

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE MARCH 11 EARTHQUAKE IN JAPAN



**“My heart aches when I think of the pain, grief, and anxiety of those whose lives have been changed forever by this tragedy.... I would like to convey my deepest respect and admiration for all who have committed themselves day and night to saving lives and providing disaster relief.”**

*From Her Holiness’ message on p. 2*

On March 11, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake—one of the largest ever recorded—struck off the northeast coast of Japan, causing tsunamis and severe damage to the region. The situation is such that it has been difficult thus far to assess the extent and ramifications of the disaster. Furthermore, concerns for the region’s safety linger as instability created by the damage continues to present challenges.

Our heart goes out to those who are affected by the earthquake, and we are praying for the swift recovery of the region. Under the leadership of Her Holiness Shinso Ito, Shinnyo-en has established an emergency task force at its Ogen Center in Tachikawa, Tokyo, to collect information and organize disaster relief activities for the coastal regions to the northeast.

Shinnyo-en’s first priority is to gather information about those who have been affected, including practitioners and their families, and respond accordingly in tandem with professional disaster relief services. We are also coordinating the mobilization of relief supplies and services. Shinnyo-en’s emergency task force will soon send the first team of its disaster relief volunteers (SeRV) to the affected areas and set up a disaster relief fund to accept and allocate donations from members and the general public.

Due to transportation disruptions and changes in our schedules, we kindly ask you to contact the nearest temple for up-to-date information before planning a visit to Shinnyo-en temples in Japan, including Oyasono and the Ogen Center.

At the heart of all faiths is the path of compassion—empathy for the suffering, troubles, and worries of others. As Shinnyo Buddhists, we strive to consider the hardships of others as our own and then meditate on how it is that we can respond, no matter how small that response might be. From this perspective, reacting to the events in Japan—or to any disaster—is less about asking *Why?* and more about asking *What can I do?* This universal, humanistic ideal is both simple to understand and easy to practice.

During the Second World War, Shinjo Ito (the founder of Shinnyo-en) turned the grounds of Shinchoji temple into a vegetable garden and gave the vegetables to his neighbors. In his eyes, this was how to create peace—through sincere acts of compassionate service. Shinjo wrote, “Faith is not about preaching or philosophy, it is simply action to which you have dedicated your whole being.”

We thank you for your heartfelt support, and join with all of you in praying for a swift recovery from this tragedy.



**Words by Her Holiness Keishu Shinso Ito**  
**Feast of Eternal Bliss Held with Prayers for Recovery in**  
**the Aftermath of the Earthquake in Japan**  
**March 15, 2011**

“In oneness with the Shinnyo Parents, the Two Dojis, the members of our Buddhist community, and others, today on this 15th of March, 2011, we offered our heartfelt prayers for the repose of those who have lost their lives in the disasters that have occurred in Japan and elsewhere around the world. We included these prayers today in our monthly Feast of Eternal Bliss, which we hold to honor the Ever-Present Buddha.

“During the service, I conducted the Tathagata Rite in accordance with the principles of Shinnyo Buddhism. Together we prayed for the safety and well-being of those in afflicted areas. My heart aches when I think of the pain, grief, and anxiety of those whose lives have been changed forever by this tragedy, and the thousands who have been displaced and forced to live in temporary shelters, as well as those who remain anxious about the safety of their family and friends.

“For the first time, this ceremony is being posted on the internet in order to reach those who are unable to travel to a Shinnyo-en sanctuary. I would like each of you to know that you are never alone. You are firmly connected to Oyasono, the home of our faith.

“In the Nirvana Sutra it is written that all beings possess buddha nature. This also means that all of us have the strength and ability to overcome any difficulty we encounter.

“The Nirvana Sutra also teaches that buddhahood is everlasting and always there to support us on our journey and in

times of need. The Buddha, our Dharma Parents, and the Two Dojis are constantly at our side to encourage us. Shojushinin Tomoji said that there is no mountain we cannot climb over. No matter what challenges we face, we can prevail with lovingkindness, compassion, and wisdom. During difficult times like these, it is even more crucial to create harmony by caring for our neighbors and fellow human beings, and overcome hardship together.

“Founder Kyoshu Shinjo said that he wished to live his life not for himself, but for others. I would like to convey my deepest respect and admiration for all who have committed themselves day and night to saving lives and providing disaster relief. As a Buddhist community, we are also committed to giving monetary and humanitarian aid through our volunteer group, SeRV, and by other means. We will continue to do as much as we possibly can for as long as necessary.

“At the temple we are continually offering prayers for the missing and injured. The Buddha and our Dharma Parents cry and suffer with us. Today’s service will help the blessings of the ever-present buddhas flow to those whose lives were lost. We have made this possible by holding rites that offer spiritual consolation and transfer merit to the deceased in accordance with the profoundest mysteries of the Nirvana Dharma.

“Let us all, as Shinnyo practitioners, come together as one and take action to help all those affected to get back on their feet again.”

## HOW SHINNYO-EN RESPONDS IN A DISASTER: SOME POINTS FOR PRACTICE

Our urgent efforts to help in the face of the earthquake characterize how Shinnyo-en has responded to the challenges of natural and human-made disasters over the years. We see this as an expression of the bodhisattva vow to act for the welfare of others. While maintaining our religious focus of offering prayers and conducting Buddhist rites, we also work with domestic and international organizations such as the Red Cross to assist in relief efforts wherever we can be of assistance.

Help is offered unconditionally regardless of religious or cultural differences. When a catastrophic earthquake struck Pakistan in 2005, Shinnyo-en donated funds to address the immediate material suffering of the population while also contributing towards rebuilding a mosque dedicated to the spiritual well-being of the local Muslim community.

Shinnyo-en is also committed to building support networks that will sustain themselves long after the initial crises have passed. After the 1995 quake in Kobe, for example, Shinnyo-en established a volunteer group to support elderly victims who were forced to live alone in temporary housing. Partnering with a local volunteer center and a social welfare council, we sent volunteers to help the elderly cope mentally with their changed circumstances. Over the years, as the infrastructure of the quake-stricken communities returned to normal, the volunteer activities evolved to include classes, parties, and other social activities aimed at caring for the elderly to enhance their health and motivation in life. The group is continuing to build a community-based network to support society at large beyond the boundaries of religion.

Concerning our religious focus, the Shinnyo-en community continues to offer special prayers each day for the sake of all. Individually and collectively, we pray for the well-being of the survivors and the recovery of all in the afflicted areas while offering sincere spiritual consolation for the victims who lost their lives. During the upcoming Festival of the Ever-Present on the 27th and 28th, we will also perform a *homa* service to pray for a swift recovery as well as a service to sincerely offer spiritual consolation for the victims.

Whenever disaster strikes somewhere in the world, Shinnyo-en reminds practitioners that they have the opportunity to ask for special “heartfelt merit transfer” (Jpn. *chushin eko*) to pray for the victims who have lost their lives.



SeRV volunteers

That is why, in addition to prayer requests for earthquake and tsunami victims, we are also accepting requests for those who died as a result of the current conflict in Libya. Shinnyo Buddhists are also encouraged to imbue their morning and evening prayers with compassion for those who died in this and other disasters, and to keep in mind those who survived and are trying to rebuild their lives.

This practice of compassion includes identifying with the suffering and pain of others as if we ourselves were afflicted. We try to understand what they are feeling, ask what we can do to help them, and take action, however small. Calamities are regarded not as things for others to face, but as challenges we all can rise to meet. We pray, meditate, reflect, and discover what we must do to act in oneness with the Buddha and our masters.

Founder Kyoshu Shinjo continued to guide his disciples and pray for those who came to him to seek help even when he himself faced devastating personal tragedies, such as the passing of a child. He said, “I am a man who serves the Buddha. It is my duty to help others first and consider myself later.” Even in her very last moments, Shojushinin Tomoji urged her husband (the founder) and daughter (the current head of Shinnyo-en) to attend to the members rather than stay and look after her.

Our founders demonstrated the willingness to devote themselves fully to the well-being of others. This came out of the deep wish, latent within us all, to cherish the life of each individual. They embodied the guiding principle that underlies Shinnyo Buddhism: to see all people as buddhas and serve them with full devotion.

Our masters acted on this expression of the bodhisattva vow, and as their disciples we are also committed to serving others wholeheartedly.