INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND NICHIREN BUDDHISM

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Abstract

This paper sets out to explore the connections between Mahayana Buddhism and international humanitarian law (IHL). Based on the Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra as interpreted by Zhiyi and Nichiren, it examines how specific Buddhist ethics are related to IHL principles. From the viewpoint of the Soka Gakkai, it also looks at how three doctrines (i.e., the dignity of life, the variability of life and the interconnectedness of life) are congruent with some IHL principles. The paper also analyzes how Buddhist organizations can be advocates of these laws and specifically looks at how the Soka Gakkai commits to IHL in terms of the use of nuclear weapons.

Keywords: International humanitarian law (IHL); Lotus Sutra; Soka Gakkai; nuclear weapons; bodhisattva; dignity of life; interconnect

The Soka Gakkai's Rejection of Nichirenism in Prewar Japan

Many scholars point out that Buddhism is a religion of peace. Hajime Nakamura, a Japanese scholar of Buddhism, states, "When Buddhism was spread to new places, it never hurt anyone. Religious scholars acknowledge that Buddhism is the only religion that was spread by peaceful persuasion without any bloodshed and military forces."[1]

The Dhammapada, an early Buddhist scripture, reads, "All tremble at violence, all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill."[2]

In Buddhism, we should strive to avoid armed conflict that kills living creatures and instead seek a peaceful and tranquil society. For example, when the king of Magadha attempted to attack Vajji, Shakyamuni Buddha prevented him from doing so.

The Soka Gakkai is a peace-oriented, community-based Buddhist network that follows Nichiren's teachings. Nichiren (1222–82), a 13th-century Japanese priest, interpreted the Lotus Sutra based on the dignity of life and, moved by the plight of the ordinary people, sought to engage the establishment in dialogue for a more peaceful society.

However, in the early 20th century, Nichirenism advocates distorted Nichiren's original teachings by interpreting them as a nationalistic philosophy. They praised war and participated in invasions, coups d'états and acts of terrorism.

Kanji Ishiwara (1889–1949), who was a general in the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II, was one of the men who devised the 1931 Manchurian Incident and promoted invasions with the aim of expanding Japan's power. These Nichirenism

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[1] Hajime Nakamura, trans. from *Heiwa wo jitsugen suru bukkyo,* (Buddhism that Realizes Peace) lecture at "The Second Global Future Generations Kyoto Forum" (August 3, 1995).
[2] Acharya Buddharakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), 53, Dhp X 129.

advocates committed many atrocities based on their distorted interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism, which is absolutely contradictory to the spirit of Buddhism.

Against this backdrop of nationalism and totalitarianism, first Soka Gakkai President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda (1900–58) developed peace activities based on nonviolence, engaging in dialogue as Buddhists because they regarded Nichiren's teachings as valuing an individual's happiness. For both Makiguchi and Toda, Nichiren Buddhism expounds the inherent potential for all individuals to attain enlightenment and thus encourages practitioners to seek their own and others' happiness.

In 1933, Japan seceded from the League of Nations, and later allied itself with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy and entered World War II. Because they resisted pressure from Japan's militarist government to abandon their religious beliefs, Makiguchi and Toda were imprisoned as "thought criminals" in 1943. Makiguchi died in prison. Toda was released in 1945 and, amidst the chaos of post-war Japan, rebuilt the Soka Gakkai, becoming its second president in 1951.

The Soka Gakkai's Buddhist Perspective on International Humanitarian Law

International humanitarian law (IHL), a major part of which is contained in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols, seeks to ensure the humane treatment of individuals at all stages of armed conflicts.[3] According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the principle of humane treatment in IHL requires that those who fall into the hands of the enemy be treated with respect for their dignity as human beings.[4] IHL reflects the principles of humanity, of distinction between civilians and combatants, of distinction between civilian objects and military objectives, of proportionality, of military necessity and of the prohibition of superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering.[5]

From a Buddhist point of view, there is no such distinction of parties. Each person deserves to be treated with respect for the dignity of their life, and this principle could be described as having compassion for each individual. Compassion, as stated in the Nichiren Buddhist sense, is not something removed from the individual, as it is rooted in respect for the inherent dignity of each life—our own and that of others—and a desire to see that dignity

[3] "What is International Humanitarian Law?" International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (website), accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf.
[4] "Humane Treatment," ICRC (website), accessed August 16, 2019, https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/humane-treatment.
[5] "Fundamental principles of IHL," ICRC (website), accessed August 16, 2019, https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/fundamental-principles-ihl.

triumph. For example, the Soka Gakkai[6] considers compassion as "a sense of solidarity with others—with all life—arising from a wish for mutual happiness and growth."[7]It is the heart of Buddhism.

Although the life of Shakyamuni (Gautama Siddartha) began some 2,500 years ago surrounded by the luxuries afforded a prince, he eventually renounced his princely status and embarked on a spiritual quest to understand how human suffering could be overcome. This quest ultimately led to his awakening. After awakening to the true nature of life, Shakyamuni travelled widely, sharing his wisdom with others.

The truth to which he was enlightened is expounded in the Lotus Sutra, a central teaching of Mahayana Buddhism.

The key message of the Lotus Sutra is that Buddhahood, the supreme state of life, characterized by boundless compassion, wisdom and courage, is inherent within every person without distinction of gender, ethnicity, social standing or intellectual ability.

The teachings of the Lotus Sutra were transmitted and developed by Buddhist scholars and teachers in India, China and Japan—most notably Zhiyi (the Great Teacher Tiantai, or T'ien-t'ai) (538–597) in China and Nichiren in Japan.

Nichiren expressed the essence of the Lotus Sutra as "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo." He taught the practice of chanting this phrase as a means for all people to overcome suffering and lead happy and fulfilled lives. This is the Buddhist practice of Soka Gakkai members around the world, who embrace the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism.

Hereafter, the term Buddhism in this paper refers to the Soka Gakkai's Buddhist understanding.

Definition of IHL Principles

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[6] "The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a community-based Buddhist organization that promotes peace, culture and education centered on respect for the dignity of life. SGI members uphold the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism in 192 countries and territories around the world. Individual SGI members strive to actualize their inherent potential while contributing as empowered global citizens to their local communities and responding to the shared issues facing humankind. The SGI's efforts to help build a lasting culture of peace are based on a commitment to dialogue and nonviolence, and the understanding that individual happiness and the realization of a peaceful world are inextricably linked." Text from "SGI: A Snapshot," Soka Gakkai International (SGI) (website), accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/snapshot/.

[7] "Compassion: Solidarity of the Heart," SGI (website), accessed August 14, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/about-us/buddhist-concepts/compassion-solidarity-of-the-heart.html.

IHL, according to the ICRC, is a set of rules that during armed conflict seek to protect people who are not or are no longer taking part in the hostilities and to restrict the methods and means of warfare employed.[8]

In exploring this principle of the protection of human dignity, the 1977 Additional Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions, article 51 stipulates in part:

> The civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.
>
> Civilians shall enjoy the protection afforded by this Section, unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities. [9]

Taking also from the Basic rules of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols[10], IHL calls for the protection of rules that call for saving the vulnerable such as civilians, medical and religious personnel, as well as military personnel who have ceased to take part in the conflict, the wounded, shipwrecked and sick combatants, and prisoners of war. From a Buddhist perspective, inherent in this statement, is the respect for the dignity of life, which is central to both Buddhism and IHL.

The Dignity of Life and the Principle of Protection

The dignity of life can be examined in the life of the bodhisattva. In Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is an individual who seeks enlightenment for both him- or herself and for others. A bodhisattva is literally a living being (*sattva*) who aspires to enlightenment (*bodhi*) and carries out altruistic practices.

Compassion, an empathetic sharing of the sufferings of others, is the bodhisattva's greatest characteristic. It is shown in the following incident from the Vimalakīrti Sutra that concerns a prominent lay follower of the Buddha, Vimalakīrti, who had fallen ill. When questioned about his illness, Vimalakīrti replied, "Because the beings are ill, the bodhisattva is ill. The sickness of the bodhisattva arises from his great compassion."[11]

The bodhisattva expresses a determination to contribute to the happiness of other people in four vows as follows, "However innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to save them;

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[8] "What is International Humanitarian Law?" ICRC (website), accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf.
[9] "Protection of The Civilian Population," ICRC (website), accessed August 16, 2019, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/470-750065.
[10] "Protection of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked" ICRC (website), accessed August 16, 2019, https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/57jmjs.htm
[11] Daisaku Ikeda, *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth & Death… And Everything in Between, A Buddhist View Life* (Santa Monica: Middleway Press, 2004), 51.

however inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to master them; however limitless the teachings are, I vow to study them; however infinite the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it."[12]

The vows may seem daunting. However, Buddhism asserts that the path of the bodhisattva is not an otherworldly undertaking for people with unique gifts of compassion or wisdom. Rather, the life condition of the bodhisattva is inherent in the lives of ordinary men and women, and the purpose of Buddhist practice is to strengthen that state until compassion becomes the basis of all our actions.

In addition to compassion, the vows reflect the bodhisattva's commitment to self-mastery, to study and learning, to the attainment of wisdom. None of these, however, are pursued in a vacuum, merely to improve or adorn the self; at the base of all these efforts is always the determination to remove the sufferings of others, and to replace them with joy.

Hiroshi Kanno states that the most important religious message of the Lotus Sutra is depicted most vibrantly in Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's actions toward everyone he came across.[13] His practice was to bow in reverence to everyone he met and praise their inherent Buddha nature. His behavior, however, sometimes provoked violence and abuse in return.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's assertions no doubt challenged people's deeply held negative assumptions about the nature of life. Their reactions, however, never upset his convictions, and he never retaliated. He would simply retreat to a safe distance and repeat his obeisance, honoring the potential for good within his persecutors. Over time, as a result of these actions, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's humanity comes to shine to the extent that those who had despised him were moved and became his disciples and thus entered the path of attaining Buddhahood themselves.

Nichiren writes, "The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the 'Never Disparaging' chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being."[14]

Nichiren clarifies that respecting others, as exemplified by the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, constitutes the essence of Buddhist practice and the correct way for human

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[12] "Bodhisattva," SGI (website), accessed August 14, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/about-us/buddhist-concepts/bodhisattva.html.
[13] Hiroshi Kanno, trans. from *Hokekyo nyumon* (Introduction to the Lotus Sutra) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001), 128.
[14] "Never Disparaging," the online edition of *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin I*, accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/N/29.

beings to behave. Such respect is not limited to a passive regard for others; it is a bold engagement of our humanity.

Bodhisattvas are thus naturally engaged in society, actively struggling both to change themselves and make the world a better, more humane place for all people especially the most vulnerable.

As we have seen in Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's case, violence is bound to occur especially when there is a lack of understanding and compassion for the other. This could explain the numerous wars and upheavals on the earth. Buddhism regards nonviolence as absolutely essential at any given time, and Buddhists will always seek a peaceful society instead of a disruptive one of violence. This is the characteristic of a bodhisattva as described in the Lotus Sutra. The bodhisattva uses wisdom to think of the best way to deal with challenges and take appropriate action.

In times of armed conflict, Buddhists would prefer nonviolent, swift resolutions. However, when such resolutions are not forthcoming and an impasse has been reached, they would seek for an outcome for the least suffering and a quick end to the war. Taking the example of Soka Gakkai, this wisdom then leads to actions that promote peace through nonviolent solutions, such as engaging in dialogue and proposing peaceful ideas. Following the examples of the bodhisattva and valuing the dignity of life, Soka Gakkai members commit to supporting ex-combatants who might suffer from physical or mental diseases. It is therefore crucial to protect and abide by rules that call for saving the vulnerable such as civilians, medical and religious personnel, as well as military personnel who have ceased to take part in the conflict, the wounded, shipwrecked and sick combatants, and prisoners of war.

The Treasure Tower and the Principle of Protection

The dignity of life can also be viewed in terms of the treasure tower depicted in the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra is largely an allegorical description of Shakyamuni Buddha interacting with a great gathering of disciples. At a key point, a magnificent treasure tower suddenly emerges from the earth. "Tower" here is a translation of stupa—a dome-like structure built to house the relics of the Buddha. Its vast dimensions stagger the imagination, and it is adorned with seven kinds of treasures described as "gold, silver, lapis, lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl, and carnelian, and it was so high that it reached to the heavenly palaces of the four heavenly kings."[15]

[15] Burton Watson, (trans.) *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2009), 209.

Shakyamuni explains that this treasure tower appears anywhere in the universe where the Lotus Sutra is being preached. He enters the tower and takes a seat beside Buddha Many Treasures. The tower and the entire assembly are raised up and suspended in space above the ground, where, in The Ceremony in the Air, further amazing events unfold. All of this is an elucidation, in rich symbolism, of the unfathomable Buddha nature inherent within the life of all people.

Daisaku Ikeda explains that, "The 'tower adorned with the seven treasures' is the grand and dignified original form of our lives." In a letter to a follower, Nichiren explains where the ultimate reality exists. It is in the depths of the lives of all people. He writes, "No treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra."[16]

This is an indication of the importance of one's life and the dignity of life.

The Variability of Life (Ten Worlds) and the Right to Life

The 1868 Saint Petersburg Declaration states that the legitimate objective of states to pursue war would be to weaken military forces by disarming "the greatest possible number of men."[17]

Deriving from the 1868 Saint Petersburg Declaration, the 1977 Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, article 35 states:

> In any armed conflict, the right of the Parties to the conflict to choose methods or means of warfare is not unlimited.
>
> It is prohibited to employ weapons, projectiles and material and methods of warfare of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.
>
> It is prohibited to employ methods or means of warfare which are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment.[18]

Although article 35 does not define what "superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering" means, it serves to prevent the destruction and deprivation of lives of all parties, including

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[16] "On the Treasure Tower," the online edition of *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin I*, accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/wnd-1/Content/31#para-2.

[17] "Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight. Saint Petersburg, 29 November / 11 December 1868," ICRC (website), accessed August 14, 2019, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=568842C2B90F4A29C12563CD0051547C.

[18] "Basic Rules," ICRC (website), accessed August 26, 2019, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=0DF4B935977689E8C12563CD0051DAE4.

combatants and civilians. Buddhism supports the ideas of article 35 based on the variability of life as well as the dignity of life.

The variability of life means that the life condition of an individual changes easily. For example, it is possible for a bellicose person to undergo an experience that transforms their warlike propensity to a passionate belief in nonviolence and the adoption of an anti-war stance. Of course, the reverse could also be true.

The longer a person lives, the more opportunities they have to change their karma. Denying an individual their right to life—which is a basic human right—denies them the opportunity for self-reflection, inner discipline and therefore transformation.

Even in times of conflict, it is possible for an individual or group to have a change of heart and this, in Buddhism, can be explained through the concept of the "Ten Worlds" that inherently exist in everyone.

This concept of the Ten Worlds offers a useful framework for understanding both the changeable nature of our moods and the basic nature or tendencies of our character. More significantly, it provides us with a sense of the great possibility inherent in life at each moment.

In *The Great Concentration and Insight*, the sixth-century Chinese Buddhist teacher Zhiyi expounds that "life is not fixed in one or another of the Ten Worlds, but can manifest any of the ten, from hell to the state of Buddhahood, at any given moment."

The worlds are, in ascending order of the degree of free will, compassion and happiness one feels, the worlds of: (1) hell, (2) hungry spirits, (3) animals, (4) *asuras*, (5) human beings (6) heavenly beings, (7) voice-hearers, (8) cause-awakened ones, (9) bodhisattvas, and (10) Buddhas.

At one time in ancient India, it was thought that these were distinct, separate and fixed realms into which beings were born, in accordance with the good or evil they had performed in past lifetimes. It was thought that they endlessly repeated the cycle of birth and death confined to one of the first six worlds (from the world of hell to heavenly beings), also known as the "six paths."

Buddhism developed in this context as a practice offering the possibility of transcending and freeing oneself from these six paths.

Pre-Lotus Sutra teachings taught that it is possible to be born in a higher or more enlightened life state depending on one's actions, specifically by carrying out acts of good and practicing the Buddha way. By accumulating good acts, one offsets the balance of evil acts one may have accumulated.

The Lotus Sutra revolutionized this paradigm, teaching that the Ten Worlds, including that of Buddhahood, are ten states of life equally inherent within each living being at each moment. Life at each moment manifests one of the Ten Worlds. And each of these worlds possesses the potential for all ten within it (the principle of "the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds"). Therefore, it is possible to open up any of these life states, including Buddhahood, at any moment through contact with an external stimulus that enables one to do so.

The world of hell is where one is imprisoned by suffering and completely lacking in freedom. In this state, living is itself painful, and everything we see is colored by our unhappiness and misery. The world of hungry spirits, or the life state of hunger, is a state where one is spiritually and physically tormented by insatiable craving. The world of animals, or the life state of animality (reflecting the ancient Indian conception of the nature of animals) is characterized by foolishness in the sense of being moved by impulse and concerned only with immediate benefit and gratification. In this condition, the ability to make moral and ethical judgments is lacking. Because the worlds of hell, hungry spirits and animals all represent conditions of suffering, they are collectively known as the "three evil paths". In ancient Indian mythology *asuras* were contentious demons. A characteristic of the world of *asuras*, or the life state of anger, is an obsession with personal superiority or self-importance, a tendency to always compare oneself to others and want to be better than them.

One cannot help being unwise and barbaric when one is controlled by one's instincts and desires, overwhelmed by the three evil paths and by the four evil paths (i.e., the three evil paths and the world of *asuras*). Such states of life are war minded and unfortunately inherent in human beings. Buddhists believe that rather than ignoring these aspects, they should recognize them as the causes of war and transform them into the causes of peace. This is the wisdom of Buddhism.

People in the world of bodhisattvas strive to attain the enlightenment of the Buddha. What distinguishes them is their aspiration for the enlightened life state. Bodhisattvas are characterized by compassion and altruism—empathy for the pain and sorrow of others and a desire to help relieve them of that suffering and find joy. For example, one may argue that those engaged in humanitarian activities have a similar state of life to that of the bodhisattva.

The world of buddhahood describes the most supremely noble state of life that a living being can manifest. It is not, however, a superhuman or supernatural state of being. The term "Buddha" means "awakened one." What a buddha is awakened to is the underlying principle of the "Mystic Law"—that all life possesses intrinsic, irreplaceable value, that all living beings are capable of harnessing unique strengths and creating good within

themselves and the environment. In other words, each living being is itself a manifestation of the Mystic Law. Those who awaken to this and take action based upon it are Buddhas.

This life state of buddhahood can be described in contemporary terms as a state of absolute and indestructible happiness unaffected by circumstantial changes or difficulties. Although this does not imply the disappearance of sufferings and problems, it does indicate possession of a vibrant, sturdy life force and abundant wisdom to challenge and overcome all the sufferings and difficulties we may encounter.

Because people's life states are dynamic and variable, even those in the four evil paths possess potential for being as compassionate and enlightened as those in the worlds of Bodhisattvas and Buddhahood. By prohibiting superfluous injury and massive destruction of life, article 35 ensures opportunities for all parties that live during warfare to reflect, discipline, and transform themselves to attain a higher life state.

The Variability of Life: Devadatta

A typical example of the variability of life is illustrated through Devadatta, a symbol of the world of hell, who was finally able to attain Buddhahood. Historically speaking, Devadatta committed three of the five cardinal sins by killing an *arhat*[19], planning an assassination of and injuring Shakyamuni and causing disunity in the Buddhist order. Although he attempted to injure and murder Shakyamuni with venom applied to his nails, he in fact poisoned himself and died.

Regarding Devadatta's evil acts, Kanno writes:

> One Buddha vehicle from the Lotus Sutra is a philosophy that allows all people to equally attain Buddhahood. There should be no exception. However, in the Buddhist history before the Lotus Sutra was completed, Devadatta, who opposed Shakyamuni, was disliked like Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ, and criticized as he fell into the hell while being alive.[20]

Although Devadatta was known to be a villain, Shakyamuni revealed the future enlightenment of Devadatta. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni recalls his past lifetime, saying,

> During those many kalpas, I constantly appeared as the ruler of a kingdom who made a vow to seek unsurpassed enlightenment. … [F]or the sake of the Law this king abandoned his kingdom and throne, delegated the government to the crown

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[19] *Arhat*, meaning one worthy of respect, refers to one who has attained the highest of the four stages that voice-hearers aim to achieve.
[20] Hiroshi Kanno, trans. from *Hokekyo nyumon* (Introduction to the Lotus Sutra) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001), 150.

> prince, sounded drums and sent out proclamations, seeking the Law in four directions.[21]

The king then cries,

> "Who possesses the great Law? If he will explain and preach it for me I will be his slave and servant!" At that time there was a seer named Asita who came and announced to this great king, "I have a subtle and wonderful Law, rarely known in this world. If you will undertake religious practice I will expound it for you." When the king heard the seer's words his heart was filled with great joy. Immediately he accompanied the seer.[22]

After Shakyamuni tells his audience this story, he reveals that the king was him and that the seer is Devadatta. He explains, "The fact that I have attained impartial and correct enlightenment and can save living beings on a broad scale is all due to Devadatta, who was a good friend."[23] He then clarifies, "Devadatta, after immeasurable kalpas have passed, will attain buddhahood."[24]

As this story indicates, Buddhism teaches that even an evil person could attain Buddhahood and change their minds. In Nichiren Buddhism, an individual has the inherent potential to change their life. The longer individuals live, the more chances they possess to make good causes in their current and for their next life, as illustrated by Devadatta who attained Buddhahood after his death.

The Variability of Life: King Ajātashatru

Another example of the variability of life is from the story of King Ajātashatru. Immediately before Shakyamuni died, he lamented that he was concerned about King Ajātashatru. Querying this concern, one of his disciples asked why, when the Buddha's compassion should reach all people equally, was Shakyamuni especially concerned about King Ajātashatru. Shakyamuni replied using the analogy of parents with seven children, their love equally distributed among the children with no discrimination. However, should one of those children become ill, the parents love becomes especially focused on that child.

Instigated by Devadatta, King Ajātashatru had killed his father, King Bimbisāra, a follower of Shakyamuni, and ascended the throne himself. Because he was deceived by Devadatta, he released a drunken elephant on Shakyamuni and his disciples in an attempt to kill them.

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[21] Burton Watson, (trans.) *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2009), 221.
[22] Ibid., 222.
[23] Ibid., 223
[24] Ibid.

However, Shakyamuni believed that King Ajātashatru was deeply unhappy, and a Buddha never abandons or forgets those whose lives are steeped in suffering. Rather, a Buddha's compassionate wish is to relieve their suffering and help move their lives in the direction of happiness.

King Ajātashatru came to regret killing his father. Tormented by guilt, he suffered from prolonged abnormal skin growth. On the advice of Jīvaka, a skilled physician and disciple of Shakyamuni, he started practicing Buddhism under Shakyamuni. His illness healed, and King Ajātashatru was able to prolong his life. He went on to edit Buddhist sutras after Shakyamuni's death.

As this story demonstrates, Shakyamuni's compassion for King Ajātashatru helped him overcome the life state of hell and oriented him toward Buddhahood.

The Variability of Life: King Ashoka

The famous story of King Ashoka also suggests that Buddhism inspired him to transform his life. His story, like that of King Ajātashatru, also illustrates the potential for good within a life of evil acts.

It is said that the Indian ruler King Ashoka (304–232) was a merciless king of the Mauryan Empire and waged many wars. He waged war against the state of Kalinga and conquered it around 261 BCE. The war led to the killing of 100,000 people and the deportation of 150,000 others.[25] The horror of this war and of what it did left him tormented to the extent that he repented his cruelty and vowed to never again wage war. It is said that he learned about Buddhist teachings immediately before he started governing his realm. Ten years after he ascended the throne, he visited the place where Shakyamuni achieved enlightenment and started his circumambulation, seeking the Buddhist law. Over the following decades of his reign, he constructed wells, planted trees, built hospitals to cure humans and animals, encouraged cultural exchanges and erected stone pillars engraved with edicts, such as those admonishing against the taking of life.

The stories of Ashoka and Ajātashatru describe the opportunity given to two individuals to change their lives, the change from "evil" to "good." Had they lived shorter lives, they would have died with the destructive mindset characteristic of the four lower paths. The fact that they were able to live longer gave them an opportunity to change from evil rulers to rulers who respect others. These narratives also illustrate that the individual exists in these Ten Worlds that influence our thoughts and behavior. The eternity of life, as described in the Lotus Sutra, provided time for Devadatta to achieve Buddhahood. Thus, given time anyone can change. The long-term effects of war on an individual, whether a combatant or victim, is difficult to predict. Therefore, the need for humane treatment of all,

[25] Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 255.

including ex-combatants, illustrates the correlation between Buddhist philosophy in terms of compassion and dignity and IHL.

The Interconnectedness of life: Three Thousand Realms of a Single Moment of Life

The oneness of life and its environment is clarified within the theoretical framework of "three thousand realms in a single moment of life," which was established by Zhiyi on the basis of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. It is an overarching explanation of the nature and workings of life. Zhiyi states that all life is interconnected. And within this interconnectedness, human beings are connected to the physical environment. Thus, the importance of protecting the environment as stated in the 1977 Additional Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions, article 35 where it says that the methods and means of war should be prohibited especially if they are intended or expected to cause "widespread, long-term or severe damage to the natural environment." As Buddhism posits the interconnectedness of all life, there is no separation of the individual and the environment.

Restrictions on Nuclear Weapons and Tactics in IHL

As stated earlier, the Buddhist principles of the variability of life and the interconnectedness of life and environment, correspond to article 35 that prohibits means and methods of warfare that cause unnecessary suffering and destroy the environment. However, as it does not explicitly state whether the prohibited means and methods include the usage of nuclear weapons, this law has led to differing interpretations among scholars and stakeholders.

Some have argued that the usage of nuclear weapons could be legal, depending on the situation. The 1868 Saint Petersburg Declaration, the first formal agreement that called for the banning of inhumane weapons in war, prohibits the use of weapons that would cause unnecessary suffering as follows:

> "Considering: . . . That the only legitimate object which States should endeavor to accomplish during war is to weaken the military forces of the enemy; That for this purpose it is sufficient to disable the greatest possible number of men; That this object would be exceeded by the employment of arms which uselessly aggravate the sufferings of disabled men, or render their death inevitable; That the employment of such arms would, therefore, be contrary to the laws of humanity"[26]

This declaration was groundbreaking as the authors saw the need to affirm humanitarian principles in warfare. It also formed a foundation for the international humanitarian laws

[26] "Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight. Saint Petersburg, 29 November / 11 December 1868," International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (website), accessed August 14, 2019, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=568842C2B90F4A29C12563CD0051547C.

that exist today. However, as the Saint Petersburg Declaration does not explicitly denounce all weapons, it does not prevent states from using nuclear weapons to "weaken the military forces" of an enemy state.

Such interpretations of these prohibitions could conceivably result in the proliferation of nuclear weapons and run contrary to the respect for the dignity of life and environment.

Similar interpretations could be made regarding the 1996 Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons issued by the International Court of Justice. It reads, "A threat or use of nuclear weapons should also be compatible with the requirements of the international law applicable in armed conflict, particularly those of the principles and rules of IHL, as well as with specific obligations under treaties and other undertakings which expressly deal with nuclear weapons."[27] Arguably, the Advisory Opinion creates a loophole that could make the use nuclear weapons acceptable. For instance, some scholars point out that the use of nuclear weapons could be legal for wartime reprisals.[28]

Another argument is that IHL bans the usage of nuclear weapons in any situation, which the Soka Gakkai also supports based on the aforementioned Buddhist ethics (i.e., the dignity of life, the variability of life and the interconnectedness of life). Historically, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in unnecessary suffering. The estimated combined causalities in both cities are 199,000,[29] and the survivors and their offspring still suffer from aftereffects including leukemia, trauma and social stigma. Simon O'Connor writes:

> The long-term impact of nuclear weapons also means a significantly increased risk of cancer mortality throughout the life of survivors. How the temporal aspect of the rule on unnecessary suffering does not manifest itself immediately, is to be understood, requires further analysis. That said, given the characteristics that would ordinarily manifest themselves from exposure to radiation, it is fair to contend that this issue must be taken into account in applying the unnecessary suffering rule."[30]

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[27] "Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996," International Court of Justice (ICJ) (website), accessed August 16, 2019, https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/95/095-19960708-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf.

[28] See Akira Mayama, "Legality of the Use of Nuclear Weapons and the 2011 Resolution 1 of the Red Cross Movement's Council of Delegates: 'Working towards the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons,'" *The Journal of Huanitaraian Studies* 3, (2014): 13.; Yumi Nishimura, "Buryoku hunso ho no riko kakuho: Sogo shugi to hukkyu [Ensuring Implementation of Law of Armed Conflict: Reciprocity and Reprisal]" in *Buryoku hunso no kokusai ho* [International Law of Armed Conflict] ed. Shinya Murase and Akira Mayama, 693–701. Tokyo: Toshindo, 2004.

[29] "The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," Atomic Archive (website), accessed August 19, 2019, http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp10.shtml.

[30] Simon O'Connor, "Nuclear Weapons and the Unnecessary Suffering Rule," in *Nuclear Weapons under International Law*, ed. by Gro Nystuen, Stuart Casey-Maslen and Annie Golden Bersagel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 147.

Thus, regardless of the reason or justification behind their usage, the damage that nuclear weapons would wreak would be catastrophic and absolutely detrimental to the dignity of life of all on the planet. It would also affect victims in the long term. There is no argument that could justify the use of nuclear weapons, as they would cause unnecessary and immeasurable suffering to both civilians and combatants.

In 2017, the United Nations Conference made the monumental decision to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The preamble of the TPNW recognizes that the important role that organizations such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement among other international and religious organizations and individuals have played in contributing to the call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The Treaty's article 8, paragraph 5 states that these organizations "shall be invited to attend the meetings of States Parties and the review conferences as observers."[31] The TPNW has promoted an international conversation clarifying whether or not the international community admits the use of nuclear weapons both in times of war and times of no war.

As a Buddhist organization that upholds the importance of compassion and the dignity of life, the Soka Gakkai engages in grassroots peace activities toward the elimination of nuclear weapons in cooperation with other organizations, such as the United Nations and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).[32]

In 1957, based on his belief as a Buddhist, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda made a declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. This declaration became the starting point of the Soka Gakkai's movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Daisaku Ikeda, who later took up the mantle as the third president of the organization, has continued to spearhead the organization's movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons and has consistently referred to the declaration in his annual peace proposals since 1983.

In his 2019 peace proposal he writes:

> While recognizing the importance of movements opposing nuclear testing that were gaining traction at the time, he [Toda] asserted that the ways of thinking that justify nuclear weapons and upon which security issues are based must be rooted out in order to bring about a fundamental solution to the problem: 'I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons.' His declaration, issued some six months before he passed away, was made from the

[31] United Nations, Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, A/CONF.229/2017/8 (7 July 2017), status as at: 22-08-2019, available from undocs.org/A/CONF.229/2017/8.
[32] The Soka Gakkai organizes antinuclear exhibitions, publishes books on anti-war themes and engages in advocacy for a nuclear-weapon-free world. For more information, see: "SGI's Activities for Nuclear Abolition," SGI (website), accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/in-focus/2016/activities-for-nuclear-abolition.html.

> standpoint that it is impermissible for anyone to threaten the fundamental right to live shared by the people of the world. Its significance lies in the fact that he returned the issue of nuclear weapons, which had been pedestaled as necessary for the peace and security of states, to the realm of the intrinsic value of life, a question of pressing concern for all people.[33]

Ikeda wrote this based on the belief that the weapons themselves are not the "enemy" but rather the way of thinking that justifies and defends the existence of these weapons.

Furthermore, in his 2007 peace proposal, Ikeda wrote on the destructive forces inherent in human life. In it, he reflects upon his mentor, Josei Toda, who referred to the destructive nature of humans as "a devil incarnate, a fiend, a monster."[34] He went on to state: "Those who would use nuclear weapons capable of instantaneously killing tens of millions of people exhibit the most desperate symptoms of this pathology. They have lost all sense of the dignity of life, having fallen prey to their own inner demons."[35]

According to Ikeda, "Buddhism classifies the underlying destructive impulses that give rise to such behavior as 'the three poisons' . . . of greed, anger and ignorance. 'The world of anger' can be thought of as the state of life of those in whom these forces have been directed outward toward others."[36]

In this form, the world of anger can be described as Nichiren states, "Since the mind of a person who is in the world of asuras desires in every moment to be superior to everyone else and cannot bear to be inferior to anyone else, he belittles and despises others and exalts himself."[37] When in the world of anger, we are always engaged in invidious comparisons with others, always seeking to excel over them. The resulting distortions prevent us from perceiving the world accurately; we fall easily into conflict, locking horns with others at the slightest provocation. Under the sway of such anger, people can commit unimaginable acts of violence and bloodshed.

When an individual's state of mind and heart are within the three evil paths, they are unable to make reasonable judgements. When in such a state of anger, decisions are ruled by one's

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[33] Daisaku Ikeda, "Toward a New Era of Peace and Disarmament: A People-Centered Approach," accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/content/files/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/2019-peace-proposal.pdf

[34] Daisaku Ikeda, "Restoring the Human Connection: The First Step to Global Pecae," accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/content/files/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/peace2007.pdf.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "Explaining the Causation of the Ten Worlds," the online edition of *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin I*, accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/wnd-2/Content/185#para-32.

ego. That is why it may be easy for such an individual to not hesitate killing others by using weapons as destructive as nuclear weapons.

Ikeda explains that "it is this state of mind that would countenance the use of nuclear weapons; it can equally be seen in the psychology of those who would advocate the use of such hideously cruel weapons as napalm, or, more recently, depleted uranium and cluster bombs. People in such a state of life are blinded, not only to the horrific suffering their actions wreak but also to the value of human life itself. For the sake of human dignity, we must never succumb to the numbing dehumanization of the rampant world of anger."[38]

Conclusion

The commonalities between IHL and the principles stemming from Mahayana Buddhism as depicted in this paper focus on the dignity, variability and interconnectedness of life from this Buddhist perspective. These are paralleled in IHL by the principle of protection and that of the restriction of weapons.

More specifically, the dignity of life described in Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra advocates for the 1977 Additional Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions, article 51, which calls for protection of the dignity of life of an individual, whereas the variability of life and the interconnectedness of life, based on Zhiyi's view, support the argument for article 35 of the Additional Protocol I, which focuses on the restriction of the weapons and means of warfare.

As seen with the adoption of the TPNW, dialogue among states, organizations and individuals is important as it advocates for peaceful resolutions to contentious issues. As there is worldwide consensus by the international community that nuclear weapons are destructive, it is imperative that the term "nuclear weapons" be included in the definition of weapons in IHL.

Nichiren Buddhism values the individual's dignity of life and believes that an individual has the potential to change and, in doing so, effect a change their environment. Based on this argument, IHL is even more important in ensuring that all people affected by war not only have their basic human right to life respected but also that the dignity of their life—be they ex-combatants or the vulnerable—be protected and respected.

[38] Daisaku Ikeda, "Restoring the Human Connection: The First Step to Global Peace," accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.sgi.org/content/files/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/peace2007.pdf.

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