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July 2021 Newsletter

Hello, everyone! How are you doing?

In the United States, vaccination has expanded throughout the country, and the signs of the effects are gradually starting to show in people's lives. President Biden announced during the G7 Summit his promise to offer large quantity of vaccines, free of charge and unconditionally, to the developing countries throughout the world. His offer was based on his largeness of heart, understanding that true solution to the pandemic is not through recovery of only one's own country, but through worldwide break out from the coronavirus infectious disease.

Nonetheless, there are still many people in large numbers who have lost their lives, are hospitalized, and recuperating at homes. We send our heartfelt condolences to those who have passed away due to the coronavirus affliction that they may rest in peace. We also earnestly pray for early recovery of all those who are presently under medical treatment and recuperation.

Furthermore, we send our heartfelt gratitude to everyone in the healthcare industry who continue to work hard without rest and to the all the essential workers and various governmental agencies and services who continue to support the basics of our life.

Now, in his Dharma Talk during the First Day of the Month Service on June 1st, President Niwano said: "our heart and mind acquire nutrients from readings," and if we are inspired and our knowledge is enhanced through reading, our hearts and minds can be abundantly nurtured. Thus, our President taught us a beneficial way to spend time during our Covid-19 pandemic self-restraining stay at home.

Furthermore, the President mentioned Confucianism's teaching that human beings inherently possess "morality" from birth, but tend to forget it as they grow up. Yet, (people who rule the country) do not forget and firmly keep it in mind. That morality is the cheerfulness, purity of mind, a heart that loves, help and serve others, gratitude for the help from others, honesty, courage, and patience. We can understand this to be what we have been taught as "buddha nature" as well.

Now, this month, I would like to share how we can live our daily lives as Buddhists.

As Shakyamuni Buddha was about to enter parinirvana, his disciple Ananda, gripped by uneasiness, asked the Buddha: From now on, who (what) shall we depend upon in our lives?

In response to Ananda's question, Shakyamuni Buddha replied with these words:

"As a human being, instead of depending upon other people or be worried about other people's opinions, you should depend upon yourself and walk the Way through your own efforts. And you must also rely upon the Dharma (Truth) to walk the Way."

This is "Make yourself the light; Make the Dharma your light," one of the key teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Without ingratiating ourselves to others or relying on others, it is in our own awakening to the Dharma and relying upon it that our self-reliance and self-respect as a human being exist. The Dharma embodies the meaning of "Truth," "Morality," and "Law."

However, to say 'depend upon ourselves' is not about the self that is filled with a selfish mind or biases. It signifies the true self that has been awakened by the teachings. For that, it is important to do our best to verify everything in accordance to the teachings. And that is how depending upon ourselves is connected to relying upon the "Dharma."

The word self-confidence [自信: *jishin*] means to have faith [信: *shin*] in oneself [自: *ji*]. Thus, our effort to become the self that is worthy of faith is important.

Buddhism is said to be "the teaching that leads to the other shore." Our practice is about detaching ourselves from the

world measured by the standard of worldly common sense of this shore [此岸: *shigan*] with aspiration to see things measured by the Buddha's viewpoint, the other shore [彼岸: *higan*].

To make the decision to give our efforts to cross the river with everyone so that we can detach ourselves from the world of greed – such as loss and gain centered outlook, self-centeredness – with aspiration for the world of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion...that is walking the Buddha Way.

As lay Buddhists, we live in the real world. In this world, there are different ways of thinking and value judgments. We become involved in such worlds as material centered, profit priority of loss and gain centered, egoism, and before we realize, may be swayed by the illusion that unless we are running with them we will be the only one left behind. We can even say that in the world of reality, we suffer in agony as we swing from joy to sorrow.

Buddhism is the teaching that helps us detach ourselves from such worldly common sense, worldly standards [*Shigan* : this shore] so we can aspire to go across to the world of Shakyamuni Buddha's way of looking at things, Shakyamuni Buddha's standard of viewpoint [*Higan* : the other shore]. In a sense, it will be a big value shift, and we would need the courage and effort to switch from what we had thought to be fine until now.

That is about our true happiness, the Way to lead a true life. I definitely think Shakyamuni Buddha is waiting expectantly for that from the other shore.

Through our daily lives, this month again, let us carefully keep such heart and mind with diligence.

* Due to COVID-19, our centers in New York, Chicago and Ft. Myer have been closed since April of last year. As the situation is improving little by little, there was a discussion at the board meeting of the NY Dharma Center on how to reopen the Center. Since our Headquarters' policy is to close quickly and to reopen without haste, our plan is to reopen in stages from around the beginning of September. While keeping in mind the policy of the state in which each center is located as well, rather than hastily opening 100%, our aim is to reopen step by step as we look at the situation of the time.

* Since the Zoom activities have thus far become quite fulfilling, hereafter, we would like to come up with plans, taking into account settings where everyone can meet in person and settings where everyone in remote areas can participate, that would work towards further uniting the Sangha

* Moreover, next year, we will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of the New York Center. We will form a task force team to plan how we will celebrate the anniversary and preparation towards that.



Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

Minister RKNY