

Dharma Message

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Virus, Humanity, and Prajna

The word "Prajna" or wisdom is a Buddhist term that originates in India. It is a function of our mind that perceives, recognizes, and processes all phenomena and structure behind all phenomena. Wisdom is the key to the alleviation of human suffering.

We are right currently in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic: the novel coronavirus. Many people have already died, while even more people's lives are being threatened by this virus. We spend each day with an abnormal sense of mental and financial uncertainty, not knowing how long this will last. However, this is not the first time humanity has experienced such uncertainty. Indeed, throughout human history, our ancestors have confronted massive challenges.

Human history has been marked by battles with three different hardships: famine, war, and epidemics (like this virus). Going through these experiences, our ancestors have collectively attained the wisdom necessary to maintain the stream of life down to our generation.

Mass production and distribution of food has led to a decrease in populations starving. Diplomatic efforts among the nations to prevent wars and maintain world peace have led to a decrease of large-scale wars. However, these issues persist and even today, people still suffer from famine and war.

The same could be such for epidemics like this virus. Archaeological data indicates that Ramesses V, the pharaoh of ancient Egypt, was infected by smallpox. The number of people killed by the plague or the black death in medieval Europe is estimated to be around 100 million. The total population of the world back then was 450 million. It is said that one-third of the population in Europe died from that virus.

The 1817 cholera outbreak claimed the lives of tens of millions of people and still continues to claim the lives of 20,000-140,000 people each year. The 1918 Spanish flu infected 27 percent of the entire world population killing 20-50 million people. The number of victims was far greater than that of the people killed in the First World War.

Historically, humanity has been in a constant battle with outbreaks and pandemics of viruses.

The smallpox that was discovered in Egyptian mummies from 3,000 years ago was finally certified as the disease globally eradicated in 1980. This was the collective victory of humanity 180 years after Edward Jenner discovered the vaccine.

Today, we are fighting against a new and unknown virus, but equipped with the weapons of medical knowledge and wisdom gained at the cost of tens of billions of lives in the past.

However, wisdom, unlike knowledge, needs more than information to be deepened. It takes individual effort through ones' practice of virtues such as:

- 1 Dana Giving / Sharing
- 2 Discipline Complying with rules
- 3 Patience Persevering through difficulty
- 4 Effort Continuous endeavor
- 5 Meditation Calming one's mind

With so much pain in this world, it is time for all humanity to join forces and deepening our wisdom, taking responsibility for this one person at a time.