



Living Life Wholeheartedly

Many say that this year, which is 80 years since the end of the war, is a milestone. It was in Showa 20, 1945, that the war came to an end. However, having been born in Showa 39, nearly 20 years after the war had ended, I have no way of knowing what the actual war was like.

Still, when I was little, there remained an air-raid shelter right near my childhood home. It had remained at a site of a ruined mansion. My parents told me not to go in there, but being told not to enter only made me want to go in more. Entering that dark shelter and imagining people enduring air raids in such a place gave me a feeling I couldn't quite put into words.

At large shrines and places where people gathered, one could see wounded war veterans. Dressed in white, they would sit on the roadside. During the 1980s, there was extensive media coverage about the Japanese war orphans left in China. These Japanese orphans left in China were children who had been left behind in former Manchuria (northeastern China) from the final stages of the war through its end, and were raised by Chinese people. In 1981, the Japanese government started a program aimed at helping these orphans to search for their

blood relatives in Japan. At the time, scenes of reunions with blood relatives were repeatedly broadcast on television and reported in newspapers. However, before long, such news was no longer to be seen.

'Falling snow - / Meiji has grown so distant' is a haiku by Nakamura Kusatao. This haiku is known to have been composed in 1931 (Showa 6) when Kusatao visited his alma mater, Seinan Elementary School, for the first time in twenty years. This was 1931 - only about twenty years after the Meiji era had ended - and yet he felt such sentiment.

Still a university student, Nakamura Kusatao felt relieved to see his old school unchanged in appearance, but as snow began to fall, he saw children wearing overcoats appear in the schoolyard. It is said that he composed the haiku with a strong sense of separation, reflecting on how in his time, children wore kimono and geta sandals.

Even now, I live in a monastery together with about twenty young disciples. Those born in the Showa era are now rare; most were born in the Heisei era. When talking with them, there are times when I feel, 'Showa has grown so distant.'

Having become master teacher at Engakuji monastery in my thirties and been given the role of chief abbot at forty-five, wherever I went, people would always say that I was young, still so young. But lately, I suddenly notice with surprise that I'm surrounded by young

people. Fifteen years have gone by since becoming chief abbot.

No matter how much the times may change, what remains unchanged is the teachings of Buddha. In the old days, they were passed down through direct sermons. Later, scriptures and other texts came to be printed using woodblocks, allowing many people to read and learn from them. In recent times, publication of books has allowed even more people to access the teachings. Thankfully, since assuming the position of chief abbot, I have had the opportunity to publish many books.

Moreover, recently the internet has spread considerably. Using YouTube as a new medium, we have begun to spread the teaching in a new way.

I heard that someone who was in the depths of despair after losing an irreplaceable loved one came across my Dharma talks on YouTube. This connection led the listener to come to Engakuji and now regularly attend the Sunday Dharma talks.

Even the depths of sorrow are insufficient - at life's end, we meet our departed loved one again.' There are still people today who experience such feelings.

The one thing Zen teaches is that your mind is a Buddha. Furthermore, Zen Master Rinzai taught that the Buddha-mind clearly manifests in our very living flesh, and that all our daily activities -

eating, excreting, wearing clothes, and sleeping at night - are the Buddha-dharma in its entirety. What I do is simply continue sharing these teachings of our Zen patriarchs.

I once received a letter from someone who had heard such talks.

After losing her husband, she had been providing daily care for her mother-in-law who was blind and bedridden, needing help with meals, toileting, and other needs. I imagine such a life did not allow her to leave the house freely. Her letter also mentioned, 'Each time my sister-in-law returns home, she has something critical to say, and I spend my days swallowing my frustration and sense of emptiness.' Such a person had been listening to my Dharma talks on YouTube.

Since I speak about how everyone has Buddha-mind, and how eating, excreting, and sleeping - these very activities - are the acts of a Buddha, she, hearing this, 'saw her mother-in-law as a Buddha.' Then, she wrote in the letter that 'The daily caregiving stopped being a burden.' She then expressed her gratitude, writing, 'Thank you so much for giving me this realization.' I am deeply grateful.

There was another person who came to Engakuji's Sunday sermon while struggling with life's problems so severely that death had become an option. My single phrase 'Your mind is a Buddha' resonated profoundly in this person. Since that day, the participant has been living life positively and still comes to the monthly sermon.

This too was simply sharing the truth of Zen that Daruma Daishi

(Bodhidharma) brought from India to China - that each person's mind is a Buddha.

Whatever age may come, human suffering will never go away. The four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death never change. Even in peaceful times, we cannot avoid the suffering of aging, the suffering of sickness, and the suffering of facing death.

'Aibetsuriku' - separation from those we love - is also suffering. There is also 'onzōeku,' the suffering of having to meet with those we hate. The suffering of not getting what we seek is 'gufutokuku.' Shakyamuni Buddha taught that the very workings of our body and mind are themselves suffering (goun-jōku).

Buddhism is not about finding a world without suffering somewhere else and going there. Buddhism teaches us how to live in the midst of this suffering. Only by perceiving the truth correctly can we be liberated from suffering.

That all is suffering is also a truth. That all things are impermanent is another truth. Even in the midst of suffering, we can transform suffering into joy by meeting various people, encountering words, and learning from teachings. Because all things are impermanent, suffering too does not last forever.

That no one can live alone is also a truth. Nothing exists on its own. Thanks to many others, we can live.

Since we receive kindness from so many others, the meaning of

life becomes an attempt to give back, even if just a little.

Ei Rokusuke composed these lines: 'Living is becoming indebted to others. To keep living is returning that debt.' In his book 'A Testament to the Japanese People,' Matsubara Taido Sensei wrote: 'What is the meaning of living? I'm often asked this question, but the answer is quite simple. Everything is for others, not for oneself.' Even if someone becomes bedridden, their very being alive can be a support and strength to others. They can also give others significant realizations.

Thanks to the hardships of our predecessors, we in Japan can now live in a world without war. Being in gratitude for this, I believe we should live wholeheartedly.