

A Buddhist Environmental Ethic in Action:
The Transformative Development of Soka Gakkai's Value Creation and Human
Revolution

By

Amanda C. LaPointe

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Approved: Dr. Anne Marie Dalton
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Mary Hale
Examiner

Approved: Dr. Alec Soucy
Reader

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement using the eco-contextualist approach in an attempt to address some ambiguity involved in the eco-Buddhist research field. The contextual strategy methodology, which is supported by the textual and practical strategy methods, is used to focus on a specific Buddhist culture and asks how its practice interacts with environmental discourse. By employing the contextual strategy methodology to examine specific accounts of thought and practice of Soka Gakkai International, this thesis ultimately shows that one can see the development and articulation of an environmental mindset among its members. This distinct mindset represents the Soka Gakkai Buddhist ideals of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation*, which work together to generate a true sense of responsibility to the natural environment. This study involves both primary and secondary research methods, and includes semi-formal interviews with members of the Soka Gakkai International chapter in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Chapter One

Buddhist Environmental Ethics – Strategies and Methods

Can religion offer an answer in the movement toward addressing contemporary ecological problems? Since the beginning of the 1960s, scholars within the field of religion and ecology have dedicated a considerable amount of research to developing a practical strategy to address contemporary environmental problems based on religious and theological virtues. The intersection of religion and ecology has created hope among the research field that in fact religion may hold the key to addressing increasing concerns such as global warming, pollution, and the overall degradation of the natural world through incorporating these concerns into their religious worldviews. Stemming from this movement, the development of the eco-Buddhist field emerged during the 1970s asking specifically what the Buddhist worldview had to offer in terms of the development of an environmental ethic. As such, numerous Buddhist traditions and the ancient canonical texts have been examined using various approaches and strategies. Buddhist dharma has been revered for its ethic of simple and mindful living, the notion of the interconnection of all things, and the law of karma as the driving force for the continued care for the natural world.

Defining what constitutes the basis for an environmental ethic within Buddhism is a complicated task. Early Buddhism itself does not contain what is readily apparent as a distinct ethic regarding the natural world. Very little was

written about the environment and its care within the early canonical texts. Therefore, eco-Buddhism and Buddhist environmental ethics are two relatively new areas of study. However, it is also contended by many Buddhist scholars that the basis for an environmental ethic can be found within early Buddhist literature, although this claim also falls victim to the challenges of ambiguity and supplementation. As Pragati Sahni (2007) writes,

It is believed predominantly that nearly all Buddhist teachings in their applications to the environment remain unclear and ambiguous. Thus scholars at both ends of the spectrum have legitimate reason to trust their own interpretation and doubt others. Emerging from this it is no surprise then that much uncertainty and mystification in this area of study continues to exist. (p. 2)

The ultimate question then becomes, does the Buddhist tradition offer a discernible basis for the development of an ethic that warrants a true understanding of and relationship with the natural world?

Consequently, this thesis aims to enter into and contribute to this conversation in two distinct, but equally important ways. First, it hopes to address some of the issues surrounding the basis for an environmental ethic within Buddhist studies. It will provide a working method for outlining what constitutes the basis of such an ethic, and by doing so, point to some of the ways in which it can be seen. Second, it will apply this strategic method in order to analyze contextualized

instances of contemporary Buddhist practice present in the lay Buddhist movement, Soka Gakkai International.¹ Ultimately, this thesis will argue that by using the eco-contextualist approach, which draws upon actualized accounts of Buddhist practice at the localized level, to examine Soka Gakkai International, one can see the development and articulation of an environmental ethic among its members. By the eco-contextualist approach, I am referring to making use of the contextual strategy methodology that focuses on specific Buddhist culture and asks how its practice interacts with and influences environmental discourse. The contextual strategy methodology is supported and contributed to by the textual and practical strategy methodologies, and this will be explained further later on in the chapter. This distinct ethic is a culmination and representative of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist ideals of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation*, which work together to generate a true sense of responsibility to the natural environment.

This thesis looks specifically at the lay Buddhist movement, Soka Gakkai International. Employing both the concepts of *Human Revolution* and *Value-Creating* education, Soka Gakkai International actively encourages its members to first find individual peace and happiness in order to then extend these virtues onto the rest of world. Soka Gakkai is based on the seven hundred year old Japanese Nichiren

¹ Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is considered a new religious movement that developed out of Japan in the mid 1930s. First established as an educational reform, which then found roots in Nichiren Buddhism and is now regarded as a lay Buddhist movement, SGI is not considered by all scholars or practitioners to be authentically Buddhist. However, for purposes of this thesis, SGI will be referred to and considered a contemporary form of Buddhist tradition and practice. SGI members follow the teachings of Nichiren and his interpretations of the Lotus Sutra as their particular form of Buddhist practice.

Buddhist tradition, which centers itself on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Soka Gakkai International is considered to be one of the fastest growing Buddhist movements in North America and is comprised of over twelve million members in 192 countries worldwide.

When I began my research, my intent was first of all to contribute to current research on developing the basis for a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic. My hope was to systematically analyze current strategies and approaches in order to define a working method for such an ethic. From there, I would apply this method to a group of individual members of a specific Buddhist group in order to demonstrate such a method could yield obvious and substantial evidence that in fact, one can see an environmental mindset in the articulation of these individual's religious worldview and practice. This chapter presents a brief introduction to the research field of eco-Buddhism, including my initial mindset as the researcher and interest in the topic at hand. Offering an explanation of the research methods used, this chapter outlines what specific research strategies and approaches were used, and the subsequent reasoning. Finally, this chapter offers an in-depth literature review of the current research trends and how they have affected this research study. It highlights the shift in the eco-Buddhist field from the textual to the contextual strategy; and by taking the eco-contextualist approach, concludes that by investigating contextualized Buddhist practice, one can see a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic. Ultimately, this introductory chapter serves to develop my overall argument that by using the contextual strategy methodology, one can see the

development of an environmental ethic within the mindset of Soka Gakkai International members.

Chapter two provides a historical introduction and overview of the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement. It focuses on the particular religious and socio-political foundations of the Soka Gakkai movement from its establishment in Japan. In addition, it also highlights the importance of the ethical and pedagogical principles employed by its founder, Tsunesburo Makiguchi, and their relation to developing a Buddhist environmental ethic. The chapter moves on to examine current environmental sustainability initiatives set forth by Soka Gakkai International and their direct relation to the guiding principles of the Buddhist movement, with particular attention paid to Soka Gakkai Canada. Finally, this chapter illustrates how the specific Soka Gakkai ideologies of *Human Revolution*, *Value Creation*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology are the driving forces behind the movement's clear concern for the natural environment.

As an extension of the two previous chapters, chapter three incorporates the contextual strategy methodology and the main ideologies of the Soka Gakkai to analyze specific and localized accounts of Buddhist practice. It presents the research data collected from the primary research methods, including the results of the semi-formal interviews conducted. In addition, chapter three is supplemented by secondary research data consisting of published member testimonials, which directly reflect the overall mindset of the interviewees. It discusses the relationship

between the core ideologies of Soka Gakkai International and the actualized practice of members at the localized level, and ultimately, shows that these ideologies directly contribute to the development and articulation of an environmental ethic by its members.

The final chapter serves as a conclusion for the overall thesis. It will connect Soka Gakkai's distinguishable and distinct ideologies of *Human Revolution*, *Value Creation*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology, to the specific accounts of Buddhist thought and practice as expressed by its members. This connection will indicate that in fact by using the eco-contextualist approach, one can see the articulation of an environmental ethic founded on Buddhist ideals. This chapter will conclude that, although this is not the only example of a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic presently being expressed by contemporary groups, that it is indeed a relevant example of the practicality of defining such an ethic. In addition, this chapter will expand on thoughts for future research and development in hopes of addressing the ambiguity that has plagued the eco-Buddhist research field for many years.

Methodology

The goal of this research is to analyze specific and contextualized examples of environmental engagement as employed by members of the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement with regards to the articulation of an environmental ethic. Through this analysis, which takes the eco-contextualist position, this research will

show that by using the contextual strategy methodology, one can see the expression of an environmental ethic within the basic principles of the Soka Gakkai's *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation*, and their application in everyday life.

The qualitative research conducted for the writing of this thesis consisted of both primary and secondary sources. The primary research consisted of a number of semi-formal interviews with four members of the Atlantic Canada SGI chapter, including its district leader. The cooperating interviewees consisted of male and female participants, and made up different ethnic and economic demographics. Some of the interviewees were also immigrants to Canada. It is important to note that all members interviewed were converts to the Soka Gakkai community, coming from a variety of religious backgrounds as well. A larger sample size of members may have yielded more telling results. However, due to financial and time constraints, this was not possible. Therefore, this sampling is not necessarily a representative of the whole, but rather the findings here are more likely to reflect the mindset of highly engaged members of the Soka Gakkai community, with specific respect to environmental engagement.

The secondary research consisted of extensive literature analysis not only of related SGI material, but also of SGI member's personal testimony and publications. The testimonials were part of a larger quarterly magazine published by SGI itself, titled *SGI Quarterly: A Buddhist Forum for Peace, Culture and Education*. And although highly representative of the ideologies set forth by Soka Gakkai

International, it is stated that the views expressed in the published member's testimonials and subsequent articles are not necessarily the view of SGI. These testimonials were used to supplement the opinions and practices of the interviewees in order to represent views from different parts of the world.

Review of the Literature, Strategies, and Methods

Many strategies have been used in order to attempt to define a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic. In employing these strategies, the arguments made by Buddhist scholars in the field of eco-Buddhism have represented diverse positions present in the research field. The purpose of this literature review is to highlight the foremost research conducted within the past fifty years on the relationship between Buddhist thought and practice, and contemporary environmental issues. Although the literature found in the following review covers a wide variety of such strategies and positions, this review will focus on the three major strategies and the five main positions that have emerged repeatedly throughout the reviewed literature. These strategies are the textual strategy, the practical strategy, and the contextual strategy. The positions examined are the ecologist position, the eco-critic position, the eco-ethicist position, the eco-constructivist position, and finally, the eco-contextualist position. (Devere Clippard, 2011) Although the literature presents these strategies and positions in a variety of contexts and from a variety of diverse viewpoints, this review will primarily focus on their ability to offer a framework for the articulation of a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic. In doing so, the following literature review seeks to lay the

foundation for the particular strategy and position that will be employed for the remainder of the paper in order to contribute a specific example of a Buddhist environmental ethic to the research field.

The relationship between Buddhist thought and contemporary environmental issues has become one of the most crucial aspects of the development of contemporary Buddhist practice. A curiosity to understand environmental issues pertaining to Buddhist virtues began in the mid-1970s developing out of the increasingly critical mindset of the environmental movement. Within the last two decades there has been a considerable amount of research dedicated to the subject beginning with the publication of Allan Hunt Badiner's anthology, *Dharma Gaia*, in 1990. "This research area has grown at a pace coinciding with dawning awareness of the negative impacts of large-scale environmental devastation and the need to address it" (Sahni, 2007, p. 9). As the intellectual community became more and more aware of the adverse effects of human actions upon the state of the natural environment, numerous academic philosophers called for an environmental ethic to address the issue, calling upon religious traditions as possible sources of answers. Within the field of religion and ecology, the issue of practicality has been the center of attention, professing the destruction of the environment requires direct and immediate action, and the hope that religion might in fact hold the key to addressing these concerns. "Thus, the interest in religion and ecology is for the most part motivated by the hope that an environmental ethic can be articulated that allows and encourages adherents of religious traditions to

incorporate environmental concerns into their religious practice or worldview" (Devere Clippard, 2011, p. 237). In doing so, the scholar plays the important role of defining what constitutes the basis of this worldview, and what contributes to the articulation of an environmental ethic. And if this ethic is to have any sort of practical application, the scholar's responsibility is to address ways in which these religious communities are practicing this ethic. Therefore, scholars and researchers alike should identify and highlight the strategies being employed by religious communities in order to address environmental problems, and in turn, this will illustrate how religious organizations are connecting religious beliefs with an environmental ethic that promotes practical application.

However, it would soon become apparent that the traditional Western accounts of the relationship between humans and the environment would go against attempts to develop such an ethic. "Western thought seemed to have been dominated by positions diametrically opposed to any form of environmental concern" (Cooper & James, 2005, p. 26). As illustrated by Lynn White's 1967 popular article, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Western Judeo-Christian philosophies, combined with the rise in the industrial and scientific revolutions, had created a worldview that held the environment in very low esteem. Gerhold Becker (2009) highlights the importance of a new and transformed ethic stating,

Respect for nature calls for a specifically environmental ethic, which no longer takes humanity as its point of departure and as its locus of value and worth but nature. It rejects anthropocentrism, denounces claims of human

superiority, and seeks to establish biocentrism as the exclusive normative perspective. (p. 23)

Jeremy Hayward (1990) adds that this environmental ethic “must include practical methods that can help us feel our interconnectedness and the pain of what is actually happening to the Earth at this moment; in turn, it must then generate the compassion needed to restore wholesomeness” (p. 65). Padmasiri de Silva (1990) suggests that Buddhism itself as a practice requires simplicity of living, with an emphasis on only what is necessary or essential, or in other words, an ethic of restraint. He claims, “The environmental ethic that can support the urgently needed shift in our world view is a Buddhist critique of the ‘self’” (de Silva, 1990, p. 14). Therefore, a highly analytical and introspective field of inquiry evolved to address how other traditional philosophies could be used as facets to address the imminent ecological crisis by developing a distinct environmental ethic.

For over thirty years now, scholars have been examining the intersection between Buddhism and ecology in hopes of articulating a practical environmental ethic. Many questions have been consequently raised regarding the legitimacy of such a relationship and whether or not Buddhism truly holds an environmental worldview at its core. A variety of approaches have been taken in addressing these questions and the attempt to resolve environmental philosophy and ethics debates, such as applying ancient Buddhist terms and doctrines to contemporary issues. “The academic community continues its search due to the widespread unconditional belief that at some level, apparent or obscure, Buddhist literature does address

issues of environmental concern” (Sahni, 2009, p. 117). Currently in the research field, there are three main approaches for establishing a Buddhist environmental ethic. These approaches include the textual strategy, which involves examining ancient texts for specific examples and evidence from canonical texts such as the Jataka Tales and the Pali Canon, which show evidence of an ecological mindset; the practical strategy, which involves applying Buddhist terms and doctrines to contemporary issues, such as relating the concepts of dependent co-origination and non-violence to ecological concepts that seem similar; and the contextual strategy, which involves using specific contextual examples of practice, such as looking at a specific Buddhist culture and asking how their practice interacts with and influences environmental discourse. It is important to note here that the contextual strategy itself involves an overlapping of both the textual and practical strategies in its methodology. The textual and practical strategies support and contribute to the contextual strategy; they need to converge in order for the contextual strategy to exist. The contextual strategy methodology makes use of textual sources, as well as instances of practice; therefore, when speaking of the contextual strategy, it should be noted that this involves all three methodologies working together exclusively.

In the past, the field of religion and ecology was dominated by the textual strategy, which consisted first of examining ancient texts in order to illustrate an environmental mindset. The textual strategy not only uses particular Buddhist doctrine and dharma, but also makes use of specific Buddhist texts. The most prevalent work used is the Jatakas, which is comprised of stories of the previous

lives of the Buddha. The Jataka Tales have been used in numerous different ways in order to promote the development of an environmental ethic, such as illustrating how animals were considered morally considerable, to argue for the inherent ecological concern for the natural world by the Buddha, and to connect human ethics with the lives of animals. In addition to the Jatakas, the Pali Canon is a common source used by Buddhist scholars to illustrate a mindset of environmental concern. The numerous suttas contained in the Pali Canon are used to highlight the reverence for the beauty of nature by the Buddha and his followers, and as such, it should be treated with great appreciation. In addition, the sutras have been used to infer the Buddhist attitude toward pollution as well as plant and animal life. Therefore, the main purpose of the textual strategy is to classify what Buddhist texts carry the ability of articulating a discourse for environmental concern.

Beyond this textually based discourse, the practical strategy examines Buddhist practice and types of activism as a way of employing a Buddhist environmental ethic. "The practice-oriented approach supports a contextualized Buddhist eco-discourse and is made meaningful and immediate by the simultaneous emergence of environmental activism and Buddhist rhetoric" (Devere Clippard, 2011, p. 226). Unlike the textual strategy, this type of approach not only highlights, but also employs the specific Buddhist concepts through direct experience and practice, which in turn creates a deep and meaningful connection between Buddhist practice and environmental concern. Employing the environmental interpretations of Buddhism helps to strengthen the practical aspect of a Buddhist environmental

ethic, and by doing so, the attempts to link environmental concern with Buddhist teaching becomes more significant. This type of practice is also known as a form of Engaged Buddhism, which applies Buddhist concepts and doctrine to contemporary social, political, and environmental issues, and works to relieve suffering of all living beings.

Within the past several years, however, there has been a shift in the eco-Buddhist field, from a concentration on textual evidence and justification for a Buddhist environmental ethic, to a focus on actual accounts of Buddhist practice in order to suggest a Buddhist environmental ethic. According to the contextual strategy, rather than focusing on how to interpret Buddhist concepts and texts in light of contemporary ecological philosophy, we should instead look to specific Buddhist cultures and ask how Buddhist discourses and practice influences and interacts with environmental concern. These specific discourses, rooted in theory or doctrine and employed through practice, are based in activist responses to environmental concerns, which are a mixture of symbolism and ritual coming together through individual's participation. In turn, this interaction of symbolism and practice makes the discourse more affective in establishing a meaningful Buddhist environmental ethic. The textual strategy and practical strategies lay the foundation for a Buddhist environmental ethic, but the contextual strategy, which investigates the application and practice of the concepts gathered from this approach, is what solidifies and fully establishes it. The textual and practical strategies rely on different interpretations of fundamental Buddhist concepts and

texts, and in doing so, attempt to establish a relationship with pre-existing environmental discourses. The contextual strategy supports a discourse of contextualized Buddhist practice, which connects meaning and symbolism through direct experience and employment of fundamental Buddhist concepts, thus linking the actual practice with the basis of these concepts. Therefore, all three strategies work to highlight environmental concern among a Buddhist context; however, the contextual strategy provides the most effective means of establishing a Buddhist environmental ethic.

From these three strategies, researchers and scholars have developed and held five main positions in terms of the development of a Buddhist environmental ethic. These five positions include, the *eco-apologist*, who holds the position that Buddhist environmentalism extends naturally from the Buddhist worldview; the *eco-critic*, who believes the Buddhist worldview does not harmonize with an environmental ethic; the *eco-constructivist*, who maintains that one can construct a Buddhist environmental ethic from Buddhist texts and doctrines; the *eco-ethicist*, who claims one should evaluate a viable Buddhist environmental ethic in terms of Buddhist ethics rather than inferred from the Buddhist worldview; and the *eco-contextualist*, who asserts the most effective Buddhist environmental ethic takes its definition in terms of particular contexts and situations, and the practice that arises from those contexts. (Devere Clippard, 2011)

For example, most Buddhist scholars hold the *eco-apologist* position and argue environmentalism is integral to Buddhist practice and seek to articulate a

distinctly Buddhist environmental ethic. The majority of writings on Buddhist environmentalism promote the position that Buddhism is inherently eco-friendly. Three main anthologies in the field, *Dharma Gaia* (1990), *Buddhism and Ecology* (1992), and *Dharma Rain* (2000), justify this position. Joanna Macy (1990) emphasizes that the basic teaching of Buddhism is the interconnectedness of all beings, which in turn leads humans to care for the well-being of all things present in the natural world. She contends that in fact early Buddhism was not an escapist philosophy, but rather world-affirming. In the chapter titled, "The Greening of the Self", in the anthology *Dharma Gaia*, she uses Buddhist thought and doctrine to establish what she calls an 'eco-self,' who vows to co-exist with all other beings on the planet. Macy (1990) writes, "The crisis that threatens our planet, whether seen from its military, ecological, or social aspect, derives from a dysfunctional and pathological notion of the self" (p. 57). She believes this extends from a misplacement of our status as humans among the rest of the world. We view ourselves as being separate and above all other beings and nature itself. However, Macy claims the concept of dependent co-origination present in Buddhism can help us to see the true nature of not only humanity, but of all reality. Macy uses the Buddhist concept of the jeweled net of Indra to highlight this point, describing it as a web that connects all things present in the world. She states, "We are profoundly interconnected and therefore we are all able to recognize and act upon our deep, intricate, and intimate inter-existence with each other and all beings" (Macy, 1990, p. 61). In employing the Buddhist concept of co-dependent origination, here we can

see that Macy uses the textual strategy to argue for a Buddhist environmental ethic from the eco-apologist position.

Stephanie Kaza joins Joanna Macy in holding the eco-apologist position. Kaza (2000) also uses the Buddhist doctrine of interconnectedness to reinforce her position that Buddhism does indeed have the potential to defend an environmental discourse. In her article titled, "Environmental Activism as Buddhist Practice", which serves as the introduction to the anthology, *Dharma Rain*, she employs the idea that "the Buddhist vision of dependent origination, in which everything depends on everything else, can function both as an insight into the nature of reality and as a basis for analysis of environmental problems" (Kaza, 2000, p. 239). David Loy (2010) also holds the eco-apologist position and argues that an environmental ethic can be derived from the basic principles of Buddhism. He believes, "[the] Buddhist account of our individual predicament corresponds precisely to our collective ecological predicament today" (Loy, 2010, p. 257). However, where Macy employed the Buddhist ideal of dependent co-origination and interconnectedness, Loy uses the Bodhisattva vow to illustrate the innate environmental mindset he believes to be present within Buddhism. The Bodhisattva vow is essentially when a practicing Buddhist chooses to forsake personal salvation from suffering or enlightenment for the sake of others. In his article titled, "Healing Ecology" from *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, he writes, "although living beings are innumerable, the bodhisattva vows to save them all. This commitment flows naturally from realizing that none of those beings is separate from oneself" (Loy, 2010, p. 257). Loy (2010) also contends that

although the Buddha and his followers were not aware of the severe and numerous ecological threats we face today, that there is still a mindset present within the original teachings of Buddhism that have evolved and transformed over time in order to lay the foundations for a Buddhist environmental ethic.

However, not all scholars in the field believe Buddhism contains an organic environmental ethic and have harshly critiqued work being done in this research field for stretching the bounds of traditional Buddhist thought and practice in order to fit contemporary contexts. The eco-critics of a distinct Buddhist environmentalism "contend that today's ecological concerns are quintessentially modern and that, consequentially, Buddhist foundational documents lack any explicit discussion of what today we would label environmental ethics" (Swearer, 2006, p. 8). The eco-critics also emphasize that an additional and significant barrier in articulating a Buddhist environmental ethic lies within the view that nature is a theoretical entity. "One philosophical problem is that there is no single view of nature or environment that crosses all the Buddhist traditions" (Gottlieb, 1996, p. 200). For example, David Eckel has explored in great detail the vast differences between Indian and Japanese views of the natural world. Eckel (1997) argues that Westerners tend to over look these distinctions in their attempts to extract an ecological mindset from Buddhism. Some scholars, such as Eckel and Loy, have referred to this process as 'mining' a particular religious tradition to serve a particular agenda.

Pragati Sahni and Lily de Silva join Eckel in their eco-critic position. In an article titled, "In search of an Environmental Ethic in Early Buddhism", for the anthology, *Environmental Ethics: Intercultural Perspectives*, Pragati Sahni (2009) argues, "Early Buddhism does not incorporate explicit environmental ideas as are employed by contemporary theories" (p. 117). In her article titled, "Early Buddhist Attitudes toward Nature", Lily de Silva (2000) writes, "Environmental [protection] is a problem of the modern age, unheard of and unsuspected during the time of the Buddha. Therefore it is difficult to find any specific discourse which deals with the topic we are interested in here" (p. 91). We can see from these excerpts, that not every Buddhist scholar believes there to be a true and inherent basis for an environmental ethic present in Buddhism.

Ian Harris, Damien Keown, and Lambert Schmidhausen are also among the eco-critic scholars who deny the approaches that portray Buddhism as having an innate environmental ethic. Harris denies the position that favors Buddhism as being authentically environmentally driven. "According to Ian Harris, most articulations of 'Buddhist Environmentalism' either appeal to values and concepts that are no different from other more general environmental philosophies, or they so greatly distort the meaning of the Buddhist concepts and text appealed to that they render them un-Buddhist" (Devere Clippard, 2011, p. 215). For example, Harris has critiqued Joanna Macy for her employment of the concept of the net of Indra as a metaphor to support an environmental mindset. He accuses her of misplacing the original teaching's focus on ecology, rather than on karma. "For Harris, the project of

'saving the world' is not a central concern, and dragging Buddhist concepts into the process may not be necessary or even helpful" (Gottlieb, 1996, p. 201). Harris supports David Eckel's assessment of Westerner's 'mining' of Buddhism, as he argues there is very little concrete evidence to support a genuine concern for nature in the early canonical texts, and he remains skeptical of scholars who clearly interpret Buddhism from a constricted environmental perspective.

Damien Keown (2007) claims to see no basis on which to generate a framework for a distinct environmental ethic. From a gathering of early texts of the Pali Canon, as well as stories from the life of Siddhartha Guatama, Keown fails to see a strategic employment of care for the natural world. He claims, "I see little evidence that the Buddha or his followers, at least down to modern times, have been greatly concerned with the questions of ecology" (Keown, 2007, p. 97), and that the recent upsurge in interest in this area is simply due to Westerners pursuing a green agenda. Keown joins Harris and Eckel in exposing the lack of concern for both the animal and natural world present in the Pali Canon texts. He states,

There is no doubt that Buddhist literature contains many references to animals and the environment, but when the context of these references is examined they often turn out to have little in common with the modern conservationist agenda or concern to reduce animal suffering.

(Keown, 2007, p. 99)

He goes on to argue that with reference in particular to animals within the canonical texts, there appears to be little interest in understanding their nature and their

status is quite ambiguous. In addition, when it comes to plant life or the wilderness, its status is equally ambivalent. Keown (2007) writes, "It is difficult to state definitively whether early Buddhists believed plants and vegetation to be on par with other beings that suffer, or whether they were considered to be non-sentient" (p. 98).

There appears to be a dichotomy present in Lambert Schmithausen's evaluation of the early canonical texts. While he believes the Pali Canon does not adequately portray an inherent concern for the natural world, he is suspect as to whether or not there still remains a basis for one. Schmithausen (1997) claims, "The sources for our knowledge of Early Buddhism are not sufficiently explicit and unambiguous on the issue of ecological ethics" (p. 6). Although environmental problems did not exist in the mindset of early Buddhist practitioners as they do today, he still believes there must have been some form of attitude toward nature. Therefore, although Schmithausen sees no evidence for a distinct environmental ethic present in the early canonical texts, he still contends there was a significant evaluation of nature that carries the ability to be the basis to establish an environmental ethic. The importance of this is not lost on Schmithausen (1997):

For, today the Buddhist tradition, like any other, cannot avoid facing the problem. If it is to remain a living tradition, it has to supply answers to new vital questions, and it may have to accommodate its heritage to the new situation by means of explication, re-interpretation, re-organization or even creative extension or change. (p. 6)

This insight articulates the importance of sustaining the eco-Buddhist research field in hopes of articulating and defining a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic; it is just a matter of determining which method is most capable of doing so.

Peter Timmerman is a member of the eco-constructivists; however, he questions our underlying assumptions of ancient Buddhist concepts and how they translate to Western cultures and ideals. He explores what the West was looking for and what it hoped to find in Buddhism. Timmerman (2000) claims the meeting of these two distinct cultures sets the stage for particular concepts of Buddhist environmentalism for the twentieth century and argues,

What is needed is an original vision that addresses our current situation fully. It should provide a coherent framework of values and ideas based on a definition of a person which puts him or her in a broader context: how a person interacts with and affects other people, other species, and the environment generally. (p. 366)

Holding the eco-constructivist position as well, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh enters the on-going dialogue with his interpretation of ancient Buddhist texts including the Jataka tales, claiming they are comprised of numerous poetic references to nature. He illustrates how the early Buddhist community established a close relationship with nature, while the Buddha incorporated nature into many of his teachings. Kabilsingh (1990) adds, "The Buddhist tradition counsels us to treasure and conserve nature, of which human beings are an active part" (p. 12). Both Timmerman and Kabilsingh highlight the importance of digging deeper than the

apparent examples of an environmental ethic itself within the Buddhist tradition and shift the focus onto the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge our own capacity to construct such ethics from our own subjectivity.

As Buddhist scholars who hold the eco-ethicist position, Padmasiri de Silva, Jeremy Hayward, and Gerhold Becker argue that in order to define a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic, we must evaluate Buddhist ethics rather than the Buddhist worldview. In his chapter in *Dharma Gaia*, titled “Buddhist Environmental Ethics”, Padmasiri de Silva (1990) argues that we must look at distinguishable Buddhist ethics, such as the critique of the individual ego, in order to argue for the basis for an environmental ethic. He emphasizes that this ethic of the analysis of the self could be used to promote an environmental mindset as it addresses the individual’s responsibility to the natural world, including moderate consumerism and exploitation. de Silva (1990) states, “Buddhism calls for a modest concept of living: simplicity, frugality, and an emphasis on what is essential – in short, a basic ethic of restraint” (p. 15). Jeremy Hayward agrees with this stance. In the same anthology, in his chapter titled “Ecology and the Experience of Sacredness”, Hayward (1990) calls for the examination of particular Buddhist ethics as they directly relate to environmental consciousness. He claims, “It is vitally important that we restore the natural, heartfelt perception of our interdependence. Until this fundamental alienation and division is healed, there may be no lasting solutions to the environmental problems affecting the Earth” (Hayward, 1990, p. 64). Finally, Gerhold Becker holds the eco-ethicist position as he examines the Buddhist religious

tradition by acknowledging the importance of the shift away from human-centered worldviews and ethics based solely on humans' needs. Becker (2009) believes such an ethic should be based on equality and a genuine respect for all beings, acknowledging their intrinsic moral value. He claims such an ethic, "rejects anthropocentrism, denounces claims of human superiority, and seeks to establish biocentrism as the exclusive normative perspective" (Becker, 2009, p. 23). By holding the eco-ethicist position, these scholars seek to define an environmental ethic based on Buddhist ethics rather than Buddhist texts, worldviews, or practice, and in doing so have also shifted the concentration of the research field to a deeper level of philosophical theory and method framework.

Finally, as a member of the research field who holds the eco-contextualist position, Seth Devere Clippard (2011) argues for the focus of the attention in Buddhist studies to be centered on the actual current contextualized practice of distinct Buddhist communities in order to see the articulation of a Buddhist environmental ethic. In his research, Devere Clippard employs both the textual and practical strategy to argue the eco-contextual strategy. And although he takes the time to acknowledge the fact that the two strategies are by no means mutually exclusive, admitting, "it seems likely that they will need to converge in some ways in order to persist" (Devere Clippard, 2011, p. 233), he strongly makes the case for a reorientation of Eco-Buddhist discourse; one from a focus on the textual strategy, to that of the rhetorical basis of the practical strategy. Devere Clippard(2011) states,

Employing ecological interpretations of Buddhist teachings

strengthens the practical character of eco-Buddhist discourse.

But it is necessary to maintain a tight connection between the concepts and the practice, as otherwise a purely textual discourse risks becoming no more than a scholarly pursuit with little influence on the environmental issues facing specific communities and society in general. (p. 233)

Here we can see that Devere Clippard acknowledges the importance of the textual strategy and the other eco-positions, as they do in fact yield some important informative data; however, he is skeptical in the ability of both this strategy and these positions to remain objective in their findings. Instead, he wants us to shift our attention to the actual practice of Buddhists in particular contexts and situations. In his article titled “The Lorax Wears Saffron: Toward a Buddhist Environmentalism”, he writes,

Rather than focusing on how to interpret Buddhist concepts and texts in the light of contemporary ecological philosophy, I will look at a specific Buddhist culture, that of Thai Buddhism, and ask how Thai Buddhist discourse and practice influence and intersect with the ‘discourse of environmental concern’.

(Devere Clippard, 2011, pp. 215-216)

Conclusion

From the previous overview of the current literature in the field of eco-Buddhist discourse, one can see the development of three distinct strategies when Buddhist scholars attempt to define a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic. These

strategies, although quite different in their approaches, ultimately strive to make the same conclusion – that in fact, by a specific investigation of the Buddhist religious tradition, one can see different aspects of an environmental ethic being employed. The research field in recent years has witnessed a drastic shift in the focus of these strategies from the textual strategy to that of the contextual strategy, thus shifting the concentration away from Buddhist texts and doctrines, towards specific accounts of contemporary and contextualized Buddhist practice. In the research that follows, I intend to add to the growing research field that chooses to use the contextual strategy as the basis for its methodology. Aligning with Buddhist scholar, Seth Devere Clippard, I intend to take the eco-contextualist position and apply the contextual strategy, which makes use of the textual and practical strategies, to the specific and contextualized practice of Soka Gakkai Buddhists. In doing so, this will further illustrate the capability of this strategy to enable the search for an environmental ethic; one founded in actualized practice rather than merely extracted from textual resources.

Chapter Two

Soka Gakkai International – A Lay Buddhist Movement

Firstly, as put forth in the previous chapter, this thesis seeks to examine the development of a distinct environmental ethic. Secondly, this examination will be applied to the contextualized account of the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement, with particular reference to member engagement in Atlantic Canada, in order to highlight specific instances of an articulation of such an ethic. In chapter one, the eco-contextualist approach was introduced as a convincing way to support a working definition of a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic for the purposes of this research. In supplementation of this methodology and definition, this chapter will provide a historical overview of both the religious and socio-political foundations of the Soka Gakkai. In addition, it will focus on the pedagogical and ethical principles, set forth by the Soka Gakkai's founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. The two kinds of principles work together to become a clear representation of the basis for the development of a distinct environmental ethic.

As a reflection of the ethical principles defined in chapter one, this chapter will also provide an examination of current initiatives employed by Soka Gakkai International working towards environmental sustainability. It will highlight the continuity between the three successive presidents' contributions towards employing the specific Soka Gakkai Buddhist principles of *Human Revolution*, *Value-Creation*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology, in order to motivate engagement in one's community, as well as on a global scale. Ultimately, this chapter

will illustrate how the distinct ideologies of the founding presidents have worked together to shape the ethical landscape of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement in terms of their sense of responsibility to, and involvement in, the continued care for the natural environment.

It is important to note within this chapter, that a large portion of the development of the environmental ethic present in Soka Gakkai Buddhism is based on the concept of inner transformation. This chapter will show that within the confines of the Buddhist ideals of the Soka Gakkai, no true engagement or outer change can begin without development of the self, as reflected in the concepts of the *Human Revolution*, *Value Creation*, and *Learn, Reflect, Empower* ideologies. This notion will be apparent throughout the entirety of the chapter and directly contributes to the overall understanding of the ethical principles that constitute the environmental mindset present in Soka Gakkai.

Historical Overview

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi founded Soka Gakkai in 1930 as a reformist study group. Makiguchi was an author and educational philosopher who devoted his life work to the development of educational pedagogy. The main premise of his philosophy for education was that the goal of human life should be happiness and this happiness was attainable through creating value in one's life. A happy person in this sense was then defined as "one who maximizes his potential in his chosen sphere of life and who helps others maximize theirs" (Metraux, 1994, p. 21). In this way, the early Soka Gakkai, which was founded as the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (SKG), or

Value-Creation Education Society, worked very much as an educational reform system. This system placed the responsibility of learning on the individual student to independently create value in their lives. SKG's initial aim was to gather a community of people, mostly educators, in order to discuss and publicize Makiguchi's educational pedagogy (Metraux, 1994). Makiguchi encouraged an educational system that, instead of sustaining the status quo, urged teachers to provide students with more personal attention and then required them to become involved in their surrounding community.

When Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Buddhism in 1928, the Soka Kyuoiku Gakkai took a turn towards a religious-based philosophy. Nichiren, a Japanese monk who lived during the thirteenth century, claimed the Lotus Sutra held the answer to the alleviation of the injustice and suffering of the human condition. According to Urbain (2010), Nichiren's aim was to highlight the human experience of life by giving it meaning even in dark circumstances, and ultimately how they could then affect the greater environment positively by beginning with personal transformation. And although Makiguchi did not come into contact with the teachings of Nichiren until later in his life, he vowed to incorporate these religious teachings into his educational reform from then on. Makiguchi came to view social life as being directly linked to and a part of religion or religious experience, which in turn functioned to provide a religious foundation for the efforts to create value in everyday life (Tamaru, 2000). Therefore, Soka Gakkai was originally founded as a reform campaign for Japanese education; however, as his educational theories

seemed to take up little response, Makiguchi became convinced Nichiren Shoshu was the vehicle through which to advocate human happiness and value-creation.

Makiguchi would publish his theories on value-creating pedagogy in 1930, illustrating his strong belief that education begins with the realization of each individual's unlimited potential, which then naturally leads to a pursuit of self-awareness, wisdom, and development (History of Soka Gakkai, 2014). Makiguchi believed that in order to facilitate change, you must find a way of being present in the world that creates value. The publication of a book on November 18th, 1930, called 'The Theory of Value-Creating Pedagogy' (Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei) marked the official establishment of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement. Subsequently, its membership became more inclusive, drawing members from all walks of life including young students and women. However, during the course of its development, Soka Gakkai also came to incorporate the teachings of Nichiren as the basis of its pedagogy, which in turn helped distinguish itself as a distinct Buddhist movement.

Nichiren Shoshu, the particular Japanese Buddhist sect that Makiguchi was interested in, was controversial due to its militant and political views. Soon, as Makiguchi led his small, but dedicated following, the Soka Gakkai movement would succumb to the same ostracized branding. People began to attend Soka Gakkai meetings in secret as the rise of the Japanese government cracked down on open and free expression or thought. From these meetings, Makiguchi began publishing a monthly magazine titled, *Kachi Sozo*, or *Creating Value*, which did not sit well with

the Japanese government and in 1942, the publication was banned. Fighting to obtain complete control over all aspects of society, including religion and free thought, the Japanese government forcefully insisted on a unification of all Nichiren sects (Metraux, 1994). Shortly following this, Soka Gakkai itself as a whole was banned and many of its leaders and members were officially jailed. Along with the help of his close friend and associate, Josei Toda, Makiguchi planned on expanding the original organization of educators into a broader educational reform with Buddhist ideals as the core of its foundation. However, it was in direct conflict with the Japanese government as it accentuated the importance of free-will and thought over rote learning and blind obedience (History of Soka Gakkai, 2014). Makiguchi, Toda, and their followers found themselves in direct conflict with the Japanese governing powers in the beginning of what would be a long history of political and religious conflict.

At the beginning of World War II, Japan initiated a drastic rise in militant nationalism and with this came the imposition of Shintoism as a state ideology. The government ordered both Makiguchi and Toda to ascribe to the state religion by enshrining Shinto idols; however, they both disagreed. Eventually, after some time of non-compliance with the Japanese government, Makiguchi was forced to affirm his belief and submission to the divinity of the Emperor in front of a Buddhist priest; however, he refused to accept an amulet of the Sun Goddess and thus rejected the affirmation (Hughes Seager, 2006). Therefore, in 1943, both Makiguchi and Toda were arrested and imprisoned for their failure to support the government regime

and compromise their newfound belief system. The following year, at the age of 73, Makiguchi died of malnutrition in prison after refusing to abide by Japanese legislation. Makiguchi would die in prison still upholding the core principles that founded the Soka Kyuoiku Gakkai, all the while continuing to proclaim his distinct adapted message of Nichiren's Buddhist ideals.

Following the war, Toda was released from prison and began to rebuild the Gakkai community, which he officially renamed Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society), this time in hopes of expanding its mission from a focus on educational reform to a concentration on the welfare of society as a whole. Toda, like Makiguchi, was compelled by the teachings of Nichiren. However, his experiences while imprisoned seemed to have shifted these beliefs and understandings. While in prison, he adamantly studied the writing and sutras of Nichiren, which led him to the awareness of the Lotus Sutra. Within the sutra, Toda discovered the insight of chanting *nam-myho-renge-kyo*, which led him to the true nature of reality that the Buddha is life itself. After his enlightenment, he vowed to dedicate the rest of his life to spreading the heart of the Lotus Sutra and the power of chanting (History of Soka Gakkai, 2014). In this way, Toda seemed to have added something different to the educational system of his mentor. He claims to have achieved enlightenment through realizing the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra as the discovery that Buddhahood, or Buddha nature, is present in every individual and can be cultivated through devoted practice and awareness (Metraux, n.d.). This drastic realization by Toda marked the beginning of the new Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement, much

different from that of Makiguchi's Soka Kyuiko Gakkai, which would essentially shift the movement's concentration to inspire the potential within each person in order to sustain and cultivate happiness.

Spreading the true reality of the Lotus Sutra and his vision of chanting daimoku – *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*– in order to cultivate inner transformation was Toda's primary goal after his release from prison. In order to implement it, he began promoting a socially engaged type of Nichiren Buddhism; one that centered on social activism and change through personal motivation and perseverance. As Urbain (2010) states, "By emphasizing the inherent potential of each human being for self-improvement, the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism affirm the preciousness of each individual as well as the principle of the dignity of all life" (p. 84). Toda coined the term, 'Human Revolution' to express this ideal, which spoke loudly to many Japanese people who felt a sense of loss and disenfranchisement after the war. *Human Revolution* is the starting point of the Soka Gakkai's Buddhist practice, encouraging personal development based on and achieved by inner transformation. In Soka Gakkai, the use of the word 'revolution' is important as it indicates that the concept does not stop at the individual, but rather spreads to the whole of society, (Urbain, 2010) in which the emergence of one's own Buddha nature, or true and inherent potential, comes forth and then strongly motivates social engagement. It would be Toda's *Human Revolution* that would lay the basis for the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement to have the ability to transform the personal lives of hundreds

of thousands of people around the world and enable them to make changes on a global scale.

By the time of Toda's death in 1958, Soka Gakkai had reached a following close to one million people. Following his death, one of his close pupils, Daisaku Ikeda, replaced him as president in 1960. Ikeda was a teenager during the war and experienced first-hand the devastation and loss it placed on the Japanese people, and as a close student to Toda, he was deeply devoted to supporting the vision of the Soka Gakkai as he believed it would be the key to bringing about a social transformation within Japan.

Ikeda's first concern for Soka Gakkai was to expand the movement internationally. After his installment as president, his first aim was to widely travel in order to spread the message of Soka Gakkai worldwide, as well as to inspire and empower current members already living abroad (Biography of Daisaku Ikeda, 2010). As Ikeda saw the potential of the Soka Gakkai for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, or social status, he travelled all over the world in hopes of facilitating the interaction between members and establishing a global network. During his travels abroad, Ikeda also initiated the establishment of a number of research organizations that would be aimed at providing peace research and cultural awareness (Biography, 2010). The message of universal peace and understanding would soon come to be a key tenet of his lectures as he urged young people of all backgrounds to embrace one another on equal grounds; a message that still remains at the heart of the Buddhist organization today with vast amounts of

energy going toward peace and reconciliation efforts. Under his leadership and striving for international development, Ikeda has established Soka Gakkai as one of the largest and fastest growing lay Buddhist movements in the world, with members in 192 countries and with close to 12 million members worldwide.

Soka Gakkai Canada

As a chapter of the Japanese lay Buddhist movement, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), Soka Gakkai Canada was established in 1960 after a visit to Toronto by President Ikeda Daisaku. Following its founding, SGI Canada had a relatively small membership and therefore was linked to the much larger chapter in the United States. However, by 1975, the Canadian group had grown its membership enough to become fully self-sufficient. According to Metraux (2012), the majority of members were located in the hub areas of Toronto and Quebec City; however, during the 1960s and 70s, additional smaller cities also began to form chapters as member numbers increased. Finally, in 1981, after a national meeting of approximately six hundred members and a visit from Ikeda, the group attained national unity. Four years later in 1985, the official national headquarters was established in Toronto. Since then, the chapter has continued to grow in numbers and in 2011, SGI Canada claimed a membership of around 7,000 members with established chapters in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, and Atlantic Canada (Metraux, 2012).

Human Revolution and Value Creation

As previously mentioned, the term “Human Revolution”, coined by Josei Toda, is one of the key distinguishing characteristics of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement.² Toda first used the term to describe a process of personal transformation, which involves breaking down the restrictions and boundaries of the ego in order to clearly see the true nature of the self. This transformation of the self, Toda claimed, was a necessary and fundamental process by which people could empower themselves to take control of their own lives. In the words of Mette Fisker-Nielsen (2012), “In Soka Gakkai, the term ‘human revolution’ is evoked as a modern way to describe the process of the attainment of enlightenment” (p. 49). It is a revolution of the personal self, which then can permeate outwards to others, thus creating a revolution on an even greater scale. Toda believed that by first transforming oneself, including one’s worldviews and actions, one can then gain the potential to be fully present in the world and thus offer themselves fully to societal, political, and environmental transformation. He believed, “the individual process of human revolution is the key to sparking change on a global scale” (*Human Revolution*, para. 10). Toda’s *Human Revolution* consisted of the belief that if we can change ourselves, then we can change the world for the better. Ultimately, Soka Gakkai’s notion of *Human Revolution* is representative of a key element in laying the

² The term “movement” here will be used in addition to the term “organization” when referring to Soka Gakkai International (SGI). The decision to make use of both terms is a reflection of how SGI refers to itself as a Buddhist entity. In the published literature and available material from SGI, the two terms are both used equally to represent or label themselves as a Buddhist body or tradition.

foundation for a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic as it works twofold to instill an inward-looking mindset and drive outward-looking engagement and action.

In addition, Ikeda has built on the idea of the *Human Revolution* and has implemented it into many of his continued teachings. Ikeda agrees with Toda in that he believes, “taking responsibility for transforming our own lives is the first step toward creating a human society based on compassion and respect for the dignity of all people’s lives” (*Human Revolution*, para. 10). Ikeda claims that in order to do so, it requires us to look at our own lifestyles and become aware of what drives us at their very core. Mette Fisker-Nielsen (2012) argues that this process motivates members “to see their own life, their Buddhist practice, their particular circumstances and subsequent actions from the perspective of the process of human revolution” (p. 49). It is a process of self-empowerment. It can be turning something negative into something positive. In this way, the process works to enable people to fundamentally change themselves and then ultimately their surroundings. This illustrates how the notion of *Human Revolution* works as a distinct Buddhist ethic to empower the members of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement to strive for a more environmentally sustainable future in order to support continued happiness for all living beings.

In addition to the concept of *Human Revolution*, Soka Gakkai is based on another equally important principle. *Value Creation* is a philosophy employed by its founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Soka Gakkai literally means “society for the creation of value”. Like his spiritual predecessor, Nichiren; Makiguchi placed an

emphasis on the human experience, creating value within it in order to essentially transform our responsibility within the world. He claimed at every moment there is potential to create value in our situation in response to our world and our environment. In order to describe the deepened sense of value created in life by Buddhist principles, Makiguchi started using the phrase 'the Life of Great Good'. (*Creating Value*, 2014) Value in this sense essentially refers to what is considered important to one's happiness. As stated on the SGI webpage, "Creating Value" (2014), "value points to the positive aspects of reality that are brought forth or generated when we creatively engage with the challenges of daily life" (para. 3). According to Soka Gakkai teachings, value is not something that exists outside of the self, but rather is something that is manifested and defined within. Therefore, each person has the capability and wisdom to generate and spread value to their own life, as well as to others.

Ikeda, the founding president of Soka Gakkai, states, "thus, what started out as inner determination of one individual to transform their circumstances, one can encourage, inspire and create lasting value within society" (para. 10). The philosophy of *Value Creation* then morphs into and works as a call to action or sense of duty, otherwise known in Buddhist terms as *dharma*. Ikeda goes on to say, "The key to leading a fulfilled life, free of regrets, is to dedicate ourselves to a course, a goal that is larger than us" (para. 10), ultimately as what is known in the Buddhist tradition as the vow of the bodhisattva. Therefore, the Buddhist ideals of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation* present in Soka Gakkai work exclusively and

collectively with one another; *Human Revolution* requires a deep and meaningful inner transformation in order to make greater transformations within the world, thus contributing to the creation of value and meaning, or *Value Creation*, in one's individual situation, and vice versa. The current president of Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, has incorporated these two very distinct ideologies into the ethical landscape of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement, set forth by his predecessors, in order to promote both personal happiness and a global community. And ultimately, it is these two core principles of the Soka Gakkai that contribute to an environmental mindset driven by specific Buddhist ethics.

Learn, Reflect, Empower: Putting Principles into Action

At the beginning of the formation of the Soka Gakkai, Makiguchi stressed the importance of the relationship between humans and their environment. Bethel (2000) writes that one of Makiguchi's biggest impacts and legacy for the twenty-first century was his reverence for the environment, and the need for human bonding with the natural world. Makiguchi saw the world as a miracle and throughout his career he called on his followers, especially the younger generations, to promote an awareness and respect for the natural world. Bethel (2000) speculates that perhaps more than anything else, this sense of relationship with the natural world was what Makiguchi wanted to communicate with his students. Over time, he would compile his thoughts, observations, and insights about the relationship between human beings and the natural world into a collection titled, *Jinsei Chirigaku*, or *Geography of Human Life*. It is clear to Bethel (2000) from the writings within this book that,

“Makiguchi was convinced that the development of a sense of interdependence and interrelatedness with the natural world, of which he perceived humans a part, is central to being human” (p. 50). One of the central principles of his teachings was creating value within the world and this included a sense of relationship with the environment. He believed that a person was able to experience the development of his or her full potential only through a deep connection with oneself, to others, and the natural world. Makiguchi truly believed the development of such awareness was of great benefit to molding one's ethical foundation.

Ikeda has done a lot to build on these principles provided by his successor, Makiguchi, and he continues to dedicate a large proportion of his teachings to highlighting the importance of sustaining a relationship between human beings and the natural world. In an in-depth interview focused on Buddhist ethical behavior present in Canada now published in the book, *On Being Human: Where Ethics, Medicine and Spirituality Converge*, Ikeda (2003) very clearly states that, “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” (p. 61). Ikeda sees the continued destruction of the natural environment as not only a threat to us, but also a major threat to all future generations of all living beings. He thus calls for a new type of environmental ethic, one that addresses these issues at their core in attempts to undercut their true nature. He states, “I picture environmental ethics as an axis around which reform within individual human

beings that will make sustainable development possible will revolve” (Ikeda, 2003, p. 66). He believes we must create solidarity among us; create a strong community of cooperation and shared responsibility. We must learn and implement a sense of moderation, which requires significant changes to be made on, first and foremost, the personal level.

As Makiguchi saw the significance of the relationship between the individual human being and the natural environment, he also saw the immense importance of the relationship between the individual to that of its community or surrounding society. The Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement did not teach a need for withdrawal from society or the human existence, but rather promoted a deep sense of purpose within it. In addition, Makiguchi believed that the aim of education was to instill a sense of accountability within the student, rather than concentrating on the transfer of knowledge. He claimed that value creation and education required the student to find personal value in the living environment and then transferring this value into the learning process, and in this way, it would prepare the student to become a contributing member of their community.

Makiguchi articulated the notion that the individual should feel a sense of responsibility to three distinct levels of citizenship; our local commitments, our national community, and the wider world (Asai, 2012). Using these guiding commitments, the current SGI has developed numerous initiatives through education and awareness-raising programs in order to support an environmental and sustainable mindset or worldview. The type of environmental education that is

promoted by the SGI is intended to motivate action and engagement in local communities, as well as on a global level. Employing this mindset driven by the specific ethical concepts present in Soka Gakkai Buddhism, in support and partnership with the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), SGI uses specific educational tools and resources to promote sustainable living. In addition, in order to support Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the current president of SGI, Daisaku Ikeda has implemented a three-point formula: 'Learn, Reflect, Empower', in his proposal presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, titled, "The Challenge of Global Empowerment" (Asai, 2012). It is through an articulation of the distinct Buddhist principles of *Human Revolution* and *Creating Value*, set forth by Soka Gakkai, that Ikeda bases his proposal for continued sustainable development for the future.

Using the basic principles of Buddhist thought, Ikeda strives to highlight the importance of continuous learning and knowledge. According to his thought, in order to start to make any kind of difference in the world, we must begin with true understanding and empathy for the human condition. He claims we must learn to grasp the realities of suffering in the world in every form, and this will point us to the grand wisdom of the Buddhist concept of the interconnectedness of all things. Given the process of true learning and understanding has occurred, Ikeda argues that one must then deepen this experience. In this way, people are able to turn learned knowledge into wisdom through reflection. In order to do so, Ikeda makes it clear that it is important that our ethics and values are clarified and defined.

Knowledge alone can mean various things to people in different contexts, and therefore, a clear and guiding vision is necessary for further development. With the acquiring of true wisdom, comes the responsibility to act. Some individuals struggle with this sense of duty and thus must be inspired and encouraged to engage themselves with responsibilities greater than themselves. Ikeda (2014) boldly states, “People must be empowered with courage and hope if they are to take those first concrete steps” (para. 8). Thus, the contention is that the wisdom is then transformed into power through action and engagement.

Based on the three-point methodology of *Learn, Reflect, Empower*, the SGI has developed a mission that employs its ideologies. Soka Gakkai chapters in over twenty-five countries support the Earth Charter (SGI, 2014). The Earth Charter is comprised of a set of ethical principles used to shape a sustainable and peaceful global society. The Charter’s aim is to motivate and inspire in everyone a sense of interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of all aspects of the natural world, not just human beings. It requires us to embrace diversity and explore our true connectedness with one another and the world through a new ethical vision (SGI, 2014). Soka Gakkai members have found new and innovative ways to incorporate its vision into their practice in community groups. It has been translated into fifty different languages and is endorsed by over 4,500 groups worldwide, including governmental and international organizations. The Charter’s vision is an excellent educational tool for sustainability and reflects the Buddhist principle of the interconnectedness of all beings, as well as the dignity of human life.

Speaking of a small indigenous community in Michoacan State, Mexico, Cardelia Amezcua Luna emphasizes the importance of the Earth Charter as a sustainable education tool, in her SGI Quarterly article, “Bringing the Earth Charter to Life”. The article highlights how the community was able to utilize the Charter as Amezcua Luna (2012) states, “we implemented the Charter’s principles in our education agenda and community projects, and created ‘Environmental education through the arts and the Earth Charter,’ which is a methodology for projects aimed at creating a sustainable future of hope, equity, justice, and peace” (para. 2). It helped the community, including the youth, to learn what they consider to be critical and creative ways of thinking about localized damaging environmental problems, such as deforestation and logging, pollution, and destruction of the ecosystem.

Partnering with the Earth Charter Initiative, the SGI has developed an educational and hope-inspiring exhibit called “Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential”. The exhibition was first held in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa and was used to introduce the encompassing concepts of sustainable development in relation to the Earth Charter. Over one and a half million people have viewed the exhibit worldwide. Subsequently, in 2010, the exhibit was adapted to include specific visions for a sustainable future and was renamed “Seeds of Hope: Visions of Sustainability, Steps toward Change” (Asai, 2012). The specific exhibit does not avoid presenting the drastic and true realities of our current ecological state, but does offer concrete and tangible options for driving action and change, illustrating

that sustainability is not simply about the environment, but rather involves all aspects of human life. It provides eight specific cases of individuals and groups from Africa, the Arctic, and Eastern Europe, who have implemented the mindset of the Earth Charter into their lives and have taken action to support environmental sustainability. It uses the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology set forth by Daisaku Ikeda and it provides concrete ideas and examples of what people can do to contribute, as well as using the language of responsibility in order to inspire pledges of action. The Seeds of Hope exhibit also includes an activity pack with educational materials, including activity ideas for young children, as well as the film, “A Quiet Revolution”.

“A Quiet Revolution” is an educational film that was released with the initial exhibit, “Seeds of Change” in 2002. The film was produced as an additional tool for environmental sustainability development and includes a number of specific case studies that highlight different ways individuals have become engaged in local initiatives in order to work towards solving environmental problems. On Earth Day, April 22nd, 2013, the Seeds of Hope exhibit, including the film A Quiet Revolution, was on display at the Rideau Centre in Ottawa. It consisted of a fully bilingual presentation with twenty-four different informational panels. It highlighted the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness and showed how this can be related to people’s everyday lives. The exhibit also encouraged participants to make individual pledges to reducing their negative impact on the environment. Woods (2014) reported, “Participants promised to ride their bikes more frequently, be more

politically active, plant trees, grow food in their backyards and serve as an example of sustainable living themselves” (para. 3). This illustrates the desire of the exhibit to inspire action beyond the Soka Gakkai community to the greater community at large.

Conclusion

The pedagogical and religious principles put forth by the founding president of Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, have greatly contributed to the ethical landscape of this lay Buddhist movement, as it exists today. Makiguchi combined the religious philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism with his controversial educational reform to profess what he felt was the true meaning of life: finding happiness through inner transformation and value-creation. During a time of war in Japan, he revolutionized religious and socio-political thought to promote independent wisdom instead of rote learning. These ideals laid the foundation for the sense of duty and ethical responsibility present in the Soka Gakkai mindset and worldview.

Building on Makiguchi's vision, both Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda have aided in developing the growing movement into an international organization with members in more than 192 countries. Toda's *Human Revolution* sparked the revelation of the potential of inner transformation to empower members worldwide and is ultimately the basis of Soka Gakkai's environmental ethic as it works to motivate engagement and action in the world. The notion of *Human Revolution* serves as a distinct Buddhist ethic that empowers members to become environmentally responsible and sustainable. While Buddhists are not the only ones

who use personal transformation as the starting point for an environmental ethic, this does serve to place environmental concern and actions squarely within a traditional Buddhist focus on personal enlightenment and transformation.

In addition, *Value Creation* is a philosophy employed by Makiguchi that places an emphasis on the human experience in order to create value and motivate our responsibility within the world. It teaches members of the Soka Gakkai that each individual has the ability and wisdom to create value in their own lives, as well as in others. This Buddhist philosophy thus works as a sense of duty, or dharma, and motivates both inner transformation in mindset and thinking, and outer transformation in the creation of worth and value in the greater world. Consequently, the Soka Gakkai Buddhist ideals of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation* work intrinsically with one another; *Human Revolution* necessitates inner transformation in order to inspire change, thus creating value and meaning, or *Value Creation*. Driven by specific Buddhist ethics, these ideals function as a basis for a distinct environmental mindset.

Finally, Ikeda's methodology of *Learn, Reflect, Empower* has built on Makiguchi's philosophy of creating a relationship and responsibility with the environment. Both presidents have stressed the importance of the development of an awareness of one's natural environment as it molds their ethical foundations. Therefore, Ikeda has dedicated his efforts to highlighting the importance of sustaining a relationship between human beings and the natural world through his three-point plan. He thus calls for a new type of environmental ethic, one that

creates solidarity, and a sense of community of cooperation and shared responsibility among us.

SGI employs its distinct ideologies, set forth by its presidents, through educational efforts such as The Earth Charter, Seeds of Hope, and the film A Quiet Revolution, all of which convey a set of ethical principles used to shape a sustainable and peaceful global society. The initiatives require members to employ a new ethical vision that highlights interconnectedness and aims to create a sense of responsibility for the well-being of all aspects of the natural world. This type of environmental education very markedly motivates action and engagement in local communities, as well as on a global level, as a clear representation of the guiding ethical principles of the SGI that contribute to a distinct environmental ethic.

Chapter Three

Ideals in Action

As previously stated, the aim of this thesis is to utilize the eco-contextualist approach to examine specific accounts of Buddhist practice within the Soka Gakkai movement in order to demonstrate the development of a distinct Buddhist environmental ethic. This in turn will also illustrate the practicality of the shift from the textual strategy to that of the contextual within the research field, in yielding tangible and contemporary examples of this development. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present the primary research conducted for this thesis, as well as the supplementary secondary data consisting of published Soka Gakkai member testimonials. The secondary data, however, must be looked at more critically as it is a specific type of information. It must be noted that Soka Gakkai International published the testimonials provided here, and therefore, this data is likely to be subject to and aligned with the organization's mission or worldview even with their disclaimer. Thus, the information provided by the interview informants as primary data will be highlighted to build a stronger case for my argument, and the testimonials will simply be used as supplementary accounts to reinforce the distinguishable themes that arose from the interviews.

As stated in the methodology section of chapter one, the primary data consists of semi-formal interviews conducted with four members of the Soka Gakkai community in Halifax, Nova Scotia, including its district leader. For purposes of this study, the interviewees will remain unnamed and simply be referred to as

informants one through four. In addition, their age will also remain confidential, but they will be referred to by gender specific pronouns. Where relevant, information will be also disclosed regarding religious and ethnic backgrounds of the informants in order to provide context. Contextually, it must also be mentioned that the research conducted here took place at a time where the promotion of environmental awareness is commonplace, and coincides with the growing concern of environmental protection in both the public and private spheres. As mentioned in chapter one, the dawn of the environmental movement is well behind us, and the field of eco-Buddhism is not new. Moreover, attempts to utilize religious or spiritual principles by both practitioners and scholars to address environmental issues have been occurring for the past forty years. Therefore, we must take into account that the testimony provided here must be considered a special type of inherited wisdom from Soka Gakkai International that adds to its context; it reinforces the relevance and ability of a spiritual component to add value to contemporary discussions regarding the care of the natural world.

This chapter will be broken down into a series of different themes that arose during the interviews conducted. These main themes include: reasons for conversion, reasons for practice, and Soka Gakkai ideals in action and the promotion of an environmental mindset. At first glance, it may not be apparent as to why it would be important to highlight reasons for conversion and practice; however, through the interviews conducted, it became obvious that these issues were directly linked to the formation and maintenance of an environmental worldview. The

specific Buddhist ideals that initiated conversion on the individual's behalf, as well as continued practice, are also the same ideals that lay the foundation for a distinct environmental ethic. Therefore, it is equally important to emphasize this testimony, as it is concurrent with the overall development of such an ethic. From an examination of these equally important distinguished themes, it becomes evident how an environmental ethic based on the specific Buddhist ideals present in Soka Gakkai develops and progresses in an integrated way.

According to the Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and the oneness of life and the environment, our current ecological state is due to a disconnection between human beings and their surroundings. Therefore, Soka Gakkai members view the destruction of the natural world as a result of people's lack of understanding of the true nature of reality.

That we depend on and closely resemble our environment makes the Buddhist concept of the oneness of life and its environment a matter of common sense. But the Buddhist view goes beyond a merely mechanical connection; it recognizes a common thread that binds living entities and their environment. This thread is the true aspect of all phenomena, the Mystic Law, which can be understood as the very life of the universe itself. (*The Oneness of Life*, 1999, para. 5)

Similarly, Nichiren wrote, "The Environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body there can be no shadow. Similarly, without life, the environment cannot exist, even though life is supported by its environment" (*The Oneness of Life*,

1999, para. 8). Soka Gakkai International teaches the entirety of the natural environment, including human society, is negatively influenced when people's worldviews are misguided. Additionally, SGI claims that we as human beings should be concerned with our impact on the environment, and "whether we are exerting a positive, valuable influence on our environment, and whether we are responding to the influences of our environment in positive and valuable ways" (The Oneness of Life, 1999, 10).

According to Informant One, the world and everything in it is a part of a larger whole; all things depend on one another. He claims, "I can see that everything is connected. Everything I do has an effect on my environment" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant Three relates to this feeling in saying, "I think focusing on things like the environment is a good way of reminding us we are human – we are just a little part of something bigger" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). In her testimonial, Yomiko Vittor (2012) claims, "my parents taught me about the Buddhist concept of the oneness of life and its environment, which explains how our lives and our environment are inextricably connected" (para. 2). She says the true realization here is to be aware that changes within ourselves are what allow us to make changes in our environment. From these initial statements, we can see how Soka Gakkai members mirror the Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and the oneness of life in their worldviews and basis for practice. What is important here is to also ask how these ideals initially progressed

and work to promote environmental action, thus showing the personal appropriation of Buddhist principles to support an environmentally driven mindset.

As the Soka Gakkai Buddhist ideals of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation* work exclusively together to establish the basis for a concern for the natural world, it is as equally important to examine this process of development of an environmental ethic, as it is seeing the ethic itself. Therefore, not only will actual examples of environmentally driven thought and practice be examined here, but also the driving forces behind this action. In the eco-contextual approach these are considered to be inseparable. In this particular case, Soka Gakkai member's reasons for conversion, as well as the reasoning behind their continued practice, effectively emphasize the ideals of *Value Creation* and *Human Revolution*, and thus, adequately show the progression of an environmentally driven worldview. Ultimately, the following chapter will first, highlight testimony from Soka Gakkai members on their reasons for conversion and continued practice, and show how this is directly linked to a true sense of environmental responsibility; and second, examine the specific accounts of thought and practice that represent the distinct environmental ethic produced by this development process.

Reasons for Conversion

After speaking with a number of different members of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist community in Halifax, Nova Scotia, it became apparent that the majority of them were converts to the lay movement. All of the informants involved in the interviews were in fact converts to the community in the later part of their lives, and

all had very different reasons for this conversion experience. Some of the main motivations included mental or health reasons, a feeling of spiritual emptiness, lacking a sense of community or connection with others, and searching for a sense of self and/or purpose. Regardless of one's previous religious experiences or backgrounds, the informants found themselves drawn to the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement for very distinct reasons. These motives helped to shape their understanding and practice of the ideals set forth by Soka Gakkai, and ultimately worked to develop a strong sense of responsibility to engaging in the world.

As Informant One tells me, his involvement with Soka Gakkai stemmed from an issue with their health. Informant One was living in Ghana at the time and was suffering from major headaches and insomnia. Informant One stated, "Back in Ghana, I was struggling with health, severe health problems. I would get headaches all the time and I couldn't concentrate or do anything. I couldn't sleep or go to work. I tried many doctors, many medicines. Nothing would help me" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant One felt as though nothing was ever going to be able to resolve his medical problems. He claimed,

I wanted to find something, anything that could help me... My friend took me to a meeting in Ghana. I did not know what it was about, but he said I might like it; try to get my mind off things. I decided to go... At first I didn't know what was going on. There were people chanting something I couldn't understand. I thought it was foolish... After we talked to some people to see

what was going on in their lives. I remember thinking, how will this help me? Why am I here? But they told stories about their problems; they seemed happy even though they had problems. (personal communication, August 25, 2013)

It became clear to Informant One that there was something more substantial to these meetings than people simply chanting and 'complaining'. Informant One explained, "My friend told his problems too. I can see everyone is struggling, not just me. I wanted to know more, to talk more" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Since the first meeting, Informant One became heavily involved in the Soka Gakkai community in his hometown. "I started to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo on my own at home in Ghana. I did it every day. I chanted to relax me, to make me feel better" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Over time, the chanting and weekly meetings worked to help Informant One deal with the health problems that were affecting every aspect of his life. Ultimately, it led him to find a new way of life in a new country. On his conversion experience, Informant One stated, "When I came to Canada, I look for people to chant with. I found my wife. We would chant together" (personal communication, August 25, 2013).

As Aurélie Neame Koueli states in an online testimonial, she too experienced severe health problems including migraines that were greatly affecting her. She speaks of her conversion to the Soka Gakkai practice,

I met Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1992. At first, I was the only member

of my family who didn't feel positive toward the practice, but later, in 1996, I decided to join the SGI. I had powerful migraines, which were making me suffer terribly, and even the sedatives I took didn't really ease the pain. One night when I couldn't sleep at all, my older brother convinced me to try chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a remedy, and at last I was able to have a peaceful sleep. (Koueli, 2014, para. 1)

Koueli experienced a remarkable relationship between chanting and her own healing. Ultimately, this is what led her to become a member of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist community and now participates regularly in local meetings.

From these examples, we can see that the chanting practice of the Soka Gakkai can have positive results for people struggling with health problems. With particular reference to these members, it was these health benefits that in fact persuaded them to convert to the Buddhist movement. Coupled with the chanting, was the sense of community these members felt when taking part in the member meetings. Although both of these members were skeptical at first of the Soka Gakkai community and its practices, after participating in group meetings and truly experiencing the effects of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they were deeply moved by their outcomes. This highlights a possible solution to mental health and health problems as one of the reasons for conversion to the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement.

For Informant Two, her conversion reasoning and experience was much

different. They spoke of struggles with a personal relationship; "I was very unhappy. I was in a bad relationship for a long time... I didn't know myself. I found it hard to stand up for myself" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant Two explained how they found themselves in an unknown situation, and felt very scared and alone. "I was going through a divorce that was bad and I felt very alone... I felt like none of my friends or family understood what I was going through" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Fundamentally, these feelings of isolation and uncertainty led Informant Two to the Soka Gakkai community.

Informant Three also struggled with personal relationships, in particular a relationship with a family member. Informant Three recalls,

I had a really hard time with my sister, we never got along, we always would fight... I was very stressed out... Now I am able to talk with her and not fight, well not always. I try to remain calm and relaxed. (personal communication, August 25, 2013)

The member tells how the practice of chanting has really helped to improve her personal relationships. Through chanting, it has enabled the informant to become self-aware and this in turn has had an immense effect on their once strained relationships. She claimed,

I needed a way to keep myself calm... When I chant, I am calm. I need that. I would go crazy without it now. Some people only need twenty minutes of it; I need to do it for at least an hour a day... Sometimes I drive my husband

insane. (personal communication, August 25, 2013)

As for Informant Three's conversion experience, she spoke of not necessarily feeling a true sense of belonging with her religious upbringing. Although she was very involved in the religious community of her childhood, she still seemed to lack a connection or sense of belonging with the community itself. She stated,

I grew up in an Anglican church. I was very involved. I tried very hard to make an effort. But it didn't feed my needs like it did for the rest of my family... I felt very different and I struggled with that for a very long time... My family doesn't really understand, but that is okay. (personal communication, August 25, 2013)

Now that she is involved in a new form of religious practice, Informant Three feels a deeper sense of connection with other members. This is essentially what led her to convert to the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement as it offered her what they consider to be a very important aspect of their spiritual development.

Both Informant Two and Informant Three were struggling with difficult personal relationships in their daily lives. Informant Two was going through a time of change and the future was unclear to them, which caused a lot of fear and sense of loneliness. Informant Three also struggled with close family relationships, especially with her sister. In addition, although they had been heavily involved in their previous religious community, they felt no ultimate tie to its members. Ultimately, this trouble with personal relationships led these members to look for a new

individual path, as well as a shared connection with others. Soka Gakkai Buddhism offered these members a new direction in their lives; one that allowed them to heal from past suffering, as well as one that allowed them to build the foundation needed to progress forward with new relationships.

Ricky Ng, a member of SGI from Canada, speaks of his conversion experience as one that was at first filled with doubt and hesitation. However, over time Ng was able to appreciate the message put forth by the local chapter in his area. He recalls,

A young woman invited me to a Buddhist meeting at the SGI Toronto Culture Centre. I peppered some of the men there with my questions about life. Their answers struck me with their honesty and insight. One answer detailed a daily Buddhist practice that would strengthen my shaky inner life state. I dropped any skepticism and tried it. (Ng, 2012, para. 2)

Now Ng recognizes the importance of that first meeting and does not take the experience for granted. He fully engages in Soka Gakkai practices as they drive him to promote Buddhist ideals in his daily life. Ng (2012) states, “There are two things that drive me now: the desire to demonstrate my gratitude for finding Nichiren Buddhism and my desire to work for world peace and the happiness of others through the principles of Buddhism” (para. 13).

Finally, for Informant Four, his conversion experience simply had to do with the right time and place in his life. Previously, Informant Four had not put too much thought or effort into religious practice, as it did not seem to personally affect the way he was living. However, when he met his current spouse who was a practicing

Soka Gakkai Buddhist, Informant Four was introduced to a new way of living. Informant Four does not necessarily consider the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement to be a religious movement, not specifically for him anyway. Rather, Informant Four views Soka Gakkai Buddhism and the chanting practice of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a way of life. He states, "It lets me have a clear head. I can let go of all the stressful things I deal with everyday"(personal communication, August 25, 2013). In this way, the practice of Soka Gakkai Buddhism simply allows Informant Four to be more engaged and involved in the practices of his daily life.

Informant Four felt as though his chanting practice and involvement with the Soka Gakkai community was not necessarily based on any religious experience or conversion. Rather, Informant Four states, "I practice with my wife and it brings us closer together. I never had an interest in any religion per say, I mean I was brought up Catholic, but never paid too much attention. So when my second wife wanted me to do this with her, I agreed" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). From this, one can see that not every member of the Soka Gakkai community views their involvement as a religious or spiritual experience, but simply an act in their lives that helps them develop as a person. The path focuses on individual practice, but at the same time offers a sense of belonging and community to its members.

From the member testimonials, as well as the information provided from the interview informants, it is clear to see there are various reasons any one person has converted to the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement. As all of the members of the conducted interviews were converts to the practice, I felt it was important to

highlight some of the reasoning behind this. It has become apparent that every member of the Soka Gakkai community is different; however, commonality can be seen among these members in terms of their motivations. Specific reasoning for conversion to the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement included mental health and health problems, issues and struggles with close personal relationships, as well as spiritual and personal development. Knowing the reasoning behind an individual's conversion to a particular religious movement can speak to their motives for their continued engagement with the practice. Here, I felt it was important to note these reasons, as they may provide some insight to these individual's overall use of Soka Gakkai Buddhist ideals to ultimately promote an environmental mindset within their local communities.

Reasons for Practice

In addition to reasons for conversion, individuals of the Soka Gakkai community also expressed varying reasons for their continued practice. After conducting interviews with members of the local community, two distinct themes evolved in terms of why individuals chose to practice the ideals set forth by Soka Gakkai International. These themes were personal and communal. First of all, in terms of practice, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is understood to be the key tool in realizing one's own inherent ability to inspire transformation. The act of chanting came up repeatedly when speaking with members about their reasons for continued practice. Chanting seemed to be the starting point, or foundation, in each individual's basis for involvement in the Soka Gakkai community. From this foundation,

members were able to express both personal and communal reasons as to why they engaged in and reflected Soka Gakkai ideals.

As stated in the previous chapter, the Soka Gakkai ideal of *Human Revolution* emphasizes an individual's ability to transform oneself in order to realize his or her own potential. This inner transformation is then said to stimulate a process of revolution that extends outwards to others, moving from one individual to the next, and ultimately reaching all of humanity. As highlighted in Chapter Two, Toda's concept of inner transformation professes that no action or engagement can occur on the communal level until one develops their own individual potential. By transforming oneself, one can then become fully present in the world and offer oneself to societal, political, and environmental transformation. In addition, Makiguchi's initial pedagogy based on creating value in one's life claimed the goal of life is the pursuit of happiness. In theory, this *Value Creation* occurs when a people choose to maximize their own potential, as well as help others to realize theirs. This philosophy urges people to then become more involved in their communities. Makiguchi's claimed people should feel a sense of responsibility to their local and national communities, as well as the world on a global scale.

It is important to note here that the ideals of *Value Creation* and *Human Revolution* are reflective of the testimony invoked by both the interview informants and members of Soka Gakkai International. The relation of personal realizations to those of communal efforts and relationships is representative of the distinct Soka Gakkai ideologies at work. Members see the positive effects of their Buddhist

practice in their personal lives, and this motivates them to develop and sustain meaningful communal relationships. These relationships in turn stimulate action and engagement focused on the greater good. Ultimately, this illustrates how the ideals set forth by Soka Gakkai International can be seen and are being employed at the localized level as well. Conclusively, this shows the authority of the international organization to successfully implement their ideologies throughout the movement. The ideals at the core of Soka Gakkai International are in fact the same ideals being employed by individual members at the localized level.

As stated previously, Informant One was struggling for quite some time with health problems and was unsuccessful in finding adequate treatment until he experienced chanting with the Soka Gakkai community. After his conversion to Soka Gakkai Buddhism, according to Informant One, his entire life changed. He stated, "Once I felt better, I was able to focus on other parts of my life. I came to Canada, I went to school, I find my wife" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant One was able to move past the crippling effects of his health issues to develop in other areas of his life. In addition, Informant One explained how he had always struggled with a speech impediment and how chanting seems to quell its negative effects as well. "Chanting helps me with my stutter. I can chant forever and not even think about it" (personal communication, August 25, 2013).

Informant Two reflects on the importance of chanting in her daily life, stating, "Every once and awhile I find myself getting really overwhelmed by life. I let my past affect and it takes over me. By chanting, I can concentrate on getting back to a good

head space" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). And for Informant Three, the practice of chanting, both individually and as part of a group, has been a truly transforming experience. Informant Three explains, "I need this for me. I have developed into a totally new and different person at this point in my life... Chanting has helped me figure out who I was and what I wanted for the rest of my life. Nothing has ever quite made me feel that way before" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). It becomes apparent that although the individual reasoning differs from member to member, strong personal reasons have compelled these individuals to continue with the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and most of the time it is on a daily basis. It requires a lot of dedication on the member's part, but the effects of this practice are evidently extremely worth the efforts of the practitioner.

Building on the outcomes of the personal act of chanting, Soka Gakkai members have additionally experienced valuable results from being involved with other members of the movement. The positive reinforcement from other members contributes to an elated sense of belonging and community. Each individual not only focuses on their own potential development, but also the progress of other members and the group as a whole. Both the interview informants and the members of SGI have expressed distinct ways in which they feel a genuine sense of community with the other members of the Soka Gakkai network, and ultimately, how this contributes to their own continued development.

Since joining the Soka Gakkai community, Informant One has also experienced numerous ways in which the communal aspect of membership has

affected him. The experience of being part of a group that shares the same ideals has allowed Informant One to develop his own potential. Informant One claims, "I have made a lot of friends. Everyone is so nice and works together. We tell each other stories of our lives and give each other advice. Some people might have many problems or problems with their relationship, but when we chant and talk together, it feels better" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant Two sees the value in the weekly discussion meetings and reflects on how they have helped to strengthen her own sense of self; "Like I said before, I felt very alone after my divorce and felt like I had no family. The weekly meetings helped me meet new people and actually find a common interest with them. Chanting with them is such a different experience than by yourself" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant Three speaks of how genuine connections are made with other members through the telling of personal stories and hardships, stating, "The amount of different people you meet and the stories you hear are simply amazing. And you feel an actual connection with these people, it's so hard to describe" (personal communication, August 25, 2013). It is clear that for the informants, the relationships built with other members of the Soka Gakkai community work to establish a sense of shared development and responsibility.

For Fern Brown, an 84 year old woman from Canada, her continued practice of Soka Gakkai Buddhism has allowed her to develop both her own sense of being, as well as enabled her to generate true and lasting relationships with others. She states, "If people are having difficulties, I know chanting can help them. Since I started

chanting, I am able to forge genuine connections with people. I now feel so different from the shy, alienated child and young woman I used to be” (Brown, 2012, para. 10). Brown has been practicing chanting for over 35 years and explains that the basis of her happiness is sharing that with others. Brown (2012) reflects, “In 1978, I moved to northern California and started to hold Buddhist meetings at my home. The main focus was chanting, studying Buddhism and sharing our practice with others. I could gradually feel myself becoming happier and knew that for the first time I was building a steady foundation for my life” (para. 8).

Again, Ricky Ng from Canada highlights the importance of chanting as a daily practice. “The simple chant of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo allowed any negative feelings I had been harboring to climb into a hopeful joy. I felt ‘right with the world,’ able to appreciate other people and life as they were” (Ng, 2012, para. 3). Ng explains how chanting has led him to develop on the personal level, which in turn has allowed him to strengthen the relationships and bonds with his family and friends. In addition, chanting has also helped him to realize the power of his community. “Although I was chanting for only 10 minutes, twice a day, I kept it up steadily, attended small group meetings in my local area and could feel myself starting to change at the very core” (Ng, 2012, para. 3). Ng recognizes the connection between his own personal development and the growth of the groups he participates in. According to Soka Gakkai teaching, this realization is crucial in fostering change on the communal level.

Andreja Nolan, a member of SGI from Australia, also speaks of her practice with others in discussion and chant meetings as a transforming and enlightening

experience. "Through my active involvement in group meetings, I have experienced care and compassion as well as wisdom and guidance. I have built up enough courage to start treating people with more respect and appreciation, regardless of 'what they could do for me' or my judgment of them" (Nolan, 2010, para. 21). Nolan claims that through the shared experience of practicing with others, she was able to deal with her own personal struggles that have inhibited her own development in the past. Nolan (2010) states, "I started to appreciate others just as they are. And that is how I want to relate to everybody that I meet--with a profound sense of appreciation for everyone's potential. What a sense of freedom that is!" (para. 22)

From these member testimonials, as well as the information provided by the interview informants, one can see that often times the communal aspect of practice for Soka Gakkai members is just as important to one's development as their personal reasoning. The sense of community felt by these practitioners directly contributes to their continued development of their own potential. Inner transformation is seen to be a result of both individual growth, but also due in part to the experience of being a part of a group. As the founding president of the Soka Gakkai movement taught, the realization of each individual's unlimited potential naturally leads to a pursuit of self-awareness, wisdom, and development. In turn, this self-realization facilitates a responsibility to create value in the world.

Overall, through the provided data, it becomes evident that the ideals of *Value Creation* and *Human Revolution* developed by the founding presidents, and set forth by Soka Gakkai International, are very much in tune with what the members

presented here are actually practicing at the localized level. The initial practice of chanting is utilized as a tool to realize one's own potential. Additionally, the realization of this potential essentially stimulates both personal and communal forms of transformation. Members speak of feeling a true sense of change within themselves due to the practice of chanting and this in turn generates a sense of responsibility to involve others in their journey. Members see themselves as able to create value in their own lives as well as in those of others, and ultimately, work towards building a community of happy and enlightened people. Through this contextualized examination of specific accounts of practice, it is clear that the ideals held by the governing organization of SGI are also those espoused by the members at the localized level. Although individual members speak of very different reasons and experiences for their practice, they are all based on the same foundation of the distinctive principles of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement.

Ideals in Action: The Promotion of an Environmental Mindset

As illustrated in the previous chapter, the current president of Soka Gakkai International, Daisaku Ikeda, has gone to great lengths to maintain and develop the ideologies set forth by his predecessors, Makiguchi and Toda. Ikeda, and therefore the organization as a whole, actively encourages the practices of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation*, and strongly believes the principles developed by Makiguchi are still an integral part of moving the international organization forward. Ikeda supports Makiguchi's stance on the importance of the relationship between the individual human and the environment. Therefore, as the Buddhist concept of

interconnectedness of all beings is viewed as central to being human, Makiguchi called for a human bonding with the natural world. Like Makiguchi, Ikeda also believes in the importance of the oneness of life and the environment, and consequently holds this Buddhist ideal to be the key to our future. Ikeda calls for a new type of environmental ethic, one that first and foremost requires a true examination of our behavior and ourselves as human beings. He claims we must learn and implement an ethic of moderation, which in turn requires significant changes on the personal level (Ikeda, 2012).

To employ this notion of a new environmental ethic, Ikeda has implemented the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology into Soka Gakkai International's plan for sustainable development. As previously mentioned, this methodology highlights the importance of continuous learning and developing knowledge. It suggests that we as human beings have the ability to transform knowledge into wisdom through reflection, and ultimately by doing this, we stimulate the responsibility to act in the world. The *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology directly reflects the Buddhist principles of interdependence and promotes a shared responsibility among humans on a global scale. From the testimony brought forth by the informants, as well as the members of SGI, it is evident that again the ideologies promoted by the organization are espoused at the localized level through its member's opinions, practice, and action. This portion of the chapter will highlight the ways in which actual members of Soka Gakkai International are reflecting and promoting the distinct

environmental ethic based on the Soka Gakkai ideals of *Human Revolution, Value Creation*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology.

Shin Won-suk lives in Korea and has been practicing Soka Gakkai Buddhism for over forty years, and by living out Buddhist principles, has found an extremely resourceful way of giving back to his local community. Won-suk (2012) claims, "By engaging in SGI activities I have learned the importance of living a contributive life--to be concerned not only for myself but for others and for society as a whole" (para. 1). In his hometown of Ulsan, Korea, there is a river called the Taehwa, which is polluted. And although the river is considered to be a major means of livelihood for the community, due to its high level of pollution, the river has become a hindrance rather than an outlet. Therefore, Won-suk (2012) wanted to think of ways in which he could provide for his local community, stating, "Taking to heart SGI President Ikeda's constant encouragement to become an asset to our local community and society, I began to think deeply about what I could do to contribute" (para. 1). He goes on to state that he realized he must be ready and willing to protect our local environment if we want to sustain a healthy global environment.

Realizing the Buddhist principles set forth by Daisaku Ikeda, Won-suk put his landscaping and gardening experience to work by initiating pollution reduction projects. He claims, "I began making time to care for the environment around the river, doing things such as developing bamboo fields, removing waste and pruning branches of trees along the river, inviting local residents and fellow SGI-Korea members to join in" (Won-suk, 2012, para. 4). In addition, he joined and chaired a

local ecological restoration group that dedicates their efforts to waste removal, and frequently speaks at local universities on the topics of sustainability and environmental awareness. He firmly believes that,

The challenge of reviving the environment requires a lot of time and effort. We don't always see immediate results, and at times, I do get frustrated and weary. However, what has kept me going in my efforts to help restore the environment are the simple words of appreciation we get from local residents. Moreover, as I chant every night upon returning home from a day of volunteer work, I feel a deep sense of fulfillment, which in turn becomes a source of energy to continue my efforts. As Nichiren Daishonin states in his writings, 'If one lights a fire for others, one will brighten one's own way'.

(Won-suk, 2012, para. 8)

This testimony mirrors that of previous member accounts in the sense that chanting drives and sustains other practices, and contributes to a sense of community and fulfillment. Accordingly, this provides the outlet for continued action and engagement on the member's behalf.

Through his and the efforts of many others, the Taehwa river has been restored to its natural state. Won-suk credits his Buddhist beliefs as the driving force behind his continued effort to support environmental initiatives. He concludes,

In Buddhism, we uphold the principle of 'oneness of self and environment,' meaning that life and its environment are inseparable. It is deeply rewarding to know that the small step of deciding to do something positive, and my

efforts to convey to others the spirit of coexisting with nature, have led to a revival of the environment and the lives of those around me. While it's easy to be overwhelmed by problems in our communities, each of us can do something to make a difference. (Won-suk, 2012, para. 9)

Here it is evident Won-suk truly believes in the power of the individual to make significant changes in their own lives, as well as in their surrounding circumstances. By reflecting on the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness, he was able to empower himself and others to make a difference in his local community. While the individual person chooses the practice of Buddhism, he or she is also then greatly affected by participating in the Buddhist community as well.

Amy Yomiko Vittor lives in the United States of America and has practiced Soka Gakkai Buddhism since she was a child. Due to this practice, she was always encouraged to develop her inner potential. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Yomiko Vittor (2012) claims, "my parents taught me about the Buddhist concept of the oneness of life and its environment, which explains how our lives and our environment are inextricably connected" (para. 2). She says the true realization here is to be aware that changes within ourselves are what allow us to make changes in our environment. This is reflective of the Soka Gakkai ideals of inner transformation and *Human Revolution*; Yomiko Vittor sees that in order to initiate change on any level, we must start with ourselves.

Guided by her Buddhist principles, Yomiko Vittor began her young life in search of ways to contribute to connecting the bond between humans and the natural environment. She states,

I wanted to find out how human health is linked to the environment. Just as understanding the concept of the oneness of life and its environment in my personal life allowed me to create change in my environment through my own development, I gathered that understanding ecology-health dynamics could lead to healthier people and better environments in which they dwell.

(Yomiko Vittor, 2012, para. 3)

Her graduate studies led her to investigate how deforestation in the Amazon rainforest was affecting the rates of malaria in the surrounding areas. In order to do so, Yomiko Vittor realized she would need to develop strong and true relationships with the people in the local communities; ones that already had a pre-existing relationship with the land and natural environment.

Finally, after completing her PhD studies, Yomiko Vittor works as an Infectious Disease fellow who works closely with HIV positive patients. "This time, I intend to examine the dynamics between ecology, urbanization and mosquito-borne encephalitis viruses such as yellow fever and dengue, ever in search of the links between life and the environment" (Yomiko Vittor, 2012, para. 8). The testimony provided here is representative of how this member has taken the ideals set forth by Soka Gakkai International and implemented them into her daily and professional life. Due to the importance placed on the relationship between humans and the

natural world throughout her upbringing, she was able to reflect on this ideal and ultimately use it to engage in strides towards positive facets of interconnectedness.

Yongjie Yon immigrated to Canada in 1996, but was practicing Soka Gakkai Buddhism with his family beforehand. Yon distinctly remembers his first encounters with SGI and recalls being quite skeptical of the messages of Ikeda. In an online testimonial titled, "Acting Locally", published by SGI Quarterly, he states,

Although I was quite young, I clearly remember hearing SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's encouragement to believe in our distinct abilities and contributions. At the time, I didn't really understand what he meant, or believe that a person like me could contribute to society. But as I grew older, his words and example inspired me to want to become more involved in the community. (Yon, 2014, para. 2)

He then began to become active in the Soka Gakkai community through youth group programs. And when he was in grade ten, he joined a youth group in his new hometown of Vancouver, Canada.

Yon's involvement in the youth group there helped to build a sense of community with people his own age, and who were ultimately concerned with the same things. His involvement in the youth group also initiated his inner drive to create new opportunities for his peers. Yon (2014) recalls,

In 1996, when I was in 10th grade, my family and I emigrated to Canada.

There, together with the SGI Vancouver youth, I helped found the SGI-Canada

Vancouver Youth Earth Charter Committee in the summer of 2003. My determination was to build friendship and trust in the community. (para. 3)

This experience functioned as a stepping-stone for Yon as he moved through his adolescence. It allowed him to develop a plan for his future, both personally and professionally. He claims,

The experience of speaking to like-minded people inspired me to start thinking about a career in which I could work for the betterment of society. However, I didn't know where to begin or what to do except to continue supporting the Earth Charter and volunteering in the community. Through this engagement, I have been involved in many simple grassroots projects, from organizing street cleaning, recycling campaigns and movie forums on sustainability to organizing conferences, exhibitions and workshops. (Yon, 2014, para. 5)

Yon claims to have thought deeply about his impact on his local community, as well as the natural environment. For Yon, the Soka Gakkai community presented many outlets to utilize the Buddhist principles of his upbringing as a way to engage with the world.

Yon (2014) articulates the direct relationship between the ideals set forth by Soka Gakkai International and the current ecological situation we find ourselves in, stating, "I believe strongly that environmental devastation originates from the minds of human beings, and I am fully convinced that through dialogue and engagement we can unlock life's unlimited potential and improve society" (para. 7). Although at first

he had some reservations about Ikeda's message of self-transformation and the path to a sustainable future, through personal experience, Yon now fully endorses the power of the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology. He concludes,

Looking back, I feel deep appreciation for all my experiences of working for sustainability. I am determined to continue to act on the inspiration I received from SGI President Ikeda to open the path of peace through dialogue and community engagement. (Yon, 2014, para. 11)

Taking the ideologies of SGI and implementing them in his own life has allowed Yon to find a true sense of meaning and purpose. Coupled with the sense of community, the experience of dedicating volunteer hours to a greater cause than himself, has empowered Yon to develop his own potential in order to promote an environmental mindset. The ethic that now drives his action in the world is based on Ikeda's message of communal engagement and works to stimulate action of others for the same cause.

At the localized level, the interview informants shared a variety of ways in which they felt the ideologies of Soka Gakkai motivated them to engage in environmentally driven awareness and practice. The informants expressed that they all felt how the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness presented the clearest vision of why an environmental mindset is an important aspect of being human. Again, as stated in the introduction, Informant One explains how he views the world and everything in it is a part of a larger whole; all things depend on one another. He claimed, "I can see that everything is connected. Everything I do has an effect on my

environment” (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Informant Three relates to this feeling in saying, “I think focusing on things like the environment is a good way of reminding us we are human – we are just a little part of something bigger” (personal communication, August 25, 2013). In addition, the informants all acknowledged that it was in fact the Buddhist principles of Soka Gakkai that led them to contemplate on a deeper level why the natural environment is to be celebrated and protected. Informant Two considers that her everyday life is directly connected to their overall practice and mindset. Every aspect of their practice is equally important and contributes to an overall holistic view of the world. Informant Two states, “I work in the Sciences and I can see how it relates to my practice. Caring for the environment is just as important as caring for ourselves, or our friends and family” (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Before their Soka Gakkai Buddhist practice, these informants did not necessarily think about the world in such a way. By their own claims, it can be seen that their chanting practice and communal involvement has led them to reflect on these issues in a more contemplative way, and in turn has ultimately led them to engagement.

The informants also spoke about their sense of shared responsibility for caring for the environment. For some, it was on a grand scale, while for others it was a realization of the importance of all things big and small. For example, Informant One spoke of his individual practices at home, as well as larger contributions. “It might not seem like a lot, but at home we always make sure to recycle and not waste power, but those are the little things. The bigger things are having the meetings and

talking with others about our responsibility” (personal communication, August 25, 2013). In addition, Informant Three mentioned,

Everyone is always concerned about money and things. Things to me that aren't very important... Sometimes we chant about personal problems, sometimes we chant about women's issues – we have a women's group that meets – and then sometimes we chant for the environment. It's all important.

(personal communication, August 25, 2013)

From this, we can see that the informants have drawn their own conclusions about specifically how the ideologies of the Soka Gakkai promote a sense of shared responsibility to the care of the natural world. This responsibility is born of the realization that all aspects of life are equally important, and thus equally valuable.

However, not every individual views the ideologies of Soka Gakkai as being environmentally driven, or as motivating such an ethic of concern. For Informant Four, the promotion and message of an environmental mindset is not as clear. He explained, “For me, it doesn't really have a clear environmental message – I mean, I can see how it would come up and I've heard it talked about – but for me, the practice is just more personal, more about chanting” (personal communication, August 25, 2013). Although Informant Four does not personally see how the environmental message of SGI is linked to his own practice, he did acknowledge that the organization is making strides to move forward with an environmentally driven mindset, stating, “I always read a lot of the [SGI] material and a lot of it has to with the environment, sustainability, nuclear warfare. At that level I can see that they are

really trying to get a positive message out there” (personal communication, August 25, 2013). This shows that although most members of the Soka Gakkai community can see how the teachings of SGI stimulate action and engagement in the world, with particular reference to the environment, not every individual clearly sees or represents this connection. It is important to note here, however, that although Informant Four does not personally see the connection, he did admit they could see it on a larger scale.

Overall, all the members of SGI examined here expressed similar concepts when articulating the reasoning for engagement in their local communities with particular reference to environmental initiatives. The members explained that due to their involvement with Soka Gakkai, they have realized the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness, and that this principle is present in all aspects of their lives. In this way, the members are implementing Ikeda’s *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology; they first take the realization of interconnectedness as a piece of knowledge and turn it into wisdom through reflection. The members truly contemplate what it means to be a part of something greater than themselves, and then what this means for the relationships they hold with others, their environment, and the world on a global scale. In addition, the members use this wisdom to then empower both themselves and others to take action in the world. Furthermore, the Soka Gakkai members are communicating the view that the individual is the basis for change. Reflecting Makiguchi’s teachings and philosophy, these members articulate that they are indeed the first piece of the puzzle. They recognize their own

responsibility to act and to inspire others to do the same. Here we can very distinctly see the Soka Gakkai ideologies of *Value Creation*, *Human Revolution*, and the three-point methodology at work.

Conclusion

By using the contextualist strategy methodology to examine specific accounts of practice and testimony from Soka Gakkai members, the primary and secondary research data presented a number of distinct and interesting themes. These themes were then used to illustrate the development of an environmental mindset among members of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist community. In doing so, this examination works to show how the shift from the textual strategy to that of the contextual has the ability to yield viable and trustworthy results among an explicit group.

Moreover, this particular examination also highlights how the specific ideologies of Soka Gakkai International are reflected in the worldviews, practices, and actions of its members at the localized level. The contextual strategy methodology showed that the distinct ideologies of *Value Creation*, *Human Revolution*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology are working to motivate and develop an environmental mindset among Soka Gakkai members at various levels of involvement.

Specific motivations, such as health issues, the pursuit of spiritual meaning, and searching for a sense of community and purpose, led the interviewees to become involved with the Soka Gakkai Buddhist community. As seen in this research, these motives formed the member's understanding of their own practice, as well as their realized potential to create value in the world. Subsequently, these

motives sustained specific reasoning for continued practice. Chanting was documented by all of the informants as the primary basis in realizing one's own potential and thus, the most significant reason for sustained practice. From the practice of chanting, and its identifiable ability to inspire both inner and communal transformation – the effects of the *Human Revolution*, members expressed personal and collective examples of practice such as struggles with identity and close relationships, as well as developing clarity of mind and a true connection with others. Finally, building on the experiences and positive outcomes of their practice, the informants voiced ways in which their understanding of SGI ideologies has led them to develop an environmental mindset. Ultimately, this mindset has motivated various accounts of engagement such as wildlife restoration and protection, scientific investigations of the relationship between humans and the environment, as well as involvement with environmental initiatives, educational groups, and sustainable development.

Through this contextual examination it becomes apparent there is a genuine progression that occurs among members of Soka Gakkai International that is reflective of its overall mission portrayed to its members. First, a person comes into contact with the organization and its distinct Buddhist ideologies. *Value Creation* is posed as the basis for individual purpose, as well as the key to happiness. Chanting is viewed as the tool to unlocking this unlimited potential and works to engage the practitioner on both the personal and communal level. This in turn inspires *Human Revolution*, or transformation, which then works to stimulate a sense of shared

responsibility to act in the world for a greater cause than oneself. Here, the philosophies of the three successive presidents of SGI, Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda, come together to promote environmental awareness and sustainable development as the key to our future. Using the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology, Ikeda expands on the pedagogies established by his predecessors in order to call for a new moral vision, or ethic, that is driven by concern for the natural world. In conclusion, it is through a contextual examination of this progression that one can examine a process that reveals an environmental ethic among members of Soka Gakkai International.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This thesis set out to determine first, if the contextual strategy methodology could enable the search for the development of an environmental ethic; and second, by using this approach, whether or not the Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement was articulating a distinct ethic that was environmentally driven. This thesis argues that indeed an environmental ethic can be seen in the thought and practice of members of Soka Gakkai International at the localized level. More importantly, it argues that by using the eco-contextual approach to examine the development of such an ethic, one can also recognize the importance of the progression that takes place in establishing the basis for the ethic. Thus, highlighting the process is just as important as the ethic itself. Through the member's understanding and development of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist ideals of *Value Creation* and *Human Revolution*, members expressed a shared sense of responsibility to take action in the world with regards to caring for the natural environment. Ultimately, it is the coupling of these ideals set forth by Soka Gakkai International that influence the mindset of members at the localized level and calls upon them to act in an environmentally conscious manner.

Chapter one introduced some of the various ways scholars of the eco-Buddhist research field have attempted to discern what constitutes a Buddhist environmental ethic, as well as the diverse approaches used in determining the basis of such an ethic. The strategies examined were the textual strategy, the practical

strategy, and the contextual strategy, and highlighted the shift in the eco-Buddhist field from the textual strategy to that of the contextual. These strategies aimed to demonstrate that investigating Buddhist traditions and practices would show an environmental ethic being employed. The shift in approaches ultimately moved the concentration away from Buddhist texts and doctrines to actual accounts of contemporary and contextualized Buddhist practice. In addition, in hopes of addressing some of the perplexities encountered by the research field, this chapter also aimed to show the importance of this shift, as it possessed the ability to produce concrete results. This helped to solidify my choice to align with Buddhist scholar, Seth Devere Clippard, in taking the eco-contextualist position and utilizing the contextual strategy methodology, which makes use of the textual and practical strategies, to examine actualized practice.

Focusing on the ethical and pedagogical ideologies employed by the three successive presidents of Soka Gakkai International, chapter two provided context to the lay Buddhist movement through a historical overview. The importance of this overview can be seen in the development of the distinct ideologies of *Value Creation*, *Human Revolution*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology, as the core principles set forth by the organization at the international level, thus shaping the worldview of its members at the localized level. As stated in chapter two, SGI claims that by first transforming oneself, including one's worldviews and actions, one can then gain the potential to be fully present in the world and thus offer themselves fully to societal, political, and environmental transformation. This is what Soka

Gakkai teachers considered to be the key to global change. And like Mette Fisker-Nielsen (2012) argued, this process motivates members “to see their own life, their Buddhist practice, their particular circumstances and subsequent actions from the perspective of the process of human revolution” (p. 49).

The SGI places an emphasis on the human experience, creating value within it in order to substantially transform our responsibility within the world, and contends that at there is potential in every moment to create value in our situation in response to our world and our environment. SGI’s current president, Ikeda states, “thus, what started out as inner determination of one individual to transform their circumstances, one can encourage, inspire and create lasting value within society” (para. 10). Additionally, chapter two showed how some of the current environmental initiatives of Soka Gakkai International are a direct result of and guided by these principles. *The Earth Charter*, *Seeds of Hope*, and the film *A Quiet Revolution*, are all used as educational tools to express a set of ethical principles that promote a sustainable and peaceful global society. Based on the ideologies of Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda, these initiatives are direct examples of the articulation of an environmental ethic as they display the principle of interconnectedness and motivate environmental responsibility.

Finally, using the contextual strategy methodology as introduced in chapter one to analyze the ideologies in chapter two, chapter three examines specific accounts of thought and practice of Soka Gakkai members in a contextualized manner. By using this methodology, chapter three highlighted the equal importance

of the process of developing an environmental ethic through the evolution of distinct themes including reason for conversion and continued practice, and Soka Gakkai ideals in action and the promotion of an environmental mindset. Moreover, this chapter also showed how the principles of Soka Gakkai International are reflected in the worldviews, practices, and actions of its members at the localized level. The contextual strategy methodology indicated that *Value Creation, Human Revolution*, and the *Learn, Reflect, Empower* methodology are distinct Buddhist ideologies that indeed stimulate an environmental mindset among Soka Gakkai members. In conclusion, this thesis argued that by using the eco-contextualist approach to examine specific accounts of Buddhist practice, one can see the development and articulation of an environmental ethic among Soka Gakkai International members, and that this ethic is a culmination and representation of the SGI ideals of *Human Revolution* and *Value Creation*, which work together to stimulate environmental responsibility.

This thesis initially questioned the intersection of religion and ecology, and asked if religious traditions had any valuable insight to offer our contemporary ecological crisis. As Devere Clippard (2012) was quoted in chapter one, "the interest in religion and ecology is for the most part motivated by the hope that an environmental ethic can be articulated that allows and encourages adherents of religious traditions to incorporate environmental concerns into their religious practice or worldview" (p.237). Born of this line of inquiry, the field of eco-

Buddhism specifically turns to the Buddhist tradition in hopes of addressing issues such as global warming and pollution. And as quoted from Schmithausen (1997),

For, today the Buddhist tradition, like any other, cannot avoid facing the problem. If it is to remain a living tradition, it has to supply answers to new vital questions, and it may have to accommodate its heritage to the new situation by means of explication, re-interpretation, re-organization or even creative extension or change. (p. 6)

By adding to the research field and these concerns, this thesis shows the relevance of religious, in this case specifically Buddhist, ideals as vital instruments in addressing contemporary environmental problems on both the local and global scale.

Religious traditions can be used to understand and engage with environmental issues, suggesting alternative and possibly less destructive ways of relating to our current ecological situation than our secular views. This thesis argued that religious traditions do have something valuable to offer the public sphere, while also being changed in the process to accommodate an environmental mindset. At the beginning of this thesis, the role of the scholar was questioned, stating, the scholar's responsibility is to address ways in which these religious communities are practicing this ethic. Therefore, scholars and researchers alike should identify and highlight the strategies being employed by religious communities in order to address environmental problems, and in turn, this will illustrate how religious organizations are connecting religious beliefs with an

environmental ethic that promotes practical application. Ultimately, this thesis showed that by using the eco-contextualist approach, one can see that the individuals examined here were guided by Buddhist principles in their claim to make efforts to reduce our environmental impact, and work to engage others in the process.

The biggest issue that arose from the methods employed in this thesis was the matter of quantifiable data examined. Ideally, a larger interview informant set would have been preferred, as well as beneficial to this study. The limitations of this research, therefore, are quantity-based in nature. However, as I do not believe this limitation invalidates the analysis and outcome of the data, I do think that a larger sample size would have yielded more reliable results. Therefore, the quality of the findings included here would only increase with a larger interview informant base. Then, the secondary research provided in this thesis would not necessarily be required, and the primary interviews conducted could stand alone as contextualized instances of actualized practice. Ultimately, this is what would reinforce the eco-contextualist position and the contextual strategy as a practical methodology for the field of eco-Buddhist discourse.

In addition, a possible future area of inquiry could be that of youth members of the SGI community aged 12 through 18. Due to the emphasis placed on this demographic by the organization in terms of engagement initiatives, it would be interesting to learn the opinions surrounding the same field of inquiry among that particular age group. This re-examination of the eco-contextual conceptual

framework in a new context would be beneficial to the research field as it could potentially highlight additional examples of the development of an environmental ethic.

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