ABOUT THE BOOK:
This exploration of what it means to be healthy from a physical, mental, and spiritual standpoint discusses Western humanism, Japanese Buddhism, and modern science from three divergent, yet expert, perspectives. Seeking common ground through dialogue, this ambitious work broaches questions about issues that face today's society, such as cancer, AIDS, death with dignity, *in vitro* fertilization, biomedical ethics, and more. The discussions cut through linguistic and cultural barriers to present a vision of the potential—and the inherent challenges—of being human. Avoiding scientific jargon, the book begins with a medical discussion of cancer and AIDS, as well as the problem of social discrimination against those infected. Questions about the fundamental nature of a harmonious existence are considered, as are specific issues such as the nature of brain death and ethical problems relating to fertility and childbirth. The origins of life, evolution, and the birth of humanity are also discussed.

from ON BEING HUMAN
CHAPTER 2: HEALTH AND HARMONY

1. The Nature of Health

Dynamic equilibrium

Ikeda • Since Buddhism is a “Law of Life,” issues like health and longevity are fundamental to it. Shakyamuni himself gave considerable thought to medical techniques. Buddhist scriptures incorporate the essence of Indian medicine (set forth in the Sacrificial Prayer Veda or *Yajur Veda*), which was the most advanced in the world in its day. At a later stage, Buddhist wisdom on the art of healing was compiled to form what is called Buddhist medicine. The sutras refer to Shakyamuni as the Great Healer. How would you define health, Dr. Bourgeault?

Bourgeault • Montaigne (1533–92) once spoke of how much better health seems after an illness.

Ikeda • As everyone knows from experience, we only appreciate how wonderful good health is once we lose it.

Bourgeault • In a certain medicine-oriented or simply idealized view, good health is often defined, as you suggest, as the absence of illness or, at least, as the checking or controlling of illness. Just as we breathe without noticing it, we are unaware of health—or of life itself—until it is threatened. Then, all of a sudden, we understand its value.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) once observed that we can feel well—that is, experience the sensation of vital well-being—but can never know that we are well. This is perhaps one of the main reasons medical diagnosis does not always correspond with the experience of the patient. No matter what health may be, defining it is as difficult as giving an adequate definition of life.

Ikeda • Exactly. That is why people sometimes only become aware of their illness once it has advanced until it is beyond treatment. Now please tell me your own view of good health.

Bourgeault • Essentially good health is less the absence of illness than the tension between a precarious equilibrium and the constant dynamic of its re-establishment. I like to compare it to walking. Walking is possible only if we are willing to accept the risk of losing our balance by moving forward. A new step temporarily restores the balance until we move still farther forward. A chain of lost and restored balance enables us to walk. A similar process in societies makes history possible.

Ikeda • I like your description of good health as a dynamic rather than static reality. According to the Indian Buddhist sutra The Wanderer's Collection (Caraka Samhita), freedom from sickness is fundamental to human life and the basis of good works, success, sexual desire, and liberation from the bonds of illusion and suffering in the three worlds. "Freedom from sickness" means more than the absence of illness. Good health is judged not only on the basis of physiological diagnoses of abnormalities, but also on a holistic view of life that includes spiritual elements.

According to the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO), health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not simply the absence of disease or infirmity. In other words, the concept of good health is not limited to the physical but extends to the spiritual and social as well. How do you feel about the idea of expanding the concept of health to the entirety of human existence?

Bourgeault • In one sense, I like the WHO holistic perspective. But this definitely too-ambitious definition of health corresponds to an ideal of vital fullness and integral happiness that is unattainable in reality. It is somewhat naïve to say that health is not only the absence of sickness or infirmity, but also a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, no less!

In 1978, the WHO pushed naïveté—rather than audacity—to the point of proposing the goal of "good health for all in 2000." Beyond the slogan, the delusion—and the fantasy—was perfectly obvious.

The definition proposed by Georges Canguilhem (1904–95) in *Britannica Micropaedia* (1992) seems more realistic: Health, in human beings, is the prolonged capacity of an individual to cope physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially with his or her environment. Though similar to the WHO version, this definition makes room for the dynamic of effort and tension I have already mentioned. It reminds us that good health is not a stable state, that it is always threatened, and that we can never take it for granted. Above all, it is never complete and whole, that is, it is never perfect.

Ikeda • Nichiren Daishonin taught that "The four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death are the nature of the threefold world."[1] In other words, since all living things must pass through birth, old age, sickness, and death, illness is a natural component of the life cycle. It does not necessarily mean the defeat of life. On the contrary, the struggle to confront illness enables us to celebrate the victory of the human experience. Efforts toward fulfillment are the dynamic of life, and this struggle is the constant equilibrium that you mentioned.

Nichiren Daishonin also said, "Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the way."[2] Sickness helps people pioneer a more fulfilled way of living by reflecting on the meaning and dignity of life. The very process of overcoming illness tempers body and mind and enables us to create a still broader equilibrium. This is the source of the radiance of good health.

Coping

Bourgeault • A friend of mine, stricken with cancer—and now deceased—refused to call himself sick and, above all, to be treated like an invalid. To the very end, he refused to live his life under the sign of sickness and succeeded in "coping"—to borrow Canguilhem's term.

Ikeda • René Dubos (1901–82), author of *Mirage of Health, Utopias, Progress and Biological Change,*[3] with whom I once conducted a dialogue, considered adaptability to the environment important to good health.

The Buddhist term *myo* (mystic or beyond comprehension) describes a continually creative force that throbs in every healthy entity, sustaining its activities. This force has three general characteristics: renewal, perfection, and openness. The first is a capacity for activation, renewal and creativity. This is demonstrated in the way the human body is constantly called upon to respond in new ways and gather up its creative resources. The second meaning is perfection and completion, in the sense of wholeness and unity. The dynamic equilibrium of the human body as a whole—its homeostatis—bears witness to the action of the mystic force. The third meaning of *myo* is the ideal of openness or the individual's availability to influence his or her environment. Every living thing reacts to its external environment and is capable of provoking a reaction in its environment.

Bourgeault • Those three words of the Buddhist tradition—renewal, perfection and openness—are three points of a cyclical continuum, or a helicoid development, in human life. They express what I myself have outlined on several occasions in discussing an evolutionist dynamic of the breakdown and re-establishment of an easily-shattered equilibrium.

Many analysts of change at all levels and on all planes—physical, physiologic and psychological, as well as in relation to social structures and societal evolution—have distinguished between disturbances that occur on the way to establishing a new equilibrium and serious breakdowns. The disturbance in equilibrium seems to be opening the door to chaos, but it is a temporary thing before balance, or equilibrium, is reconstituted into a form hopefully more open than the one that went before. No doubt I am sacrificing a few of the nuances in comparing this to the Buddhist viewpoint you describe—but perhaps, when all is said and done, not entirely.

Ikeda • What can you tell me about the genetic interpretation of health and illness?

Bourgeault • One might say that genetics today "internalizes" illness, and health along with it. It claims that, at the heart of what makes a person an individual living being, a defect, error, or genetic flaw—or at least a predisposition or risk—causes internal imbalance or an incapacity to interrelate adequately with the environment.

Indirectly, these definitions refer back to a "normality," a rectitude, and a perfection, and therefore an implicit norm never defined and undoubtedly indefinable. This is a statistical normality that relates to no real individual. It is an ideal and totally unreal normality. But of course, any kind of "normality"—even if we are not aware of it—establishes a norm.

Ikeda • I am afraid that such an ambiguous standard of normality could promote discrimination.

Bourgeault • Yes, there is that risk, notably in drafting health policies. A few years ago, at the Research Center on Public Law at the University of Montreal, I headed a team that was working on the role of ideas of anomaly, handicap, and genetic illnesses in the development and management of health-related policies in Quebec and across Canada.

The development of genetic medicine and epidemiology as instruments of public prevention policy runs the risk of being accompanied by a certain stigmatization of targeted populations. Discriminatory behavior is imputable to inadequate understanding of genetics and to equating the illness with the gene and the gene with the person.

A deeper understanding of health and illness, handicap and incapacity, anomaly and abnormality, and the full gamut of intermediary stages is of crucial importance.

2. Health and Illness

The oneness of sickness and health

Ikeda • Have you ever been ill?

Bourgeault • Not really. I have experienced illness only indirectly—if I can put it that way—through the sickness that struck my older brother—now deceased—when I was a child and later when some of my friends became seriously sick. I had a high fever when I was four, but it went down fairly fast. A few days later, it struck my nine-year-old brother, who then suffered from polio and its after-effects until his death at fifty-five.

Ikeda • At that time, the polio vaccine was not yet available. So you really experienced the suffering of illness through your brother.

Bourgeault • At first I felt guilty. Later, perhaps I simply became very attentive to sick people because I enjoyed the privilege of good health.

Ikeda • What you just said reminds me of the story of the Mahayana bodhisattva Vimalakirti who, though actually in good health, pretends to be ill out of empathy with sick and suffering sentient beings. In the story told in the *Vimalakirti Sutra,* Shakyamuni suggests that his disciples pay a sick call on him. But Shariputra, Ananda, and the other Disciples of Learning are reluctant to go and see him. Finally, Monjushiri, one of the most outstanding of the bodhisattvas, visits Vimalakirti's sickroom, along with some other bodhisattvas and Disciples of Learning and Realization. When Monjushiri asks, "What is your illness?" Vimalakirti answers, "I am ill because other beings are ill. When they are healed, I too will be healed."

The message is that the bodhisattva's illness is the result of his great compassion and his sense of responsibility for the sufferings of all other beings. Your own sense of responsibility toward those who are suffering from illness is very similar to the idea of Buddhist compassion. Buddhism teaches that good health and sickness are one and inseparable. This unifying vision of health illustrates the links that tie each individual to the suffering of others, creating a radiant picture of human health.

Bourgeault • I like your way of understanding good health and sickness as inseparable. The relationship between health and illness—the latter being a revealing reflection of the former—is complex. There is more than simple opposition between the obverse and reverse—between health and illness.

Ikeda • Modern molecular biology and biotechnology are making astonishing progress. New substances are being created and new ways of synthesizing natural substances are being discovered. Many of them are producing impressive results in disease treatment. One of the fascinating aspects of these recent developments is the discovery that the human body was designed to naturally produce substances such as insulin and morphine. In other words, an organism in "good working order" is able to produce these natural "drugs" in sufficient quantities.

Bourgeault • The natural forces of the cosmos and of living beings are indeed extraordinary. I am always dazzled by the amazing capacity of the living being to restore life in spite of obstacles or breakdowns. This capacity is miraculous in the etymological sense of the word. But the play of natural forces is not always without catastrophe. I am thinking about the kinds of things that high-flown sermons on the "return to Nature" overlook: volcanic eruptions, typhoons, tidal waves, and the totally natural disappearance of certain species.

Ikeda • True. Life does have negative aspects, at least on the surface.

Bourgeault • While the human organism possesses remarkable forces of healing or restoration of internal equilibrium and health—even of regeneration—it also has destructive elements, such as over- or underproduction of insulin and renal dysfunction necessitating regular dialysis to ward off poisoning and death. While we can be confident in the natural forces of the organism, we must also know how to compensate for their insufficiences and sometimes modify the rules of the game in order to correct unfortunate trajectories.

Ikeda • Yes. Too much insulin produces harmful side effects. Too little hinders the health of the organism. A hyperactive immune system, rather than protecting the body from outside enemies, can result in so-called autoimmune illnesses like Basedow's disease (exophthalmic goitre), *myasthenia gravis,* and other recalcitrant conditions.

It is true that we know little about this, or about the way the body functions. We cannot define superfluity and insufficiency in simple terms, so we must take a multifaceted view of life itself. In addition, we must further explore the "rules" that regulate the body's inherent healing powers.

Bourgeault • We must guard against blind faith in nature—specifically the natural self-healing capacity of the human organism—and take into consideration the risks of using medication (in the strict sense of pharmaceutical products). The use of medication grows at a startling rate. We now know that while certain treatments and medications enable us to save lives or improve the condition and quality of life, they may have harmful side effects. For example, the role of antibiotics is to combat bacterial infection. They can also, however, weaken and even upset the functioning of the immune system.

Generally, simple responses and solutions are illusory. We would like to be able to say that whatever is "natural" is for that reason good. Similarly we would like to be able to say that whatever is artificial—the product of artifice (art and science)—if not always bad, inevitably induces risk because it changes the rules of the game by modifying the natural course of things. But actually the natural course of things sometimes leads to catastrophe if artifice does not divert it in the desired direction.

The teeming complexity of interactions occurring constantly "inside" the human organism and with the very numerous forces of the exterior environment condemns all interventions in the biomedical field to ambivalence and ambiguity. These interventions, which simultaneously make and unmake the order of things, cannot eliminate one risk without introducing another.

We can nevertheless greet as promising research and therapy that aim to instate a new equilibrium and new relations between "nature" and "artifice." As one example among many, it is now possible to produce insulin outside the body for later injection when the rhythm of internal insulin production is insufficient. This provides new impetus to what you have called the body's pharmaceutical factory. But who knows how far we will be able to go on that impetus.

A new genetic therapy has recently enabled Robert Tanguay, of Laval University, and Marcus Grompe, of the Oregon University of Sciences and Health, to reconstruct complete livers inside living mice, using a few genetically modified cells. No doubt, genetic therapy, in which artifice helps nature, will soon be called upon to play an important role in stimulating the forces of internal regeneration in human beings.

Recipes for health

Ikeda • I'd like to ask you a few questions about nutrition. Is there a particular type of food that can invigorate the mind? Linus Pauling (1901–94), the father of modern chemistry and a

celebrated researcher on vitamin C, looked perplexed when I asked him that question. I don't expect a definitive scientific answer. I'm simply curious about your opinion.

Bourgeault • My wife is a dietician, but that does not make me an expert in the Weld. I only know, for example, that children who do not eat breakfast find it hard to pay attention in class. That is why, for almost twenty years, breakfasts have been served every morning in schools in the so-called underprivileged parts of Montreal.

Ikeda • In his book *The Education of Man,* Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) says that, depending on whether or not children eat breakfast, they will be industrious or lazy, lively or indecisive, quick or dull-witted, energetic or listless. In Japan today, the number of children who do not or cannot eat breakfast is said to be growing.

Bourgeault • We know that malnutrition—or what the specialists call "undernutrition"—can irreparably damage the brain. But I know of no work that has established an irrefutable link between any particular food and intellectual vigor.

Ikeda • I suppose we will have to wait for corroborative research in brain sciences and nutrition. Do you yourself follow any specific health regimens?

Bourgeault • I have never gone in for sports. In high school and college I always had my nose in a book. A teacher once told me I was jeopardizing my health and that I would not last long, but I have now rounded the sixty mark—possibly out of sheer belligerence. When I was little, my mother used to say that if I ever fell into a river, she would send the lifeguards to fish me out upstream instead of downstream. I do, however, observe two principles for staying in good health.

Ikeda • Tell us what they are.

Bourgeault • One is to free my mind when I have finished a task of, for instance, writing or teaching, even when I know that I could have gone farther and done better. The other is walking on an almost daily basis. But, most important of all, I think I have inherited what we call "good genes."

3. Harmony with the Environment

Six causes of illness

Ikeda • The great Chinese Buddhist teacher T'ien-t'ai (538–597) posits six causes of sickness that cover problems arising from dietary habits, viral infections—such as polio—mental disorders and genetic heritage.

First, sickness results from disharmony among the four elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—that make up the human body and correspond to the physical states solid, liquid, thermal and gaseous. This disharmony can result from an inability to adapt to changes in the external environment—weather, for example. Second come illnesses arising from poor dietary habits or irregular mealtimes. Third are sicknesses said to be caused by irregular meditation. In other words, when there are disturbances in the rhythm of our lives—such as insufficient sleep and exercise—we are susceptible to illness.

The fourth cause of illness T'ien-t'ai mentions is quite interesting: "news from a demon." In modern terms, this demon could be something like bacteria or viruses or external psychological

stress. The fifth cause is the influence of malevolent forces. The chaotic instincts and desires inherent in human nature unbalance the functions of the body and the mind. Buddhism teaches that mental illnesses arise mainly from delusions like wrath and greed. Sixth are karma-caused sicknesses. Buddhism and other Indian religions teach that life transmigrates from the past, to the present, and into the future because of the powerful energy of karma, which may be called potential life energy. Consequently, physical and psychological genetic makeup reflects past karma. According to the distinctively Buddhist interpretation, distortions in that energy can cause sickness.

The oneness of life and its environment

Ikeda • Let us further discuss the relationship between the human body and the environment—or what T'ien-t'ai calls disharmony among the four elements. In speaking of the environment and human life, Nichiren Daishonin said, "The ten directions are the 'environment,' and living beings are 'life.' Environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body, no shadow can exist, and without life, no environment. In the same way, life is shaped by its environment."[4] In other words, at the fundamental level, the environment and the living body are one and mutually influence each other. Buddhism refers to this doctrine as the oneness of life and its environment.

Bourgeault • I see.

Ikeda • During the long process of evolution, the human body repeatedly adapted to the external environment by acquiring a capacity to regulate the internal environment. In our modern scientific civilization, however, where environmental pollution and destruction present serious challenges, we confront material circumstances for which we have no adaptive mechanisms. If we do not now follow the Buddhist teaching of the oneness of life and its environment and learn to live in harmony and peaceful coexistence with the global ecology, we will put not only ourselves, but also every other living thing on Earth in jeopardy.

In times like these, what must we do to maintain dynamic harmony with the global environment and enable humanity to enjoy a healthy way of life?

Bourgeault • Today, the preservation and restoration of the environment are a question of life and death, of health or illness, for us and for our children and grandchildren.

In a sense, the history of human intervention in the environment goes back as far as humanity itself. Technological and industrial developments of the last decades, however, have fantastically widened the Weld for human environmental intervention. That is the novelty. A qualitative breakdown—made up of many fragmentations—has taken place. This is what makes ethical judgment crucially important. Should human beings do what we are able to do simply because we can? Is it appropriate? Is it advantageous? And, if so, advantageous to whom?

In these affairs I reject both wide-eyed optimism and anguished pessimism. To my mind, active lucidity opens a middle way between naïveté and cynicism.

A sense of responsibility demanded by scientific and technological development

Ikeda • The release of nuclear energy took technoscientific progress to an extreme. Even peaceful uses of nuclear power cause serious environmental pollution. The disastrous Chernobyl accident in 1986 was by far the worst environmental disaster to date. The immediate effects of the deadly radioactive fallout were terrible, but it was only afterward, when radioactive

contamination was found in neighboring countries, that people fully grasped the extent of the damage to water and the food chain.

The possibility of environmental pollution from the large-scale nuclear power plants and nuclear-energy facilities being built all over the world stimulates debate and arouses a sense of crisis on national and global levels. Government authorities and experts urge the public to avoid unfounded fears and trust reasonable judgments, but this did not prevent the Chernobyl disaster and the extensive spread of deadly pollution despite all efforts to minimize the tragedy.

Bourgeault • The abundance of hydroelectric resources in Canada explains why we have built only a few nuclear power plants. But they, too, have had their “little failures.” Canada has exported its nuclear technology—the Candu—to a number of countries, notably India.

Personally, I react with distrust to what both ardent defenders and detractors of nuclear energy have to say. The former solemnly affirm the great security of nuclear facilities and cite control measures and systems so rigorous that risks are minimal—in theory, zero. The latter periodically cite the incidence—and extent—of startling genetic malformations and diverse illnesses in regions contaminated without the knowledge of local inhabitants. Once again, I refuse to be forced to choose either unconditional trust or suspicious vigilance.

Ikeda • In the late 1990s, accidents involving radioactive leakage occurred at several of the facilities operated by the Japanese Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation. Worse yet, the company tried to conceal them and presented falsified reports to the government authorities. This unforgivable irresponsibility stirred up considerable distrust and criticism from all quarters. If there is a lesson to be learned from these accidents, it is that responsibility for operating nuclear energy facilities must be made clear, and entire operations must be open to scrutiny.

Bourgeault • Even when the equally undeniable advantages and risks are taken into consideration, recourse to nuclear energy, in whatever form and to whatever end, should not be envisioned without rigorous supervision.

Ikeda • I agree completely.

Bourgeault • To act in a responsible manner is to recognize risk and, if it cannot be entirely eliminated, appropriate measures should be taken to reduce its impact. We still have not found a place where nuclear waste can be stockpiled with complete safety for the coming centuries.

Ikeda • A keen sense of responsibility is extremely important in all environmental issues.

Bourgeault • Absolutely. Another important aspect of an ethic of responsibility concerns intergenerational relationships.

Ikeda • We must not continue to destroy the environment for the sake of present generations when this means inflicting suffering on future generations. In addition to intergenerational problems, we face interregional conflicts as well. For instance, opposition between the North and South greatly impeded efforts for environmental conservation at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Brazil in 1992.

Bourgeault • The situation is all the graver because nuclear plants are not the only menace to environmental quality. In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the destructive nature of a certain mode of industrial and technological development. Instead of renouncing or changing methods of production and technologies that do not conform to the strict norms of the

countries in the North, large international enterprises export them to countries in the South—in the guise of regional development! This is being done under the banner of the noble cause of economic globalization and business restructuring. Even non-recyclable production wastes from northern countries are exported to poor nations, as is sometimes revealed when the media follow maritime cargoes from port to port and on to their eventual destination. No doubt, however, many "deliveries" of such "merchandise" escape their vigilance.

Ikeda • Tropical rainforests in such timber-exporting Southeast-Asian countries as the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia are being destroyed. One of the causes is excessive felling in response to the Japanese liberalization of lumber imports in the 1960s.

Pollution today does not remain within national borders but spreads to every part of the world. Destruction of the Arctic ozone layer—on Canada's threshold—is connected with global increases in ultraviolet rays that damage human beings, animals and crops. Many nations are co-operating to control the production of devices that emit chlorofluorocarbons, which deplete the ozone layer, but it is clear that the policies and countermeasures of a few countries acting independently are no longer enough to solve the world-scale problem of our times.

Bourgeault • You are quite right. The deterioration of the ozone layer is causing increasing anxiety in Canada. Awareness of this matter increases proportionally with fear in the face of mounting skin-cancer rates. We are equally disturbed by global warming and its consequences. But, for all that, behavior remains unchanged—or changes very little.

Ikeda • Canada is world-famous for the beautiful lakes and vast forests of its wonderful natural environment. What role and mission do you see for your country in dealing with global-problem syndromes?

Bourgeault • The work and recommendations of the Brundtland Commission, the publication of reports in the media, symposia and conferences—like the meeting in Montreal some years ago—have aroused unprecedented awareness of the deterioration of the environment and of the possibility of redressing the situation—at a price.

A public opinion poll conducted in 1989 put environmental issues in first place among the concerns of the Canadian people. A poll conducted in the United States in 1990 showed that 74% of the population felt that, even if they are costly, necessary steps to preserve and improve the quality of the environment must not be further postponed. Ten years later, however, rising unemployment seems to have put economic issues—what are sometimes called economic "imperatives"—back in first place.

An environmental ethics of sustainable development

Ikeda • In Japan, too, awareness of environmental issues is increasing little by little. People are especially concerned about the harmful effects of the chemical byproducts of incinerators. One survey showed that 80% of the population is familiar with the term "environmental hormones."

The public debate brought about by the 1997 Kyoto Agreement on climatic changes and greenhouse gases helped make the Japanese people more aware of such global issues as the restriction of carbon dioxide emissions. Extensive media coverage of the meeting certainly had a great impact on the public.

UN officials and other people concerned with environmental issues frequently repeat the mantra of "sustainable development."

Bourgeault • In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development, presided over by Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland (1939–), presented the General Assembly of the United Nations with a report very significantly entitled *Our Common Future.*[5] Attempting to reconcile the proponents of development (principally, if not exclusively, economic) and those of the protection and preservation of the environment, the report proposed as a compromise a course of integration and an inclusive perspective referred to as sustainable development.

There was nothing radically new in the proposal, which restates, fifteen years later, the manifesto of the Stockholm Conference devoted to humanity in its environment: *Only One Earth.*[6] The resources of our small planet are not unlimited. As has already been said, we must use them with prudence and foresight, in a way that does not exhaust them but ensures their constant renewal.

Nonetheless, it fell to the Brundtland Commission to give new impetus to the dissemination of these ideas, this perspective, and this course of action. Its members called for solidarity, justice, and especially the need for equity between present and future generations. They showed that the proposed change in direction is feasible if we resolutely undertake to devote to sustainable development the sums now invested in armament (more than US$1000 billion a year).

According to the Brundtland Commission, humanity has no future unless we reconcile the demands of development with protection of the quality of the environment in a dynamic of sustainable development. Among other preliminary conditions, this dynamic requires peace, justice, respect for the rights of everyone, and solidarity between nations and generations.

Ikeda • I picture environmental ethics as an axis around which reform within individual human beings that will make sustainable development possible will revolve.

First, the premise of environmental ethics must be the practice of non-violence and peace arising from the concept of the dignity of life. Efforts to create a non-violent world will enable us to redirect the vast sums now spent on war and armaments to environmental conservation.

Second, since the environment is necessarily limited, we require an ethics that allows us to live within those limitations. We must convert the greed-driven, extravagant lifestyle of the industrialized nations into a lifestyle in which we control our desires. Third, our ethics must be based on a vision that will inspire and help not only the people of today, but also future generations. Consider the way we manage our economies: unless we can make a transition to a cyclical concept in which constant economic growth is not a “given,” we will compromise the environment for future generations.

Bourgeault • An ethic for sustainable development demands profound changes in mentality and behavior. We must learn to think in terms of systems instead of the compartments we are accustomed to. We must act in solidarity, all the while respecting differentiation of the responsibilities and tasks of various partners.

Ikeda • We of the SGI seek to create solidarity from a global perspective with everybody, no matter how much their standpoints differ from our own.

Bourgeault • Admittedly, until the present, thinking in compartments has permitted the development of scientific knowledge. Now, however, to proceed further, science must take into consideration the interactions within a complex play of interdependencies. In addition, we must learn a sense of moderation—moderation imposed both by the limits of our resources and ecological requirements and by justice. We must learn friendliness and cooperation among ourselves, beyond our borders, and also between ourselves and other living beings and the natural environment. We must learn shared responsibility, with a view to collective action and synergy.

Ikeda • The fourth environmental ethic derives from the idea of coexistence. Its major element is recognition of the right to life not only of humans, but also of animals and all other living things. To internalize the philosophy of harmonious human coexistence with the environment, we need to actively promote environmental education.

Bourgeault • Like you, I believe that only education can help us develop a responsible ethic permitting us to confront the issues of today and tomorrow. In the medium and long term, the route to regulating technological development must be through ethics and education.

4. Obsession with Perpetual Youth

The quest for eternity and a meaningful present

Bourgeault • The so-called Western nations have long been influenced by Judeo-Grecian-Christian thought. People shared a hope of and belief in life after death. Today, in their uncertainty about post-mortem life, they prefer to give meaning to their existences by living as fully as possible now.

Ikeda • Although living now with all our might is important, if we lose sight of the idea that the present exists for the future, we run the risk of lapsing into Epicureanism.

Bourgeault • Life has in store for everyone so many annoyances and such misery that it would be difficult to give oneself up to the blessed satisfaction of the pleasure of the moment. It is true, however, that there exists, especially in the countries of North America and Europe, a certain cult of happiness—a duty to be happy, even a right to happiness. I refer to this as the Japanese-car syndrome.

As you know, for twenty years now, many of the cars on the streets of Quebec have been of Japanese make. The increase in the number of these vehicles is partly the result of a policy of full guarantee on parts and labor provided by the Japanese manufacturers. The "bumper-to-bumper guarantee" means that in case of breakdown, defect or even sometimes accident, the purchaser is entitled to repairs free of charge, or even to a new car. Sometimes, we interpret our relationship with our bodies, our health and our quality of life in a similar way. In other words, misfortune simply has to be the result of faulty manufacture. Therefore the responsibility rests with the Creator, the parents, or the delivering doctor. And we demand repairs or, at least, compensation.

Ikeda • It is an clever metaphor. According to Buddhist teachings, some sicknesses and disabilities are attributed to karma, as I said earlier. This means that we must delve deeply into life itself to understand certain physical or mental conditions.

In monotheistic religions, God is called the "Creator." It is he who made human beings and everything that exists in the universe. But some people are born with congenital or hereditary malformations, and others with disabilities. There is a host of possible answers, not all of them convincing, to the question of why God created evil.

As you say, people today think above all of getting the most out of life, of living in a way that makes sense of life. But it seems to me that behind this need to make sense out of life, there lies a propensity for the eternal. If life were nothing but present existence, theoretically Epicureanism would be perfectly acceptable. But most people want to follow the path of good. The very idea of wanting to live righteously indicates intuitive awareness of something eternal.

Bourgeault • On this point our views differ. Eternal life seems to me to be a desire, a dream, but not a reality. Mere wishful thinking. Desire does not create reality. Like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), I believe we can live in compassion and solidarity and give our existence the meaning we desire, even if there is no life after death—no life after this one. Giving meaning to life is simultaneously an issue of human liberty and a challenge, a responsibility.

Ikeda • It is only natural that our views should differ on some issues. The Buddhist scripture called *Majjima-nikaya* (The Middle-Length Sayings) contains a passage saying, "Do not chase after the past, do not long for the future . . . Who knows? Death may come tomorrow. Just do in earnest what must be done today." Though its basic view of life and death differs from Sartre's, it shares with him the idea of living enthusiastically in the single moment we call now, in the single day we call today and in this life. On this specific point perhaps we agree, you and I.

Bourgeault • The universe was here long before me and will remain when I am gone. We are made of the same matter as the stars. To repeat the lovely title of Hubert Reeves's book, we are "stardust."[7] Our life is only a piece, a fragment, of an immensely more inclusive life.

Ikeda • You speak of human life as part of a much more inclusive life. Similarly, Buddhism teaches that we human beings contain within ourselves the great entity of cosmic life. Not only are our bodies made of the same matter as the universe, but our minds are also united with the cosmos at a deep level. This principle is known as "three thousand realms in a single life-moment *(ichinen-sanzen)*." Our life is the single life-moment, and the three thousand realms are cosmic life. Both spiritually and physically, our life is one with the universe; in other words, the self equals the cosmos.

Bourgeault • Someone once said that astonishment was the origin of philosophy—and of poetry, too, no doubt. I recall contemplating the starry sky when I was an adolescent. I still do it today. Nonetheless, I am convinced that I have only this life to live, my own, limited yet so precious.

Ikeda • That is true. Precious and irreplaceable.

Transforming the four sufferings into elation and happiness

Ikeda • By the way, according to the Buddhist view, we can live to be 120, as Nichiren makes clear in the following passage: "It is better to live a single day with honor than to live to 120 and die in disgrace."[8] What do you think is the maximum age to which we can live?

Bourgeault • Some say that, given optimal conditions, we can really attain the respectable age of 120, or even more. Others maintain that age limit is registered in each person's genetic clock. I discovered my own mortality when I reached the age of fifty—late in life, my friends tell me. In spite of my resolute optimism, I found myself compelled to embark on the downhill side of my life.

Ikeda • In the aging societies of industrialized nations like Japan and Canada, everyone must directly face the questions of both how to live and how to die with dignity. Medical science has studied the human aging phenomenon from various angles. Some say life span is determined by the limits of cell division. Others claim that aging is genetically controlled. What are your opinions on the aging process?

Bourgeault • Undoubtedly the secret desire for eternal youth has nourished many dreams. Certain fairy tales that have become classics of Western literature bear me out in this. I am sure the same is true in Japan as well. Developments in biomedical science and technology have undoubtedly revived dormant desires for eternal youth. So far we have managed to prolong life

without being able to restore to it the vigor of youth. As the great French diet and nutrition specialist Jean Trémolières was fond of saying, the important thing is not to add years to life but to add life to years.

My personal attitudes toward aging—and more indirectly toward death—are stamped with ambivalence. Surely I am not alone in this. There is no Golden Age. There are no Good Old Times. In his novel *Write to Kill: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea,* novelist and teacher Daniel Pennac (1944–) has the protagonist, Malaussene, say: "At whatever age, life is an utter bitch: childhood, the age of tonsils and total dependence; adolescence, the age of onanism and pointless questioning; maturity, the age of cancer and rampant bullshit; old age, the age of arthritis and vain regret."[9]

Ikeda • Such biting satire! But it is also poignant, because it describes the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

Bourgeault • Pennac's iconoclastic and deliberately offensive and provocative comments seem somehow related to the Buddhist tradition of the four sufferings. The difficulty of living tinges all stages of existence.

Ikeda • Yes, as you suggest, Buddhism interprets the hard realities of life as the four sufferings, which are innate and inherent in life itself for all human beings.

In addition to these four general categories, Buddhism examines more specific sufferings as well. First is the necessity of parting from our loved ones. For various reasons, we must all part with people we love, and these partings are all sad, no matter how much we love the people we're obliged to leave. The ultimate form of separation is, of course, death. Second is the necessity of encountering people we hate. Experiencing resentment and animosity, at home or at work, is demoralizing. Third is the impossibility of attaining what we desire—whether our desire is spiritual, psychological, material, or social. In industrialized countries, people may be satisfied in material and social terms, but many still experience profound frustration on the spiritual and existential planes, a frustration centered on the question of how they can live a fulfilling life. Feelings of general powerlessness, pessimism and depression are the symptoms of being unable to answer this question.

These seven kinds of suffering are considered inevitable as long as the "Five components" of life—form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness—are active. These components are the foundation for all life operations, physical and mental. As long as we remain alive, our bodies are active and our minds are constantly changing. The suffering that arises from these activities is inherent in life. Starting from these hard realities, Buddhism shows how suffering can be transformed into true joy, not simply physical pleasure.

Bourgeault • We fool ourselves with illusions of laughing childhood, gilded youth, the assured success of mature age, and the wisdom of the old. Perhaps we actually recognize them to be delusions. There is no best time in life, perhaps for the sound reason that all times in life can be good. There are no givens: nothing is either assured or irreparably lost.

Ikeda • A French writer once compared life to the flow of a river: youth is like a torrent, maturity a rapid river, and old age a great waterway reflecting the surrounding scenery like a mirror and finally emptying into the ocean.

Each person experiences the transition from childhood, to adolescence, to young adulthood, maturity, and finally old age. In youth, torrent-like, we live headlong. In maturity, we face the growing responsibilities of family and society. Next comes a period of deep reflection on the meaning of life—a time of wisdom and completion. Then comes the final summing up as, from the

standpoint of old age, we look into the face of death.

An open, pliable and tolerant mind

Bourgeault • As I have already said, ambivalence colors my attitudes toward aging. Increasing age means often slow, enriching maturation, accompanied by an irremediable decline in energy. Ours is a strange situation: we must consent to lose in order to gain.

Ikeda • You are right. We gain experience as we pass through the various stages of life. The depth, breadth, and confidence of the views of life and death we evolve in the process determine whether we triumph or fail. In this sense, we all hope that growing old will mean growing as a human being, that it will be a process that leads us to our full potential as individuals.

Bourgeault • In the past, I often told people that I felt younger at 30 than I had at 20 and younger at 40 than I had at 30. Beyond the fifty-year mark, I stopped saying this. Had I really been talking of youth? Sifting through my memories, I seemed to be more at my ease. I was "in better possession of my resources," as people sometimes say. More experienced. More secure and for that reason more open and ready for new encounters, new friendships, and new challenges.

Ikeda • Your splendid process of self-actualization reveals how, while overcoming the four sufferings, you expanded your environment to the scale of a great ocean. You have experienced the ideal life.

Bourgeault • Not at all. As I said, at 50, I hesitated to say that I felt younger than I had at 40. I wondered whether I wasn't deluding myself to claim I was staying young. I began to feel strongly that I ought to be responsible for and to young people (those of my own family and the students I met and worked with) for the future life they would live when I was no longer among them.

Ikeda • The real meaning of youth has nothing to do with physical age. In Buddhist terms, youth means the open-mindedness—pliability and tolerance—of the life-moment *(ichinen)*.

Bourgeault • I consider it mistaken to associate openness and flexibility with youth and obtuse rigidity with old age. In practical experience—which, of course, varies from one person to another—things are much more nuanced.

Ikeda • Very true. Many older people are enthusiastically active in society, do creative work, or perform social services. They demonstrate acute powers of observation and broad judgment based on a rich store of experience, and they continue to study and to learn. They constantly absorb new knowledge and have minds that are truly open to society and life. For these people, old age is akin to writing the final chapter of their lives, the purpose of which is to perfect themselves as individuals. Their lives are founded on creativity, hope, and joy.

Bourgeault • It seemed easier for me to be open and to accept new things when I was 40 and even 50 than it had been when I was 20.

Ikeda • One of the Buddhist scriptures reads, "You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate."[10]

The importance of new encounters

Bourgeault • At 50, I had to give in to the evidence that I would be unable to visit all the countries on earth, let alone the planets and stars of the innumerable galaxies of the universe.

Ikeda • I have circled the globe several times and visited many countries, but there are still so many that I haven't visited.

Bourgeault • I shall die without discovering cities rich in history and culture, without meeting and exchanging ideas with many people—both men and women—with whom I share a common humanity transcending boundaries traced in space and time, and without having read so many of the books I want to read. For a while this thought made me profoundly sad. But the sadness dissipated quickly.

Ikeda • Did something happen to cause this change?

Bourgeault • Instead of pursuing the new and unknown, I went—for perhaps the thirtieth time—to Paris, where I love to stroll aimlessly in the streets and parks. I suddenly saw that what I needed was to live more fully and to savor what had been given me to know. I realized that I needed to overcome, from within, limitations that seemed to have been stifling me. After the breathlessness of the race, I needed to find the rhythm of slow, deep breathing.

Then all of a sudden I was 60, without trying or even thinking about it. Then I felt even more keenly a desire to exchange ideas with people younger than me. My aim was not only to teach them what I knew, but also to learn from them and, perhaps, to avoid growing old too fast. I wanted to prevent my sensibilities from dulling too rapidly by stimulating them through associations with newer sensibilities. It is impossible to teach for more than 40 years and not be profoundly affected by it! I saw that we learn by teaching and that we can teach passionately and communicate the pleasure of learning only if we preserve our own thirst for learning. It seems to me that societies and individuals need to establish new relationships between generations.

Ikeda • That is exactly what the famous exhortation "know thyself" means. You not only reoriented yourself, you discovered your true self.

The goal of Buddhism is also self-knowledge. To know his true self, Shakyamuni abandoned his royal position, rejected earthly pleasures, and endured terrible privations. He went on to reject asceticism and advocate a way of life that transcends the extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial. Savoring the rhythm of the Middle Way, he became enlightened and discovered his cosmic self, which we call the Buddha. And this was the start of Shakyamuni Buddha's mission to save all sentient beings.

Bourgeault • Love, friendship, and meeting people have become more important for me than ever. I appreciate the privilege of teaching more.

Ikeda • Shakyamuni is sometimes called the Teacher of Humanity. In Buddhist thought, compassion is a process of eliminating suffering and giving happiness. It suggests sharing the four sufferings, triumphing over them and winning true happiness. Originally the term compassion connoted friendship. Compassion, friendship, and encounters with other people are symbols of youth. They are the rewards of lifelong youthfulness.

5. Overcoming Stress

Mother and daughter: sharing the battle against cancer

Bourgeault • In your discussion with Dr. Simard you asked whether it is desirable to inform patients that they have cancer. If you don't mind, I would like to add my "two cents' worth."

Ikeda • Please, by all means. It would be a shame to miss out on what an authority on bioethics has to say on the subject.

Bourgeault • Actually I would simply like to tell the story of one of my former students. She was 27 at the time and the mother of a little girl of five. She had enrolled in a master's course under my direction. One day, she came into my office and said, "I have something important to tell you." She confided in me the news that she had cancer.

Ikeda • You must have been stunned.

Bourgeault • I listened attentively until she had finished. Several months earlier, discovering a lump in her breast, she had consulted a doctor. Tests showed that she had cancer and needed immediate surgery. She pleaded with the doctor to give her time to accomplish one or two things she wanted to do at all costs before going into the hospital.

Ikeda • So young . . . she must have been very shaken up. What was it she wanted to do before her surgery?

Bourgeault • She had already planned to visit her parents the next weekend to complete the detailed outline of her master's thesis on her father's computer. She delivered it to me the following Monday, adding as she did so, "Now I'm going into the hospital."

Ikeda • When her doctor informed her of her cancer, she made a reasoned judgment about how to proceed. I assume you are telling me that being informed had beneficial effects.

Bourgeault • Exactly. I had the feeling that she needed some time—a weekend with her parents—to carry out her projects. We could interpret this as a phase of denial before she became able to evaluate and cope with her new situation and the consequences of her cancer. The next time I had a chance to talk with her, she told me at length about what had happened in the meantime. She told me that her hospitalization had greatly saddened her daughter.

Ikeda • That was natural. Though only for a short time, the child had to part from her mother. Explaining the nature of her mother's sickness to her must have been difficult.

Bourgeault • That stands to reason. Some time later, the little girl asked, "Mummy, have you really told me everything?" Her mother said she had. Then, as she bathed her daughter, she explained how serious her condition was: "We all hope it won't happen, sweetheart, but Mummy might even die from this." Strangely enough, the girl was reassured by being candidly told the whole truth about her mother's condition.

Ikeda • A child of five may understand her mother's suffering, but at that age we can't really understand the meaning of death. Nonetheless, the girl was probably reassured: her mother was honest with her and treated her like a responsible individual. The fact that the child was reassured is testimony to the woman's profound love for her daughter and to the strong bond of mutual confidence between them.

Bourgeault • After her surgery, the young mother underwent all kinds of treatment for two or three years. She fought the disease with all the courage and energy she could muster, but eventually the cancer reappeared. All the while, she drew sketches to explain the progress of the

illness to her daughter. As she was quite skilled at drawing, she produced a kind of illustrated narrative.

Ikeda • What a splendid way to communicate with a young child! Only a mother's love could have inspired such an ingenious method. She realized that it would be impossible to talk to her child about the disease and its symptoms using medical and biological jargon.

Bourgeault • The illustrated narrative was published a few months before its author died. In the story, a terrifying monster often appears in a child's bad dreams. The child weeps and cries out for her mother. Then suddenly, in the midst of a nightmare, a marvellous dragon appears and confronts the monster. He promises the child everlasting protection because, as he explains, "I am here in your heart."[11]

Ikeda • I am touched by the closeness of mother and child in their battle against a formidable illness. I am sure that the woman felt her vitality swelling and growing as she drew the illustrations for her daughter. In some sense, she probably also wanted to show her daughter how people can lead a courageous battle to overcome suffering. She used her own fight with cancer as an example.

The *Path of the Law Sutra* (Dhammapada) says: "Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless . . . The heedful do not die." The mother and daughter battled together against the sufferings of sickness and death. Their battle became the "cause" in the life of the daughter that led to the "effect" of a lifelong ability to triumph over hardship.

Bourgeault • As a matter of fact, for several years before she became ill, the mother had been a Buddhist adherent. After her mother's speech at the launching of the book, the daughter took the microphone and said simply, "Thank you all for coming to this party for the publication of my mother's book." She was seven or eight at the time.

New kinds of suffering

Ikeda • This declaration of triumph on the part of mother and daughter has all the grandeur of an artistic masterpiece. It shows us that some children at that age are aware of the meaning of death. Surely this little girl, who confronted death with her mother, was more deeply aware than other children her age.

The death of their mother is perhaps the most mentally and emotionally stressful event for children to experience. How the child overcomes that stress—and in each case it is different—has a determining effect on the rest of the child's life. Some years ago Dr. Hans Selye (1907–82), former director of the Institute for Experimental Medicine at the University of Montreal, became widely known for his research on the topic. In fact, he was the first person to establish the concept of stress in the medical field.

Bourgeault • The work Dr. Selye and his team did on stress was certainly decisive. People sometimes consider stress a sickness of our times. In this connection I think it is useful to clarify two points. First—and the work of Dr. Selye was very revealing in this regard—strictly speaking, stress is not an illness or even a cause of illness.

It mobilizes energies necessary for self-defense, self-protection, even creativity. Second, because all situations entail risk and present challenges, they are all stressful.

Ikeda • People are exposed on a daily basis to all sorts of situations—not only exterior circumstances like heat and cold, but psychological factors like anxiety and fear—that bring on systemic stress. Trouble in our personal and social lives can also be stressful. Indeed, in our time, psychological and social stress factors are becoming increasingly serious.

By assigning point values to stress factors in daily life, the American scientist Dr. T. Holmes (1918–88) came up with some highly interesting data. On a scale of 100, he set a value of 100 for the stress caused by the death of a spouse. Divorce was rated at 73 points, separation 65, and illness 53. Getting married, too, is stressful; Holmes gave it 50 points. Losing a job gets 47 points, being transferred 36, and new or changed work responsibilities 29. According to Holmes's study, 79% of the people with over 300 stress points within a year complained of some kind of physical or mental sickness.

Bourgeault • In psychogenic syndromes, influences reciprocate. That is to say, the body influences the spirit, and the psychological state affects physical condition.

Ikeda • The oneness of body and mind is one of the central tenets of Buddhism.

Bourgeault • A two-way movement is implied in the recognition of the psychosomatic nature of many complaints and illnesses. We often emphasize the influence of the mental state on the physiological state. We rely on psychological treatment—in the psychoanalytical tradition or some other school—to re-establish biological harmony or balance in a human being we recognize as a unit, rather than something compartmentalized according to various disciplines and specialties.

But the inverse is equally true. Physiological complaints—that is, dysfunctioning of the organism or sickness—can cause, or at least nourish and support, what the ancients called melancholy and what we today call depression. Violent or tenacious stress can provoke or aggravate stomach ulcers. Since this is the case, cannot stomach ulcers resulting from a faulty digestive system give rise to stress or cause it to increase? Human beings cannot escape stress. As long as we live, we must cope with it somehow. All life is full of stress.

Ikeda • The *Lotus Sutra* describes the threefold world (of desire, form and formlessness) as a burning house inhabited by unenlightened beings. It is said to be overflowing with the sufferings of mortal life—birth, old age, sickness and death. In the Buddhist tradition, the fire represents anger, anxiety, fear, greed and other delusional desires.

Bourgeault • Today we can have no idea of the fears people once felt when lightning struck. They knew nothing of its origins or mechanisms, but it ripped off treetops and set forests ablaze. We do not know what they felt when famine threatened.

True, today new kinds of misfortune threaten and compromise human life, such as the complexity of the so-called developed societies you mentioned. Certainly this complexity is the source of many kinds of stress. To the usual list, I should like to add the current globalization of production and trade, economic globalization that causes pervasive unemployment. Fear of the future, which young people think is closed to them because they have no access to the job market and cannot find a place in the attractive social dynamic of adult life. People over 50 resent the lack of access to jobs because of business restructuring and forced early retirement. Felix Leclerc (1914–88) sings of one hundred thousand ways to kill a man. The easiest and most effective—perhaps the most brutal—is to refuse him the possibility—thus the right—to work, "to make a living." This is a pregnant expression because it describes the meaning of work and its connection with the quality of human life. Our societies make work a privileged, practically exclusive mechanism for social integration and yet shut out large groups, thus condemning them to marginalization or exclusion.

Precarious jobs. Poorly paid jobs. Unemployment. Are these not some of the causes of rising suicide rates—in Quebec, to stick to my own home ground—and of other kinds of violence in many countries undergoing “industrial restructuring” (to resort to a cynical euphemism)?

Stress is the spice of life

Ikeda • As you know, unstable social conditions, like those prevailing during economic downturns such as the ones experienced in Japan and throughout Asia over the past several years, have increased suicide rates among the middle-aged and elderly and violence among the young.

Bourgeault • When such things happen, there is a sudden proliferation of spiritual movements promising deliverance from all evils. Esoteric teachings inspired by these movements propose religious practices that claim to provide deliverance from evil. While I generally agree with your position on compassion and the importance of gratitude, I allow myself some reservations about certain psychological and religious trends that “disarm” combatants—if I may use the expression—and demobilize them, ultimately prompting passive toleration of everything, even the intolerable.

I just referred to the positive dynamic of stress as an instrument mobilizing energies to encourage self-defence. These same energies stimulate the creation of and commitment to concrete actions to redress, for instance, situations of injustice. In such instances, should spiritual practices free us of stress? And, if they succeed in this liberation, whose interests do they serve? Without being simplistic, I want to point out the ambiguity of practices that, under the pretext of helping people and improving their quality of life and their health, threaten to imprison them in unbearable situations and unacceptable conditions. To avoid misunderstanding, I should say that I recognize that some practices can help control stress and, above all, rechannel energy in creative, instead of destructive, directions.

Ikeda • I agree. We must have the wisdom to distinguish what is genuine from what is fraudulent. We must never allow ourselves to be taken in by fakes. Swallowing cleverly worded publicity and persuasive words can lead to unhappiness. Yet people still fall for such things and, rather than reinforcing their strength to deal with the challenges of modern life, grasp pitifully at the hope that one doubtful practice or another will vanquish their suffering. Suffering only gets worse when we try to run from it rather than facing it.

Bourgeault • You are right. One of Dr. Selye’s most important contributions was to shed light on the positive aspects of stress. He argued that stress itself is not a sickness nor does it necessarily lead to sickness. It can enable us to exercise creativity and muster the vitality or energy we need to defend ourselves from exterior menace.

Ikeda • Dr. Seyle once described stress as “the spice of life.” You really need to be free from worldly concerns to actually appreciate stress like that. It is healthy, and even necessary, to let go of the pressures of work and go have a drink with friends, sing in a karaoke bar or relax with some other form of recreation. Fundamentally, however, the important thing is to gather our internal forces enough to make stress a “spice” and to learn to use it creatively.

Bourgeault • The world of human beings is certainly no utopia of universal justice and peace. On the contrary, it is rife with injustice, discord and conflict. We must learn to live with these painful realities.

Ikeda • I held several discussions with the famous French biologist René Dubos, and he said that though it is pleasant to imagine a world free of worry, stress, and tension, such a world is no more

than the pipedream of the indolent. He added that human beings develop in the face of adversity. This is how our spirits work—it is the destiny of humankind. What you just said reminds me of Dubos's words.

The most effective way to deal with stress is to constantly struggle to cultivate our minds and forge our personalities, even in the face of danger.

Bourgeault • No matter how absurd or irrational our circumstances, we can and must persevere in efforts to convert war into peace. Like liberty, equality and fraternity, justice and peace constantly elude us. We must nevertheless continue to make sustained efforts and to move, step by step, toward this unattainable goal and achieve at least fragments of peace and justice.

Ikeda • On the basis of his own experience fighting against cancer, Dr. Selye recommends the following in building a constructive life style: (1) Since resentment and anger lower one's resistance to stress, turn those feelings into respect and sympathy; (2) set goals for yourself; and (3) live for the benefit of others, for in so doing, you yourself will benefit.

The way of life Dr. Selye encourages is exactly what is called the bodhisattva way in Buddhism. Bodhisattvas live for the peace of humankind and to build a just and fair society. By so doing, they transform their indignation into compassion and control greed with wisdom. They enjoy their lives by making stress the spice of their vitality. A passage in the *Lotus Sutra* reads, "Jewelled trees abound in flowers and fruit where living beings enjoy themselves at ease."[12]

Bourgeault • Such qualities as vitality, self-control, creativity, wisdom, and perseverance are essential to the realization of justice and peace.

Again, it is not possible to totally avert war and completely eliminate injustice. But we can change the status quo; in fact, it is our duty to do so. At the very least, we are obligated to improve the realities of this world.

Ikeda • I agree absolutely.

Bourgeault • SGI has been working for years in close collaboration with the major agencies of the United Nations, including UNESCO. As president of SGI, you support the sentiment expressed in the opening of the UNESCO charter: "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

Building justice and peace day by day requires mobilization of energies of self-defense, creativity, and clear, warm-hearted inventiveness. Often the effect of the spiritual movements that proliferate today—regardless of whether or not this is the intention—is to demobilize and eliminate responsibility. No doubt, as I have said, injustices and wars are unavoidable. They exist—they scream at us from our television sets. But we can change things. It is our responsibility to do so or at least to work to that end.

Ikeda • True. The way to lasting peace is to make our minds firm citadels of peace even under the worst circumstances. I am convinced that this is the way to build the "human security" advocated by the United Nations.

6. Coping with Mental Illness

The importance of friends

Ikeda • Let us now turn to the problem of mental illness, the archetypal illness of the modern world, so closely related to the question of stress. Specialists in Japan report increasing numbers of cases of depression. Indeed, it has become so frequent that some doctors call it the "mental common cold." Schizophrenia, too, is on the rise and has been described as a mirror of the contemporary social environment.

Bourgeault • In Canada, depression and schizophrenia are among the most common mental disorders. Until recently, various mental illnesses were indiscriminately lumped together under the categories of insanity and dementia. More precise diagnosis, however, has revealed the large variety of states observable today.

Ikeda • In other words, progress in medical science has made it possible to differentiate between conditions like schizophrenia and manic-depression.

Bourgeault • Exactly. But, although progress has undeniably been made in diagnosis, the same cannot always be said for treatment. In Canada, especially in Quebec, better knowledge of mental illness has convinced us to abandon the practice of keeping patients capable of fitting into society in specialized psychiatric institutions—once called insane asylums. But because of reductions in public funding allocated to health during the eighties and especially the nineties, essential community services are often lacking. Many itinerants and homeless, whose lot is certainly unenviable, suffer from mental-health problems and are left without support and often without medication.

Ikeda • How effective is medication for mental problems?

Bourgeault • Lithium carbonate has proven effective in controlling manic-depression, up to a point. But as far as I know, we still do not have really effective medicines against schizophrenia, although we can reduce some of its symptoms.

Ikeda • What therapies other than medication are being used against psychosis?

Bourgeault • Experiments with halfway houses, where a number of people suffering from mental-health problems live together under the supervision of a specialist, are being tried with reasonable success. The goal is progressive reintroduction into society. I am thinking specifically about experiments conducted in collaboration with various professionals (doctors, psychologists, and social workers—often women) at the Douglas Hospital in Montreal.

Ikeda • How effective were the halfway houses as therapy?

Bourgeault • I have known several people with experience in halfway houses. One came out fairly well, the others much less so. Still, their lives might have been even harder without the support they were afforded there.

Two of the people I personally knew succeeded in completing their university studies. One did so thanks to permanent medication and to his research advisor, who helped keep him on track. The other person rejected all medication and forced herself to remain in contact with "reality" by taking notes on her surroundings. Apparently, she wanted to preserve her dreamlike—or virtual—life. Though it was possibly more frightening than real life, it was also evidently more exciting. Of course, these people did not have easy lives. Among other things, they had difficulty establishing relationships that fit in with their own needs and expectations.

Ikeda • Auditory hallucinations and thinking disturbances often occur in schizophrenics. As I understand it, it is important for such people to have friends who treat them as equals. They need to be able to converse with people they can confide in spontaneously and honestly.

Bourgeault • Exactly. It is vital for friends and acquaintances to fully understand the condition of a mentally disturbed person. No matter what the treatment, responsibility for the consequences—or at least for some of them—must be shared with others. The support and understanding of friends, family—in fact, of everybody else—are crucial, although even they do not ensure success.

Ikeda • Understanding and responsibility are two qualities essential to any relationship based on trust. Certain Buddhist scriptures teach the fundamental ethics of personal relationships.

Bourgeault • What do they teach?

Ikeda • Well, as the old saying goes, "A friend in need is a friend indeed"—in other words, a good friend offers help in time of trouble. Such a friend is as true in hard times as in good times. True friends always have your best interests at heart in their dealings with you. And true friends always demonstrate care, compassion and sympathy. The sick have special need of such good friends.

The sutra also describes bad friends. These people take without giving—sometimes unwittingly. They are full of empty words and flattery, companions in dissipation. These people will never be true friends.

Relating to people

Ikeda • In the fall of 1997, I had the great good fortune to meet Dr. Linus Pauling, Jr. (1925–). He is a psychiatrist practicing in Hawaii. Dr. Pauling told me that, although cases of serious mental disorder are not increasing, growing numbers of people are becoming incapable of adapting to social, professional and family life.

Bourgeault • Our society does not facilitate the integration of people with mental-health problems. To function properly in society today—to work and to take part in social life—we must master abstract concepts and complex codes. Even people with outstanding qualities and diverse skills can be marginalized.

Ikeda • The wholesome development of society requires us to accept and make use of all kinds of human individualities, skills and qualities.

Bourgeault • That is very true. The people I was speaking of are full of talent! But the capacity for love, sadness, laughter and sympathy are hardly valued in today's pragmatic, highly competitive society.

Ikeda • Yes, I agree with you. Dr. Pauling and I discussed several aspects of human relations, including parent-child and teacher-pupil relationships. I shared with him the fourfold Buddhist concept of personal relationships, called *shi-shobo* in Japanese.

Bourgeault • What does that mean?

Ikeda • It refers to four ways of fostering the capacity to do good, to avoid evil and to follow the Middle Way. First is almsgiving, both material and spiritual, that relieves the other person's anxieties and imparts courage. Second is kind words, or using caring, compassionate speech. Third is benefiting others with good conduct in thought, word and deed, which means putting

yourself in the other person's shoes. Fourth is an identification with others, the act of working and sharing with others. It seems to me that the ability to relate to others in these four ways is of growing importance in our increasingly technological and industrial society.

Bourgeault • I think so, too.

Ikeda • Dr. Pauling was very interested in this fourfold concept. He said that in the Weld of psychiatry, doctors have very particular relationships with their patients. The idea of almsgiving is applicable because of the supreme necessity for the doctor, in daily practice, to eliminate or reduce the patient's anxiety. The three other aspects of speech, benefit and shared identity could help patients discover other avenues of expression, new values and a new way of living and so achieve their full potential.

If "kind words" are used in discussions and conversations with patients, they will adopt more positive and constructive attitudes. Through dialogue, the psychiatrist also encourages patients to consider the emotions of others and make judgments from standpoints other than their own. Dr. Pauling explained that in the context of group therapy, it is impossible to avoid working closely and sharing with others. By grouping together patients with similar problems, doctors encourage them to share their opinions and feelings. In the process, many of them find the solutions to their personal problems.

Bourgeault • People stigmatized by mental-health problems are not the only ones who need the support of the groups they belong to. Or perhaps I should say that the difficulty the mentally ill experience is caused in part by the lack of such support and by the fact of being marginalized.

Personally, for more than twenty-five years I have relied on the support of a group that meets almost once a month to share a meal and exchange ideas. We impose only two rules. First, the host never provides the meal. Each person brings one dish. That way, everyone feels freer and more relaxed. Second, during the exchanges of ideas and discussion, we may be critical but we must never "judge," we must never make decisions for each other. We do not try to convince each other. Sometimes confrontations occur, but they are stimulating confrontations.

Ikeda • In the Soka Gakkai, we have long held similar discussion meetings. They are held in all countries, on the community or neighborhood level. Friends and acquaintances get together at someone's home to debate, discuss issues or study Buddhist teachings. Participants also give testimonials about the efficacy of faith. For many people, these meetings have a deeply therapeutic value. They are like a cure for heartache. But they don't feed the stomach—nobody brings food!

Human rights of the mentally disturbed

Bourgeault • In Canada, many people complain that mental illness and the mentally ill fail to receive the attention they deserve from governments, medical institutions, doctors, practitioners, and research workers. Very little is invested in mental illness—as if it were a shameful sickness. Is the situation the same in Japan?

Ikeda • In Japan, too, much less attention is paid to mental illness than physical illness.

Bourgeault • If the president of a large business has a heart attack, presumably from overwork, everybody admires him.

Ikeda • The Japanese react the same way. After all, we are supposedly "economic animals."

Bourgeault • If he suffers from depression, on the other hand, that same company president conceals it, out of humiliation.

Ikeda • I am sorry to admit that the Japanese tend to react the same way.

Bourgeault • Few agencies or organizations defend the rights of the mentally ill. Public funds allocated for research in this area are pitifully insufficient in comparison with the enormous sums invested in products or technologies that promise revolutionary therapies for cardiac illnesses.

Ikeda • I can't help thinking that the criteria for diagnosing mental illness seem vague and even arbitrary.

Bourgeault • They are. All the more so—in the Weld of education, for example—because of the chameleon effect that leads students to conform to the professor's expectations in order to demonstrate their brilliance—or stupidity.

Ikeda • That is a very important principle in educational psychology. We must not label people. The Buddhist concept of three thousand realms in a single life-moment *(ichinen-sanzen)*, which I mentioned earlier, teaches that what is truly important is the manifestation of the individual's life at each moment, not what others think.

Bourgeault • Our self image is partly constructed from the opinions of others and above all by dominant social perceptions. Perceptions of health and the criteria by which it is defined vary from one society to another. What I call the "canons of normalcy," too, vary. We declare anyone who does not conform to those canons to be ill or handicapped.

Ikeda • Quite right. Our apparent criteria of normalcy and abnormality cannot be definitive.

Bourgeault • This is one of the major—and rarely discussed—issues of the development of biotechnologies, specifically genetic therapy. Research and experimentation in this Weld touches on what I—and others—call "soft eugenics." By this we mean eugenics that stops short of sterilizing people judged abnormal or, of course, exterminating them in gas chambers as the Nazi regime did in many countries during the thirties. Advocates of soft eugenics speak of redressing or restoring the so-called normal and "ordained" order. But who decides, and on what basis? In reference to what model of humanity?

Ikeda • The Buddhist concept of the mutual possession of the ten worlds *(jikkai-gogu)* teaches us that every life state or life condition is inherent in all others, from Hell right through to Buddhahood. In individual terms, a good person may at any moment become evil, and an evil person may demonstrate goodness.

Bourgeault • We are far from a sound understanding of the functioning of the brain and what is called the human spirit. Nonetheless, we can hope that progress in research will allow us to cure or comfort people afflicted with mental-health problems.

Ikeda • Your words will encourage many people. In addition to conducting research, we must eliminate social and economic discrimination against mental illness. We must build a society that recognizes and vigorously protects the rights of the mentally ill, the elderly, the handicapped, minorities, the socially underprivileged, women, and children. We must progress toward a human rights society.

Bourgeault • I doubt—and lament—however, that the rights of the mentally ill and society's treatment of them will become major issues in bioethics.

7. The Ideal Life

Reformers working for the sake of the people

Ikeda • Having discussed true good health from many angles, now, at the conclusion of this chapter on health and harmony, I should like to examine the optimum and healthiest way to live. In other words, I want to examine the ideal way of life. Dr. Bourgeault, who do you think has led an ideal life?

Bourgeault • To my way of thinking, no one has ever known an ideal life. We are all doomed to live the life given us, even when it sometimes contradicts our aspirations. We try to give meaning to it by taking strange detours.

Having said this, as a person interested in ethics and education, I immediately think of Socrates (470–399 BCE) and Jesus. And of Gandhi (1869–1948) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68)—indeed, of everyone who has broken established rules and stood up against the authorities of their time, not capriciously but in the name of a strictly ethical imperative.

Ikeda • It's true. In keeping with the laws of his country, Socrates drank the poisoned cup when his sentence was pronounced. Jesus was crucified because of a confrontation with the authorities in his country. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King were assassinated in their non-violent combat against injustice.

Bourgeault • Each one of them knew exactly what awaited them if they publicly criticized the authorities or persisted in resisting the established powers.

Ikeda • You have singled out reformers, people willing to fight established authority and powers to save the ordinary people.

Bourgeault • It is now my turn to ask whom you respect most among the great figures of Buddhist tradition.

Ikeda • Mahatma Gandhi embodied the spirit of Buddhism better than anyone. This is why many of my Indian friends consider him the spiritual heir of Shakyamuni, who struggled against the corrupt ruling Brahman priests of his time twenty-five centuries ago. Gandhi advocated non-violent resistance (ahimsa) against Britain, the greatest empire of the day. As a Buddhist, I look at Gandhi in the same way.

In Japan, the person who best embodies the spirit of Buddhism was Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82), whose teachings I follow. Without the support of any secular authority, he addressed a letter of remonstration—*On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land (Rissho Ankokuron)*,[13]—to the Kamakura shogunate, which held absolute authority over the people at the time.

Bourgeault • What arguments did he advance?

Ikeda • He argued that, if the leaders of the nation ignored the fundamental law of the dignity of life (in conformance with the correct teaching), the people would suffer, hardships would arise, and society would collapse. The Daishonin urged the rulers to prevent this and to protect the country by making the well-being of the people the basic premise of government.

Bourgeault • I imagine his words were not well received!

Ikeda • Of course not. After he had delivered this remonstrance, the shogunate began to restrict his activities. He was arrested several times on false accusations, sentenced to death without trial, and exiled on an isolated northern island off the coast of Japan.

In spite of continuous and cruel persecutions, Nichiren continued the struggle, without giving an inch. Finally, in February 1274, the shogunate released him from exile. His predictions of catastrophe, civil war and invasion by foreign armies had all come true or were on the point of coming true. The first Mongol invasion occurred in October of the same year, in a massive military attack against the islands off Kyushu. At that point, the government had no choice but to heed Nichiren's warnings.

Upon returning to Kamakura, he said, "Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler's domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart."[14] These words embody the Daishonin's determination never to be enslaved by the powerful. They might exile him, they might execute him, but they could not control his beliefs. He remained faithful to this conviction throughout his life.

Prizing life above all

Bourgeault • Such is the indomitable freedom of the prisoner. Recent history provides us with many similar examples. The environment, however, can support, threaten or weaken that freedom.

Ikeda • Incidently, those words of Nichiren Daishonin appear in a collection of famous quotations about human rights published to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of UNESCO.

The most powerful authority cannot enchain the heart and spirit. The voice of freedom cannot be stifled. I have relayed these words to intelligent and learned people all over the world, and today many are coming to see Nichiren Daishonin's life as an example of the struggle against authority for the sake of human rights. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first president of Soka Gakkai, and my mentor Josei Toda, the second president, inherited the struggle and launched a movement that has not stopped growing.

Bourgeault • I have heard tell of their resistance to the Japanese government during World War II.

Ikeda • They were imprisoned by the military regime in 1943 on the pretext of having violated the Peace Preservation Law and for lèse-majesté because of their active opposition to the regime's policy of war. Makiguchi died in prison in November of the next year, at the age of 73. In a letter to his family, he wrote, "I'm doing quite well here in hell." He never stopped resisting authority. Inheriting Makiguchi's mission, Toda rose up alone, in the burned-out ruins of postwar Japan, to devote himself fully to the ordinary people.

Bourgeault • People often say that life is what is most important. It seems self-evident. But Socrates, Gandhi, King, and many others considered it more important to preserve the meaning they assigned to their lives than to preserve their lives.

Ikeda • Very aptly put. Martyrdom is the fundamental spirit of religion. Nichiren Daishonin declared that "Life is the foremost of all treasures."[15] He taught that all the treasures of the universe together are worth less than life. He stressed his absolute belief in the sacred quality of life, and then added: "Fish want to survive; they deplore their pond's shallowness and dig holes to hide in, yet tricked by bait, they take the hook. Birds in a tree fear that they are too low and perch in the top branches, yet bewitched by bait, they too are caught in snares. Human beings are

equally vulnerable. They give their lives for shallow, worldly matters but rarely for the noble cause of Buddhism."[16] In other words, preoccupied by self-interest, over-eager to protect their material circumstances, people lose their lives out of an obsession with greed and power. Nichiren didn't mince his words in denouncing the idiocy of human selfishness.

Bourgeault • The fish metaphor is very vivid.

Ikeda • The real question is to know, as you said, how we should live and what goals we should pursue if we want to honor the dignity of our lives. As Nichiren Daishonin expressed it, "Since nothing is more precious than life itself, one who dedicates one's life to Buddhist practice is certain to attain Buddhahood."[17] Alms or offering, in the Buddhist sense, means putting ourselves at the service of others. The Daishonin taught that struggling to protect the lives of others is the essence of nobility, both for ourselves and for others.

Helping people escape suffering, doing our best to support others, committing ourselves to improving communities and society at large, these are the most noble of human works. Along the way, we are bound to clash with those in power—those who lust after dominance. Lives may be lost in the fray. Such loss of life is martyrdom.

Despite this, I believe that the only way of life worthy of our humanity is to fight for the sake of world peace and the protection of human rights. A life dedicated to these noble goals radiates a light of its own. This is the bodhisattva way embodied by the bodhisattva Vimalakirti I spoke of earlier. His acceptance of responsibility for others' pain makes him a perfect example of humanity in its full splendor.

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13. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin.* 6.
14. *Ibid.* 579.
15. *Ibid.* 1125.
16. *Ibid.* 301.
17. *Ibid.* 301.