

【Yuka-sensei】

Hello, everyone. Thank you very much for joining us for the "Video Prayer Gathering" on Saturday, August 22nd.

August is drawing to a close, and since my children will soon be starting school again, I find myself rather excited about it. But to speak of more serious matters: this summer we had the earthquake in Kumamoto, and last week the torrential rains in Chiba Prefecture. I imagine that many people are still living through this heat in the aftermath of those disasters.

All kinds of situations are arising throughout the world right now, and in the midst of natural disasters as well, I feel that our praying together is a truly great power—one that turns major disaster into minor disaster, and that keeps sending light, the resonance of divinity, into those places. The "Video Prayer Gathering" is, I feel, a precious time in which all the members of our organization can gather like this and send their prayers as one. So today as well, everyone, thank you very much for being here.

【Maki-sensei】

At the previous "Video Prayer Gathering," as we were dissolving the borders between nations, we offered prayers for each country of the world while picturing together with all of you a world in which those borders disappear. Since then, I too have been given a great deal of time over these past two weeks to think about boundaries and about national borders.

What does it mean to dissolve them? What is the truly divine role held by those national borders and boundaries? They do not exist without meaning. Surely they are not there solely to deepen division, to intensify opposition, to strengthen the separation and conflict between self and other, or between one country and another. I kept thinking that, as we ourselves deepen and raise our understanding of what a line is, we may find that there is a divine role held within the very existence of that line.

Within my own life as well, in my connections with other people, there were times when—out of a wish to truly honor another person's feelings, to grant what they hoped for—I tried to receive those feelings and give them form even when I could not necessarily share them. In that sense, these two weeks were also very painful ones for me.

What I felt through that experience is this: the fact that a boundary exists—melting together and becoming one—does not necessarily mean receiving the other person's wishes, granting them, merging with them, and changing my own feelings in order to fulfill them. Rather, when there is a line, when there is distance, it allows me to respect both what I myself hold dear and what the other person holds dear; and even when I cannot grant what they wish, it allows me to keep holding feelings of respect, of understanding, of wanting to receive them. I felt very strongly over these two weeks that the role of that line may in fact be one that keeps each other's divinity from being violated, and that brings that divinity to life.

Among the many things that exist in this world, there is nothing that is simply bad or simply good, nothing that simply must be eliminated, nothing that simply must be kept in existence or continued. The question is rather how, toward whatever gives us a sense of discomfort, we can raise our own perspective, connect our understanding with our experience, and look at things again with fresh eyes.

My own understanding has not yet reached that far, so I am afraid I am not conveying what I want

to say very well to all of you. But the theme within me is this: it is not a matter of judging something as bad or good, as better eliminated or better kept.

The same is true of today's Gratitude to Nature. Even while thinking that it truly would be better if natural disasters did not occur, rather than simply concluding "it would be better if they did not exist, full stop"—when we raise this to a divine perspective, while showing our resolve to reach out with all our strength and stay close to those who are hurt by such events, it is not simply "better if they did not exist, full stop." Within the events themselves, too—as it says in the writing Goi-sensei has given us today—everything is a process that evolves humanity toward divinity. Holding that spaciousness while facing each thing: that, I feel, is something I hold dear in my own life right now.

It is out of all of this that today's special program has come. Once again, I would be so glad if we could share together with all of you our understanding of this, and the felt sense that arises within us as we ourselves pray. Thank you very much for being with us today.

【Rika-sensei】

Listening just now to Maki-sensei's words, there is much that I feel in the same way. When I think that the fading-away form and the Prayer for World Peace are precisely the path of humanity's evolution and creation, it is because divinity alone, light alone, does not quite reach new creation, the evolution and creation of humanity. In a sense, when the counteraction of the fading-away form is added, the foundation beneath it—divinity, or the spirit and spirituality of melting together with all things, as in "May Peace Prevail on Earth"—the prayer word that supports it from deep within comes alive, and seeps out. In a sense, I felt that this pairing of the fading-away form and "May Peace Prevail on Earth" is doing a very great work in the evolution and creation of humanity.

On August 17th, the anniversary of Goi-sensei's passing, the three of us offered prayer at the Fuji Sanctuary. We formed a triangle, and when the three of us connected directly with Goi-sensei, something like a great pillar of Goi-sensei's light came softly down into the center. The path and the prayer that Goi-sensei left us and continues to connect us to—and everything: nature, God, all that we had divided off and separated ourselves from—are fused together through this prayer word. That path has already been made, and we stand at its head, allowed to pray it day by day in our daily lives. For this work, and for the precious mission we are given to live, I offered my deepest gratitude.

And so today as well, this path that Goi-sensei opened and that Masami-sensei carried on all the way to the Divine Spark—receiving that stream firmly, and with hearts full of gratitude, I hope we may send deep prayer also to the fading-away forms that are appearing in so many places in nature. Thank you very much.

<Yuka-sensei's explanation in English>

【Yuka-sensei】

Now then, everyone, let us begin with prayer. Thank you very much.

<Prayer for World Peace>

【Rika-sensei】

Let us move into the main program. As Maki-sensei spoke of a moment ago, today we would like to offer the Gratitude to Nature together with all of you.

As always, we will begin with a reading, so that all of you may take Goi-sensei's words fully into your hearts, and after that we will offer the Gratitude to Nature. If the way we see nature, and the

way we relate to nature, is transformed little by little within us, I believe our prayer will deepen all the more.

Today I will read from "Nature—The Picture Scroll of Great Life, Volume 1," a book by Goi Masahisa-sensei. From page 36 of this book, I will read the piece titled "For the Evolution of Humanity." Please listen.

<Reading of Goi-sensei's "For the Evolution of Humanity">

For the Evolution of Humanity

Masahisa Goi

Gazing at the rainy-season sky, watching the trees in the garden sway in the wind, I begin to feel that the heart of the wind is gloomy and sorrowful. Yet under a summer sky, with the sun beating down, that same heart becomes bright and refreshing, and the heart of the wind grows vivid and alive.

Does the human heart pass into the wind, or does the heart of the wind pass into us? Within human life, the movements of the wind's heart carry a considerable influence. The clearest example of this is the typhoon. The typhoon instills fear in human beings and destroys their lives.

Taking up its role in the will of great Nature, which seeks to evolve the human heart further, the wind goes on working. And yet, for the wind, destroying human lives is a sorrowful thing.

The will of God works always in the wish for humanity's evolution. Unless it continues to evolve, humanity will one day lose the very value of its existence. Right now, humanity is walking the path of its greatest evolution. The greater the evolution, the more severe the suffering it brings. All the various habits and ways of living that belonged to the earlier, unevolved stages must be erased and cast away entirely. It is in the midst of that anguish that humanity now stands. Those fading-away forms have risen to the surface of human life, and the world is filled with ugly, foolish matters — the kind that pain the hearts of thoughtful people and make them knit their brows.

Earthquakes, typhoons, all the phenomena of nature — every one of them is a phenomenon brought about by the will of the gods, in order to extinguish and purify away the evil habits of humanity's unevolved past. If we wish to escape such calamities, then humanity must bring its own heart into accord with the law of evolution before such upheavals of heaven and earth occur.

The law of evolution is this: to become one with the will of God — as Shakyamuni, Laozi, and Christ each taught through to the end, though their words differed. A heart in harmony with the whole of the great universe, the whole of great Nature — this should be the first concern of the human heart. In the rain as in the wind, the will of the gods for humanity's evolution is at work.

If rain falls, become the heart of the rain;
if wind blows, melt into the wind and live.

Within the Prayer for World Peace, I pray for great harmony with all that is.

Thank you very much. Now then, Maki-sensei, over to you.

【Maki-sensei】

Every single one of Goi-sensei's words overflows with deep wisdom. In the time ahead, returning slowly to Goi-sensei's words, I would like us to enter the special program, the "Gratitude to Nature."

First, I would like us to turn our hearts to the words of Goi-sensei that Rika-sensei read for us:

"Does the human heart pass into the wind, or does the heart of the wind pass into us? Within human life, the movements of the wind's heart carry a considerable influence."

So, everyone, please close your eyes slowly and breathe very, very quietly. Breathe in slowly, and breathe out slowly. Please continue breathing quietly.

With your eyes closed, continuing to breathe, please listen. This breathing is something that everyone does in daily life without stopping to think about it—an act of living that we take for granted. Yet even in this single act of breathing, feel that we are not something complete in ourselves alone, and continue slowly breathing in and breathing out.

We receive as air the oxygen that the trees and plants make for us. And there is water sustaining those trees, and the sun, and the earth, and the rain. There are countless lives. Even in taking a single breath like this, I can remember that today, and in this very moment, I am a being kept alive by nature.

And not only our breathing—if we trace back the things that make up our bodies, we can come to realize that all of it is received from nature. The water flowing within our bodies, the nourishment that builds our bodies, the energy that moves this physical body—all of it is received from nature, and in this very moment we are kept alive by nature.

Rather than understanding it with the head, I would like you to feel with the body the sense of being kept alive. Through your breathing, please remember that sense. And by connecting with the fact that we are beings kept alive, I hope you will connect with the feeling of gratitude that wells up and overflows.

The feeling of "thank you" that overflows when we turn our awareness to the connections we are feeling. To the blessings of nature—the sun, the water, the earth, the air, the plants, and all life, and to our own life—I would like you to turn that feeling of "thank you." Thank you very much.

Just now, within the resonance of gratitude, we have felt in our bodies and through our own experience that we are beings kept alive.

Next, I would like us to turn our awareness to Goi-sensei's words: "The will of God works always in the wish for humanity's evolution," and "Right now, humanity is walking the path of its greatest evolution."

When I read these words, what I thought was this: perhaps the various natural disasters occurring on the Earth right now are not trying to destroy humanity; perhaps we can look at them from the perspective of the working of great Nature, which is truly trying to lead humanity toward a great evolution.

We are captivated by the beautiful blessings nature gives us and by the greatness of nature, and it is relatively easy for us to turn gratitude toward that. But when we see the harsh side that nature sometimes shows us, I thought that turning gratitude toward that is surely quite difficult.

And at such times, I do not think there is any need to force ourselves to feel gratitude.

Only, as Goi-sensei says, I wanted to keep from forgetting that, as a matter of fact, the workings of nature—whether in beauty or in harshness—have behind them a great intention that seeks to bring about our evolution and creation, and that there is a power of divinity there.

Within the long view—the workings of the universe—there are the many workings of nature that humanity has faced until now: new land born from volcanic activity, mountains born from the movements of the earth's crust, rain that moistens the land, and the flooding of rivers that enriches

all sorts of microorganisms in the soil.

Of such great workings we can understand this: "When we turn our thoughts to the vast, vast working, and let our hearts reach toward the intention of the universe, we find that even events that look like destruction or feel like terror moment by moment carry within them a working that seeks to bring forth the sprout of divinity."

I say this because I believe it is very much like the accumulation of "the fading-away form and the working of divinity" that I spoke of at the beginning of today's talk.

Might there not be a great working of divinity, an intention of evolution, that cannot be grasped by the human measure of good and bad? Only when we turn our eyes there can we truly receive the real meaning of the words Goi-sensei set down in the writing we heard today: "The will of God works always in the wish for humanity's evolution," and "Right now, humanity is walking the path of its greatest evolution."

And yet, what I want above all to hold dear is this: even while understanding that there is this great working of nature, there is no need to force ourselves to think "there is meaning in this" or "this too is a blessing" about the pain and sorrow we receive through it.

That, I believe, is the same as this: when a fading-away form appears before us, there is no need to make the sorrow, anxiety, and fear we receive through it into something that never happened. When this fading-away form arises, rather than denying the anxiety and fear within it, even while feeling that fading-away form, at the same time it would be good if we could keep in a corner of our minds that there is a divine self, a divine possibility, an infinite capacity that is trying to be born out of it.

When a natural disaster occurs, we face that fear and anxiety to the fullest; and when there is fear and anxiety, we feel gratitude for the closeness of others, we stay as close as we can to those who are afraid, we reach out our hands, we offer our prayers.

That is the capacity for empathy we have as human beings, the power to stay close to others. While holding dear that wish to "somehow do something," it is not a matter of denying the phenomenon; rather, if we can, we try to turn our eyes also to the working of divinity that lies deep within that phenomenon.

Whatever fading-away form may be occurring, I want to keep holding a heart that is certain, that believes, that the stream of divinity and the working of divinity deep within it are never lost.

And so, praying because we are anxious is one way of being; but even while the anxiety is there, setting that anxiety aside, holding the conviction that "everything is perfect," "my divinity is never lost in any situation," "my perfection is never lost whatever the circumstances," "the perfection of the Earth and the perfection of the universe are never lost no matter what unfolds before our eyes"—and, with that conviction, looking upon the fading-away form and praying.

That prayer, I believe, is precisely the prayer word we hold so dear: "May Peace Prevail on Earth."

And so once again, returning to Goi-sensei's words—"The will of God works always in the wish for humanity's evolution," "Right now, humanity is walking the path of its greatest evolution"—and remembering that what appears before us is not all there is, I would like once more, together with all of you, to return our hearts to the divinity of the human being deep within the fading-away form, the divinity of humanity, the divinity deep within confusion, the divinity deep within sorrow, the divinity that is there even when we stand before the fierce face of nature—which perhaps we cannot understand in that moment—the divinity of great Nature deep within, and to offer the

Gratitude to Nature together with all of you. The slides, please.

As we offer this Gratitude to Nature, I will say it again: while returning the human fading-away form again and again into the Prayer for World Peace, at the same time we align our hearts with the divinity deep within—the divinity of the sea, of the earth, of the mountains, of the water, of the plants, of the animals, and of the Earth itself. By offering the Gratitude to Nature in this way, each one of us returns, through this offering of gratitude, into true great harmony. And humanity becomes connected with that. With such thoughts, I would like to offer this gratitude together with all of you. Let us begin.

<Gratitude to Nature>

Taking a little time in quietness, I would like each of you to connect within yourselves with a deep feeling of gratitude toward all of nature.

As we offered the Gratitude to Nature, we have been offering it as one who gives thanks to nature, as one who sees and connects with the divinity of nature.

Now, at the last, in keeping with Goi-sensei's words—"If rain falls, become the heart of the rain; if wind blows, melt into the wind and live"—if rain is falling, then rather than being the one who watches the rain, become the heart of the rain. If wind is blowing, then rather than being the one who feels the wind, melt into the wind. I would like to make a little time to turn our awareness toward this.

Not merely as one who offers gratitude, but holding the feeling that "I am one with nature"—with that, we return to the breathing we did at the beginning.

Please close your eyes and breathe slowly. Breathe in slowly. As you breathe in, great Nature enters into me. And breathe out. As you breathe out, I enter into great Nature.

As I breathe in, great Nature enters into me; as I breathe out, I enter into great Nature. Through the breath, the boundary between nature and me dissolves little by little. The border between me and nature dissolves quietly, quietly. And as it dissolves—where do I end, and where does nature begin?

The water flowing through my body was once water that circled through rain and wind and sea. The air I am breathing in now is air that has circulated together with plants and the sea and countless lives. And the air I breathe out connects again with plants and the sea and countless forms of nature, and goes on making nature. Through the breath, I am not a being cut off from nature. I am a part of nature, and nature too is a part of me; nature is within me. Through the breath, quietly, feeling this sense, feeling myself dissolving into nature, please continue breathing. Thank you very much.

At the end of his writing, Goi-sensei has written, "Within the Prayer for World Peace, I pray for great harmony with all that is." And I think that this "great harmony with all that is" of which Goi-sensei speaks may perhaps be exactly what we are feeling within ourselves and within all of you right now: the boundary between nature and me dissolving little by little, and the figure of oneself existing together with all of it—one's own being, and the being of the person before us.

Now, at the last, feeling that this is what it means that everything exists as one Great Life, as a divine existence, I would like us to form the Divine Spark IN Mudra once together with all of you, and bring this special program to a close.

"Nature and I are not separate." "I and the people around me are not separate." "Within the

resonance of divinity, all things are connected to one another."

To return to divinity is to return to the self that is connected with all of these. With that thought, let us form the Divine Spark IN Mudra.

<The Divine Spark IN Mudra, once>

【Maki-sensei】

Thank you very much. I would love to hear from Yuka-sensei and Rika-sensei as well about what they felt in Goi-sensei's words. Yuka-sensei, are you there?

【Yuka-sensei】

As I listened to Maki-sensei's various talks and explanations, I found myself feeling this: as human beings, in the midst of a disaster, there is of course the feeling of fear; but deep within that phenomenon is something that wishes for the evolution of humanity, and I want to be someone who can grasp that truth in the moment and see it.

I am sorry that this will be a little long, but right now I have started an English-language YouTube channel, and together with a team we are creating YouTube videos.

As it happens, yesterday we were interviewing Mr. Takeuchi, a senior member of Byakko. It was an exchange in Japanese, and he told us that Goi-sensei had said, "Aikido and Byakko are in fact the two wheels of the same cart."

Starting from there, listening to Mr. Takeuchi—who has worked at Byakko for more than sixty years while continuing Aikido for more than fifty—an hour and a half went by in no time at all.

His talk was truly a treasure house of wisdom. I think the staff of our team will now be racking their brains over how to turn this into a video of about ten minutes for the English YouTube channel. I do not know in what form it will come out into the world, but it was such that I truly wished the members in Japan could see it as well.

In that talk, he said that the very first self-introduction when Goi-sensei and Ueshiba-sensei met was, "I am the universe." When Ueshiba-sensei said, "I am the universe," Goi-sensei replied, "I too am the universe." That, apparently, was how the two of them introduced themselves at their meeting.

The reason I bring this up is that the keyword that emerged from that talk about the two wheels was "a heart vibrantly alive, and great harmony." It was because both Ueshiba-sensei and Goi-sensei held this so dear that Goi-sensei said Byakko and Aikido are two wheels of the same cart.

As we went deeper into that, Mr. Takeuchi told us something that only someone who has practiced Aikido for so long could tell: that when two practitioners of Aikido engage with each other, there are moments when, without any sense of what has happened, one has simply been thrown.

But apparently, if you engage while thinking "I will defeat him" or "I will do this," setting yourself apart from your opponent, you can never experience that state.

It is something only those who have experienced it can know; but his account—that when you engage with someone who has passed beyond into that state, or when both of you are in that state, it ends in an instant, as though the moment of collision had never occurred—made a deep impression on me, and I felt it connects strongly with "a heart vibrantly alive, and great harmony."

What I wanted to say is that, apparently, when you are thinking "I will defeat him" or "I will do this," you can never reach that state.

So in a disaster too, when we are saying "I must protect myself," "I must do something about this," "I, I"—I thought that we become greatly cut off from the vibrantly alive state of heart deep within, and from great harmony.

Mr. Takeuchi also said that when asked, "How do you get rid of the thought of self?", the answer is that it is good to live immersed in the resonance of gratitude toward our Guardians, with the state of mind that "our Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities are always protecting us."

Then it is no longer a matter of my doing something about it; rather, one comes into a state of entrusting oneself to the will of God, feeling "I am protected by everything, so it is all right." Whether in Aikido or in the midst of a disaster, I felt that for me it is precisely the presence of our Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities that becomes the bridge.

Thoughts of anxiety and fear are born the moment we think we must do something about it ourselves. But the deities are magnificent. The deities wish for the evolution of humanity. They say, "Everything is love."

Looking at myself now, standing in that state, I thought: "Here is the law of evolution," "Here I am one with the will of God."

When our Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities are always protecting us, and we stand not in "I must do something," "I must overcome this," "I must protect myself," but in the heart of great harmony that says "whatever happens, everything is all right," then the same thing as in the Aikido story happens to us as well.

Just as in that story it was over before there was any memory of being thrown, so too it becomes a state in which, in an instant, with no sense of opposition or friction there at all, one thinks, "Oh—what just happened?"

I could not forget the talk that made me aware of this, and so I have shared it with you. Once we enter into the resonance of great harmony, we can come through in an instant, in great harmony.

Since it happened, so timely, that I did that interview just yesterday, I have woven that story in here. To keep from forgetting that deep within the visible world there is a working that wishes for the evolution of humanity and for hearts vibrantly alive, I felt I want to stay connected with the Guardian Deities and Spirits. I have gone on at length, but thank you so very much again today.

【Maki-sensei】

Listening to that just now, I felt once again that fear and anxiety are signs telling us that our awareness has become separated from the Guardian Deities and Spirits.

Originally, we live together with our Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities; we are kept alive by divinity, and are allowed to have all kinds of experiences.

But when anxiety and fear arise, we forget that connection, or become cut off from it—and I thought that this is a sign that our awareness is turned only toward the self that is somehow cut off from there.

Hearing that talk, I felt anew how important it is to return to the place of knowing that we truly are protected by our Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities, and to deepen our everyday prayer.

Even if, when something big happens all of a sudden, we cannot immediately arrive on the spot at "I am connected with my Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities, and I am at peace and serene," we need not blame ourselves. By continually turning gratitude toward our Guardian Spirits and Guardian Deities from the small things of daily life, when something truly great happens we can

come into the state of mind of living vibrantly, in great harmony.

I have dabbled in it only a little myself, but daily Aikido practice is truly steady and unglamorous, and in the process of practicing you cannot see how this practice will connect to that experience.

But you keep practicing alone when nothing is happening. As you do, in the end you become able to express that you are connected with the great Something.

To be able, when facing another person, to have the sense of self disappear and to engage while connected with the great Something—that, I felt anew as I listened, is possible only because each person has raised themselves in that way through their days. Thank you very much.

【Rika-sensei】

That was wonderful. Truly, listening to Yuka-sensei, I felt that it is not a matter of straining to protect or to erase something by oneself; rather, living with the sense of security that our Guardian Deities and Spirits are doing it in our place, and with a heart of complete entrustment—that is what keeps everything circulating and flowing smoothly.

And so everything is condensed within the prayer words "May Peace Prevail on Earth," "Thank you, Guardian Spirits," "Thank you, Guardian Deities."

At first we come to them thinking, "What lovely words." But the depth of the words of the Prayer for World Peace that we are praying reaches into the true great purification of the Universal God, into evolution and creation—into that great movement of the universe.

And so, with "Does the human heart pass into the wind, or does the heart of the wind pass into us?"—it is a working of two sides, where you cannot tell which is which. Sometimes, even where it says "wind," I interpret it as "God."

As for "Does the human heart pass into God, or does the heart of God pass into us?"—we are both of these; we are working on both sides at once.

Nature, all living things, and humanity are all dissolved into the great universe, and at its very source flows the single line of prayer, "May Peace Prevail on Earth."

Today I truly felt that we are kept alive within such perfect evolution and creation, and I was so glad to be able to hold once again the sense and the image of the nature within me and the nature outside me interacting with each other. Thank you very much.

【Yuka-sensei】

Thank you very much. Now then, let us move on to the announcements.

<Announcements>

【Rika-sensei / Yuka-sensei】

Thank you very much. It has been a wonderful time again today.

And everyone, please have a wonderful day. May Peace Prevail on Earth. Thank you very much.

That is all.