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July 2022 Newsletter

Hello, everyone!
Hope you are all doing well.

Summer will soon be in full swing, but I hope you are prepared for the heat. If our body is not accustomed to the heat, it may cause us to feel ill, so it is necessary to make proper efforts to gradually acclimate our body to the heat.

Although due to the progress of vaccinations, the fear of COVID has eased to some extent, we still must not neglect to exercise caution.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows no signs of concluding, and people around the world are watching the situation closely. This situation has had a negative impact on the global economy, and the rising prices of commodities in many parts of the world are threatening our daily lives.

This year the New York Center is celebrating our 40th Anniversary and this fall, on October 16th, we plan to hold a commemorative ceremony. We formed a preparatory committee which has been meeting monthly to discuss and prepare, approaching everything from various angles.

In 1982, when the decision was made to establish the New York Center, the 2nd Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Disarmament was held, and our Founder Nikkyo Niwano, as a religious representative of a United Nations NGO, made a powerful appeal for peace in his speech at the General Assembly Hall.

At that time, our Founder donated one million dollars to fund disarmament efforts, and at the same time, he decided to establish a Peace Center in New York City as Rissho Kosei-kai's district base for peace. This led to the establishment of the New York Center.

At each of the three Special Sessions of the General Assembly for Disarmament Affairs, held before and after that time, our Founder continuously presented his thoughts on peace based on Buddhism from the standpoint of a religious leader at the United Nations.

In 1984, he published a booklet in both English and Japanese titled "My Proposal for Peace" and distributed it to many people.

This month, I would like to introduce some part of its content and consider the role we, the NY Center, should play, especially since our existence is directly connected to our Founder's appeal for peace.

In this booklet, as he called the religious people for action toward peace, the Founder begins by introducing Mahatma Gandhi, his spirit and his practice of nonviolence, as the model to follow. He also expressed his belief that "The only power that can save humanity in the nuclear age is nonviolence." And to those who cling to the idea that "The only way to ensure security is through military power," he asserted and appealed, "That has completely lost its effectiveness as a means of settling international disputes. Now, we must step onto an entirely new path."

Next, the Founder introduced the Hoza practice of Rissho Kosei-kai under the title of "Practice to Overcome Conflicts." He explained that as we look at the global issues from the perspective of the important awareness attained in the Hoza, "What is most important when we think about world peace is how to overcome 'evil actions we have committed without our knowledge or intention.'"

It is the overcoming of egoism, which is inseparable and latent in the assertion of one's own rights and assertion of righteousness of one's own country.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught that in a world where everything is interdependent, there can be no absolute good nor absolute evil. This is the teaching of the "Middle Way."

The Founder concluded this section by saying, "What we, as religious people, must show to humankind today... is that it is possible to create a new union between people and people, and between countries and countries, that are on the verge of being disintegrated. I believe that is the path to the realization of a true world community."

(Some omission of content...)

In the final chapter, "Religious Cooperation for the Transformation of Human Consciousness," the Founder stated, "At all costs, we must come up with a path that ensures security and can replace military power. We must spread a network of trust throughout the world." He also called out, "Let us use the enormous military spending to live in peace." He added, "Thinking of our own happiness, only for one's own happiness give rise to feelings of envy, suspicion, distrust, and fear – all sorts of bad feelings that eventually lead us to our own destruction. In Buddhism, they are called 'delusions' They have a powerful explosive force. Shakyamuni Buddha taught us not to suppress these delusions, but to transform their power into 'bodhi-citta (aspiration to supreme perfect awakening)'."

The Founder also proposed to the religious people of the world a "four-stage of practice for the fulfillment of peace". The four stages of realizing the world that God and the Buddha wish for us; the four stages in which all people of the world can live in peace.

In the Lotus Sutra, the four stages are called the "Four Requirements." They are explained as follows:

The first is "to be safeguarded by the buddhas"

(To have absolute faith that God and the Buddha are always with us and are protecting us. We must believe that all the people around us, even those of different races and countries, are children of the same God and the Buddha, and that they are our brothers and sisters. Let us call on each other to become aware of this fact.)

The second is "planting many roots of virtue"

(It doesn't matter how small it is. Let us try do what we can do in the place we are now.)

The third is "joining the assembly of those resolved to become awakened"

(A gathering of people who are determined to do good deeds. It is a desire to associate with people with a religion they believe in, no matter what that religion may be.)

The fourth is "aspiring to liberate all living beings."

(This means to try to consider the other person's welfare before one's own welfare, and to consider the position of other countries before one's own country's welfare. It also means to do the best one can to devote oneself to others.)

Founder said he thinks that the implementation of these four stages is the way to realize the "transformation of human consciousness.

To tie everything together, it is stated as follows:

"However much we may wish that all the nations on earth would have a Peace Constitution, there are probably many who think that this is nothing more than a pipe dream. And probably not only a few people despair that it is impossible to abolish nuclear weapons in a world that has come this far.

However, when each one of us continues to have such a desire, and then when one by one, we accumulate the necessary actions to realize it, a "miracle" will occur.

This proposal for peace by the Founder was made nearly 40 years ago, shortly after the establishment of the New York Center.

I feel that the mission of the New York Center for peace has been entrusted to us.

The situation in Ukraine, the nuclear tests in North Korea, and the tensions between China and Taiwan, etc. still resonates with us even in this day and age.

Let us also make efforts to practice from wherever we can through the Sangha activities of the New York Center.



Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

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