1

Preface:

To you who hold these poems in your hands.

In Ukraine and Gaza, children and people with disabilities are facing great danger in their lives, powerless to resist. Unable to sit still any longer, I, an amateur poet, faced my keyboard. I began to hit with all my might. I hit. I hit. I hit. These urgent words of prayer reached from my soul. The words formed a scrum and began to take off, with a life of their own. I beseech you, please reach out, for the children, for the disabled.

From Fujii Katsunori of Japan.

This is an English translation of eleven poems from the collection: “Let Hope Be Not Cut Off From The Heart”.

Please forward to your acquaintances and friends.

 **LET HOPE BE NOT CUT OFF FROM THE HEART**

 **By Katsunori Fujii**

 **Translated by William I. Elliott & Katsumasa Nishihara**

1

 War is evil.

 Oppression and discrimination are evil.

 A rotten government is evil.

 What is worse is tolerating them.

2 SOLIDARITY AND PRAYER

 ---Fellow people with disabilities in Ukraine---

 War makes the disabled nuisances.

 War leaves the disabled behind.

 War arouses a eugenic point of view.

 The worst evil cause of a colossal number of people with disability is war.

 I fearfully watch the first news on TV in the morning.

 Encirclement around Kiev has become narrower again.

 Churches and cultural assets have collapsed as if screams arose.

 Prohibited tactics have been used and a nuclear plant has flamed up.

 Not killing one another, but negotiations,

 not an invasion but a cease-fire,

 not a cease-fire but peace---those are what we want very badly.

 It is peace which goes well with the blue sky and the golden harvest.

 We keep on praying,

 while gazing in the direction of west-northwest,

 in order not to give up our hope from our minds.

 At all costs, we want you to survive

War immediately puts obstacles in the way of people’s lives.

 War easily takes away the dignity of the disabled.

War smears the disabled person’s tomorrow with black paint.

 We must put an end to this soon. No. Right now.

 Let me tell you once again:

　At all costs, we want you to survive,

 no matter if forced to steal food

or beg for quarter before an enemy,

from faraway, long-distant Japan yet my heart is always close to you

3 A DREAM OF THE MIDDLE EAST

 It happened again.

 Not that it happened but that it was caused.

 Both leaders should have known everything---

 Once it broke out what would become of that?

 It would take a heavy toll of human lives.

 War coverage reminds me

 of the sound of an antiwar song.

 A tune of over a half century before springs to my lips.

 “Oh, that was all the man left behind him when he died.”1

 word after word heartbreakingly still holds today.

 Blaming each other starts incorrigibly.

 Both try to get more by holding out, which reveals nothing but

 the atrophy of the United Nations.

 As the result guiltless citizens run around trying to escape and

 almost all the victims are children, the disabled, the elderly and women.

 Characters on the TV screen look solemn and tough.

 What on earth has human society been doing so far?

 Old clichés are exchanged as usual:

 “This is a jihad.”

 “The cause is the other nation.”

 “Retaliation is our right.”

 “Our victims will go to the Kingdom of God.”

 The only answer at this time is a cease-fire.

 The war countries concerned must stop attacking unconditionally

 and promptly.

 As soon as a cease-fire is established, we must get ready for peace.

 Peace talks well suit the United Nations Headquarters.

 Participants should be children, the disabled, the elderly and women.

 I wish such a “Dream of the Middle East” to be one

 with no terrorism,

 poverty or hatred would be realized

 and that one day peace, indigenous to the Middle East, superior to oil,

 would be exported to many countries in the world.

　　１　a snatch of a song “ALL THAT THE MAN LEFT BEHIND WHEN HE DIED”:

 The song was created for an anti-Vietnam War meeting in 1965. Lyrics

 were written by Shuntaro Tanikawa. Music was composed by Toru

 Takemitsu.

4 A SUDDEN THOUGHT

 What I think of, after I wake up from my dream,

 Is that I wish there would be channels in a dream, like a TV set,

 So then I could watch only funny scenes that I like.

 What I think of the first news in the morning

 is that I wish there would be peaceful news only.

 What I think of a missile launching

 is that I wish there would be an extra-large fishing net to catch it

 in the sky.

 What I think of the report on the dead bodies from the front

 is that the most dreadful thing is my growing used to it.

 What I think of an evil murderer

 is whether he had his own boyhood.

 What I think of colorful curtains in apartments at dusk

 is that I wish the world would be linked together with this sort of

 quiet-colored patchwork.

 What I pray for at today’s end

 Is that I wish hope would waken in my heart as I rise up in the

 morning.

5 THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY ANIMALS

 Another United Nations General Assembly begins in Africa.

 The assembly hall is a prairie as far as the eye can see. A blazing sun

 illuminates it.

 Participants are there by choice.

 Some stretch out, some seat themselves, some on the trees

 and others take a dip in a river. A buffalo slowly takes the chair.

 Now is the time for the United Nations General Assembly By Animals to begin.

 The chair-animal begins to talk by clearing his throat.

 “The war by human beings doesn’t seem to end. We mustn’t leave it alone. Is there any good idea?” His shoulders droop a little as he says,

 “Strain your ears and you’ll hear many lives grate.”

 And he goes on in a harsh tone,

 “please feel free to think with one another these three days. From now on.”

 A savanna which has been quiet suddenly comes to life.

 A lion with the preliminary of “I won’t attack on today” says to a zebra,

 “It’s the height of folly that man and man try to kill each other.”

 An elephant, raising its trunk, says,

 “We animals ever since we were born have never used any weapon.”

 A warthog, grunting, says,

 “Characters in this war are all males, which is too bad.”

 A hippopotamus in a river, making its small eyes bigger, says,

“Speaking about how peace is important is mere talk, but they probably won’t think up anything helpful.”

 Gorilla brothers from the taller tree and the shorter say,

 “To the guys selling weapons peace is quite a nuisance.”

 These three days are coming to an end in no time.

 An ostrich begins to run, after being nominated by the chair-animal,

 with its flag reading, “Any opinion will be ok, no later than tomorrow

 morning.”

 The next morning a blazing sun begins to rise.

 “Thwack!” “Whack!” “Thwack!” “Whack!” The sounds of a mallet echo

 across the prairie.

 The buffalo, the chair-animal, declares with dignity:

 “We’d like to deliver three demands to human beings.”

 No. 1 Throw away weapons at once.

 No. 2 Never attack the nation that has thrown away weapons.

 No. 3 Listen to voiceless voices and the opinions of all the living.

 Clapping and cheering in joy. Without a dissenting voice.

 The chair-animal says to a vulture, “Take this to human society right now.”

 “Aye, aye, sir.”

 The vulture hangs a pouch around its neck bearing a special resolution

 addressed to “Men and Women” and flies away beyond the prairie.

 All the animals smile with a look of satisfaction.

 Waving and wagging their tails, they are on their way to dens.

 A giraffe’s head disappears from the horizon.

 The buffalo, after seeing all of them off, clears his throat as usual and mutters:

 “Man, honour mankind.” \*

\* The Hadamar killing centre, located in the German town of Hadamar, a

 killing facility involved in the Nazi involuntary euthanasia programme

 known as *Aktion T4*, has now become The Hadamar Memorial Museum.

 In the back yard a monument stands bearing the cautionary inscription

“Mensch achte den Menschen,” meaning “Man, honour mankind.”

6 THE HEIGHT OF FOLLY

 War is what makes humans inhuman.

 War means that the more you kill people the more you’ll be praised.

 War is what leaves behind incurable scars.

War is what makes you carry a nightmare on your back throughout a lifetime.

 War is what makes a dictator more than a dictator.

 War is what leaves a legacy of hatred for one hundred or one hundred and fifty years.

 War is what makes a national budget abnormal.

War is what throws off the supply-demand balance in food and energy.

War is what snatches away hope and freedom from a daily life.

War is what puts culture and art to rout.

War is what splashes decorations and liveliness with muddy water.

War is what makes your life plan go awry.

War is what makes an awful man’s worth rise extraordinarily.

War is what directly leads to abandonment of the weak.

 War forcibly separates families and the lovers.

　War is what paints a child’s heart pitch-black.

War is what knocks down the earth and the living.

War becomes the testing ground for developing a weapon.

 War is what makes a dead body nothing but a substance.

 War never ends once it starts.

 War starting from one man’s illusion

 is the height of irretrievable folly.

7 HUMAN RIGHTS’ MONOLOGUE

 Since when have we, human rights, been known to the world?

 In fact, it must have been with the birth of human beings.

 But it is recently that we have been thought of as good customers.

 Who are we?

 We may be something like air.

 Usually we are never conscious of it but when we suddenly change

 in quality that is an important matter.

 What’s the difference between us and air.

 Air is a blessing from nature.

 Human rights have been created by people’s unrelenting effort.

 What becomes of us if threatened by someone?

 We feel as if our life were lacking in oxygen.

 We feel as if the outline of our hope were gnawed at little by little.

 What will happen if we make friends with people?

 Families, schools, working places and the whole town will look brighter.

 We can hardly wait for tomorrow. That’s too much for us.

 The way we look good

 depends on the age when it becomes a matter of course to be able to

 decide everything by our own will.

 It’s a society in which there’s no oppression and war.

 What encourages us is human rights’ standards are heavier than the weight enduring in history

and a flexible civic campaign, without flinching at all?

 We’d like you to know about us better.

 We’d like you to care for us better.

 We’d like to work harder, too.

8 TIES

 What will happen if all the “ties” are completely pulled out of a society?

 It might be just the same as the extinction of the sun.

 It was ties among people which brought about a major reform in

 hunting and agrarian cultures.

 These ties helped create technology, science and art.

 They are constantly changing their forms and have become the foundations of civilization.

 Modern society is riding on them too.

 What ties bring about now are:

 friends,

 security,

 production

 and hope.

 There are, of course, pitfalls in these ties.

 People without ties are expelled.

 When people with ties become dependent on one another, they lose

 their individuality.

 The tighter ties get, the more others look like obstacles.

 Ties with a hard heart give birth to domination and submission.

 To make ties true

 we must try hard to get to know a person who has a different opinion.

 Always placing people with troubles in the center of the matter,

 willingness to meet anyone in person, with no rush or pressure,

 enlarging the torch of peace,

 standing in the way of environmental destruction

 and fixing the fragility of society

 are established through a small,

 yet sure tie.

9 A BOOKSTORE IN A TOWN

 Oh, disappearing:

 one bookstore after another

 like the light of a miniature bulb burning out.

 Oh, disappearing:

 a small cultural centre

 where after one semester I felt I was becoming well informed.

 Oh, disappearing:

 nostalgia beyond endurance

 and impatience to wait for a monthly mag’ on the date of sale.

 Oh, disappearing:

 the terms I got to know at a bookstore, such as

 standing reading, selling books stacked flat,

 and now in a second printing!

 Oh, disappearing:

 a place for shelter from the rain on my way back home

 as I worried about the drift of a cloud, looking at the spine of

 a book.

 Oh, disappearing:

 a piece of advice on a good book.

 A storekeeper’s confident recommendation, though his voice is low, was no mistake at all.

 Oh, never let them disappear.

 It’s no easy task to stop the closing of a school and the abolishment of a railroad route.

 But why can’t adults in this country at least protect a bookstore

 in a town?

10 READING WHILE YOU’RE AT SOMETHING ELSE

 They say that the circulation of newspapers in every publishing company

 have greatly decreased

 and the numbers of publication and of sales have rapidly declined.

 Digital books have appeared in their place

 and increased the pace of production more and more.

 How to read news in a paper and in a digital edition are quite different.

 In the paper you’ll get to the article at the end by stopping here and there along the way.

 The special technique of the digital version is its success on the first try.

 The difference between the two is absolutely crucial.

 The right way to read a newspaper originally begins with taking the whole

 view of space on a page.

 Every reader of the paper unconsciously looks for some articles

 interesting to him.

 An interesting aspect in reading while you’re at something else is an

 encounter with various news.

 What about the case of a dictionary?

 You never succeed on the first try to hit the bull’s eye by investigation.

Page after page, after some items, you’ll reach a memorable word.

 You’ll get a greater-than-expected harvest through reading the word

 before and after it.

 The effectiveness of reading in a paper, while you’re at something else,

 is no match for that of the digital version.

 A found object to be got through loitering on the way.

 An old sage said, “Human nature lies in tarrying on the way.”

 Reading while you’re at something else is a warning about an exaggerated

 belief in the efficiency of reading.

 Reading while you’re at something else helps increase the width and the

 depth of your way of thinking.

 \* According to the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association, the

 circulation of newspapers in Japan is around 30,840,000 in number.

 Compared to the previous year 2021, the decrease is about 2,180,000,

 which is equivalent to a 6.6 percent decrease. (This survey was made in

 October, 2022.)

11 SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT A FIVE-FORKED ROAD

 When I near a five-forked road, my feet stop.

 It’s not because I lose my way

 but because I just want to have a feeling different from that of a

 crossroads.

 Besides four directions, a five-forked road has one more direction.

 If the four cardinal directions are normal,

 will another road be like a lone-wolf or something like a valuable

 possession?

 Four roads in the four cardinal directions have something stable about

 them.

Does this come from force of habit?

 Is a sense of security from force of habit the real thing?

 Looking back over my life, I’ve been walking along a long-cherished road.

 Has my way of thinking been unnoticed and tamed into something like

 a fixed idea of a crossroads?

 Is what I tend to think of only the four cardinal directions spread ahead of me?

 It’s good to stop at a five-forked road.

 It’s also good to think of another unseen road at a crossroads.

 It’s also good to get lost on a road sometimes though it’s a little

 unsettling.

With thanks to Ian W McKay, Alex Noone and Yuri Suzuki.