



**A message from Pierre Bonneels,  
BJA Friendship Committee Chair**

Dear BJA Friends,

Starting with the period of hanami beneath the cherry blossoms, celebrating the new energy provided by the powerful mother nature straight through the season of early summer time.... personally, I feel I am still walking on eggshells. As if I risked committing an odd move at every step: defying the city rules by taking a “static position” enjoying the transient beauty of flowers in my favorite public parc, shocking my neighbors by walking with the kids in a freshly disinfected Metro, that feeling still lingers on...

Are we all doing well? I fear that if the lockdown felt odd, the continuing deconfinement might be feeling even more strange in the future. Surrounded by constant ethical dilemma, we have a hard time to enjoy a freedom that we took so much for granted before. Any of our future actions seem to require greater responsibility. What if the second wave hits us because of our communal incapacity to control the human-to-human spread of the COVID-19?

Even before I can act, whether it is forbidden or not, each of my actions seems to be necessarily facing some ethical questions or else I might have a guilty conscience. What about having a happy hour drink with friends at home while not meeting anyone else? Why not, after all, that seems to be basic. We all need human warmth to go on and pursue our dream. But can I do the same with my old mother? Do I have to decide for her whether or not she can meet me? Do I have the right to judge whether she is strong enough to meet my children or do things with other family members?

How do we know the difference between irresponsibility and paranoia? In a way, we are currently required to act even though things unfold in our everyday life as unknown to us and we have to do this without being able to anticipate how things are afterwards. What instrument or technology can show us the right way to make right decisions today? It's called "bad luck" in ethics. It means that you never really know where you are going. There is no static North Star by which we can navigate the course of our journey and what we can do the best is for us to avoid the reefs that may break our ship. Not having the absolute rules to apply to but still being able to act according to a context gives a form of wisdom that Aristotle called Phronesis. In Japanese we use the common expression "watch out" (kiotsukeru 気を付つける) or the more elaborate term of "prudence" (shinchō 慎重) and "discernment" (shikibetsu 識別) all of these elements are the proof of an Aristotelian "middle way," which does not require to bring our actions to a complete halt; but it is simply a question of not falling into excesses that lead us nowhere. This is very similar to what the "middle path" (chūdō 中道) in the Buddhist tradition. It is the first teaching that the Buddha delivered after his awakening or satori. Finding solutions tailored to the specific situations we are in is an old and universal teaching we should never forget especially in the time of a crisis.

Whether you are a medical staff, a company director, a kaishain or a jogger, more than ever ethical questions are now part of your daily routines. But this should not stop us from finding solutions to ever new cases of conscience we face. The Friendship committee and its committee members are here to think with you about any of the questions you may have today; for friends are made to listen and our Friendship café (this time online) is especially designed for that purpose. So, please do not hesitate to join us whenever you feel alone in facing life's questions or simply feel like sharing your insights. Once the deconfinement releases us to go walk with a group of friends, we will go out and enjoy once again together all the beauty of nature and each other.

Pierre Bonneels  
BJA Friendship Committee Chair