

Daisaku Ikeda
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***Maisha: Kitendawili na Johari (Life: An Enigma, a Precious Jewel).* Translated by A.E. Ndalú and H.M. Ikambili (1989)**

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Introduction

This chapter examines Daisaku Ikeda's *Maisha: Kitendawili na Johari* translated into Kiswahili from *Life: An Enigma, A Precious Jewel*. It focuses on the contribution of the translated text on the subject of life and death. Our main objective is to highlight the relevance of Ikeda's work to the Kiswahili audience in East and Central Africa. But first we look at the meaning of translation.

According to the *International Encyclopaedia of Linguistics* Vol. 4 (1992), the word translation refers to the transfer of a written message from a source language to a target language. We can therefore say that translation is a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another language.

At another level, translation could be regarded as communication; thus, it is intended to communicate some information to a given audience. This

implies, therefore, that in order for a translation to be done, there must be a need for doing it. It is in this regard that *Maisha: Kitendawili na Johari* is timely.

Translation is an activity of enormous importance in the modern world. A lot has been translated into the various languages of the world. Research findings, in different fields have been disseminated through translation in different languages of the world.

In the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries translated very many books including the Bible into Kiswahili and other languages in Kenya and East Africa. During the colonial period, a lot of literary works from Europe and Asia were translated into Kiswahili. After independence, the Africans themselves were at the forefront in translating some of the great literary works of the world into Kiswahili. For example, two of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* as *Mabepari wa Venisi* and *Julius Caesar* as *Julius Kaizari*, were translated by Julius Nyerere. *Maisha: Kitendawili na Johari* by Daisaku Ikeda is an important addition to the other translations that we have in the Kiswahili language. In *Maisha: Kitendawili na Johari*, Daisaku Ikeda has addressed very salient issues which are relevant to the human race all over the world.

Universal Themes

In the book, Ikeda shows the relationship between the Buddhist answers to the mystery of life and the empirical solutions modern science has offered. However, the questions which he addresses have preoccupied mankind from time immemorial. For example, he poses the most difficult question about the meaning of life. He recognises the fact that science has probed into matter and discovered the world of atoms and electrons and in its search for the infinite, science continues to push the limits of the cosmos further and further; but life remains a mystery. Many philosophers have recognised that understanding life is man's basic problem and in their endeavour to unfold the mystery of life, they have only magnified the riddle.

According to Ikeda, Shakyamuni (Gautama Siddhartha) of the Shakya tribe, also called the Buddha, is the one who has unfolded and given the perfect solution. To him, life involves living and being in the world of the here and now, achieving enlightenment in the midst of reality, being able to cope with laughter and sorrow. Shakyamuni spent most of his life teaching people how to overcome the suffering of this world and finding happiness, and not attempting to explain the abstractness of the riddle of life, while Ikeda uses traditional theories as developed by such founding fathers of Buddhist religion as Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu and Chih-i to explain the riddles of life.

He discusses the cosmos and life. He points out that when we think that we have found out the answer to what is life, we discover that we still don't know. This is because as more and more of the elements of life are revealed, the number of mysteries increases. He advocates that in the search for the secret of life, we must go beyond the findings of science, for science cannot teach us the basic underlying principle that explains the myriad of phenomena that exist.

Some of the questions posed by Daisaku Ikeda are: what produces life, what fundamental reality causes life to manifest itself as life? According to him, if these questions are answered, then the riddle of the universe, matter and life can be solved. He says that it is the purpose of religion and philosophy to search out the principle that underlies all existence and to cause this principle to be reflected in all human life. This should be able to bring happiness and the potentiality for creativity to all men.

He says that there is need to go further and examine the true and fundamental source of life and the universe. To illustrate this, he describes the composition of the human body. He advocates for the need to understand the human body which is composed of matter and the spirit. He says that the body must be looked on as the manifestation of life, for the life force is inherent in the body. That at the very minimum, understanding one's life is a necessary condition for leading a full and happy life.

We must also remember that the body is the location of spiritual activity such as the working of intelligence, the exercise of conscience, and the choice between good and evil. Thus by observing the physical elements, we can see the manifestations of the spiritual element.

While still discussing the question of life, Ikeda points out the interdependence between man and nature. He argues that life cannot exist in complete isolation. In order to maintain respect for the lives not only of human beings, but of all living things, we must not interfere with the thread of life which joins all objects and beings in the universe. This is because all existence in the universe forms one great unified life system. In so doing, the author underscores the importance of the human being taking care of his/her environment because his life depends on it.

Ikeda's plea to humanity is evident in his words when he says:

What we must remember is that the universe, with its systematic and rhythmic movements, is the only universe we have. We must make every possible effort to ensure that human beings themselves do not become demented cells (Ikeda, 1990:31).

About time, his advice is that our lives are rooted in the past, but we must not live in the past. Nor should we allow our enthusiasm for the future to make us lose sight of the present. We must set ourselves a lofty goal for the future and live each moment in such a way as to achieve its full potential.

In the second part of the book, he looks at the Buddhist view of life: the self-realisation of individual lives with varying degrees of freedom, and with corresponding differences in happiness and unhappiness. The book stresses here that each life is constantly changing and is consequently susceptible to an inner revolution by means of which the individual may achieve happiness and fulfilment.

Buddhism recognises ten states or realms in which the individual self might exist. In the universal sense, these are ten categories of existence into which at any given time all living beings fall. These states are:

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| 1. Hell (Jehanam) | 2. Hunger (Njaa) |
| 3. Animality (Unyama) | 4. Anger (Hasira) |
| 5. Humanity (Utu) | 6. Rapture (Upeo wa Furaha) |
| 7. Learning (Kujifunza) | 8. Realisation (Utambuzi) |
| 9. The Budhisattra Nature (Uongofu wa Kibuddha) | 10. Buddhahood (Ubuddha). |

This helps to shed light on the Buddhist religion of which little is known especially in the Kiswahili language.

In the last part of the book, Ikeda tackles the difficult question of death. He rightly observes that apprehension of death is one of the qualities distinguishing man from the lower animals. Thus human beings fear death. However, his advice is that we must face death calmly and dispassionately, thereby developing in ourselves the courage and determination to make our lives more abundant and fruitful.

He recognises the belief in life after death of various religions, such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism. However, he distinguishes Buddhist belief by the doctrine of transmigration, the idea that life being eternal passes through an endless chain of death and rebirth; thus physical death is not a final end. Buddhism sees the joys and sorrows of the present life as being determined by causes accumulated in previous lives.

Conclusion

Generally, *Maisha: Kitendawili na Johari* is an important text as earlier mentioned. Apart from carving a place for itself, it has contributed in enlightening Kiswahili readers about various aspects of life.

Among other issues, the text attempts to explain the meaning of life and death. It provides us with the courage to challenge both life and death. It enables us to see death not as some terrifying unknown but as a normal phase

of existence. It also teaches us to treasure the life we are now living and to try to make it as worthwhile as possible.

The book has a further important teaching — that the only way to fulfil the potential of the human race is to live just, kind, benevolent and compassionate lives. It has shed a lot of light on Buddhism as a religion, and in a language that is understood by a large audience in East and Central Africa. The issues raised and discussed have no cultural barrier and the book should be translated into several other African languages in order for this knowledge to reach more people.

Reference

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