

**New Year Message - "Precious Life"**

**T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei**

A Happy New Year!

For my New Year cards this year, I quote a passage written by Shinran Shonin, the founder of Jodoshinshu Buddhism, declaring "May there be peace in the world." The entire passage reads as follows.

Those who feel uncertain of Birth in the Buddha Land should say Nembutsu aspiring first for their own Birth. Those who feel that their own Birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha's benevolence, hold the Nembutsu in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, "May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teaching spread!"

It is important to settle one's own problem first; then one is able to act accordingly. It is with the Nembutsu teaching that we are able to attain peace within ourselves and realize the importance of the Buddha's teaching. With this understanding, we can wish for peace in the world, and wish for the spreading of the Buddha-Dharma.

In the Nembutsu teaching, peace is deeply related to the preciousness of life in the Buddha's eyes. Realizing the true value of all life, Amida Buddha established the forty-eight vows to liberate all of us - young or old, good or evil, regardless of nationality, race, or gender - through the Nembutsu practice.

We tend to see things according to their usefulness. If a person is useful for our society, he or she is important, admired and respected. A person who is not seen as useful can be treated as nothing, as if there is no value to their life. If there is agreement to a similar ideology, people become friends, but if they have opposing ideologies, they may become enemies. We tend to be very aware of the different levels and stages of other people's lives socially, politically and economically: This person's life is very important, but not that person's life. Where does this approach come from? It is very similar to the way we treat tools or utilities. If items are useful, they are good. If they are broken down and become useless, discard them and replace them with new ones.

The Buddha's value approach is certainly not based on this kind of utility value. All life is seen as precious and irreplaceable by anyone and anything. Each life has absolute value. It does not matter whether one is useful or not. You may think your life is meaningless; the Buddha said that your life is precious and you need to take good care of it. Even if we wish that a person would "drop dead," he or she has Buddha-nature and his or her existence is recognized in the Buddha's eyes. So we need to wish for this person's happiness and peace. All living beings have the potentiality to become enlightened.

You don't have to feel too proud of yourself, nor feel too disappointed of yourself. Whatever you are, you are okay as you are, so you need to cultivate your own potentiality with a sincere mind dedicated to learning and practicing the Buddha-Dharma. May the year 2005 bring you peace in the Buddha-Dharma. Namo-amida-bu!

Living my life with acceptance

I am grateful for the Nembutsu-Dharma

From the eyes of the Compassion and Wisdom of the Buddha

Each one is precious and equal without any conventional labels! (kenjitsu)