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## April 2021 News letter

Hello everyone!



It feels like spring is gradually upon us. How are you faring?

Time does fly by. It is already a whole year since I started to write my monthly messages to you.

From about March of last year, COVID-19 spread throughout the world as a pandemic. We closed the New York Center since then and even to date there is no prospect of when the pandemic will settle down. It feels like our self-restraining stay at home life has considerably become a routine. We are experiencing every day what no one could have imagined.

We must not forget to express our gratitude to everyone in the healthcare industry who continue to work without rest and to all the essential workers and various governmental agencies and services who are supporting our self-restraining stay at home lives.

Numerous people have furthermore passed away and we pray that they may rest in peace.

And for those who are presently undergoing treatment in the hospital as well as those who are continuing to recuperate at home, we send our heartfelt prayers for their safe and speedy recovery.

Now, in the beginning of March, I returned to NY from my temporary visit back to Tokyo. As usual, due to jet lag, my afternoons and nights were reversed for a while. Even when I was able to sleep at night, I tended to immediately wake up and at times feel groggy.

In such half awake and half asleep state, I think about and realize many things.

This month I would like to share one of those thoughts.

One night, in my mind, I was repeatedly thinking about the words of a passage in the "Invocation" of our old Kyoten, "We take this occasion to repent earnestly, each of us, for our misdeeds, our lack of understanding, and all the evil actions we have committed even without our knowledge or intention."

Founder said, it is easy to acknowledge and feel remorse for committing mistakes we know are bad, but we cannot recognize mistakes we committed when we don't realize it was a mistake unless someone points it out to us.

Sometimes we may do things with good intentions, but the words we voiced may unintentionally hurt the other person. Since we did not do it on purpose, we do not understand the other person's pain and cannot apologize. It is only when we become aware that we can offer an apology.

This is my next realization. If we were to reverse the situation, during the time we have lived until now, there probably were numerous kindnesses we received and countless ways we made others worry.

Many people worried for us, prayed for us, wished for us, and offered kindness to us. But if we were not aware of that, we will not be grateful to them nor thank them. Worse, we may have the tendency to think we were capable of living without any kindness or help from others.

We could even say whether one can recognize or not realize how one is, firsthand or indirectly, supported by numerous people can determine that person's happiness or misery. It is because of this awareness that one can feel gratitude and thank others.

Furthermore, it is precisely those who cannot recognize the kindness of others, who tend to never forget any kindness they themselves offered or the time they worried about others, always seeking words of appreciation and gratitude.

Unless we can bear in mind that numerous people have been kind to us and worried for us, how we had listened to the thoughtful words of others, in our lives until now, there is no way we can realize anything or be grateful.

We tend to always remember things we did for others, but now and then, we are completely unaware of the kindness of others.

Shakyamuni Buddha said, “If you wish to be praised and receive kindness from others, praise and be kind to others. If you do not want others to speak ill of you or be bullied, do not speak ill of others or bully others.” That is certainly true.

When I looked back on how much kindness I may have received and how much I may have worried others without my knowledge, I was astounded. In my dreamy state of mind, I was talking to myself. It made me realize that I may have tried to live the best I can, but as I was focusing on doing my best, I may not have paid enough attention to the thoughts of those close to me.

We are always taught that we are “safeguarded by the buddhas” (Lotus Sutra Chapter 28) and “we are caused to live by the Buddha,” but are we grateful that we can live thanks to the air we cannot see and the water? Isn’t it important to know to what extent we can be awakened?

Speaking about realizations, it was stated in a book that “Awakening is not something that we ourselves attain on our own, but awakening comes to us from outside and we become awakened.” As an example to illustrate this point, there was a mathematician named Kiyoshi Oka who was struggling for days working to solve a difficult problem. At such time, he sat in front of his home altar praying to Amida Buddha every day. At one moment, while he prayed, he suddenly realized the answer to the problem he could not solve, no matter how hard he tried, until then.

It could be because he took great pains and efforts until then. Awakening can be likened to dropping milk into vinegar which suddenly hardens and could be the invisible workings of the Buddha that enabled him to see something clearly in an instant. I think the significance of this is that the accumulation of daily efforts leads to important realizations.

This month we will celebrate Shakyamuni Buddha’s date of birth in India over 2500 years ago. Let us consider this month as the month to express our deep gratitude to the precious value that Shakyamuni Buddha was born, attained Supreme Perfect Awakening and expounded the Dharma.

Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

Minister of RKNY

