

(2020 New Year's Message)

**Let Us Proceed on the "Path to Peace"**

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Happy New Year, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to God for being able to greet this New Year in good health with all of you. Thank you very much.

The year before last in Japan, there was the heavy snowfall till March, the earthquake in the northern region of Osaka Prefecture in June, the heavy rains in Western Japan in July, which was followed in September by the Hokkaido Eastern Iburi Earthquake. Then last year, there were the heavy rains in Northern Kyushu in August followed by the prolonged major power outage in Chiba Prefecture due to Typhoon Faxai, and the major flood damage in the Kanto, Nagano, Tohoku regions from Typhoon Hagabis and so forth. In recent years, major disasters have been increasing in Japan.

Serious damage from climate change is spreading throughout the world also. Last summer, heat waves hit Europe raising temperatures to 46 degrees Celsius, or 115 degrees Fahrenheit, in France and 42.6 degrees Celsius, or 109 degrees Fahrenheit, in Germany. Flooding occurred not only in Japan, but also in Argentina and Uruguay in South America. Furthermore, in the United States, in the state of California, wildfires continued burning for a long time with many losing their precious homes. While droughts continue in Australia in the Southern Hemisphere, forest fires have spread and between the months of September and early December last year, it is said that the total area destroyed was 2 million hectares, more than ten times the previous year. This area is larger than the entire area of the island of Shikoku in Japan.

With these abnormal weather in mind, the World Meteorological Organization of the United Nations, in November last year, reported that the highest average global greenhouse gas concentration (407.8 ppm) in 2018 was observed. He said that if the statistics for 2019 were collected, the concentration would almost certainly increase. WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas warned, "If the average concentration continues to rise, the next generation will be affected by more severe climate

change, such as further increases in temperature, water shortages, and rising sea levels.

What caught my attention about this press conference was his pointing out that “extreme heat waves and floods that occur once every century will occur more regularly in the future.” The Japan Meteorological Agency issues a “special warning” when there is a possibility that extreme weather of the magnitude that will occur “once every few decades.” But I don’t think this expression “once every few decades” accurately explains how serious the situation is. Those who have experienced the danger of “once every few decades” think that the same risk will come again in a few decades. In fact, however, we have to live prepared for the worse, knowing that what occurred “once every few decades” will occur more frequently going forward.

In order to cope with such unprecedented climate change, Seicho-No-Ie moved its International Headquarters in 2013 from the big city, Tokyo, to the “forest” at the southern foot of Yatsugatake. We learned from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident that was a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and set the goal of “carbon zero” to conduct business using renewable natural energy only. And now, not only has that been realized, but at the end of last year, large-capacity storage batteries were added to the Office to build an “off-grid” system that does not receive external power. The actual operation will start this spring, but with this, we will be able to carry out our work without emitting greenhouse gases, our staff will be able to live normally, and in the event of future disasters, not only will we be able to continue our work, but I believe we will also be able to contribute to the community.

These actions are the first steps towards building the foundation of a “new civilization.” Climate change due to global warming is now developing before our very eyes with increasing intensity. Doing nothing despite that is not using the power of reason God has given us, is ignoring the science and technology our ancestors worked so hard and unceasingly to develop, and is negating the mind of careful consideration of others, the mind of love, and the mind of compassion that many of the world’s religions teach in unison and encourage us to practice.

Now, throughout the world, with traditional crops facing difficulty in growing due to the effects of climate change, fishing zones becoming less available, and droughts or heavy floods, wildfires and mudslides taking place more often, food shortages and water shortages are looming. In such circumstances, the world population has risen

to 7.6 billion and will soon reach 9 billion. The gap between the economically “rich” and “poor” countries continues to widen. The widening gap between the rich and poor has various negative effects on society. One of them is that the majority who are put on the “poor side” would get increasingly indifferent to the wellbeing of society. There would be an increased tendency to curse society, disrupt order, and head towards destructive activities. This happens not only within one country but also between countries. We are witnessing this in the form of terrorism and the expansion of international conflicts.

However, we still have many things we can do. Stop using fossil fuels. We can stop the destruction of nature. Rather than pursue the easy convenience of the city, we can get to know nature well, deepen our contact with nature, and promote a way of life that coexists with nature. It’s not something painful, it may be challenging but it’s also pleasurable. Seicho-No-Ie has already started doing this all over the world. I believe that expanding this way of life will prevent the expansion of the gap between the rich and the poor, deepen the connection between people, and prevent terrorism and conflict.

Having said this, however, there is one condition necessary to change to this way of life. That is to forgo to a certain extent the convenience of urban life, where the population is dense, material things are abundant and the infrastructure is developed.

Do you think, “I can’t possibly do that”?

Do you choose to change your values and lifestyle and live together with nature, or do you choose not to change your values or your life style, and live a way of life of pursuing things and conveniences even more. Do you choose to continue to compete in the dry city while continuing a way of life of mass consumption, and while, on one hand, enduring the increasing natural disasters, expand armaments, and struggle with other countries for the acquisition of resources and energy?

I sincerely hope that you will not choose the latter but choose the former. This year is the “year of choice.” Seicho-No-Ie has created a new organization called the “project-based system.” By joining it, ordinary people can gain the know-how on how to live with nature and build a lifestyle that does that. Ladies and Gentlemen, please join us in this movement, invite more people, and expand new values and a new lifestyle. The path to pursuing the fulfillment of desires is the “way to war,” but the path to living with nature is the “way to peace.”

Let us walk along the “way to peace” with courage and joy. I look forward to working with you again this year.