

Peace Declaration

We are gathered here today on September 18 to observe the 40th Annual Memorial Service for All Who Perished in War, and particularly, this year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. Unfortunately, however, the entire world is facing a crisis that humanity has never experienced, at least in modern times. Last December, a mysterious pneumonia-like disease was reported by the media, and within a blink of an eye, the virus has been rampaging throughout the world. This new infectious disease was named COVID-19, and its pathogen has yet to be specified. At present, the death toll count is more than 900,000 and there is no sign of it slowing down. Nonetheless, under such circumstances, we have the determination to maintain the tradition of holding the memorial because we find it meaningful to reflect on the significance of having it.

In 2015 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, we released a recorded discussion that resulted from a dialogue on peace. Here, we pointed out the necessity of ‘positive peace,’ which can be achieved only by overcoming various social or systematic problems that could induce warfare. Social inequality, violation of basic human rights like freedom of religion, hunger, and even environmental crisis are all the issues that we need to deal with to realize a peaceful society.

However, in a surge of the pandemic, many people hoarded facemasks and other necessities, which were then in short supply, and there were even instances of some who resold those products at a greatly inflated price. Furthermore, another outstanding concern is the social exclusion of those who were infected with the disease, and this discrimination is directed even toward the patients’ families. Thus, this new infectious disease is disclosing our hidden self-centeredness as well as ignorance that easily violates the dignity of other lives.

Our Head Priest, Monshu Sennyō states in his message, ‘A Way of Living as a Nembutsu Follower’ as follows,

In today’s world, there is an endless list of difficult global issues that are directly related to the existence of humanity such as terrorist attacks, armed conflicts, widening economic gap, global warming, mishandling of nuclear waste, and violation of human rights through discrimination. Such are the result of our ignorance and blind passions in which we fail to see the true nature of ourselves.

Through this message, he clarifies that our egoistic human nature is the very origin of many of the global issues, and we must take this seriously.

Monshu also introduces the following Buddhist principle in the same message,

Buddhism describes the true reality of this world and humanity using such phrases as ‘impermanence’ and ‘dependent origination.’ ‘Impermanence’ refers to the fact that everything changes moment by moment. On the other hand, ‘dependent origination’ explains that all things and phenomena are interconnected with one another, which bring about various causes and conditions that then give another set of causes and conditions and so on and so forth. Therefore, in this world we cannot find an unchanging and fixed ‘self.’

Now I would like to introduce the following *haiku* poem composed by Nagayama Shusei,

In the middle of rice planting, the rain comes, and everything becomes even more lively.

Every life receives the benevolence of nature. None can survive without air, soil, or water. It goes without saying for us humans as well. We are enabled to live because we take other lives to receive nourishment from them. We all are interrelated to one another and everyone is enabled to live because things allow us to be. In addition, things are changing at every moment, which means there is no solid or unchangeable matter or phenomenon in this world.

Therefore, once we realize this ultimate reality of dependent origination, we cannot help but want to make efforts for the benefit of ourselves as well as others even though the result of our efforts is unknown, because unlike the Buddha who has boundless wisdom and compassion, we are imperfect and our ability is limited. Being fully aware of our own limitedness, still we can try as hard as we can to control and minimize our ego, arrogance, attachment, and belligerence, feeling close to other people’s joy and sadness. The path to our ideal peaceful world can be found only when we overcome the current hardship by making sincere efforts to realize a society of peace and harmony, not one of conflicts and exclusion.

With the wish for peace, temple bells shall be tolled across Japan. Our aspiration for peace for the world, which reverberates through the sound of the bells, shall reach our children and grandchildren. Now let us continue our efforts together.

September 18, 2020

Governor General Iwagami Chiko
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