

Posthumous tribute to Daisaku Ikeda

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On November 15 of the present year, 2023, at the age of 95, Daisaku Ikeda, a revered pacifist, educator, and Buddhist leader, passed away in Japan. He was a tireless advocate for building conditions of peace amidst the great social and cultural challenges of our time.

Since the early 1980s, Ikeda dedicated himself to traveling the world, engaging with personalities from the fields of culture, science, religion, and politics. He operated with the awareness that friction and disagreements are inevitable in human relationships, but he firmly believed that wars can and must be avoided—a crucial stance for the development of the human spirit and an indispensable condition for the advancement of scientific culture. Ikeda initiated dialogues with figures from various political and cultural backgrounds worldwide, addressing pressing issues, many of which are documented in dozens of his books.

Acknowledging the contemporary world's movement towards diversification coupled with a discernible tendency towards chaos, Ikeda suggested that the crucial pursuit of integration should surpass positions endorsing hasty universalisms. Such universalisms, generated in culture and science, often adhere to the “closed box” model, reproducing systems of domination and perpetuating prejudices, akin to colonialist processes.

Ikeda denounces that these universalisms carry forward their own logic, ultimately dulling the consciences of agents committed to abstractly universal laws, which are emptied of actual experience. Consequently, insensitivity towards human dramas, blindness towards injustices and contradictions in real processes, result in the weakening of cultures, serving as dramatic symptoms of depersonalizing universalisms.

Ikeda was thus engaged in building dialogues with diverse cultural positions, seeking the “great universalism” forged by the experiences of human beings in science, culture, and politics. He took a personal stance in the face of the historical dramas of his time.

Even at the cost of numerous misunderstandings in the Cold War world, Ikeda actively participated for decades in actions to restore Sino-Japanese relations. He drew attention to the importance of not isolating China and, to achieve this goal, helped found

a political party in Japan and organized university exchange projects between Japanese and Chinese students. During moments of imminent risk of war, he conducted dialogues with Chu Enlai (Chinese Premier in 1974) and Deng Xiaoping (Chinese Vice Prime Minister in 1974 and 1975), as well as with Henry Kissinger (United States Secretary of State in 1975), Mikhail Gorbachev (seven times President of the then Soviet Union, from 1990 to 2001), and established historic dialogues with Rajiv Gandhi (Prime Minister of India in 1985), Fidel Castro (President of Cuba in 1996), Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1989), Nelson Mandela (President of South Africa in 1990 and 1995), among many other public authorities.

In Brazil, a dialogue with Austregésilo de Athayde, then president of Academia Brasileira de Letras, led to Ikeda's appointment as a "Corresponding Member" of that illustrious Academy on February 12, 1993. This collaboration also resulted in the creation of the book entitled *Human Rights in the Twenty-first Century: A Dialogue*.

Another significant dialogue took place in 2005 with Brazilian astronomer Ronaldo Rogério de Freitas Mourão, which gave rise to the book *Astronomy and Buddhism*. Ikeda established lasting friendships with Brazilian poet Thiago de Mello in 1975 and pianist-conductor Amaral Vieira in 1992, maintaining ongoing connections with both.

Focusing on Brazil and recognizing its potential for collaboration in establishing a culture of "great universalism", Ikeda founded a basic education school in São Paulo based on the pedagogical principles of Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Additionally, he established a youth philharmonic orchestra led by Amaral Vieira and founded CEPEAM - the Center for Research and Environmental Studies of the Amazon in the 1990s (recently renamed the Soka Institute of the Amazon), emphasizing environmental conservation and archaeological research.

Ikeda's global engagement extended to various countries on four continents, where he confronted the most challenging issues of each historical moment. Simultaneously, he identified the unique contributions of each people, each cultural and political personality, and even each individual to the construction of world peace.

Particularly noteworthy among Ikeda's numerous dialogues are his conversations with the British historian Arnold Toynbee in 1972-73, discussing the reorganization of the world order after the Second World War and the importance of addressing the demands of the Arab peoples (cf. the book *Choose Life*). Additionally, there's the conversation with Aurelio Peccei, the founder of the Club of Rome, in 1975,

centered on the global production society (captured in the book *Before It Is Too Late*), and the dialogue with René Huyghe, a psychologist and art critic from the French Academy, in 1974-75, is published in *Dawn After Dark: A Dialogue*. Other significant dialogues include discussions with the British sociologist of religion Bryan Wilson, documented in *Human Values in a Changing World: A Dialogue*, and the dialogue with the Sinhalese astronomer Chandra Wickramasinghe about astronomy principles and their connection with the Buddhist worldview (published as *Space and Eternal Life*). These are among the 39 dialogues with personalities from around the world, published and translated into several languages. Lastly, the dialogue with the Argentine Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel in 1995 is recorded in the book *The Power of Hope: Thoughts on Peace and Human Rights in the Third Millennium*, along with the jointly written manifesto titled *To the Youth of the World: An Appeal for Resilience and Hope* (published in Rome in 2018).

In the field of higher education, Ikeda founded Soka University, based in Tokyo, Japan, with an additional campus in the United States. This university focuses on contemporary challenges as a pedagogical proposal for integrated technical, intellectual, and human training. Particularly noteworthy is the alignment with the global goals for 2030 (SDG) as parameters for student training, encouraging them to establish exchange relationships in various countries worldwide. In collaboration with Brazil, the Soka University of Japan has official exchange agreements signed with several federal universities in the Northeast region, as well as the Federal University of Paraná and our Federal University of Minas Gerais.

At 19, Ikeda realized with deep sorrow that his quest for meaning took him on paths divergent from those chosen by his close Christian friend. This occasion, often recounted by Ikeda in public speeches and poems, became a symbol of the decision to forge his own path, with the certainty that the resulting separation was only apparent. Despite the divergence, their pain and love for life would keep them united throughout their lives, albeit in different ways. The farewell meeting took place on the Japanese beach of Morigasaki. Without fear of error, we can say that today, that beach extends across the entire world. Across the globe, there are those who navigate their unique paths, responding to the challenges of their time in harmony with the great builder of peace and humanist culture. The recent departure of Daisaku Ikeda underscores the definitive unity in diversity.

The passing of Daisaku Ikeda is an irreplaceable loss, particularly at this historical moment marked by structural narcissism and growing intolerance. However, his absence also urges us to adopt more radical positions in the pursuit of peace within our specific realm of culture.

The University Council of the Federal University of Minas Gerais welcomed the proposal from the Department of Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences to confer upon Prof. Daisaku Ikeda the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa*. He expressed his acceptance, but unfortunately, he passed away before the award could be bestowed. Despite the sadness stemming from this incompleteness, there is a firm conviction in the appropriateness of the tribute, as reaffirmed by this brief note.