

**THE BELL OF PEACE:
THE RAINBOW OVER NAGASAKI**

TO MY BELOVED FRIENDS OF NAGASAKI

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Wings born from the dreams
of a kingdom of light.
Wings that beat to the rhythm of renewal.
Softly, gently, they pluck
the harp of peace and
—piercing the dark night of life
like a silver arrow—
embark on a journey
from which bursts forth
rays of golden light.
For the spreading wings of youth
no fearful clouds exist.

Nagasaki—
this bustling port
surrounded by mountains
resembling cranes about to
spring into flight.
At the foot of Mount Inasa,
on the banks of a river,
near ground zero of the atomic blast,
the white edifice
of our Nagasaki Peace Center
stands in august silence.

How inscrutable are the workings of fate!
The Urakami River
that swallowed and carried away
so many people who,
seared by the heat of the explosion,
sought water in unspeakable anguish.
Now its waters reflect the image of
a palace of lasting peace.

A palace filled with prayers of friends
and a renewed vow to reject war.
The flowing melodies of this song of humanity,
the bell of peace that rings far and loud.

Oh, Nagasaki!
With azure sea, verdant green, and scented flowers,
Western-style villas climbing the terraced hills.
When droplets of rain fall like pearls,
the cobbled streets are bathed in silver light.
As daylight fades,
a vista of scattered jewels unfolds into the night.

Oh, Nagasaki!
A romantic, poetic city,
an open window of culture to the world.
A city of enterprise,
filled with the hopes and dreams of youth.
And a city of history,
marked by the tragic tears of Christian martyrs.

To think that more than forty years ago,
a terrible blow was delivered
to your beautiful boulevards
with cruel irony, with tragedy,
through the thickly gathered clouds.

August 9, 1945—
a bomber heads for Kokura, Kyushu,
carrying an atomic weapon.
Although above its target,
visual confirmation is obstructed by clouds,
and the plane arches back and turns to Nagasaki.

This city, also, is obscured by clouds,
making sighting impossible.
But, oh, as if at some satanic behest,
a sudden break appears in the clouds,
and a munitions factory lies exposed below.

At 11:02 a.m.,
in the wake of Hiroshima,
a second atomic bomb
falls through the sky.
A crimson fireball bursts.

Flame and fire
bear down on heaven and earth.
Thermal radiation melts steel
and blast winds shatter stone.
Buildings collapse
and trees burst into flame.
In an instant,
the city is transformed
into a smoldering wasteland.

The number of dead: seventy-four thousand.
The number of injured: seventy-five thousand.
A living hell appears on Earth.

Amid the black rubble,
in a city filled with the fetid smell of death,
mothers search for their beloved children,
people crawl about in search of water.
The piteous forms of corpses fill the streets,
the flames of funeral pyres rise endlessly,
searing the night skies.

Day by day, the circle of death
rippled further outward from ground zero.
The living groaned in agony,
fearfully wondering
if they would see tomorrow.

Their bodies assailed by radiation,
people wandered
along dark paths of anguish,
staggering under heavy burdens of pain.

Plaintive eyes turned heavenward,
people endured their fate,
despite their prostrate tears,
unhealable wounds, inconsolable hearts. . .

On September 8, 1957,
twelve years after the atomic bombings,
the air was thick with the threat of atomic tests.
Embracing the fierce desire for lasting peace,
my mentor Toda Sensei raised his voice.

Seeking to rip out
the claws that lie hidden
in the depths of the nuclear issue,
he declared that any use of atomic weapons
threatens humankind's right to live;
it is fiendish, an act of evil incarnate,
regardless of the country that uses them.

In this way,
Toda Sensei entrusted to youth
these words as the foremost of his instructions
to spread this understanding throughout the world.
This is the enduring inspiration of our peace movement.

What are the claws that lie hidden in the depths
of the nuclear issue?

Complex crosscurrents of history
form the background for their use.

But if we peel back
the veneer of justification,
we will see revealed
the barefaced scramble
for greater gain and power,
and the arrogance of states.

Delve deeper still
and we arrive at the truly
demonic aspects of human life
that root in people's hearts,
corrupting leaders.

Ego and arrogance,
hatred and fury,
suspicion and anxiety
are like magma roiling
in the depths,
a turbid stream of dark urges
that course through the human heart.

This vast source of fundamental evil
swallows up reason as it
heaves and swells,
entangling and driving all
to division, destruction, annihilation.

More fearsome, more formidable than
the forces unleashed by nuclear fission
are those that split and fissure
the core and heart of our humanity.
More fearsome, more formidable than
radioactive contamination
is irradiation of the soul.
Because it occurs in unseen realms,
our minds are easily darkened,
our judgment clouded.
This is humankind's
greatest blind spot and weakness.

In the tale related by Homer,
Sisyphus struggled to roll
a great boulder up a hill,
only to have it roll back down
just before he reached the peak,
condemning Sisyphus to an eternity
of futile effort repeated without end.

Unaware, nay willfully unaware,
of the fission and irradiation of the heart,
we wander here and there,
trapped in the winding,
endless maze we think of as “reality,”
bound, like Sisyphus, to our fate.

Peace is thus always just a respite
until the next conflict,
an interlude between one war and another.

It was Goethe who said,
“Search inside yourself, and there you will find all.”

Indeed, the exploration of our inner self
in search of a sure and certain heart
as unshakable as a great tree in the storm
—this labor to tame and forge our inner selves—
this is the very spirit that quickens peace,
the essential perspective
that modern civilization has forgotten,
even as it is threatened
by nuclear weapons.

This is why my mentor,
keenly discerning the crux of the matter,
sought to defang
the destructive impulses inherent in life
and issued his stern declaration.

It is the human being that constitutes
the reference point for peace.
Thus, a change in the inner determination
of just a single person
—a great human revolution—
forms the fulcrum for the creation of peace,
a peace that continues
from generation to generation,
within a country,
indeed throughout the world.

In Buddhism, which propounds the great law of life,
there is a limitless source of illumination.
It shows the way to restore humanity to its rightful place
and open the road to indestructible happiness for all.
It offers proof of the realization
of dignity, liberty and equality.

This being so, we are unavoidably led
to eradicate the nuclear weapons
that threaten our survival,
to work for the creation of peace,
and to protect human dignity at all cost.
This is the noble task that we must fulfill.

Oh, so dark were those clouds
that set Nagasaki's fate.
As in the words of Beethoven
—"passing through suffering to arrive at joy"—
heroically, majestically, boldly,
confront your fate.

Amid a maelstrom of persecution,
Nichiren proclaimed, with great compassion,
"I rejoice, having long expected these travails."

Oh, my friends of Nagasaki!
Rise up, as you are,
hearts filled with justice and courage,
looking up to a fiercely bright, triumphant sun.

In the year of my mentor's passing,
as the November chrysanthemums bloomed,
I made his heart my own,
determined to bring the light of peace to this land.
I attended the inaugural meeting
of the Soka Gakkai's chapter in Nagasaki,
joined by more than ten thousand friends
who arose to fulfill their mission.
Celebrating their progress, I declared:

“Let us turn this bomb-blackened earth
into the land of true peace!

Those who have suffered most
have a right to the greatest happiness.
My friends from Nagasaki
who have drunk the bitter cup
of the atomic bombing
understand more than any other
the preciousness of peace.

“That is why it is your mission
to transform this city, transform this place
into a land of greater peace, deeper joy, than any other.”

Peace is not something conferred on us,
but is something that is fought for and won—
by the determined hands of individuals,
with sweated brow,
speaking and acting with a resolve
strong enough to crush any obstacle,
as if breaking down a rock face
with bare hands.

The horror of the atomic bombing is not
a wound that will fade into history.
The silent cry of countless fallen friends
is a heartrending lesson to the world;
it is our task to transform their lamentations
into an eternal call
for peace, for peace.

Oh, my friends of Nagasaki!
I will never forget your smiling faces
on that day as you made your vow.

I joined you in that vow:
to cherish the spirit of Nagasaki
and traverse the world
as an emissary of peace.

In the thirty years since then,
I have traveled to many countries,
building bridges connecting
people's hearts and minds,
blazing trails of friendship and trust,
charting new courses of cultural exchange.

You arose with courage,
to summon forth new waves of peace
from this saddened earth,
to build a city of perpetual peace.

One after another,
your impassioned calls
pulsed with the hot beat of life
as they generated
a widening circle of shared feeling.

Oh, my friends,
my friends of Nagasaki!
Nagasaki always has an important place
in the map of peace that I carry in my heart.
I have continued my journey for peace
picturing your brave figures in my mind.

In the sunlit spring of April 1980,
having completed my fifth visit to China
—a passage of enduring significance
in the history of Sino-Japanese relations,
a golden bridge of friendship—
I flew to Nagasaki,
desiring to mark my first return step
here in this homeland of peace.

That day at the airport
as local friends came out to welcome me,
the sky was adorned with
a resplendent seven-colored rainbow.
It was a felicitous arc for the ideals

of humankind that we carry forward;
the starting point of our journey,
embroidered in the sky.

Two years later, at a time
when the United Kingdom and Argentina
were engaged in the conflict
of the Falklands/Malvinas War,
I stood in the green Peace Park
with Richard Causton,
leader of our SGI organization in the UK.

Branches caught the gentle breeze,
white doves gathered,
and a fountain danced in the distance as
my gaze fell on the Peace Statue.

The right hand pointing upward
to warn of the nuclear threat;
the left stretching calm and sure
in an admonition for peace and tranquility;
a visage filled with mercy and gentleness.

Beholding this embodiment
of humankind's fervent wish,
we prayed for the repose of the bombing victims,
laid flowers with a deep desire for eternal peace,
and for the end of the Falklands/Malvinas War.

Even as that war raged on,
lifelines of friendship
flowed between both lands,
as Richard Causton spoke by phone
with his fellow Buddhists in Argentina:
“Even as our countries are at war,
let us do our utmost for peace.”

Oh, such bonds among common people
bound firmly, strongly. . .
Like roots that sink into the soil,
they bridged the chasm between countries.

Ever deeper, ever wider,
these countless roots will join
and bind together
the entire world,
forming a firm foundation
for the renunciation of war.

The Peace Statue's
folded right leg symbolizes
meditation, or stillness.
The upright left leg symbolizes
salvation, or action.

Profound prayers and firm vows for peace,
together with courageous action,
are the fundamental vectors
of our practice for self and others.
The golden rays of lasting peace
will shine resplendently on this practice,
on the great path of propagation
that is, in itself, peace.

The road is long and far
but we will not give up.
Like the poem
by the statue's creator Seibo Kitamura:
"How fearsome is the snail's tireless advance."

Persistence is power,
accrual is power.
The cumulative impact of actions
undertaken steadily and without interruption—
this is the path of conviction.
Let us cast the rainbow of magnificent ideals
over humankind—

as one action gives rise to countless more;
as unceasing waves smooth the jagged rocks.

Oh, my friends!
My beloved friends of Nagasaki!

Devotedly you have traversed
the hills of this city
for the sake of your friends.
With eyes set on
the beautiful future that awaits
when you finally reach
the summit of that lush hill,
your gaze fixed on the great shining light
on the horizon,
you have crisscrossed
these green islands set in a blue sea
for the sake of the noble law.

Unwavering, you have scaled the hill of life
sharing untiring smiles
through stormy nights.
The laurels of humanity adorn you,
champions of courage and dedication.

Oh, my friends!
My beloved friends of peace!

I remember pondering the future
as the scarlet rays of the sun
setting over Omura Bay
colored our cheeks.
To this day, I cherish
the conversation we shared
at our Isahaya Culture Center.

As we walked together, we refined
the lines of "Bells of Peace,"
the prefectural song
we composed together.

Youth, with committed
and dignified determination,
offered a vigorous rendition of
“The Vow of the Green Leaves,”
the song of Kyushu.

This was the opening act
of a new era of human celebration,
youth’s fresh symphony of life!

Go forth, my friends of Nagasaki
with the torch of peace in your hands
and compassion in your hearts!
Go forth across the sea
of the rainbow-lit century!

Peace from Nagasaki.
Nagasaki is the very homeland
of perpetual peace.
So join hands joyfully,
shining with the brilliance of life,
in this city, on this hill,
across the world.
Ring loud, ring loud the bell of peace!

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Heiwa Kaikan, Soka Gakkai Headquarters
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Poet Laureate