

Arnold Toynbee

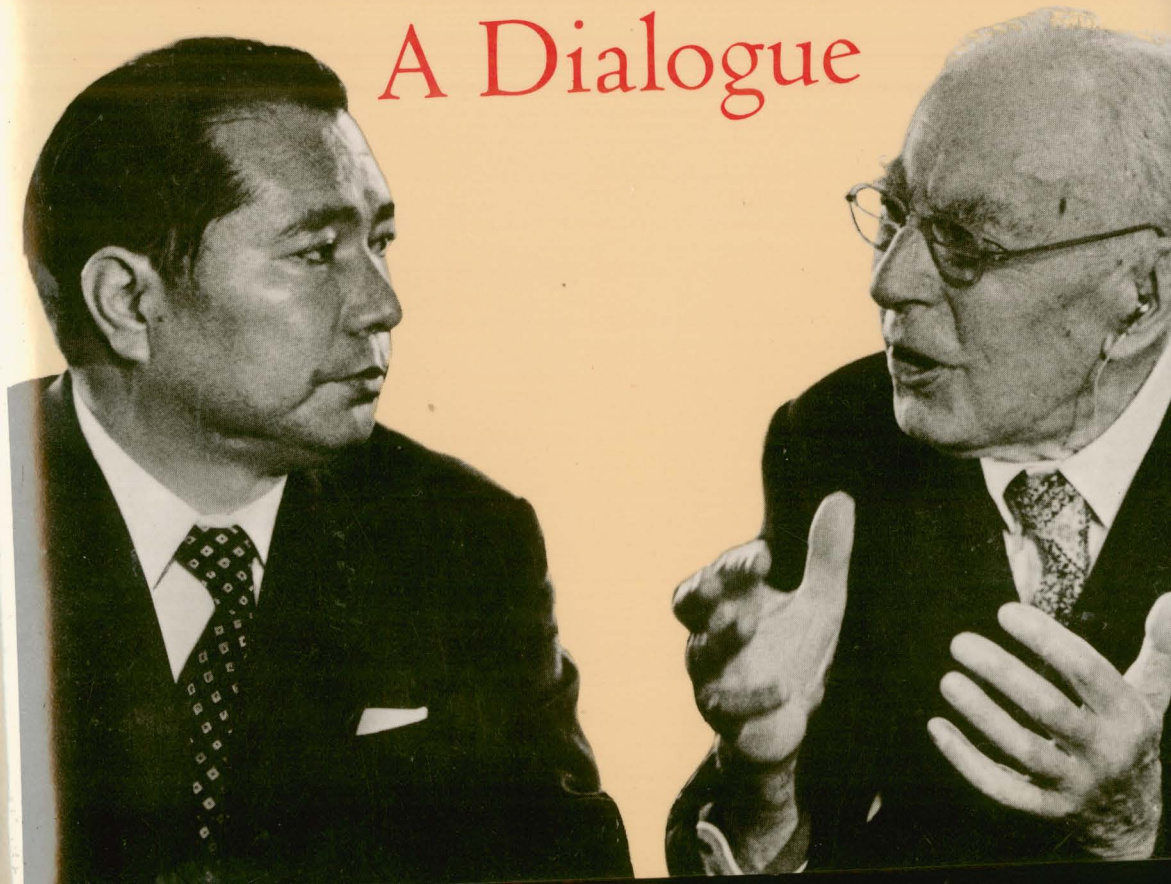
and

Daisaku Ikeda

CHOOSE

LIFE

A Dialogue



ARNOLD TOYNBEE
and
DAISAKU IKEDA

CHOOSE
LIFE
A DIALOGUE

Edited by Richard L. Gage

Choose life and then you and
your descendants shall live
Deuteronomy 30: 19

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PREFACE

The table of contents of this book will tell the reader, at a glance, that the book covers a wide range of topics. These topics have entered into the dialogue because they are matters of personal concern to the two participants. The dialogue is now being published as a book in the hope that the same topics will prove to be matters of general concern for the authors' contemporaries in the English-speaking world, in Japan, and elsewhere.

The dialogue was originally an oral one. The two participants met in London and their conversation lasted for several days. The record of what they said has been rearranged by Mr. Richard L. Gage. His editorial work has been both skillful and arduous. A reader's eye needs a different presentation from the kind that suits a listener's ear, and the two authors of this book are very grateful to Mr. Gage for the service that he has done for them. They believe that their gratitude will be shared by the reader.

The topics discussed in this book are of very diverse kinds. Some of them are of urgent concern at the present time, but some of them are issues of perennial importance that have been pondered and discussed by human beings ever since the unknown date at which our ancestors first awoke to consciousness. It seems probable that these perennial questions will continue to be debated so long as mankind survives in the psychosomatic form in which we exist in our material environment, that is to say, in the biosphere that covers the planet earth.

Daisaku Ikeda is an East Asian; Arnold Toynbee is a Westerner. In the most recent chapter of mankind's history, the West has been taking the lead and has been playing a dominant role. In the present book, Toynbee suggests reasons for expecting that, in the future, the leadership is going to be taken over from the West by Eastern Asia. Mankind has already been united on the technological plane by the worldwide expansion of the West European peoples' activities within the last five hundred years. The authors agree with each other in

expecting, and hoping, that, in the next chapter of history, mankind will succeed in unifying politically and spiritually. Ikeda is more hopeful than Toynbee that this great change can be brought about voluntarily, on terms of equality between all sections of the human race, without further domination of one section over others—an evil that, in the past, has all too often been the price of political and spiritual unification on a less than worldwide scale.

Toynbee is, in general, more pessimistic than Ikeda in the sense that he expects that mankind will have to pay a high price for making those profound changes in attitude, objective, and conduct that both authors believe to be indispensable conditions for the survival of humanity. Is Toynbee's comparative pessimism due simply to his age? (It is notorious that in old age people tend to think that the world "is going to the dogs.") Or is it because he is a Westerner who shares, to some extent, Oswald Spengler's belief that, in the twentieth century, we are witnessing the Decline of the West (*der Untergang des Abendlandes*)? Or is it because he is, by vocation, a historian and is therefore particularly (perhaps excessively) conscious of mankind's tragic failure, hitherto, on the political and, still more, on the spiritual plane of human life—a failure that is accentuated by its contrast with the brilliance of mankind's achievements in technology?

Another possible cause of Toynbee's fear that the next chapter of history may be more violent and brutal than Ikeda thinks that it need be is the difference between the religious traditions in which the two authors have been brought up. Toynbee was brought up as a Christian; Ikeda is a Buddhist of the Northern (Mahayana) school. Both Buddhism and Christianity have spread widely (more widely than any nonreligious institution so far), but the means and the consequences of their dissemination have differed. Buddhism, which has spread almost exclusively by peaceful penetration, has been content to coexist amicably with the other religions and philosophies that it has found already present in the regions in which it has been propagated. Buddhism has established a *modus vivendi* with Taoism and Confucianism in China and with Shinto in Japan. In contrast to Buddhism, Christianity, like its sister-religion Islam, is exclusive minded; in a number of cases Christianity has been imposed by force—for instance, on a majority of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, on the continental Saxons, and on the pre-Columbian peoples of Mexico and Peru. An awareness of this dark side of the history of Christianity may make a Christian, or ex-Christian, more skeptical than a Buddhist about the possibility of achieving great social changes peaceably.

In spite of the difference between the authors' religious and cultural backgrounds, a remarkable degree of agreement in their outlooks and aims has been brought to light in their dialogue. Their agreement is far-reaching; their

points of disagreement are relatively slight. They agree in believing that religion is the mainspring of human life. They agree that a human being ought to be perpetually striving to overcome his innate propensity to try to exploit the rest of the universe and that he ought to be trying, instead, to put himself at the service of the universe so unreservedly that his ego will become identical with an ultimate reality, which for a Buddhist is the Buddha state. They agree in believing that this ultimate reality is not a humanlike divine personality.

They also agree in believing in the reality of karma, a Sanskrit word that literally means "action" but that, in the vocabulary of Buddhism, has acquired the special meaning of an ethical "bank-account" in which the balance is constantly being changed by fresh credit or fresh debit entries during a human being's psychosomatic life on earth. The balance of a human being's karma, at any particular moment, is determined by the plus or minus sum of the previous credit and debit entries; but the karma-bearer can, and will, change the balance, for better or for worse, by his further acts. In fact, he makes his karma for himself and is thus, at least partially, a free agent.

As the authors see it, a human being's perennial spiritual task is to overcome his egotism by expanding his ego until it becomes coextensive with the ultimate reality, from which it is, in truth, inseparable. There is a Hindu saying "*Tat tvam asi*," which means "That (the ultimate reality) is what thou (a human being) art." But a statement of the identity of "thou" and "that" is only a proposition; it must be turned into a practical reality by strenuous spiritual exertion. This spiritual exertion, made by individual human beings, is the only effective means of social change for the better. Changes of institutions are effective only insofar as they are symptoms and consequences of the spiritual self-transformation of the persons whose relations with each other are the network that constitutes a human society.

Thus the agreement between the East Asian and the Western party to the dialogue published in this book is extensive. How is it to be explained? Today, mankind, all round the globe, is being confronted by a number of acute problems. These problems are now besetting all of us, rich and poor, technologically advanced or backward, no matter whether the people's or individual's ancestral religion happens to be of the Indian or of the Judaic school. The universality of these current common problems is a historical consequence of the worldwide network of technological and economic relations that has been created by the expansion of the West European peoples' activities within the last five centuries. Technological and economic relations engender political, ethical, and religious relations. In truth, in our time, we are witnessing the birth of a common worldwide civilization that has originated in a technological framework of Western origin but is now being enriched spiritually by contri-

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butions from all the historic regional civilizations. This recent trend in mankind's history may account, in part, for the striking amount of common ground between Daisaku Ikeda's and Arnold Toynbee's Weltanschauungen. It is also possible that, in their exchange of ideas about philosophical and religious life, the authors have delved into the subconscious psychic strata of human nature to a depth at which they have reached elements of human nature that are the same in all human beings, always and everywhere, in virtue of being the offspring of the ultimate common ground of existence that is at the root of all phenomena.

Down to this point, this preface represents both authors of the book, but Toynbee now thanks Ikeda for having taken the initiative in arranging the meetings and for publication of the dialogue as a book. When Toynbee had reached an age at which it had become difficult for him to travel, Ikeda came from Japan to England to meet him. It was also Ikeda who arranged for the translation of his own part of the dialogue from Japanese into English and for the editing of the whole dialogue in a form in which it could be read as a book. This was a formidable task, and Arnold Toynbee is very grateful to Daisaku Ikeda for having taken it upon his younger shoulders.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This preface was written by Mr. Toynbee in the third person on behalf of both authors and in accordance with their wishes appears in this style.