



# Spirituality, Ecology, and the Security of Society

by Akio Matsumura

**Editor's Note:** In 2007 we see in the world deep and dangerous cleavages riven by belief systems that share both political and spiritual dimensions. Iraq, Iran, Timor, and Afghanistan are but a few sorry examples. With extraordinary prescience, Akio Matsumura, then a high level United Nations diplomat, foresaw the need to deal with such potential conflicts on a much lower level that taps into our common humanity. He organized structures to work within this context, such as the Global Forum of Spiritual & Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, and for this he won a MacArthur genius grant. Last year the Academy formed the Akio Matsumura Chair to provide another base for his important work.

The mission continues. Last month Akio was invited to Moscow to address the International Conference on Global Security and Sustainable Development where he delivered the brief speech which follows.

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I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Velikhov and Dr. Zakharov for inviting me to speak at this conference. I am so happy to have the opportunity to return to Moscow after my last visit in 1990 when we jointly organized the Global Forum Conference. The Conference, hosted by President Gorbachev at the Kremlin, was the first time that one thousand parliamentarian and spiritual leaders gathered together in the Soviet Union. Of all the experiences of the conference still being discussed, the most memorable is when all the Jewish attendees, including the Orthodox Jews, transcended their religious taboo and attended the events of Friday evening on the Sabbath. Each individual and group in our society has their own taboos that separate them from a complete understanding of the rest of society. As each of those taboos is transcended, each individual and group in the world becomes closer, better understood, and more united.

As evidence of this, I would like to explain to you the story of the Sabbath in greater detail. It will make clear one of the good examples of how important it is for the political and religious leaders to handle unexpected challenges and also to motivate leaders to handle the challenge in a manner that ordinary people cannot. Hopefully you may understand from the story what it means to transcend political and religious barriers.

The closing ceremony was originally planned at 2 pm on Friday of the 19th of January, 1990 before the sun set so that all Jewish participants could attend before Sabbath. However, at the last moment, the Communist Party had an emergency meeting set at the Kremlin on the same day, and our closing ceremony at the Kremlin was cancelled. I immediately ran to Dr. Velikhov to express my embarrassment since many eminent people, including the Secretary General of the UN, Senator Al Gore, the Grand Mufti of Syria, Dr. Carl Sagan and many other world dignitaries were scheduled to be with us at the Kremlin for the closing ceremony. Dr. Velikhov told me that although he understood my great disappointment, President Gorbachev could not change the Communist Party decision; however, he still tried to convey my message personally to President Gorbachev. Here the wisdom of the great leader comes in.

President Gorbachev said that he could not change the Communist Party's decision, but, as the President of the assembly, he could control the time of the meeting. He assured us that he would finish the emergency meeting by 5 pm on Friday.

President Gorbachev asked me to change the closing ceremony to 7 p.m. from 2 p.m. I agreed to this change but I encountered another taboo: all the Jewish participants came to me to say that they could not attend the ceremony on the Sabbath. I responded to them that we had finally transcended the political taboo; therefore, if they all could not transcend their own taboo, I would proceed with the closing ceremony without Jewish participation. More than 13 Rabbis gathered together and prayed in the corridor. All of them then attended

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the closing ceremony on the Sabbath. The Jewish participants told me that they would never forget the Sabbath experiences for the rest of their lives. This is a good example of the way religious leaders demonstrated how their efforts can succeed in transcending traditional dogmas.

At the conference, while taboos were being broken, organizations were being created. At that time, President Gorbachev suggested the creation of the International Green Cross, and I had the privilege of working with him on the initial stages of this organization.

Since the Moscow conference, the world, and also this host country, have dramatically changed. With change comes the need for discussion, and that is precisely what we are here to do. At this conference we will address and discuss global warming, greenhouse gas emissions and their impact upon the global gross product, world population increase, the consumption of the world's natural resources, environmental deterioration, nuclear energy for peace, etc.

The subject of my speech is Spirituality, Ecology, and the Security of Society. First, however, I wish to draw your attention to the name of the organization I established in 1985, the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival. The name itself contains the concept of today's subject, which I thought about continuously during my time in the UN.

I thought about how we live under two sets of laws, governmental law and spiritual law. We have to look at our human issues from two perspectives, physical value and spiritual value. With these perspectives come important questions.

Many people asked me:

What is the difference between spiritual and religious leaders?

Why do we always say we must save the humans, which is a selfish idea, instead of saying we must save the planet?

As I answer these questions, you will be led to an understanding of the basic problems at hand.

Human beings started the relationship between God and human. This relationship proceeded until eventually we began interpreting what God said. This written document of interpretation is what we call the Bible, the Quran, or the Torah. This is religion.

On the other hand, spirituality comes from the connection of the individual to nature, society, or cause and effect. It is therefore an invisible power that provides us with intangible results. Those who say, "We have to save the planet," or "The planet is vulnerable," have to think of the fact that we humans have only existed for 4 million years, and that our planet is 4.5 billion years old. In other words, even if we human beings vanish from this planet due to our own deterioration of the environment, ten million years from that moment — a long time in human standards, but only three days of time for the planet — the planet will have completely healed itself and recovered with an abundance of new life.

What I wish to stress here is that we live in a very narrow and thin environment of a very large planet. This limited part of the environment allows for human survival, your own survival, and my own survival.

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Power-structured minds lead us to believe in the illusion that our military is more powerful than others, our economy is more powerful than others, our science technology is further advanced than others, and that the total population of our religion is greater than others.

This spiritual pollution will cause physical pollution.

Too often we search for tangible solutions to the problems of the vulnerability of the planet, or our destruction of the planet. The solution is intangible; it is an invisible power. A spiritual connection between societies must be found and then, together, we must find a connection between our global society and nature. If we all adopt a more humble attitude toward the planet, toward other societies and toward scientific technologies, only then can we hear the true non-political message of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the appeal of millions and millions of spaces that have been disappearing from our planet, and finally begin to recognize the absolute power of the planet Earth. And it is not enough for each of us to have this knowledge for ourselves; the importance of the planet must be known to all future generations, and so we must pass it down to our children, and they to their children. Only through this cycle can we live in harmony with the planet.

I would like to conclude my speech with the words of Dr. Albert Einstein. He said, "It is possible to convert plutonium into nuclear energy for peace, but it will be extremely difficult to convert ugly human minds to peaceful minds."

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