

Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Statement on Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has spread throughout the world and shows little sign of ending. Here in Japan, we have entered a new stage with the announcement of the state of emergency.

First, I wish to express our sincerest condolences to those in Japan and the rest of the world, who have passed on due to Covid-19 pandemic. And to those who have become ill, we send our best wishes for a speedy recovery. Moreover, we express our deepest admiration and gratitude to all the doctors, nurses and medical staff for their heroic effort to treat and save the patients, even at the high risk of danger to themselves.

During this crisis, people around the world are confronting the enormous set of challenges by working together through mutual cooperation and encouragement. However, it has been pointed out that one of the causes for the spread of the disease lies in the actions of asymptomatic people who are unaware that they have contracted the virus. We must, therefore, understand its dangers and the correct response to the virus and act accordingly. We are requesting everyone to show genuine concern for one another so as not to allow the spread of any kind of discrimination and prejudice. Let us act properly based on our careful consideration of the implications of our action.

The Buddha taught us that ignorance and afflictions are the cause of our suffering. And Shinran Shonin revealed to us of the truth of our self-centeredness that lurks at our core through the words, “we foolish ordinary beings possessed of afflictions.” Given these truths, isn’t it important that we share in the joys and pain precisely because we are in such a difficult time? In Buddhism, we value the teaching of ‘interdependence,’ which points to the reality that ‘all things exist by being connected through the workings of causes and conditions’ and are, therefore, ‘without any fixed substantial entity.’ The spread of Covid-19 is due to the person-to-person contact. Consequently, we no longer feel relief but, instead, anxiety about our ‘human connectedness,’ which was originally something that was highly cherished. Therefore, we must not come to regard our ‘human connectedness’ negatively as something of great danger. Precisely because we are now facing this worldwide pandemic, we must become even more cognizant of the original meaning and the importance of our ‘human connectedness.’

What is crucially important at this time is for us to be guided by the Buddha’s wisdom and to work cooperatively together within the workings of Buddha’s great compassion. In so doing, we can reaffirm the importance of being alive and to bring an end to the spread of this disease. It is not the governmental announcement of the state of emergency that will defeat this Coronavirus crisis. Instead, it is the thorough and appropriate actions of each one of us, in cooperation with many others, which will determine whether or not we can bring the current crisis to its end.

Precisely because my very existence is made possible within the connectedness with the people of the world, we shall be able to rejoice with them when we eventually overcome this difficulty together. Within our respective personal circumstances, we are encouraged to think about what we can do to combat this crisis without diminishing the Lamp of Dharma and our tradition. And we shall cooperate and pool our resources as we receive the mind of Nembutsu that reaches us from Amida Buddha, promising to “liberate us just as we are.” So, let us do our part to the best of our abilities in order to regain our society, in which everyone can live with a peace of mind.



April 14, 2020

Chiko Iwagami

Governor General, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanjiha