

## **A Message from the President of Administrative Headquarters of Soto Zen Buddhism**

Rev. Shunei Oniuda  
The President of Sotoshu Shumucho

I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences for those who have lost their precious lives from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and offer a prayer that they may rest in peace.

For those who have been affected by this illness, I pray that they will recover as soon as possible, and I would like to offer my deepest sympathy to their families and relatives who have also been affected by this illness. Also, my thoughts are with all those experiencing tremendous difficulties whose lives have been affected by the spread of this epidemic and the need to stay home.

In the Kamakura Period of Japanese history when Dogen Zenji was teaching, there were times when cool summers caused by climate change often brought poor harvests. There were outbreaks of plague, and, during the Great Kanki Famine (1230-31), it is said that about a third of the population of Japan perished. In times such as these, Dogen Zenji emphasized that these were the very times to not neglect the Buddha Way.

With the spread of the novel coronavirus infection, many people are upset. They are frightened because of the spread of the infection and anxious because their own lives are at risk. It is in such a time that the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, Dogen Zenji, and Keizan Zenji are necessary.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught right view, right speech, and right practice in the face of the sufferings of sickness and death. It is necessary to have correct and current information about the novel coronavirus infection to insure that harmful rumors and discrimination do not occur. It is also necessary to take care so that we do not become infected by this virus and other people are also not infected.

Even if people are agitated or anxious in the confusion caused by others who are fearful and buy up or hoard food and other goods, let us act calmly. Let us act in accordance with the spirit of Dogen Zenji's teaching of *the intention of first saving others before ourselves* and in accordance with the Bodhisattva's Four Embracing Actions. By doing our best to disinfect our hands and maintain proper etiquette when coughing and sneezing, we are preventing not only our own infection but practicing good hygiene so that others are not infected. This is to naturally practice the way of benefitting others.

Also, Keizan Zenji taught that we should have compassion and love for all things, that we should sympathize with others' sufferings as if they are our own, and that with the mind of compassion we should be diligent in the practice of zazen. I encourage you to endeavor to practice zazen during this time that we must spend quietly at home.

Published on Soto Zen Net ([www.sotozen-net.or.jp](http://www.sotozen-net.or.jp)) on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020  
Translated by Soto Zen Buddhism International Center