

## Public Event

As Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, we find the source of the word *an'non*, “peace and tranquility” in Shinran Shonin’s letter which states, “...Hold the nembutsu in your hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, ‘May peace and tranquility prevail throughout the world, and may the Buddha’s teaching spread!’” Although it is natural for us as Buddhists and Nembutsu followers to want peace to prevail in the world and the Buddha’s teaching spread, it is very difficult to make this a realization. Still, I hope that we will endeavor to make even a small portion of it a reality.

From the view of the Buddha Dharma, the main reason we do not have world peace is us, human beings. We humans are ignorant of the truth, consider things by differentiating and comparing them, thereby inflicting harm to and whittling away our own limited lives, and causing antagonism to deepen antagonism and conflicts to arise. The issue of individual humans is the fundamental problem of life. It is concerned with the survival instinct of living entities. Unable to trade places with others, we innately possess various anxieties such as old age, sickness, and death. Traditionally, Buddhism has been dealing with these issues.

On the other hand, problems in the world have recently come to be seen as important issues for Buddhism to consider. Until now, the mainstream way of thinking was that although Buddhism addressed issues concerning an individual’s internal or psychological and spiritual aspect, it should not be involved with social problems. However, the social responsibilities of each individual in regard to various problems such as conflicts, poverty, and human rights have become clearer as democracy has become more prevalent, environmental problems have intensified, and rather than wars erupting between nations, disputes within a single country or those involving racial or cultural problems has escalated, and therefore issues that concern Buddhism have increased. Emancipation and spiritual peace of each individual should be realized first and then reflected on various social problems.

In Buddhism, the basic problems of human beings are known as the “three poisons,” namely, greed, anger, and ignorance. They are related to not only the internal aspects of the individual, but also social matters.

Let me explain each category. Greed implies excessive desire. All living entities, including human beings, have the innate desire to survive and leave their own descendants. Without this instinct, life cannot continue. However, humans are different from other flora and fauna in that they have greed that is endlessly insatiable. This greed leads to disputes arising over natural resources and territories and the destruction of the natural environment. Once a dispute begins, it produces anger and causes yet another dispute to erupt.

Ignorance is the lack of correct knowledge, and is a distorted way of thinking which is caused by self-centered desires. The Buddha’s wisdom allows one to see everything equally, free of distortion and prejudice. Further, it also teaches that every being and entity in this world exist mutually supporting and sustaining each other. My existence is due to various countless conditions, and in turn, it means that it is capable for me to lead the world toward either a better

direction or worse one by changing myself.

Every human has the potential for making mistakes. You might cause a serious accident to occur if you took your eyes off the road for just a moment to look somewhere else while driving a car. You may have good intentions of wanting to cheer up someone who is ill, but could inadvertently deeply hurt his or her feelings. Seventy years ago, Japan, due to the fear it had that it could be conquered at any time by the developed western nations, its overflowing pride that after the Meiji Restoration it had become a leading nation because of its own diligence, and the superiority complex it possessed since it viewed the other Asian countries as behind the times and old-fashioned, made its way toward a tragic war. In regard to the atomic bomb, I think that no one could have even imagined the devastation and misery it could cause until it was used. The dead cannot be brought back to life and incidents in the past cannot be undone, but we can learn from the past, and by more deeply understanding the past, new paths open for us.

The United Nations has declared this year, two thousand nine (2009), as International Year of Reconciliation. It is not easy for two parties that have opposed and hated each other for years to reconcile. Even so, by looking at the tragedy that results from conflict, delving into the source that brought about the confrontation, not provoking the situation, and instituting measures to alleviate the animosity, we can broaden the possibilities for reconciliation. I feel above all else that problems should never be resolved through the use of violence, and that the role religion, especially Buddhism, should take on is indeed great.

We find the following statements among the words of Sakyamuni Buddha:

In this world, if we respond to hatred with hatred, hatred will never cease.  
(Dhammapada, verse 5)

All beings are fearful of violence, for life is dear to all. Thus, knowing this and feeling for others as for yourself, you must not kill, and you must not cause others to kill.  
(Dhammapada, verse 130)

I believe that these words express the ideals of not only Buddhists but all humans.

The Jodo Shinshu teaching that was established by Shinran Shonin teaches us to simply acknowledge our limitations as human beings, which means that our desires are never fulfilled and our self-centeredness is undeniable, and to accept the wisdom and compassion of Amida Tathagata that always works on us because of our limitations. If his teaching were misunderstood, evilness in this world could be neglected, but when understood correctly, it could admonish human conceit, and from the common viewpoint that we are all *bombu*, that is, foolish, ordinary beings filled with self-centered desires, it could encourage us to lead a better way of life and to build a better society. This is all due to the working of Amida Tathagata which always sustains us from our very foundation. We do not have the luxury of being able to wait until the world is filled with only upstanding people. According to dualism, good people triumph over bad people, but this only invites more disputes. It is important for us to come to the awareness that

we are all foolish, ordinary beings, and from this standpoint, to do what we can in cooperation with others.

Today, there is much bitter criticism concerning the dangerous potential that religions have. It is not easy for me to fully understand religions I am unfamiliar with, however, at least, we should not belittle other religions or show any contempt for its fundamental character. We must overcome differences and make efforts to prevent hostility.

Human life should not be used as a means to an end, but rather, let us endeavor toward the realization of a world in which every life can shine.

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