

What Can You Yourself Do?



Connecting with One Another Defines Us as Human

〈The strength possessed by each of us〉

human beings is actually a weak, small force.

Indeed, without the advantages of being able to use language and tools and to act in groups, the human species would not have been able to win the struggle for survival.

〈And the reason〉

human beings are called social animals is that we have built sophisticated societies in which we communicate our ideas and cooperate with each other, striving to help everyone live well.

As I have said before, "getting along well with other people is the purpose of having received life as human beings,"

and I believe that people instinctively know that this is the meaning of life throughout history.

〈However, these days,〉

perhaps due to a trend of prioritizing individual values, some people are putting the brakes on their communication and effort to get along with others — characteristics that define us as human.

〈This trend〉

may lead to their own isolation or indifference to others, which is symbolized by the social problem of dying alone and remaining undiscovered for several days.

〈The world of children〉

is no exception to this phenomenon, and according to a recent study in Japan, the number of suicides among elementary, junior high, and high school students has reached an all-time high, despite the declining birthrate. This is a tragic state of affairs.

〈Biohistorian Keiko Nakamura〉

stated more than ten years ago that "The people I want to help most right now are children. Elementary school students have sent me letters saying that they 'want to die'" (*Iki iki*, March 2015).

There has been a constant stream of children who are emotionally exhausted due to isolation at school, or family discord, and they feel like they want to die.

Ask Yourself Every Day How You Are Living

〈We who have had〉

problems or difficulties ourselves can readily empathize with others who are suffering, understanding that they must be going through a hard time.

〈However,〉

without that kind of personal experience, it is often difficult to even take an interest in the suffering of others. And when it comes to suffering so unbearable that someone contemplates suicide, I think that very few people are truly capable of understanding what the person in question is feeling.

〈Zen Master Dogen (1200–1253)〉

teaches us that, "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self."

Although we may think we know ourselves, in reality, we do not fully understand our own selves.

And as we do not even understand ourselves, to suppose that we can truly comprehend the feelings of others, strikes me as an even more difficult task.

〈Educator Nobuzo Mori (1896–1992)〉

observed, "No matter how difficult one's life may be, there is no greater blessing on this earth than having received the gift of life. And true religious faith makes us aware of this fact."

〈Keiko Nakamura's〉

fervent wish for children is "to let them know that the very fact that they are alive right now is something truly extraordinary."

Both of these educators explain the importance of conveying to people the truth about life, and Nakamura also notes that "if you trace your lineage all the way back, you arrive at the ancestral cells from 3.8 billion years ago that connect us all."

Realizing "the oneness of self and others" and that "all are one" gives us the courage to live with the mind of reverence for ourselves

Perhaps what matters most is that we demonstrate

—through the very way we live our lives— our ability to accept any kind of hardship

and to go on living with an awareness of gratitude for the life we are receiving in the present moment.

As a result, when we hear people who are suffering with troubles give voice to what is on their minds,

we will be able to offer them words of strength and encouragement

Zen Master Ryokan (1758–1831) wrote: "If you ask me, 'what is suffering,' My answer is, 'the frame of mind that creates distance between people.'"

〈This teaches us〉

that the greatest suffering of all lies in the failure of human beings to help each other and live in harmony.

Therefore, while engaging in daily self-reflection on how you should now be, try to remain attentive to people close to you, and notice even slight changes. Then reach out to them by asking, "How are you doing?" The repetition of this simple act of caring liberates people from suffering, and it also helps to nurture young people.