Club, over which he was presiding.

Testifying to the close relations of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi and Shishmanov, the count said upon Shishmanov’s death:

This bold nation has made three times the effort to become a leading state in the Balkans and it was twice defeated by its opponents.  
. . . And it was to this nation that Professor Shishmanov used to

preach the virtue of all-forgiveness, peace, and understanding. His ideas were acclaimed not only by the common people and the youth, they were also morally encouraged by the government of the country.<sup>13</sup>

I mention these until recently little-known facts because I think that they are indicative of the commitment of our country to the idea of a United Europe ever since it was conceived and they explain our initial aspiration to join the EU, as well as the feelings of disappointment that followed.

*Seeking a “Union of Spirit and of Hearts”*

**Ikeda:** You have outlined some very important historical developments. As represented by Professor Shishmanov, Bulgaria played an important role in the movement for European unity from the very beginning.

In *Under the Yoke*, the eminent Bulgarian writer Ivan Minchov Vazov (1850–1921), wrote: “There’s some noble hearts among us, . . . and that makes me love Bulgaria still more.”<sup>14</sup>

Bulgaria is indeed a trove of worthy individuals.

The record of the efforts of leading Bulgarian individuals to create a European union of hearts and minds is a precious historical legacy for future generations.

The “Ode to Joy” in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony that you mentioned declares: “Thy magic power reunites / All that custom has divided, / All men become brothers / Under the sway of thy gentle wings.”<sup>15</sup>

The “Ode to Joy” is an affirmation of love for humanity, of overcoming the divisions that separate people and bringing them together in unity. I can understand why Count Coudenhove-Kalergi proposed the symphony as the anthem of a united Europe, and I have often spoken to Japanese youth of the count’s proposal.

As I am sure you know, Beethoven wrote of joy: “We mortals with immortal minds are only born for sorrows and joys, and one might almost say that the most excellent only receive their joys through sorrows.”<sup>16</sup>

Beethoven, who experienced war in Europe and lived in an age of great shared suffering, had an impassioned desire for peace. Overcoming the sufferings of war and winning the joy of peace through friendship and amity is one of the most basic aspirations of all humankind.

Unfortunately, the twentieth century in which you and I have lived was a time of war and division, resulting in an unprecedented number of casualties. With that firmly in mind, in the autumn of 1999, on the eve of the twenty-first century, I wrote in an essay that it was imperative to make the new century one of peace and harmonious coexistence. I felt that no other age would be in greater need of an anthem for humanity that transcends national and ethnic differences and unites people's hearts—and that the closest approximation of such an anthem was Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, articulating his vision of a peaceful future, said that peace could be described as harmony among the peoples of the world; without harmony, however, neither peace nor friendship nor individual happiness is possible.<sup>17</sup>

He believed that the main source of happiness is harmony, in all its many forms: our inner harmony; harmony with our family members and friends; harmony with our social environment; harmony in our appetite and food; health, which is the harmony of our physical bodies; harmony in our professions and economic lives; and international harmony arising from peace and prosperity.<sup>18</sup>

This spirit of harmony and peaceful coexistence is more important than ever today. Attempting to build our happiness on the misfortune of others, trying to expand one's own nation's power and prosperity through war and violence—such actions only end up destroying ourselves and others alike. This, I feel, is one of history's most important lessons.

Vienna, which has such strong associations with both Count Coudenhove-Kalergi and Professor Shishmanov, was a cradle of the ideas and ideals regarding European union.

"Live and let live" is an old Viennese proverb. Citing this ethos of Vienna, author Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) asserted that human beings should neither rule over nor serve under others and that every individual should become ends in themselves and lead unfettered lives. He also valued the spirit of conciliation and tolerance—the capacity to accept and appreciate different peoples, cultures, philosophies, and religions, transforming dissonance into harmony.<sup>19</sup> This, of course, was the basis with which Viennese citizens were able to coexist and mutually prosper.

Zweig, moreover, urged that we must counter the institutions for war with the institutions for peace.<sup>20</sup> He was keenly aware that once the spirit of intolerance and violence is allowed to run rampant, opposing networks and institutions for peace are indispensable, but their opposition will be impotent if they are not united in purpose.

I believe this applies equally to Japan. In particular, her people must come together to avoid repeating the tragedy of war and to preserve peace. Furthermore, any movement to build a network working for peace must be a joint effort of people around the world, on a scale that transcends nations. Our SGI movement, comprised of people in 192 countries and territories, is actively pursuing this goal, working in tandem with other international organizations.

*The Nation Exists for the Sake of the People*

**Ikeda:** The experiences of the two world wars have provoked repeated examinations of the meaning of the nation-state, because nation-states have initiated wars that have destroyed the homes, neighborhoods, and communities, the stages upon which people lead actual lives.

As an advocate of European union, Count Coudenhove-Kalergi repeatedly questioned the purpose of nations and why they existed.

“The state exists for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the state,” he declared: “Men without states are conceivable—states without men are inconceivable. Man is an end and not a means. The state is a means and not an end. The value of the state is exactly the value of its services to human beings; in so much as it serves to develop man it is good—so soon as it hinders the development of man it is evil.”<sup>21</sup>

“Man is a being, and the state is his tool—for good or for evil.”<sup>22</sup>

A nation, then, exists solely to promote the well-being and welfare of the individual, and for it to obstruct that purpose or sacrifice people out of national interest is inexcusable and perverse.

The roots of a European union lay in the re-examination of the nation-state from the perspective of a Europe and world transcending the nation, as well as from the perspective of the community and society.

**Djourova:** Historically speaking, a number of well-known, outstanding figures had discussed or dreamed of a United States of Europe long prior to this, from George Washington through Napoleon Bonaparte and Giuseppe Mazzini to Count Coudenhove-Kalergi. However, in my opinion, the clearest and perhaps the most detailed vision was formulated by French author Victor Hugo (1802–85).

After the French Revolution of 1848, he was the first to coin the notion of a United States of Europe at the International Peace Congress, an international congress to defend peace that he organized in Paris in August 1849. At the congress he delivered the following speech:

A day will come when you, France—you, Russia—you, Italy—you, England—you, Germany—all of you, nations of the Continent, will, without losing your distinctive qualities and your glorious individuality, be blended into a superior unity, and constitute an European fraternity, just as Normandy, Brittany, Burgundy, Lorraine, Alsace, have been blended into France.<sup>23</sup>

This vision of a future Europe is easy to understand in the context of the time—the turbulent events of European history in the nineteenth century, in particular the numerous wars between France and Germany, which Hugo experienced personally. Hugo’s beautiful vision of a United States of Europe was one of peace based on the democratic concept of universal suffrage and a Great European Parliament.

What I find of utmost significance is his idea that the nations of Europe should be united in a superior entity, in a stronger brotherhood without losing their distinct qualities and individuality—in other words, “Unity in Diversity,” the European slogan officially endorsed in the 2004 Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The slogan, in fact, clearly reflects the fundamental aspects of the idea of the United European States originally proposed by Hugo.

And although the idea of uniting various European nations can be traced back as early as to the Westphalian Peace Treaties of 1648, the EU, founded on the idea of consolidation and which we are in the process of establishing today, was the result of the efforts of the peoples having gone through the horrors of the First and Second World Wars.

In fact, in Bulgaria we initially thought that the EU would “rescue” Eastern Europe from its history, that is, the region would be offered the chance to overcome the traumas inflicted by the past two world wars. Today, after the 2014 European Parliament election, our optimism has waned. One reason for this is the lack of a second Marshall Plan—European Recovery Program—for a more effective integration of poorer European countries, and especially the East European countries, into the European community.

If we look back to the original objectives of the EU, a continuous effort to bring nations together through dialogue and equality, we must conclude that the present state of the EU has departed considerably from the objectives it initially sought to achieve. The EU originated in the ideal of solidarity, articulated in the Schuman Declaration—the foundation for establishment of the EU—issued by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman (1886–1963) in 1950.

In my opinion, the basic principle for achieving that aim should be

the creation of conditions for prosperity and solidarity, not just hewing to a political orthodoxy based on the interests of the stronger members at the cost of the deterioration of the economies of weaker countries, which is largely what is happening in Bulgaria, for instance. The results of the latest opinion surveys (2014) are quite disturbing, showing an almost equal divide between supporters and opponents of the EU in this country. This suggests that political leaders need to take steps toward finding the right instruments for encouraging public support for participation in the European community. To achieve this, people need to feel at home within the community.

**Ikeda:** You spoke on the need to return to the original objectives of the EU. The Schuman Declaration outlined the joint operation of coal and steel production by France and West Germany. As I understand it, the initiative sought to facilitate *de facto* peace and integration by having various European countries work together on a concrete endeavor. It created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which eventually evolved into the European Economic Community (EEC).

To build peace in the future, one of the keys we should return to is to understand the manner in which the ECSC was created, based on the ideals and effort it required. Jean Monnet (1888–1979), a leading French architect of European integration who played a pivotal role in the community’s establishment, emphasized that to truly grasp the essence of things we must return to their origins.

Monnet said, “We are not forming coalitions between States, but union among peoples,”<sup>24</sup> and “It seemed to me, looking back, that I had always followed the same line of thought, however varied the circumstances, and no matter where I was. My sole preoccupation was to unite men, to solve the problems that divide them, and to persuade them to see their common interest.”<sup>25</sup>

The context for Monnet and the others in the movement he led to build a united Europe was the historical experience of the shared pain of World War I, the failure of the League of Nations and World War II.

We can find many profound perspectives recorded in his memoirs. For example: “Peace can be founded only on equality of rights.”<sup>26</sup> Observing the results of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) after World War I, Monnet declared that the discriminatory treatment of one people by another merely engenders misery and discontent, and thus relations between the peoples of different countries must be equal and fair.

Monnet’s second important insight is “everyone should seek the interest which is common to all.”<sup>27</sup> One of the fundamental causes of the

world wars is the principle of national sovereignty. As long as nations clung to this principle, it would be difficult to achieve peace in Europe and establish transnational organizations.

Monnet focused on coal and steel, at that time the driving force for war. By relinquishing national sovereignty in those industries to ECSC, a new European authority could be created to operate the industries, transforming coal and steel into a source of shared prosperity and “create *de facto* solidarity.”<sup>28</sup> A serious effort requiring an enormous expenditure of time and energy was needed to overcome the opposition of individual nations through dialogue and reach agreement.

The third principle offered by Monnet is “take a positive attitude, in which there would be neither victors nor vanquished.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, every member of the ECSC must be a winner. This is based on the conviction that the greatest consensus and common benefit can be attained through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Monnet’s fourth insight is the recognition that “rich diversity will benefit civilization.”<sup>30</sup> The spirit of solidarity exemplified in the ECSC created by Monnet and Robert Schuman through dialogue rests on the principles of equality, common good, everyone being a winner, and respect for diversity.

In addition, it is worth noting that Schuman identified the need for religious fellowship to underlie European solidarity. He wrote: “We have to fall back on the Christian law of a noble but humble brotherhood.”<sup>31</sup>

I believe there is a valuable spiritual lesson to be learned from the history of the establishment of the European community, undertaken at a time when Europe had been laid waste by war. This agrees, I think, with what you see as the original objectives of the EU. In light of this, and though there are still many practical issues and difficulties to deal with, what direction do you think Bulgaria, having recently joined the EU, should advance in?

### *The Future of the EU—Can Hope Be Revived?*

**Djourova:** Since 1989 we in Bulgaria have been subjected to a series of social experiments aimed at establishing democracy and a market economy, as well as preparation for Bulgaria’s acceptance for entry into the EU.

So far these attempts have failed to produce the desired results, due to the unpreparedness of the local communities and the economy, and probably a somewhat negative attitude toward the EU prevailing

among the populace.

From that perspective, even in spite of officially joining the European family in 2007, we haven't seen a positive result. If to this we add the fact that the great European ideas, such as Social Democracy and Christian Democracy, never quite evolved in Bulgaria and therefore have not been adopted, the actual result has been massive social disintegration and stratification. It has turned out that our society was not prepared for these major changes and the unpredictability of the developments in the fields of economy, science, and culture.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the idea of the socialist state was discredited in Europe and subverted by the neoliberal model. Thus in Bulgaria, a widespread public loss of faith and hope, and a confusion of values, have developed parallel to the lack of respect and trust in public institutions. In fact, the most chaotic years of the entire twenty-seven-year period of transition from 1989 to 2016 came after the objective of joining the European Union was achieved—the union we had acclaimed with such enthusiasm and accepted as a panacea to all our problems! Many in Bulgaria have started to ask themselves questions about the direction in which we are moving, only to reach the conclusion that, as far as a number of indices—economic, social, and cultural—are concerned, the period of transition today looks very much like a national catastrophe.

In addition, the version of neoliberalism applied in Bulgaria in a rather inept way resulted in the stifling of small and medium-sized businesses by the financial monopolies. Vast numbers of people feel deceived, especially those who have cherished the idea that by joining the European Union we would be equivalent to being admitted to the paradise of a welfare state. All this turned out to be an illusion. And I do not think that this is a process taking place only in Bulgaria.

**Ikeda:** As you say, the emergence of neoliberalism has engendered excessive economic competition and produced a climate in which any means are deemed acceptable in achieving economic gains. This has necessarily had many deleterious effects, including exacerbating the wealth gap, violations of human dignity, and the erosion of sound moral values.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), with his commitment to the pursuit of enduring peace, has stressed that “the supreme rule is to put freedom to good use,”<sup>32</sup> and “if he has none, freedom is his greatest misfortune.”<sup>33</sup> The rules that must be enforced are those protecting the dignity and worth of human life. The value of life is absolute; it

cannot be compared to or replaced by any other value. But in today's society, we are seeing an inversion of values in which economic, political, and other values are assuming top priority.

In the closing chapter of our dialogue, Professor Toynbee and I were in complete agreement on this point. We were discussing Kant's emphasis on the dignity of human beings. The philosopher—who wrote that “he is above any price (*pretium*)”<sup>34</sup>—declares:

Humanity itself is a dignity; for a human being cannot be used merely as a means by any human being (either by others or even by himself) but must always be used at the same time as an end. . . . But just as he cannot give himself away for any price (this would conflict with his duty of self-esteem), so neither can he act contrary to the equally necessary self-esteem of others.<sup>35</sup>

At times of social unrest it is more important than ever to ensure that the value of the absolute dignity and worth of human life prevails in every area of society.

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) particularly lamented the tendency for wealth to act as a source of conflict and mutual antagonism in society. He denounced the deluded value system underlying the times that identified wealth with happiness.

In the theory of value he articulated in his work *Soka kyoikugaku tai-kei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy), Mr. Makiguchi noted that value should not be established apart from its conceptual foundation of relationship with life.<sup>36</sup> Value, in his view, does not exist as something fixed and independent, but is determined by its association with life.

Mr. Makiguchi also wrote that all those factors that are determined as beneficial to the sustenance of life in their respective kinds and degrees are goodness, benefit, and beauty. Together these are value, which may exist in greater and lesser degrees. Likewise, all those factors that are determined to be harmful to the maintenance of life in their respective kinds and degrees are evil, harm, and ugliness.<sup>37</sup>

The aim of life as well as the authentic depiction of happiness lies in creating the values of beauty, benefit, and goodness for ourselves and for others. Mr. Makiguchi regarded the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the essence of the Lotus Sutra—as an inexhaustible wellspring of value creation and upheld the Buddhist conviction to bring forth the limitless courage, wisdom, and compassion inherent in all people.

Nichiren wrote: “One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the major world system [i.e., the entire universe].”<sup>38</sup> This is why

peace is a foundational principle of Buddhism.

Even while persecuted by Japan's militaristic authorities during World War II, Mr. Makiguchi remained true to his belief in peace and the dignity and worth of life, dying in prison for his convictions. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900–58) was incarcerated along with Mr. Makiguchi. Released just weeks before the war's end, Mr. Toda dedicated his life to rebuilding the Soka Gakkai and advancing a people's movement for peace.

It was a movement encouraging each individual, through the Buddhist practice of affirming the ultimate worth and dignity of life, to rise to the challenge of creating value contributing to peace and prosperity in their communities and places of work—and to do so while attaining a life state of happiness for both themselves and others. Nothing worthwhile, I firmly believe, can be achieved without the participation of the people.

Some leading world thinkers—of whom Professor Toynbee was one—have noted that the rapid postwar economic recovery of Japan took place simultaneously with the expansion of the spiritual revival promoted by the people's movement of the Soka Gakkai.

Discussing the economic revival of postwar Japan, the American economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006), with whom I engaged in a dialogue, observed that people were the ultimate movers of the economy. No matter how dire the reality or daunting the adversity people may face, he believed that they, as constituent members of a given society, will become the driving force for an astonishing process of reversal, recovery, and progress, returning that society to prosperity.<sup>39</sup>

Dr. Galbraith was active in implementing the New Deal policies of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) during the Great Depression. Granted, economic policies that enable a society to prosper and the lives of the general public to flourish are important, but we must always remember that such policies are the handiwork of human beings, and that education, culture, and philosophy are essential in fostering and sustaining them.

**Djourova:** Yes! I agree with you and in this respect I would like to reiterate Shishmanov's view that the Pan-European Union should be "not only a union in the name of interests, but also a union of spirit and of hearts." After having so enthusiastically acclaimed the EU and accepting it as a panacea for all our problems, we in Bulgaria find ourselves at a crossroads, saddened by our failure to "attain Europe." But I do not think we can stop here. I still cherish the hope that the EU, in spite of the many problems to be solved, will seriously reconsider

its vision for the future.

The failure to take into consideration kinship relations between nations, as well as their unique national features and the specific historical development of the various regions—for example, the Balkans—in the process of producing a strategy for development of the EU, bespeaks at the very least a lack of foresight among the political strategists who originally conceived of the EU.

## DIVERSITY AND UNITY IN EUROPE

### *The Importance of Respect for Cultural Identity*

**Djourova:** Above all, Europe is a spiritual space that cannot exist solely on the grounds of economic criteria. So far, the economic criteria do not function well for all member states, and at the same time those criteria neglect the above-mentioned significant kinship ties between the forms of culture, religion, and ways of living of the individual nations. I am referring here to the recent and, in my opinion, extremely shortsighted actions by the EU aimed at the isolation of Russia.

Europe needs to rediscover itself in the tradition, in the social causes, in the national identity that has been somehow forgotten in the last decades. In my opinion, the insufficient respect on the part of the European Union for the ways of living and the cultures of the individual nations, for their specific national features, is extremely harmful.

The attempts at unification of customs and ways of life that have been undertaken so far turned out to be of little success. The European Union shall be doomed to failure unless it becomes aware of or takes into consideration this fact in its projects for future development.

As is well known, geographic environment, social conditions, and language all contribute to establishing the pattern for the characteristic features of individual nations. For instance, one cannot change, at least not as quickly as the strategists of the European idea would like, the reserved and dispassionate way in which the nations inhabiting the North express their excitement, making them gesticulate vigorously, speak in loud voices and be as noisy and passionate as the nations from the South.

Parallel with the impact of geographic environment on the formation of national character, the second fundamental factor is the national language—called “intra-history” by the Spanish educator Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936), due to the fact that it is intrinsically related to the thinking of a nation, which comes from its history, from the inherit-

ed customs, legends, and beliefs.

Europe is a model of linguistic wealth, developed and preserved through the ages, producing a linguistic heritage for which Europe has so far shown respect. Today there is even a tendency to revive local languages spoken by a very limited number of people. For example, the Lenga d'òc language in Occitania, which is the historical region in Southern Europe. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) wrote in his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772): “A language has ages and just like a human creature it is being born, gets mature, blossoms, and fades away.”<sup>40</sup>

**Ikeda:** Language lies at the core of every nation and people. Culture develops as the complex conglomeration of such elements as language, art, science, and religion. With the increasing homogenization of cultures resulting from globalization, I am concerned about the disappearance of the languages of numerous ethnic groups and peoples around the world and the decline of the richness of cultural diversity.

Articulating a philosophy of history based on a respect for the right to exist for all the peoples of the Earth, Herder said: “Every man, every animal, every plant, has his own climate.”<sup>41</sup> He further noted, “The germes of every great and noble feeling not only exist in all places, but are universally unfolded, as much as the way of life, climate, tradition, or peculiarity of the nation will permit.”<sup>42</sup> Marked by the influences of the environment in which they have lived, their society, culture, and times, every ethnic group and people has a unique character.

Similarly, Buddhism teaches that each subject, each human life, unfolds in the context of an inextricable interrelation with a distinct environment, which includes nature, other human beings, culture, and a homeland. All life, then, exists within the context of being rooted in its own unique environment. When that root is severed, life also perishes. As such, respecting the unique qualities of diverse cultures is the same as respecting the lives of the people who have been nurtured in those cultures. In addition, as fellow human beings, we have the capacity to find empathy and common ground in understanding other cultures, no matter how different they are from our own.

You mentioned earlier the cultural kinship linking countries together. In the East, for example, Buddhism engaged in a dialogue with the Hindu civilization in India and other places. It also traversed the Silk Road, absorbing Grecian civilization and other influences along the way, and then—primarily as Mahayana Buddhism—entered China. Within the cultural sphere defined by the Chinese writing system—which

included the Korean Peninsula and Japan—Buddhism engaged in dialogues with Confucianism and Taoism. In the process, a broad-ranging foundation for Eastern spirituality was formed. Count Coudenhove-Kalergi noted that Buddhist philosophy, and the history of its spread and interactions with new peoples and cultures were always remarkably peaceful in nature.

In the West, the foundation for kinship among nations and cultures is the spread of Christianity in its various forms, including Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Orthodox Church. Looking even further back, we arrive at Greek philosophy. In addition, there is the historical fact that the lineage of Greek philosophy, having largely disappeared in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, was reintroduced to European civilization through Islamic culture. The flowering of diverse cultures nurtured by that shared spiritual foundation is indeed a perfect manifestation of the expression “unity in diversity.”

Nevertheless, throughout world history, we see peoples, nations, and civilizations wielding “hard power,” in the forms of military, economic, and political force, to discriminate against and oppress other cultures, and to force their culture on others. This stripped those who were oppressed of their dignity. This was certainly the case in the twentieth century, racked by war and aggression.

The poet T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) defined culture as “a way of life”<sup>43</sup> and “that which makes life worth living.”<sup>44</sup> He also wrote, “The deliberate destruction of another culture as a whole is an irreparable wrong, almost as evil as to treat human beings like animals.”<sup>45</sup> This is the unequivocal truth.

In a similar fashion, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) argued that the numerous manifestations of cultural diversity inherent in the essential unity of European culture have been a blessing, not a drawback.<sup>46</sup> He also noted that uniformity brings death to culture, while diversity enriches it.<sup>47</sup> In both Europe and the world, cultural diversity enables a culture to flourish, a wisdom that people have arrived at after overcoming numerous hardships and conflicts.

**Djourova:** The citizens of the continent have always regarded the richness of European culture as an inspiring source of pride. Europeans have always identified themselves through their culture, and it has encouraged an awareness of the need for solidarity. I do not yet see today any specific efforts by the European Union to outline a cultural strategy based on this foundation, which would affirm the equality of the individual cultures of Europe, and through that promote the unity of the

peoples of Europe. In my opinion the time has come to revive the fundamental ideas of the European project, as well as of its political ambitions.

I think that the greatest wealth of the European community is the contribution of all member countries with their specific cultures, molded by their geographical locations, languages, and popular customs, as well as with the cultural and spiritual bridges between the individual nations. These factors create the diverse, multilayered richness of Europe's spirituality, which is of no less value than the value of its economic development. The European understanding of the concepts of culture, politics, and history forms the foundations of the EU, and has also provided the philosophical foundation for Europe's existence through the ages.

Today's world, with its complete reliance on scientific technology and markets, seeks to ignore culture. This represents, however, a failure to understand the spiritual nature of culture, and unless we are aware of this tendency, we risk reducing culture to a vast museum of past cultural grandeur.

In the coming years, in addition to being a community of related peoples who have preserved their specific spiritual and cultural identities, I would also like to see the European Union become more socially oriented, stronger and more independent in the course of making vital decisions about its future destiny. It is my hope that the EU will adopt much more responsible policies than it does today, while at the same time also taking into consideration the specifics of the various regions, for instance of the Balkan region. The Balkan region is also characterized by the spiritual culture of the Greek Orthodox Church, with its Christian principles of sanctified suffering and a peculiar irrationality, which during periods of trial can transform the hatred we feel for our neighbors into a sublime sympathy, elevated even to self-sacrifice.

The Balkan cultures have their own distinct way of interpreting European values. Our enlightenment esteems its own heroes from the past as idols. The Balkan nations respect European culture, and while not perceiving it as an alien culture, they tend to see it as a new and modern culture that at times is hard to digest. This is why it is so difficult for the Balkan nations to achieve European standards. It is a painful, if not impossible, process. It is not by chance that the Europeans often consider the Balkan nations as preserving the mystery, the myth, and the romanticism they themselves have long forgotten.

*Returning to Our Starting Point as Human Beings*

**Djourova:** The year 2000, in which our dialogue was published in Bulgaria, was designated by the United Nations as the Year of a Culture of Peace. You have described such a culture of peace as a state in which civilizations coexist in harmony and mutual understanding, reject war, and prioritize nonviolence and dialogue. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, we have witnessed quite the opposite—endless talks about peace contrasting with ever-intensifying violence and multiple local conflicts.

I believe it can be said that the warnings you expressed in our dialogue have become realities. We seem to still be a long way from achieving a culture of peace.

**Ikeda:** As a crossroads of civilization, Bulgaria and the Balkan Peninsula have been the stage of repeated encounters and intermingling among differing cultures throughout history, while also being subjected to the domination and aggression of foreign powers. In the magnificent culture of Bulgaria, I believe we can see a deeply felt outcry against these adversities and an impassioned desire for peace. A universal philosophy of peace sparkles in Bulgarian culture—of this, I remain convinced.

I am deeply impressed by Bulgarian literature. The poet Botev, moved by the plight of the oppressed, the discriminated against, and the poor, embraced their sufferings as his own and repeatedly expressed his desire to alleviate their misery in his works. “Do you hear the poor lament? — / and there my wounded heart is called.”<sup>48</sup> The foundation for peace is the spirit of empathy with those in anguish, and in propagating the noble spirit of tolerance and acceptance, of sharing, with our friends, our compatriots, and people of all stations and circumstances.

Empathy and compassion—regarding the sufferings of others as one’s own and taking action to ameliorate them—are also the core spirit of Buddhism. The Buddhist term for compassion, *jihi*, is made up of two characters: *ji* meaning to impart joy to people and *hi* meaning to alleviate their sufferings.

Shakyamuni awakened to the fundamental Law of the universe and all life so that people may save themselves from the underlying source of all suffering. Nichiren revealed that Law as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, declaring that “the sufferings that all living beings undergo, all springing from this one cause—all these are Nichiren’s own sufferings.”<sup>49</sup> He also wrote, “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing,

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity.”<sup>50</sup> It was an elucidation of a great pathway to peace and happiness that transcends time.

In his poem “Patriot,” Botev repeatedly stresses the need to question our conduct toward our fellow human beings. He warned against the duplicity of leaders claiming to be serving the people while actually selfishly exploiting them. Such hypocrisy has exacted an incalculable toll on human life and our sense of well-being and security. To put an end to this, ordinary people must become wise to such duplicitous leadership and find the strength to resist it.

The trappings of power and fame are fleeting and illusory. No matter how much wealth and status one may acquire, they are not indicative of true happiness. Nor do they put an end to the fundamental problems we face as human beings. In fact, how often do wealth and power only cast people into the depths of suffering! Ultimately, what enables us to overcome the inherent sufferings of life and determine our own happiness is what we do as human beings.

I’d like to take this opportunity to speak about your father, a Bulgarian leader. You have said he always taught you that people are people, no matter what their circumstances, and that he placed importance on the value of one’s humanity. Who we are as human beings—this is the fundamental point of departure from which we can vanquish all hypocrisy and advance toward peace and prosperity.

In *Is He Coming?*, a short story by Vazov, a mother is waiting for her son to return safe and sound from the battlefield. Yet when she sees exhausted prisoners of war from the enemy country being led through the streets, she offers them provisions: “But they’re good people . . . Their poor mothers . . . do they know?”<sup>51</sup>

My own mother said much the same thing. During World War II, a young American crewman parachuted out of a warplane that had been shot down near our home. People had gathered and were beating and abusing him. Then the military police arrived, and arrested him and took him away. When my mother heard about this she said, “How terrible! How sad! Just think how worried his mother must be about her son!” No matter where, no matter how brutal the times, the humanity—and especially motherly love—that courses deep within the lives of ordinary people shines with a noble light.

In another Vazov’s story, *Under the Yoke*, he writes: “The bright spark of humanity can always be ignited in the heart by the blows of suffering, if only it be there to begin with.”<sup>52</sup> Nichiren similarly writes, “If one lights a fire for others, one will brighten one’s own way.”<sup>53</sup> The light of

compassion we shine on other lives illuminates our own lives as well. This is the source of the culture of peace that is common to Bulgarian culture and Buddhism.

I am reminded of the words of your mentor, Professor Ivan Dujčev (1907–86), the eminent authority on Slavic and Bulgarian studies, which you previously shared with me:

All the scholars, poets and artists active in the field of culture need to concern themselves with the ultimate purpose of life—building bridges of peace, bridges of mutual friendship among people. And in so doing, they can contribute to realizing the eternal dream of humanity. Only by this means can creative individuals fulfill their responsibility to be of service to their colleagues and the people of the world and, at the same time, accomplish their sacred mission in their lives and their works.<sup>54</sup>

Given their precious historical experience as a crossroads of civilization, Bulgaria and the Balkan region have a key part to play in building bridges of peace based on mutual amity.

### *The Elevated Spirituality of the Crossroads of Civilizations*

**Djourova:** Yes! This is true, and in periods of trials we have always managed to build these bridges. For instance, the long centuries under Ottoman rule did not succeed in obliterating any of the Balkan ethnic communities. Even five hundred years and more later—after 1878, when the Slavonic peoples were liberated by Russia, and after the Balkan War of 1912 to 1913, when the Balkan peoples won their freedom from the Ottomans—they proved to be much the same as they were on the eve of their enslavement at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

When I say “much the same” I am referring not only to their mentality, their style of living, and their cultures, but also, unfortunately, to the fact that they remain at times as disunited and hostile as they ever were. What is this evidence of? To understand the culture established here in the Balkans, one has to be also aware of certain contradictory features of the nations inhabiting the region. One has to be cognizant of their patterns of behavior and thinking in order to develop and propose relevant models for consolidation and integration.

For instance, Greece, the birthplace of democracy, is one of the last European countries to adopt it as a system of government. In addition to

being the place where democracy was conceived, the Mediterranean region and the Eastern Balkans are the motherland of the European culture that began with Homer and Aristotle.

The concept of the “Balkan Peninsula” only became widespread as late as in the second half of the nineteenth century. German geographer Johann August Zeune (1778–1853) is thought to have coined the term in order to distinguish the region from Europe. “The Balkans” was his rendering of *Stara planina*—the Slavonic name of the Balkan Mountain Range, given to it by the Turks—and eventually “the Balkans” gained currency and endured as the name for the entire region.

The region was not only late to experience but also to truly grasp the significance of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment in Europe. This has inevitably resulted in complexes, which engender their delayed reproduction. As I mentioned before, this region maintains the spiritual culture of the Greek Orthodox Church, such as sanctified suffering and a unique irrationality, showing that people can transform the hatred against their neighbors into a sublime sympathy and even self-sacrifice.

To be more precise, the Balkan region is situated on the “fault line” of Christian and Islamic civilizations. So the cultures of the Balkan nations can be perceived simultaneously as a border line dividing East and West, as well as their meeting point. To those outside the region, the very word “Balkanization” in the sense implied by English journalist James Louis Garvin (1868–1947), who is said to have coined it, means division and fragmentation.<sup>56</sup>

But the history of the Balkan nations is not solely characterized by confrontations and hostilities, as the term suggests; there was also a great deal of cross-pollination among its various cultures, a consolidation based on a shared tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church during the Ottoman rule of the fourteenth through nineteenth century, a common sociocultural environment and a similar mentality. It is true, however, that these nations have never accepted a unified state government organization—in this case Europe. Especially when Europe acts as a mentor not only concerning cultural aspects, but also concerning issues related to the organization of public life.

If we assume that the integration of Europe is an inevitable and irreversible historic process and that in the future the European Union will include Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, Turkey, and in my opinion Russia as well, I find myself asking what their road to joining will be like, and what price they will pay for admission.

I do this based on the fact that almost ten years after the entrance of

Bulgaria into the EU, problems are multiplying and we are faced with a growing number of worrying questions about the future. The prospects for “clashes of civilizations” of the kind described by Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (1927–2008) in the 1990s along the fault line that characterizes the Balkan region do not fill me with optimism.<sup>57</sup> My knowledge of the history of Bulgaria causes my optimism to diminish even farther.

Notwithstanding the fact that the integration of Bulgaria into the EU had a favorable impact on inter-Balkan cooperation and contributed to the settlement of a number of controversial issues, many remain unresolved and the general conditions not only in Bulgaria, but also in Greece, Rumania, and Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013, are not improving. In Bulgaria, for instance, 80 percent of the population had a favorable view of joining the EU in 2007. Today that has dropped to 48 percent. Perhaps more tellingly, 80 percent of the Bulgarian people are living at less than subsistence level.

My skepticism also reflects the reality that significant portions of the industrial, agricultural, and commercial sectors of our economy have been lost, as well as the emigration of 2.6 million Bulgarians, most of whom are qualified specialists. As a result, we are approaching a critically low level of human resources in the fields of health care, scientific and technical development, and education. We have become a “reservoir” for the export of inexpensive qualified labor.

These developments amplify the inequality between the developed countries and the countries on the periphery of the European Union in every area. The foreign debt of Greece, the veteran EU member Balkan nation, has increased to 160 percent of their GDP. This can explain the growing Euro-skepticism, as well as the expansion of nationalism, not just in the Balkans, but within the entire European Union and the failure to approve the countries from the West Balkans expecting to join the Union for purely military and political reasons.

As is well known, for centuries the territory of Bulgaria has been a crossroads for military campaigns and the migration of peoples. For instance, the territory was often used as military camps by Byzantium. Due to its geographic position and ethnographic specifics, as well as because of the ambitions of the Great Powers, Bulgaria never has had clearly defined national boundaries and my present fears are that, considering the current geopolitical considerations and interests, it might be transformed into a military camp again.

**Ikeda:** I understand your sense of duty to stand watch at this very

crucial historical moment. In that context, your tireless efforts, as well as those of the members of the BAS and the faculty of Sofia University, to focus your collective wisdom on fostering capable individuals are indeed a great source of hope, in my opinion.

Earlier you noted that the Balkans is the birthplace of democracy and of European culture.

Plato wrote in the work of his final years, *Laws*:

So war, for example, is in their view a serious matter, and needs to be properly handled for the sake of peace. Whereas the fact is that in war there is neither play (that is not its nature) nor indeed any education, present or future, worth talking about—though that is what we claim to regard as the most important thing there is. So for the individual, it is his peacetime life he needs to lead as fully and as well as we can.<sup>58</sup>

Plato's words resonate deeply with those of my generation, whose youth, the critical period of the formation of a person's character and personality, was so violently disrupted by World War II.

It has been suggested that while science and technology made great strides and material civilization achieved remarkable progress in the twentieth century, human spirituality and morality stagnated. The result was a century of war and violence, in which the gains of science and technology were abused, robbing countless individuals of their lives, and leaving deep scars on countless others. Professor Toynbee called this contradiction between the growth of material prosperity and the decline of the human spirit "the morality gap," and warned of its consequences. Many of the thinkers I have met and talked with in the world have expressed similar concern.

But in the twenty-first century, the chain of violence begetting violence continues, though in different forms. The world will never become a better place until human beings better themselves. As Plato pointed out, "Those who have the ability to rule themselves are good, and those who don't are bad."<sup>59</sup>

According to Plato, the soul (psyche) has three principles—the rational principle (mind or intellect), the passionate or spirited principle (will or volition), and the concupiscent principle (emotion or desire). The soul achieves harmony and virtue when the spirited and concupiscent principles are ruled by the rational principle.<sup>60</sup>

Plato's student Aristotle observed: "For those who are ill-disposed in soul neither wealth nor strength nor beauty is a good."<sup>61</sup> Such a person

will abuse whatever he possesses and bring misery to both himself and others. A good person, in contrast, utilizes everything for the happiness of himself and others, for society, and for peace. It all comes down to oneself. We are the starting point of everything. We need to make our inner beings virtuous. This is one of the great insights of Greek philosophy.

Plato's concept of the three principles of the soul and Aristotle's philosophy were each transmitted to and absorbed by the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and Islam in distinctive ways.

As is well known, St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–94), the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, advocated self-control. According to him, people are not good or evil by nature. They can at any time transition to good or evil, positive or negative. They have free will (*prohairesis*). They alone are responsible for their choices, not God. St. Gregory identified the aim of life as a constant effort to purge the inner potential for evil and transcend and elevate the self (*epektasis*).

St. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) stated, "Love for God in no way admits of hatred for man."<sup>62</sup> He also noted, "The one who loves God surely loves his neighbor as well."<sup>63</sup> These teachings of the Greek patriarchs encouraged people to lead good and virtuous lives of self-improvement and love for others.

Buddhism also regards both good and evil as inherent in human beings. As I have discussed with you in the past, Buddhism categorizes the states of our life into the ten distinct realms, or Ten Worlds. To briefly reiterate, the ten life states, from evil to good, are the realms of hell (the lowest state, being imprisoned by suffering), hungry spirits (filled with insatiable desire), animals (driven by instinct and lacking self-awareness), *asuras* (driven by the desire to dominate or surpass others), humans (a state of equanimity and calm), heavenly beings (the state of joy at attaining one's desires), voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones (stages of dwelling in partial enlightenment), bodhisattvas (a state of pursuing enlightenment and benefitting others), and Buddhas (or Buddhahood: a state of absolute happiness, awakened to the fundamental Law of life and the universe and filled with courage, compassion, and wisdom).

Buddhism teaches that the supreme state of Buddhahood is inherent in all people. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, or the fundamental Law of life and the universe, we can draw forth boundless courage, compassion, and wisdom while vanquishing our evil tendencies and elevating our life states. In doing so, we can shift everything in a better, more positive direction, with our own inner-directed reformation—what

we term “human revolution”—driving the transformation of our communities and societies.

I expressed the main theme of my novel *The Human Revolution* in this statement: “A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.”<sup>64</sup>

In a dialogue we published together, the French author André Malraux (1901–76) spoke of the critical importance of the formation of character. This cannot be achieved through science or the mere transmission of knowledge, but requires a great religious order. That is the model of character formation. He thus had high hopes for the Soka Gakkai’s movement to encourage character formation and human revolution.<sup>65</sup>

The thought, culture, and experience fostered in Bulgaria and the Balkan region, together with the spirituality of the Eastern Orthodox Church, are seeds that lead to the flowering of a culture of peace. I am convinced they also provide the EU with the wisdom needed for its sound development and for peace.

### *The Balkans as a “Bridge-Land”*

**Djourova:** Yes! But only under the conditions I have already mentioned—that the European Union makes a concerted effort to understand and respond to the specifics of our region, and that it affirms its founding philosophy—“the equality of all individual nations forming the common spiritual space of Europe.”

I also agree with you that true peace can indeed be attained through a philosophy of seeking the causes of things within ourselves rather than attributing them to external circumstances, and activating the life state of Buddhahood that is inherent in all human beings. Such efforts aimed at self-perfection should be an imperative on the road to reaching a joint solution. I would not like to yield to the temptation to pass pessimistic judgment on the present, and especially on the future. For this reason I believe that in the twenty-first century humankind faces two options—degrading or elevating the mind. If we would like the twenty-first century to become, according to your definition, the Age of Life—the age in search of humaneness, then the fate of humankind depends on the individual’s capacities and skills to master one’s passions.

What are the future possibilities for Bulgaria in this extremely complex and, I would say, entangled situation? Being a small nation amidst vast imperial territories and interests, we can only play the part of an intermediary, as you have just noted. Historically we have inherited

knowledge of and experience in both the European spirit and Russian culture, and in this sense we can act as mediators between Europe, Russia, and the United States—provided our politicians will find a way to contribute to the balance between them, while defending our national interests, rather than currying the favor of the great powers.

I often ask myself if it is useful, when dealing with an oppressive present, to turn our gaze to the past. I think it is important to discern which of the numerous cultural features and patterns that have accumulated and taken shape over the centuries can be useful to us today. Reflecting on and gaining an understanding of past events can be a source of wisdom.

For many nations, and especially the Balkan nations, the past may wield greater influence on the present than is commonly recognized. In Bulgaria, for example, our sense of belonging to the Orthodox Christian community, our closeness to Russian culture and our feelings for the Russians as our liberators are much more alive in our minds than we might initially suppose. Immediately following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 to 1878, Bulgaria began its new life of freedom with a constitution based on the Belgian Constitution of 1831, and pursued petty-bourgeois European standards of living.

Its new cultural institutions were created with great help from Czechs and Slovaks, and the new nation set its hopes on the establishment of a Balkan Slavic Federation. Yet in spite of these modern aspirations, the heritage of Orthodox Christianity according to the Byzantine model turned out to exert a much stronger force. When we of the Balkans become aware that the history of our nations has predetermined our joint destiny as well, perhaps we shall be able to realize the mission assigned by it to walk along the road to the future together and overcome obstacles in solidarity.

There are a series of cultural sites that, from remote antiquity to the formation of Byzantium and the arrival of the Slavs and the Proto-Bulgarians, played a part in the formation of the specific features defining the Balkan micro-community. These are also an integral part of the diverse spiritual aspect of Europe.

When we consider these, we realize that this region has been for a millennium, and shall continue to be, the gate to Europe, the Old Continent. As a gate, it was open in the past and is still open now to accept the flows of refugees created by dramatic events unfolding in Asia and Africa. But it is also a gate that has not been and is still not solid enough to prevent invasions led by various conquerors, past and present.

I love our region, and travelling along the asphalt-paved highways or narrow country roads of the Balkans in recent years, I can see, as if in a distilled form, that it is reliving its millennia-long fate. I have been prompted to ask myself why the Balkans have been defined as a “bridge-land,” and the people living there a “crossroads people,” not only in the geographical, but in the historical sense as well.

I have reached the conclusion that this may not be by chance. I do not know of anywhere else in the world where so many different civilizations, ethnicities, cultures, and religions exist layer over layer, or a layer next to a layer, in so confined a space. The specific features of people of this region have been formed, on the one hand, by the common Thracian-Dacian-Illyrian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine heritage, and on the other by their continuous struggle for a place under the sun and their joint resistance to the foreign conquerors through the ages.

The similar geopolitical conditions of the Balkan nations have also led to the evolution, as I have already mentioned, of a common strategy and tactics for survival, as well as common heroes, symbols, and myths. Among the literary figures or fictional characters emerging from our history are Prince Marko, Bai Ganyo (“Uncle Ganyo”), Hitar Petar (“Witty Peter”), and Zorba the Greek. And as great writers of the Balkans we can cite Ivo Andrić of Yugoslavia, Ivan Vazov and Aleko Konstantinov of Bulgaria, Nikos Kazantzakis of Greece, and Ismail Kadare of Albania. In recent times Milorad Pavić of Serbia and Orhan Pamuk of Turkey are celebrated.

The “crossroads” nature of our consciousness has also created the inclination of those born in the Balkans to dualism (the Bogomilism), which we discussed in our previous dialogue; it was also the reason for the swing between the East and the West in the process of attaining independence of the state and the church (between Constantinople and Rome, Russia and the United States, and currently the European Union too). It also sets the pattern of the tragic strenuousness of our everyday life.

At the same time it stimulates our ascending the heights of great creative and spiritual achievements, as well as the unexpected sudden falls and treacheries. Through the ages in this “bridge-land,” known in the past and at present as “the Powder Keg of Europe,” a culture had been flourishing which is attractive to this day, as well as exotic with its combination of conservatism and innovations.<sup>66</sup>

In the Balkans, many nations have merged, and their borders have never been natural, genuine, or just. In the event of even the smallest conflict, this fact would result in demolition of the bridges that were

built in times of peace, which leads to the eruption of rivalry and animosities. In spite of such a situation, in the field of culture and human coexistence, dialogue has always been maintained and spiritual ideas, mental attitudes and, as I have mentioned, common symbols, heroes, and myths are shared. This sustains my great hope for the peaceful development of the region, and for its brighter future—which will also contain, I am sure, many dramatic events and unexpected vicissitudes.

My hope, however, may prove ephemeral if the peoples of Central Europe and the political leaders of Europe do not overcome their condescending attitude to the Balkans, formed on the basis of insufficient knowledge of our region. Only through an understanding of how difficult it is for the peoples of the Balkans to accept attempts to impose ways of living alien to their historic and spiritual patterns can steps be successfully taken to overcome the existing contradictions in the Balkans and create a more peaceful and prosperous life in the region. Such steps cannot involve trying to persuade us to forget our history and our myths, to suppress our feelings and thoughts, and to unfasten our eyes from our mythological past, which we often use as a shield against our stifling present. That approach would mean ripping out our souls—ours and, respectively, those of Europe itself.

Our passionate initial pursuit of joining the European family was based on the belief that Europe is not just policies and markets, that it is not just an economic environment. To us, Europe has a soul, and this soul embodies its history, its culture, its life-style, and its ancient art, all of which still fascinate us. These feelings should not be abandoned without a fight. I should note here that, in my opinion, we are not at variance with the better part of those European intellectuals, whose appeals expressing these same ideas are heard more and more often lately at various forums and in the mass media. I believe the time has come for a reconsideration of the idea of globalization.

### *Administrating a Global Society: A Vision*

**Ikeda:** Today, the original sense of hope and optimism suggested by the term “globalization” has been overshadowed by the impositions of globalization that have emerged.

For example, the origins of the 2008 financial crisis that started in the US were a fundamental pathology of modern civilization, a bewitchment with money aptly described by “global mammonism”—the economic face of globalism, a rapidly spreading greed for wealth. This calls to mind the words of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900):

“But a horror to us is the degenerating sense, which saith: ‘All for myself.’”<sup>67</sup> Buddhism identifies this impulse as “avaricious desire.”

According to Buddhism, greed, anger, and foolishness are known as the three poisons among the fundamental earthly desires, or the sources of illusions and base impulses inherent in life. Such greed is an overpowering, insatiable, escalating desire. Anger is aggression and violence. Foolishness, also called ignorance or darkness, is the negative energy that erupts from being unaware of the right way to live, an expression of the fundamental egoism of life.

A society in which greed and egoism prevail cannot develop in a sound and healthy way. What we need is a transformation of the very nature of modern materialistic civilization. We need to establish a sound moral and ethical outlook—which can only be achieved by the inner transformation of human beings.

As you know, when the world struggled under imperialistic domination over a century ago, Mr. Makiguchi, in his work *Jinsei chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life), published in 1903, envisioned a time when the world would embrace what he termed “humanitarian competition.” Looking back through human history, he observed, the human race has evolved from competing in the military realm to competing in the economic realm. He argued that we must move forward yet again, to humanitarian or moral competition. This is the only way, he stressed, to a brighter future for human society.

Modern civilization is indeed at such a crossroads. The humanitarian competition foreseen by Mr. Makiguchi was the effort to preserve and enhance not only one’s own welfare, but also that of others, bringing benefit to oneself while also benefiting and helping others.<sup>68</sup> Today, NGOs and civil movements and organizations around the world are engaged in doing just this, in various ways. In a world awash with greed and hatred, ordinary citizens are taking action for the sake of others and society, individuals with open minds and hearts that are doing so out of a profound sense of humanity. They expand the reach of their movements through dialogue. I believe that these grassroots networks will prove foundational in the revival of a sound spirituality and robust democracy in this age of globalism.

I have engaged in a dialogue with Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, the environmentalist and co-president of the Club of Rome. For many years, Dr. Weizsäcker has offered constructive proposals to address such pressing problems as climate change and he has engaged in a variety of activities to promote a sustainable society. He has long held high hopes for networks and organizations of ordinary citizens, endorsing “global

governance,” and “the strengthening of civil society, inducing it to fight for public interests.”<sup>69</sup> He also calls on NGOs to keep a close vigil over their respective home nations and to lead them in a positive direction.

The humanitarian competition advocated by Mr. Makiguchi can only be firmly established through movements of individual citizens engaged in steadfast, grassroots initiatives. The SGI is also an NGO, and over the past more than three decades it has continued to work together with other citizens’ organizations on such issues as the environment, nuclear disarmament, and support for the United Nations.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted a program of Sustainable Development Goals, one of which affirms the importance of educating global citizens.

The ongoing tide of globalization is likely to continue, making it all the more important for each member of civil society and in particular the younger generation to think earnestly about the future and take an active and central role in creating positive social change.

Be it in government, the business world, or society at large, there is a growing sentiment that some sacrifice is inevitable when striving to achieve the greatest happiness of the largest number of people. But in a world of increasing globalization, various events are linked together in a web of mutual relatedness. In the case of climate change, for example, our willingness to overlook the plight of people living in other places can ultimately threaten the survival of humanity as a whole. By deepening our awareness and recognition of such interrelated connections through education for global citizenship, a basis for a shared understanding that we cannot be happy if others are unhappy, that we cannot enjoy peace and prosperity when others are suffering from disaster, can be established for a new civil society transcending national borders.

In addition, a shift from a fiercely competitive, survival of the fittest mindset to a mutually creative mindset in which all can enjoy happiness and everyone wins; a life of the creation of positive value for self and others alike—surely this can become a standard of conduct for building a healthy and harmonious global society.

SGI members seek to take part in establishing such a standard of conduct by building networks for good wherever they live, and while their work may go unseen, they will continue to play a proactive part in bettering their communities, enabling these to shine with hope. We remain committed, now more than ever, to creating a truly global world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Hristo Botev, *Poems*, ed. Marco Mincoff (Sofia: Narodna Kultura, 1955), p. 25.
- <sup>2</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Jaspers, television interview by Thilo Koch, March 10, 1960 (broadcast on August 10, 1960).
- <sup>5</sup> Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), p. 45.
- <sup>6</sup> Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2006), p. 778.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999), p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, November 29, 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> See Romyana Koneva, *Ivan Shishmanov and United Europe* (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 2011), p. 146; BAS ф. 11к, о.л. 1, а.е. 236, л. 52.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162; BAS, ф. 11к, о.л. 2, а.е. 568, л. 15.
- <sup>11</sup> “Fathers For Life,” [http://fathersforlife.org/hist/song\\_of\\_the\\_bell.htm](http://fathersforlife.org/hist/song_of_the_bell.htm) (accessed July 19, 2017).
- <sup>12</sup> Koneva, *Ivan Shishmanov and United Europe*, pp. 176–77.
- <sup>13</sup> Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, “Das Pan-Europa-Programm” (Vienna: *Panuropa*, 1924), No 4. S. 12.
- <sup>14</sup> Ivan Vazov, *Under the Yoke* (London: William Heinemann, 1912), p. 168.
- <sup>15</sup> Hector Berlioz, *The Art of Music and Other Essays* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 36.
- <sup>16</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Beethoven’s Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 380.
- <sup>17</sup> Translated from Japanese. Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi and Daisaku Ikeda, *Bunmei: nishi to higashi* (Civilization: East and West) in *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Daisaku Ikeda), vol. 102 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun-sha, 2003), p. 92.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- <sup>19</sup> Stefan Zweig, “Das Wien von gestern” (lecture, Paris, 1940).
- <sup>20</sup> Zweig, “Bertha von Suttner” (speech, Bern, 1917).
- <sup>21</sup> Count Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *The Totalitarian State Against Man*, trans. Sir Andrew McFadyean (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1938), p. 15.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>23</sup> Henry Richard and Elihu Burritt, *Report of the Proceedings of the Second General Peace Congress Held in Paris on; the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of August, 1849* (London: C. Gilpin, 1849), p. 11.
- <sup>24</sup> Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 10.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 474.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Schuman, *For Europe* (Geneva: Negel Editions, 2010), p. 32.

- <sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 126.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 187.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 209.
- <sup>36</sup> Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu* (The Complete Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmeisha, 1982), p. 219.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 308–09.
- <sup>38</sup> Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 955.
- <sup>39</sup> Translated from Japanese. John Kenneth Galbraith, *Nihon keizai e no saigo no keikoku* (The Last Warning to the Japanese Economy), trans. Takashi Kakuma (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2002), p. 16.
- <sup>40</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, “Treatise on the Origin of Language” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed., trans. Michael N. Forster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1772), p. 72.
- <sup>41</sup> Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill, vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1803), p. 322.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 387.
- <sup>43</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 28.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 9.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>46</sup> Translated from German. Johan Huizinga, *Schriften zur Zeitkritik: Im Schatten von morgen* (Writings on Contemporary Criticism: In the Shadow of Tomorrow) (Zürich: Occident-Verlag, 1948), p. 300.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> “To my First Love,” <http://www.slovo.bg/old/f/en/botev/tomylove.htm> (accessed July 10, 2017).
- <sup>49</sup> Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 934.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 736.
- <sup>51</sup> Ivan Minchov Vazov, *Selected Stories* (Sofia: Foreign Languages, 1967), p. 89.
- <sup>52</sup> Vazov, *Under the Yoke* (London: William Heinemann, 1894), p. 50.
- <sup>53</sup> Nichiren, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 1060.
- <sup>54</sup> Translated from Japanese. Axinia D. Djourova and Daisaku Ikeda, *Utsukushiki shishi no tamashii* (The Beauty of a Lion’s Heart) (Tokyo: The Institute of Oriental Philosophy, 1999), p. 21.
- <sup>55</sup> With Russia’s victory in the Russo-Turkish War in 1878, Slavic peoples living under the Ottoman Turk Empire gained greater freedom.
- <sup>56</sup> Андрей Пантев, Историческо съвремие, сп. *Везни* № 3 (София: Захари Стоянов, 2006), с. 53–68.
- <sup>57</sup> Самюъл П. Хънтингтън, Сблъсъкът на цивилизациите, сп. *Демократичен преглед* № 2–3 (София: Изток—Запад, 1995), с. 167–189. (Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*)
- <sup>58</sup> Plato, *Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 264.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

- <sup>60</sup> See Plato, *The Republic and Other Works* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2012), pp. 132–33.
- <sup>61</sup> Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 2403.
- <sup>62</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New Jersey: Paulist, 1985), p. 37.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, *The Human Revolution* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2004), p. viii.
- <sup>65</sup> See André Malraux and Daisaku Ikeda, *Ningen kakumei to ningen no joken* (Changes Within: The Human Revolution vs. the Human Condition) (Tokyo: Ushio Publishing Co., Ltd., 1976), pp. 59–64.
- <sup>66</sup> See E. Durham, *The Burden of the Balkans* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905); and David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995).
- <sup>67</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Courier Corporation, 2012), p. 49.
- <sup>68</sup> Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1996), p. 399.
- <sup>69</sup> Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker and Daisaku Ikeda, *Knowing Our Worth: Conversations on Energy and Sustainability* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Dialogue Path Press, 2016), p. 53.

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