



Planting the Seeds of Peace

by Akio Matsumura

For the past three decades, Akio Matsumura has been working diligently to span national and cultural divides as he promotes world peace. Akio grew up in the Japan that had been devastated by World War II. He witnessed his nation's resurgence in the context of international comity, and was exposed to many cultures and national leaders in large part because people made an effort to extend a hand of friendship both to him and his nation.

In 2005 the World Business Academy created the [Akio Matsumura Chair](#) to "apply in the private sector the talents and contacts developed in 30 years' success in international diplomacy, in the resolution of major problems confronting multinational corporations; and to develop a framework for an integral approach to a seemingly intractable transcultural challenge involving strategic, financial, and spiritual considerations."

As conflict spreads between Islam and other systems of belief and economic organization around the world, Akio is applying his talents and energies to increasing dialogue and understanding in this realm.

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In 1994 Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke and Mr. Bradford Morse, former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), visited my home and we discussed and selected four regions of the world most likely to become political hotspots in the coming decades. Jerusalem, Greater Central Asia, India and Pakistan, and North and South Korea comprised our choices. Our first step was to challenge the upcoming Gaza-Jericho Peace conference with the assistance of Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat. Ms. Shulamit Aloni, then Minister of Culture of Israel, who attended the Moscow and Oxford conferences, told me that I should talk with Chairman Arafat of the Jericho conference while she talked to Prime Minister Rabin. Within the next twelve months, however, Death visited my circle frequently. We lost Messrs. Duke and Morse, as well as James Grant, the head of UNICEF. A few months later former Prime Minister Fukuda of Japan died. A madman shot Prime Minister Rabin the next year. At this point we decided to postpone the conference. I then made up my mind to focus on the Central Asia region based on our discussion of the four future political hotspots. This led to the Central Asian Parliamentary and Spiritual Conference in Konya, Turkey in 1997.

Several years later, the attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred. That event has dramatically changed world views and brought the new type of confrontation into reality. Each day in the news we hear about the global war on terrorism. There is no question that those events of six years ago have greatly contributed greatly to the turmoil of today; however, I would like to step back a moment to reflect on my prediction 25 years ago about the new type of confrontation. At the time I spoke at length about the difference between the old and new types of confrontations that we would face in the 21st century. I had come to the conclusion by that time, and I still believe today, that although the old type of confrontation remains, there is a new struggle that more accurately defines our time. This new form of conflict results from the collision of political, religious, technological, and economic forces on a global level.

A battle of ideologies and spirituality has emerged—a battle of cultures. As these cultures grow and become more interconnected in our global world, more confrontations continue to arise between them. Many ideologies and values are not shared and understood cross-culturally because of their self-contained taboos. These limiting taboos inhibit people from understanding and sharing cultural values, even as technology shrinks the gaps that previously had separated the cultures. As globalization compresses these cultures into smaller spaces, hatred begins to breed as a result of ignorance and indifference. Frustrated people across the world begin to act for political or religious reasons, but as entities separate from the state. Volcanic eruptions build over a long time in a process that cannot be stopped; lava continues to flow violently until all the energy in that hotspot has been spent and the earth has cooled in that place. Many eminent scholars suggest that a similar kind of eruption will accompany the new type of confrontation. It will last for the duration of the century, and all our technological innovations will be hard put to prevent it.

As we pass along the causes (ignorance, distrust, hatred, intolerance) of this new type of confrontation to younger generations, it would be irresponsible to do so without also passing along the richness and diversity of culture that humankind possesses as a possible solution and way to diminish the damage. These anecdotes of my past experiences speak to the rich cultural experiences we are able to pass along to future generations.

One day long before September 11, 2001, Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro of Syria, a guest speaker at the Moscow conference, invited my wife Maki and me to his residence in Damascus and asked me why I admire the American culture, something totally opposite from that of Japan. He wondered why I have many friends there. I told Grand Mufti a story about a person who changed my life. This was General William Draper, a World War II general who was sent to Japan by President Truman to determine the occupation policy eventually carried out by General MacArthur. After he retired from his government position he assisted in establishing the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). He guided me to work for the IPPF in London and the UNFPA in New York. He introduced me to many children of American leaders during World War II such as Mr. Bob Wallace, son of Vice President of Henry Wallace; Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland; his son Senator Joseph Tydings, who was Chairman of the Armed Service Committee; General Draper's son, Mr. William Draper III, former President of the Export and Import Bank of US, and later, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and two other eminent persons: Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke and his wife Robin Duke. I was enormously fortunate to meet the children of these eminent leaders, who each became important leaders in their own time. It seems to me that Grand Mufti respected my motivation, and asked me to keep the door open to his Muslims colleagues as well.

In 1999, Senator Claiborn Pell, former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relation Committee and attendee of the Moscow conference and Parliamentary Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, invited Maki and me to his home in Rhode Island. For four hours we discussed the issues the world would face throughout the 21st century. Senator Pell asked me what would be my advice to the American leaders on the threshold of the new millennium. My answer was that American leaders will have to face the challenge of appreciating the Muslim culture and its people, notwithstanding the accompanying religious dogmas on both sides. My current efforts are now focused on establishing just that sort of a platform for dialogue between Muslim and American leaders. The events of September 11, 2001 underscored the importance of our conversation. I am sure Senator Pell was reminded of all we had discussed.

My story indicates how important it is to establish individual trust and to pass along this trust as a resource to our children. Much of where I am today has come from the help of a previous generation, and I wish to pass along what I can to future generations. Just as Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi began my international relationships when he introduced me to General Draper in 1972, I wish that we are all able to pass along our knowledge and resources along to the next generation.

Let us revisit our own trusted friends and the trees each of us has planted for the benefit of the next generation. I am sure the trees you planted are growing much more healthily than you thought. They are awaiting your return to reveal the peace growing within them. When I returned to Moscow for the first time since 1990 and met with President Gorbachev, Dr. Evgeny Velikhov, Dr. Rustem Khairov and many others, I understood the importance of returning to previously planted seeds, whether they are friends or places. At the international conference there I made a speech entitled *Spirituality in the Modern World*. Many young people were surprised to learn that one thousand parliamentarians and spiritual leaders convened and were hosted at the Kremlin by President Gorbachev. Also many Jewish people were surprised to learn that Jewish orthodox leaders attended the closing ceremony as sabbath began on Friday evening. This and many other cultural and religious barriers were broken during that conference in 1990. This created much hope that others are able to be broken also. I believe that these leaders, remembering a time when Americans and Soviets aimed warheads at one another, could contribute their Cold War experiences to help alleviate the current nuclear tensions that are escalating in the world today. They may indicate how important it was to establish a communication hotline between the two nations' leaders and the great role played by unofficial government networks. These same seeds of solutions remain just as vital today.

During my travels, I revisited the Sakaki tree (*Cleyera Japonica*) at Okayama which was planted by many dignitaries, including Grand Mufti Kuftaro of Syria, Metropolitan Pitirim of the Soviet Union, Chief Leon Shenandoah, Dr. Viqar Hamdani of Pakistan, Senator Satpaul Mittal of India, Ambassador Angier Duke and Mr. Tarzie Vittachi, all of whom have gone to the other world. This tree is growing with the love and care of the Reverend Muneharu Kurozumi and the Reverend Munemichi Kurozumi, who hosted the Shinto International Workshop in 1990. I am proud that the Reverend Munemichi, one of the youngest participants in the Oxford conference, has been carrying the spirit of the tree with him all these years. I realized that those eminent persons are not with us any more. This tree will remind the next generation of these historic facts and the lessons learned and shared among this network of luminaries.

I have most recently revisited New Delhi, the first time since the passing of my old friend, Senator Satpaul Mittal in 1992. I met with many political and religious leaders and explained to them why I decided to return to India after so many years. The India-Pakistan region now is one of the few areas of the world where nations aim nuclear warheads at each other, and so it is also a strong symbolic representation of the new type of confrontation. I urged every leader with whom I met with to establish an unofficial dialogue with Pakistan by transcending political and religious barriers and to create trust-building networks similar those formed between the Soviet Union and the U.S. during the Cold War.

Sunil and Rajan Mittal, sons of our founding chairman, the late Senator Mittal, have become the most influential business leaders in India. I am very proud and excited to know that they are carrying the spirit of their father with them because I have known them since they were very young. In that

region their contributions to international cultural exchanges exceed what I could do at this critical time. Those whom I met in India strongly suggested that I visit Pakistan and express my feelings there.

Although some cultural barriers may endure, if they are at least understood we can believe that a relationship based on openness and communication seeded years before may continue to grow. For this reason, I am promoting the idea of the Emerging Leaders, which will help prepare today's young leaders for this new type of confrontation, helping them transcend taboos and intercultural barriers.

I encourage all of you to return to a trusted place where you are able to pause and draw the power to free yourself from political and religious bounds, and let your moral and spiritual energy grow. Feeling the peace around you, think to pass on to future generations the lessons you have learned, for we pass them many troubles also.

All of us need to give enough space to others who are growing so that they are able to flourish as they would without any impeding boundaries.

About the Author:

Akio Matsumura is founder of the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival and holds the [Akio Matsumura Chair of the World Business Academy](#).

Throughout his long career at the United Nations and other organizations he has created events for current and future political leaders that often changed the courses of their lives. More often than not, the timing and location of these meetings have been prescient: conferences he has arranged in Kyoto, Rio de Janeiro, Jericho, Moscow, and Constantinople have all preceded major "tectonic" shifts of power in those areas.

Heads of state, corporations, and churches all have noticed his uncanny ability to "dial into" the most difficult situations, inducing people to transcend religious and cultural barriers, and connect at a deeper human level to find a solution.

When Akio won a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant" he used the proceeds to create the now-famous 1988 Oxford Global Conference of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, which was attended by many rising leaders who subsequently attained national and international stature.