

EPISODE NINE

NINETEEN PAPER CRANES

**AS I
AM**



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EPIISODE NINE - NINETEEN PAPER CRANES



FILM SUMMARY

Sachiko Tanaka is a woman with disabilities in Japan. She lives a simple and peaceful life in the L'Arche Japan community. One day, her country woke to the news that she is disposable. In this episode, we see how Sachiko's community responds to the largest mass murder in their country since World War II.



"WHY DOES THE WORLD
ASSUME THAT A DISABLED
LIFE IS NOT PROFOUNDLY
BEAUTIFUL?"

FILM THEMES

- **Vulnerability**

In his letter, the assailant explained his logic for killing. If these people are miserable and the people who care for them are miserable, then they are better off dead. He only took those who were the most fragile, the most vulnerable. In this way vulnerability presented a condition worthy of violence instead of tenderness.

- **Eugenics**

Though eugenics as a concept and practice have been around since the time of ancient civilizations, many countries have had thriving eugenics programs in modern times. Japan is just one country that has advocated and legislated for improving the hereditary qualities of a human population. These policies and practices call for regulation of the birth and life of "undesirable" people, like people with physical or intellectual disabilities. Though these ideas went through a period of major decline following WWII, some have identified a resurgence as science and technology around genomic studies advances.

- **Deaf**

Sachiko goes to taiko practice even though she is deaf. She listens to the vibrations with her whole body. As the film goes silent, we are invited to contemplate what it means to listen without hearing. This presented another reminder that, despite mainstream notions, having disabilities is not synonymous with having less joy or less happiness.

- **Origami cranes**

To commemorate the lives of the people killed at the Sagamihara institution, the L'Arche community made cranes and presented them at the memorial site. There were many discussions about what the community would like to do, the final decision was made to turn the pain of the letter into cranes that could "carry the souls to paradise."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After watching the film, how did you feel?
2. "Out of our assumptions, we made 19 deaths." What does this mean to you?
3. Examine your own assumptions about a disabled life. Where do you think these assumptions come from?
4. Some people have sided with the assailant because he considered his act a form of compassionate killing for people whose profound disabilities made life unbearable while others have argued that he took the lives of innocent, vulnerable people. Discuss both of these arguments and explain where you stand and why.
5. What stood out to you about Sachiko's life? Why?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Sachiko has an active sense of humor. The scene where she pretended to be choking is one of her classic jokes. Because her body appears weak and off balance, people who meet her for the first time are often concerned that she will come in harm's way. She chooses to use jokes to make people more comfortable with her fragility.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

What happens when the desire to improve lives leads to activities that end lives? What are the differences and similarities between this event and other events you have seen on the news? Take time to examine the social conditioning that allows some lives to matter more than others. What would it take to respect and protect the lives of the vulnerable?