

A Message from the Overseas District Abbot

March 30, 2020

The rapid spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has caused so much anxiety in the last few weeks. My deepest condolences go out to the families of those who lost their loved ones due to the disease, and I extend my best wishes for a speedy recovery to those who have contracted the virus. At the same time, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all of the caregivers who are sacrificing their own well-being to combat this horrific pandemic.

Since all services, Dharma gatherings, and study programs have been cancelled or postponed at our temples throughout Japan as well as in the overseas districts, it is disheartening we are unable to gather together to listen to the teachings of Shinran Shōnin. We were looking forward to seeing all of you at the 13th World Dōbō Gathering that was scheduled to occur in April of this year. I was saddened to hear that the event would be cancelled in consideration of health concerns. At the same time, however, it gave me a chance to remind myself of the truth that everything that occurs in our lives is nothing other than impermanence. Right at this moment, this viral disease is quickly and steadily spreading throughout the world almost as if it were mocking our desperate efforts to stop the pandemic. Seeing the escalation of the devastation it continues to bring, I cannot help but realize how fragile and fleeting our lives are.

The coronavirus epidemic has already caused so much suffering to all of us who live on this planet regardless of such differences as race, nationality, gender, or age. This challenge has confronted us with the indisputable fact that all of us are nothing but ordinary, unenlightened beings. The reality is that we have to understand that the suffering and anxiety we are experiencing in this pandemic has always been a part of human existence. When I reflect on this truth, however, I am able to renew and to deepen my appreciation of the compassionate heart of the Tathāgata which is always reaching out to each and every one of us, embracing us as companions regardless of who we are.

It is my sincerest wish that we will be able to bring an end to the novel coronavirus pandemic as soon as possible so that we can once again join together before Amida Buddha to listen to the Dharma together.

Chōyū Ōtani
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