

Daisaku Ikeda's "Life-Sized Paradigm": From the 2003 Peace Proposal to the 2023 Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit

Rosita Šorytė

FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief)

rosita_soryte@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: 2023 marks the 20th anniversary of one of the most important yearly "Peace Proposals" of Soka Gakkai third President Daisaku Ikeda, the one he published in 2003. While the attention at the time might have focused on the political comments he made after the war in Afghanistan and on the eve of the second war in Iraq, the paper argues that his dialogue with French 17th-century philosopher Blaise Pascal and the proposal of a "life-sized paradigm" for peace are the most important features of Ikeda's text. In 2023, Ikeda has also published a statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit. Here again, the paper argues that beyond political contingency the text is deeply rooted in a spiritual paradigm calling to the conversion of the heart as the only way to avoid a nuclear apocalypse.

KEYWORDS: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, Ikeda Peace Proposal, Ikeda Peace Proposal 2003, Ikeda's Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit, Pascal and Buddhism.

1. Pascal, the Six Senses of Buddhism, and Science: Ikeda's "Life-Sized Paradigm" After Twenty Years

The 2003 Message: The Political Context

Since 1983, Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai's third President and current Honorary President, has issued every year a "Peace Proposal." 2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of what I regard as one of the most important among Ikeda's Peace Proposals. It is his text for 2003, whose title was, "A Global Ethic of Coexistence: Toward a 'Life-Sized' Paradigm for Our Age." It is a dense document, in fact a small encyclopedia about peace (Ikeda 2003).

Ikeda normally starts from the international political context. 2003 was still a year marked by the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack of 2001. Ikeda did not consider the Afghan Taliban innocent of the charge that they had supported terrorism and noted that stopping the operation of al-Qaida bases in Afghanistan was a positive result (Ikeda 2003, 2).

The Soka Gakkai leader distinguished his position from absolute pacifism by discussing sociologist Max Weber's (1864–1920) famous 1918 Munich lecture "Politik als Beruf" (Politics as Vocation). There, Weber distinguished an "ethic of ultimate ends," which may apply to personal life and to the practices of certain religious communities, and an "ethic of responsibility" politicians should adopt for the common good (Weber 1919). The "ethic of ultimate ends" may lead to the refusal of bears arms or wage wars. As an option for individuals or small communities it should be respected. However, the "ethic of responsibility" should acknowledge that the use of armed force may be unavoidable in certain cases (Ikeda 2003, 3).

Ikeda agrees, although he insists that the armed force should be used with "moderation and self-control" (Ikeda 2003, 3) to avoid being captured by an endless "cycle of hatred and retaliation" (Ikeda 2003, 5). Here, Ikeda includes a criticism of a form of unilateralism and a mistaken belief that the answer to 9/11 might be only or mostly military that he saw developing in the United States (Ikeda 2003, 4).

He published his peace message on January 26, 2003. On March 20, the United States and their allies started the second Iraqi war. Without entering the debate about this war and its motivations, we may note how prophetic now sound Ikeda's words questioning the wisdom of military campaigns not accompanied by clear plans for the future, and by a broader vision of how to promote a democratic and peaceful evolution of certain areas of the world through education and economic plans the citizens of these regions may recognize as beneficial and fair.

Changing the Ethical Paradigm

While Ikeda's political comments are in the first pages of his 2003 Peace Proposal, and may immediately capture the attention, I would argue that the text maintains an interest and a freshness today because of its core thesis, that humanity is doomed without a change of paradigm.

Ikeda is also known for his dialogues with the world's luminaries of politics and culture, which are often transcribed and generate books. The first best seller based on these dialogues was published in 1975 in Japanese and in 1976 in English. It featured the conversations between Ikeda and one of the greatest historians of the 21st century, Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975: Toynbee and Ikeda 1976).

In the 2003 Peace Proposal, Ikeda remembered how Toynbee told him that his main concern was that humanity was advancing towards a future of “mass-suicide” because the evolution of the technology was much quicker than the evolution of an ethical conscience capable of dealing with destructive technologies and controlling them. Actually, Toynbee believed, the average level of morality among human beings “may actually have declined” (Toynbee and Ikeda 1976, 300). Toynbee was skeptical about the future, unless one of the “revolution[s] in religion” he had studied as an historian would unpredictably happen and change the hearts of millions (Ikeda 2003, 2).

Obviously, when he mentioned a possible “mass-suicide,” Toynbee had in mind nuclear weapons, a theme of great interest for Soka Gakkai, which since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has conducted massive international campaigns for their elimination (Šorytė 2019). Ikeda also contrasted Toynbee's concern for the general human morality with the Nazi Holocaust bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962) as depicted in a then recent play by Japanese writer Masakazu Yamazaki (1934–2020: Yamazaki 2002).

When he was arrested, brought to Israel, tried, sentenced, and executed, Eichmann continued to exhibit a lack of interest for human morality and even for his own. His defense continued to be that a state bureaucrat should just obey orders, not reflect on whether they are right or wrong, noble or monstrous. With such bureaucrats, dialogue is impossible. They continue to exist and put humanity at risk of mass suicide, because they will obey any criminal order of their governments (Ikeda 2003, 2).

By contrast, Ikeda proposed what he called a “life-sized paradigm.” He defined it as

a way of thinking that never deviates from the human scale. It is simultaneously a humane sensitivity to life as a whole and also to the details of everyday human existence (Ikeda 2003, 5).

A Dialogue with Pascal

But what is the “human scale”? Here, Ikeda starts a dialogue with 17th-century French Catholic philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). He quotes one of Pascal’s two most famous aphorisms: “Man is but a reed, the feeblest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed” (Pascal 1670, 177). Pascal also wrote that, “By space, the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought, I comprehend the world” (Pascal 1951, I, 6, 113; the passage is not in the 1670 edition).

Ikeda’s ideal dialogue with Pascal focuses on the latter’s use of one French verb, “comprendre” (comprehend). Both the English “comprehend” and the French “comprendre” have two meanings: “to encompass” and “to understand.” Ikeda believes that the two meanings are connected, which by the way is etymologically correct.

What is, however, crucial for Ikeda is that Pascal wrote that “by thought, I comprehend the world.” He could have used other French verbs, which had a specific philosophical tradition, to indicate an intellectual grasp of the world (such as “saisir” or “apprehénder”). He used “comprendre,” a verb with two meanings. The choice of the verb, according to Ikeda, in turn illuminates Pascal’s understanding of the word “thought.”

Ikeda wrote that

“thought” is not used [by Pascal] in a narrow, Cartesian sense—an intellectual activity that reduces everything to quantifiable components. Rather, it embraces the qualitative virtues of human sensitivity as well as the holistic activities of life through both a “mathematical” and an “intuitive” mind, engaging one’s entire being (Ikeda 2003, 5).

Simply put, we “comprehend” the world both through our mind and our heart.

Here, I would mention a personal anecdote. By participating in international conferences about new religious movements, I came across a Taiwanese group whose name is Weixin Shengjiao, which specializes in teaching Feng Shui and I Ching (see Introvigne 2017). When I first met them, they translated the name of their movement into English as “the holy religion of mind only.” This puzzled me, because Feng Shui and I Ching are precisely ancient Chinese systems that it is impossible to grasp with the mind only. Later, they have acknowledged this problem and sometimes “Weixin” is now translated as “heart only” rather than as “mind only.” But the truth is that, depending on the context, the word “xin,”

which is crucial in Chinese culture and spirituality, can be translated both as “mind” and as “heart.” There is considerable scholarly literature on how to translate “xin,” and some suggest “mind-heart” or “heart-mind” (see Yu 2008; Palmer 2021).

We are not far away from Ikeda’s approach to the French word “comprendre” as used by Pascal. For him, it means that we can grasp the world only by using both the mind and the heart. In fact, I mentioned earlier that the dictum comparing the human being to a reed is one of the two most famous among Pascal’s aphorisms. The other universally known aphorism states that “Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connoist point,” “The heart has its reasons, of which the reason [or mind] knows nothing about” (Pascal 1670, 269).

We should not forget that Pascal was a deeply religious man. For him, the problem with the mind was that it would never “comprehend” God. We can only have some knowledge of God through an intuition of the heart. One consequence is that the heart comes before the mind, a notion that Pascal further elaborated by suggesting that it is the heart that “comprehends” the first principles, which are needed for the mind to start operating.

Pascal and Buddhism

Ikeda does not quote this famous second aphorism of Pascal, but it would have nicely confirmed his argument. Being a Buddhist, Ikeda notes that Pascal’s thought

shares a deep commonality with the teachings of Buddhism, which stress the proper balance among what are referred to as the “six sense organs,” i.e., the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch as well as the faculty of the intellect. In the Mahayana tradition, the structures of consciousness, including realms typically referred to as the subconscious and beyond, are explored in their full complexity. For present purposes, however, it is enough to note that Buddhism views the balanced functioning of the six sense organs as essential to the full and healthy workings of our life activities (Ikeda 2003, 5).

Pascal’s “comprendre,” which for Ikeda affirms the priority of life over mind, corresponds to a sentence by the Medieval Japanese monk Nichiren, the founder of the Buddhist school to which Soka Gakkai belongs: “The eighty-four thousand teachings are the diary of one’s own life.” “Eighty-four thousand” is the number

of different teachings offered by Buddhism according to the tradition. What Nichiren's sentence means, wrote Ikeda, is that all these teachings may be just "a detailed account of the inner life of a single individual" (Ikeda 2003, 5).

Going more in depth, Ikeda follows up by summarizing another quote from Nichiren (which I reproduce here in the longer version from the English-language *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*):

One understands that everything that is contained within this body of ours is modeled after heaven and earth. Thus we see that the roundness of the head is patterned after the heavens, the squareness of the feet imitates the form of the earth. The empty spaces within the body correspond to the empty sky. The warmth of the belly is patterned on spring and summer, the firmness of the back is patterned on autumn and winter. The four major parts of the body imitate the four seasons, the twelve large joints imitate the twelve months, the three hundred and sixty smaller joints imitate the three hundred and sixty days of the year. The breath going in and out of the nose imitates the wind passing over the mountain lakes and stream valleys, the breath going in and out of the mouth imitates the wind in the open sky. The eyes correspond to the sun and moon, and their opening and closing correspond to day and night. The hairs of the head are like the stars and constellations, the eyebrows like the stars of the Big Dipper, the veins like the rivers and streams, the bones like the rocks, the skin and flesh like the earth, and the body hairs like the thickets and groves of trees. The five major organs correspond to the five planets in the sky, the five sacred mountains on the earth, the five agents in the yin-yang cosmology, the five constant virtues in human society, the five components that make up the mind, the five virtues in terms of conduct, and the five penalties in terms of the regulation of crime (Nichiren 2006, 848–49).

For a Western reader, this text evokes irresistibly the motto "As above, so below," which is constantly repeated by all esoteric masters and schools since it first appeared in the "Emerald Tablet," a text perhaps coming from the first centuries of the Christian era (although the first manuscripts we have of it, in Arabic, are of the 8th and 9th centuries) and attributed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistus (see Hanegraaff 2022). Although "As above, so below" is quoted so often that we risk missing its meaning, its message is that there are systematic correspondences between the macrocosm, the universe, and the microcosm, the human being.

While it worked as the foundation of the Western esoteric tradition, it is a principle that does not preclude dialogue with science, particularly in its modern incarnations. Ikeda quoted his dialogue with anti-nuclear-weapons activist David Krieger:

Just as science revealed the enormous amount of energy contained within even a single particle of matter, we must now awaken to the fact that the inner determination within each individual's life at every moment contains the power to change the world (Ikeda 2003, 15; Krieger and Ikeda 2002, 271)

—and to “comprehend” it based on the correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm.

Again, this is a message we found in Pascal's reed aphorism and in its reading and Buddhist comparisons by Ikeda. By comprehending ourselves with the heart and not with the mind only, we can comprehend the universe, or something of it. But a pre-condition for this comprehension is humility. Ikeda writes that,

We must never forget our true, human proportion—the fact that, within the larger context of the ecosystem, we are but “a reed, the most feeble thing in nature.” If we lose sight of this reality, we may find ourselves following the mammoth down the sudden path of extinction (Ikeda 2003, 7).

We can now have a better understanding of what the “life-sized paradigm” proposed by Ikeda twenty years ago really is. It is a conversion of the heart, a way of putting at the center not politics, economy, or even religion but the human beings, with both their fragility (they are like reeds) and their immense richness (in the inner life of a single individual, we may find all the 84,000 Buddhist teachings). The idea is not to put “me” at the center but all the suffering human beings. This is a core Buddhist idea and may also be the way to escape the nuclear “mass-suicide” Toynbee saw as a dramatic possibility of our time.

2. Daisaku Ikeda and the 2023 G7 Summit in Hiroshima

Introduction

Traditionally, the globalization of a religious movement is perceived as an expansion by increasing its membership worldwide. However, at the same time, there may also be another dimension of globalization—an expansion of its activities, beyond the purely religious or spiritual, into engaged political and social action nationally and internationally. Unlike other so called “traditional” Buddhist movements, Soka Gakkai, since the end of World War II, is deeply involved both in internal Japanese domestic issues and in international humanitarian, social, and political affairs.

Levi McLaughlin, in his seminal 2019 book *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, credits Ikeda, who took office in 1960, for this astounding development (McLaughlin 2019). However, he built on the legacy of its predecessors Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and Josei Toda (1900–1958), whose brand of Buddhism was always deeply interested in social and international issues.

Under Ikeda, peace, culture, and education became the three pillars of Soka Gakkai's outreach activities. Two important dates were 1981 and 1983. In 1981, Soka Gakkai obtained its first United Nations recognition as an NGO, when it registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1983, Ikeda issued the first of his already mentioned "Peace Proposals," which continued to be published yearly and have now become an important and familiar reference for the international community of those engaged in peace education. Ikeda also published transcripts of his dialogues with world cultural and political luminaries, many of which were about international peace, starting with the one with Toynbee I discussed above (Toynbee and Ikeda 1976). Subsequent dialogues included conversations with political leaders such as Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022), and several others (McLaughlin 2019, 59).

My observation of Soka Gakkai in Italy confirms that the movement has achieved a remarkable success in terms of number of members, while at the same time an even wider circle knows of its efforts in the fields of peace education and, particularly, anti-nuclear-weapon campaigns. While Soka Gakkai has some 90,000 members in Italy, visitors and participants in its anti-nuclear-weapon exhibitions and initiatives have been in the excess of 360,000 (Šorytè 2019; Pellecchia 2022).

Anti-Nuclear-Weapon Efforts After the War in Ukraine

In a previous paper, published in the September–October 2022 issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*, I discussed how Soka Gakkai's campaign against nuclear weapons entered a new and difficult phase when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 (Šorytè 2022). I mentioned documents published by Soka Gakkai's Toda Peace Institute noting that in many countries the mood has shifted, and the number of those prepared to support campaigns against nuclear weapons has been substantially reduced (Clements 2022; Wulf 2022).

I also discussed Ikeda's Peace Proposal for 2022, which was published before the invasion of Ukraine, on January 26. Ikeda noted there that the year 2022 had started with a positive development (Ikeda 2022). The leaders of the five states that admit being in possession of nuclear weapons, i.e., the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, signed a "Joint Statement on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arm Races" ("Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races" 2022).

The leaders stated that their goal was "a world without nuclear weapons." Meanwhile, they said they regarded

the avoidance of war between Nuclear-Weapon States and the reduction of strategic risks as our foremost responsibilities. We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought ("Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races" 2022).

The five countries assured the world they

remained committed to our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations, including our Article VI obligation "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" ("Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races" 2022).

Obviously, when Putin signed the Joint Statement on January 3, the invasion of Ukraine was already being prepared. Still, he may not have anticipated the strength of the Ukrainian resistance and the determination of the West to help Ukraine. What is sure is that Ikeda was not naive, and he warned that the words of the Joint Statement may be subject in the future to different "interpretations." In fact, threats to use the nuclear weapons were heard from several prominent Russian figures after it became clear that the war would not end as soon as the Kremlin expected.

On February 21, 2023, Russia suspended its participation in the new START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), signed in Prague in 2010 to replace the SORT (Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty), which was in force between Russia and the United States from 2003 to 2011. In turn, SORT was the last chapter in a long series of negotiations and agreements that had started between United States and the Soviet Union in 1969, when the first SALT (Strategic Arm

Limitation Talks) started. With the war in Ukraine, the sharing of information on their respective nuclear arsenals between the United States and Russia was also stopped.

Ikeda's Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit

A document where Ikeda reacts to these new developments is his April 27, 2023 "Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit, the Ukraine Crisis, and No First Use of Nuclear Weapons" (Ikeda 2023) to which I will now turn my attention. That a G7 summit may be organized in Hiroshima was an old wish of Ikeda. However, the Hiroshima summit took place on May 2023 in dramatic circumstances.

In the Statement, Ikeda reminds the leaders coming to Japan that the origins of the G7 can be traced back to the 1975 G6 Rambouillet Summit, which brought together the six nations that were the richest and most industrialized at that time: the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy (Ikeda 2023, 4).

Ikeda notes that, coincidentally, Soka Gakkai International was also founded in 1975. In that year, he visited the five countries that admitted their possession of nuclear weapons and met with some of their leaders. He concluded his tour with a speech delivered in Hiroshima on November 9, one week before the Rambouillet G6 Summit started. He called for a next meeting to be held in Hiroshima, and for all nuclear-weapon and G6 states to sign a declaration of "No First Use" of atomic weapons (Ikeda 2023, 4–5).

48 years have passed from 1975. Ikeda's hope of a summit in Hiroshima has now been realized. Some progress has been achieved in the field of nuclear weapon risk awareness. Ikeda pays a special homage in the statement to one of the many luminaries he met, Dr. Bernard Lown (1921–2021), one of the greatest cardiologists of the 20th century and the inventor of the defibrillator. The cardiologist was a Lithuanian Jew born in Utena in 1921, although his family had emigrated to the United States before World War II and changed its last name from Lacas to Lown.

When Ikeda and Lown met in 1989, the Lithuanian-American doctor was well-known for another dialogue he had started in 1980 with a fellow Soviet

cardiologist, Yevgeny Chazov (1929–2021), a world-famous surgeon who will eventually serve as Gorbachev’s Minister of Health in the last years of the Soviet Union. Chazov and Lown shared a lifelong concern for the possibility that life on earth might be annihilated by a nuclear war. They are credited with inspiring the Reagan-Gorbachev 1985 Geneva Communiqué, which included the words repeated in the January 2022 Joint Statement: “A nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought.” The two cardiologists also co-founded an organization called IPPNW, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

In 1986, Lown and Chazov delivered a joint lecture in Hiroshima at a symposium whose title was “Let’s Live Together, Not Die Together: What Must We Do Now to Prevent Nuclear War?” They also visited survivors of the 1945 bombing. While he fondly remembers his meeting with Lown, who died in 2021 a few months before turning 100, Ikeda invites the world not to under-evaluate the role of medical doctors. Their commitment to save human lives and experience of human suffering suggest that their professional organizations should be more involved by the United Nations and other international actors in their efforts to solve world crises (Ikeda 2023, 1–2).

Ikeda also celebrated the *hibakusha*, the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Soka Gakkai made a considerable effort for preserving and publishing their stories, and believes they played a role in persuading the world that after the 1945 tragedies in Japan nuclear weapons should not be used. However, Ikeda notes that with the war in Ukraine the “taboo” against mentioning the possible use of nuclear weapons seems to have come to an end (Ikeda 2023, 3).

Ikeda was already the President of Soka Gakkai during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. It was the incident closest to what we are seeing now around the Ukrainian war, Ikeda notes, but it lasted for thirteen days only, while

The current crisis is without parallel in the length of time that the threat of use and the fear of use of nuclear weapons have persisted without cease (Ikeda 2023, 3).

While Soka Gakkai remains committed to the total abolition of nuclear weapons, Ikeda asks the nuclear-armed states to sign for now a commitment of “No First Use” of the weapons they possess. This is what Ikeda asked in 1975. It would also be a firmer commitment than the one that a nuclear war “should never be fought” included in the 2022 Joint Statement.

In September 2022, when the war in Ukraine was entering into its seventh month, one of the world's leading Buddhist magazines, *Tricycle*, published an article about Soka Gakkai's efforts against nuclear weapons. The main point the article made was that for Soka Gakkai "nuclear abolition isn't just about politics; it's also about spirituality" (Kandil 2022).

Having interviewed several young Soka Gakkai anti-nuclear-weapon activists, the magazine concluded that they do not regard their efforts to practice Buddhism and their volunteer work against nuclear weapons as separated. They are two sides of the same coin. They observed that often professional negotiators they meet in international United Nations conferences focus on "numbers and military strategy," where Soka Gakkai volunteers try to put the problem of human suffering at the center of all discourses on nuclear weapons.

The Fundamental Darkness and the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven

From the point of view of Soka Gakkai members, whose brand of Buddhism is based on the teachings of the Medieval Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–1282), nuclear weapons are a manifestation of "fundamental darkness," also known as "primal ignorance." Nichiren personified it as "the devil king of the sixth heaven." The fundamental darkness exists in all beings, even in the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Nichiren wrote that,

The great demon of fundamental darkness can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near perfect enlightenment and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra's blessing of perfect enlightenment. How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice! (Nichiren 1999, 496).

The fundamental darkness, Ikeda explains,

is the fundamental negative impulse that resides in the depths of people's lives. This devilish nature or negativity gives rise to the desire to control others or even take others' lives, and causes destruction and war (Ikeda 2019),

particularly through nuclear weapons. Inside us, however, is also the fundamental nature of enlightenment, which coincides with the Buddha nature.

By practicing Buddhism, we bring forth our fundamental nature of enlightenment and overcome the fundamental darkness. Here also lies the final

solution of the nuclear weapon problem, which is to be found in a change of heart and not in a change of politics only.

It is also important to understand that the devil king of the sixth heaven does not operate in a Western dualistic system opposing forever a good God and a bad Devil. The second President of Soka Gakkai Josei Toda, who is at the origins of the movement's anti-nuclear-weapon efforts, noted that, "The devil king of the sixth heaven is depicted on the Gohonzon," i.e., the scroll containing Chinese and Sanskrit characters in front of which Soka Gakkai practitioners chant and recite portions of the Lotus Sutra.

So when we pray to the Gohonzon the devil king obeys the Gohonzon. The devil king will issue orders keeping the leaders of his devilish forces in check. The original enlightened potential of the devil king is manifested through the Gohonzon... The devil king of the sixth heaven then changes for the first time into an entity that helps and benefits others (Ikeda 2019).

Applied to the nuclear weapon drama, the story of the devil king of the sixth heaven encourages the Soka Gakkai volunteers to hope that everybody's heart can be changed, and the world itself can be changed into one free of nuclear annihilation fear.

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