

# Living the

# LOTUS

## Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

## The Flower that Blooms in a Willing and Flexible Heart

IT is said that when a certain noted manga artist would accept a new student, the artist would place more weight on the potential student's temperament than their skill. We may wonder how someone with poor drawing skills could ever become a manga artist. But if people concentrate on only one task, there are times when even someone thought to be a hopeless case can "mutate," suddenly and drastically improving. Isn't it fascinating?

Among Shakyamuni's disciples was a person named Cudapanthaka, who couldn't remember even one phrase of the Buddha's teachings. He devoted himself to a single practice, thinking, "I will purify the monastery," as the Buddha had instructed him, and so day in and day out he concentrated on cleaning the monastery. One day, he suddenly achieved

enlightenment. This is the same thing, isn't it? When you maintain a willing and flexible heart that single-mindedly perseveres as your teacher instructed, the day will certainly come when the flower, previously hidden within you, will blossom.

If you ask people working in top positions in various fields what they were like in their elementary school days, those who were considered gifted and talented are in fact rare. When it comes to education in the home, nurturing "the human heart" is what is important. If a child is raised by a parent who thinks only of their child's ladder to success, no matter which path that child chooses, he or she is unlikely to become a child who is able to blossom.

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization whose holy scripture is the Threefold Lotus Sutra. It was established by Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Cofounder Myoko Naganuma in 1938. This organization is composed of ordinary men and women who have faith in the Buddha and strive to enrich their spirituality by applying his teachings to their daily lives. At both the local community and international levels, we, under the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, are very active in promoting peace and well-being through altruistic activities and cooperation with other organizations.

The title, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, is meant to convey our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life, to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. The online edition aims to make Buddhism more practicable in the daily lives of people around the world.

## The Brilliance of Our Senior Citizens

by Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



### All Are Originally Wonderful

Today in Japan, there are some 16.41 million people over the age of seventy-five, who are commonly called *koki koreisha* (latter-stage senior citizens). I am one of them. A wonderful letter that I received not long ago pointed out that, by changing the word *koki* (latter-stage) to a homonym meaning brilliant and shining, latter-stage senior citizens are actually brilliant, shining senior citizens. In other words, after age seventy-five, people can be all the more bright and brilliant—that has a cheerful feeling and conveys an image of happy, active seniors.

However, “brilliant, shining seniors” are not necessarily active and sprightly people, which presents us with a rather delicate problem.

“In spring, the flowers. In summer, the cuckoo. In autumn, the moon. And in winter, the glistening snow, clear and cool.” This is a famous poem by the Zen master Dogen (1200–1253). This poem expresses how each of the four seasons, in and of itself, exudes its own distinct brilliance. These are all involved in the working of nature, and each is wonderful in its own way.

From this perspective, being bright and brilliant suggests much more than activities in the spotlight, and it is important even in our senior years, the so-called late autumn of life, that we are able to honestly accept things for what they are at each and every moment.

In other words, to say nothing of those who remain robustly healthy and active, all those who turn their eyes toward the fact that they are existing in the here and now and are aware of the brilliance reflected in that fact, and are grateful for it, are in the truest sense, bright, brilliant seniors.

The haiku poet Fusei Tomiyasu (1885–1979) wrote the following verse: “At last, being alive is enjoyable, / In the spring of my old age.” Running through this verse is the sentiment of having realized something important that could not be understood in the spring or summer of life. This verse certainly expresses the mindset of a bright, brilliant senior citizen.



## The Brilliance of Bodhisattvas

On the one hand, old age has a brilliance not found among younger generations, but undeniably the reality is that it entails suffering. Not only for the elderly persons who must receive care, but for some of those people who are caring for elderly family members as well, the phrase “brilliant, shining seniors” may sound like whitewashing the dilemma of mounting worries about an expensive, exhausting situation, which they have nowhere to let out.

However, while your heart is occupied by difficulties and complicated feelings that are hard to express and you grumble about the situation, at the same time you wish the person requiring care would get better. At the bottom of your heart, you want to do everything possible to help. And what is calling forth in you such profound consideration is, without a doubt, the fact of a family member in need of care. Therefore, I think that such a family member who serves as a cause, lighting the lamp of the caregiver’s mind of compassion, is deserving of the description “shining brilliance.”

For instance, we must never forget that even someone who is bedridden can become a brilliant, shining bodhisattva, serving as the plow and the hoe that cultivate the field of the hearts and minds of the people around him or her. As Founder Nikkyo Niwano once said, “I want to live the kind of life that is, in and of itself, an offering,” how we are leading our lives can be one form of such an offering.

Of course, just as the scholar of Oriental philosophy Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983) said, “The secret to never growing old is to continue to be passionate about learning, the arts, and religious faith,” when we lead lives that are actively engaged in study that is put to use as a contribution to society, we are leading lives that are an offering of a senior citizen’s brilliance.

Of course, it goes without saying that our Risho Kosei-kai Dharma centers and our Sangha have firmly laid the groundwork for this. The teachings of the Buddha that we learn at our Dharma centers are put to work in our homes and communities. That gives each of us a reason to live life fully and brings joy to everyone around us. For us, it is natural to help each other and call out to one another, filling our Dharma centers with kind consideration. Seeing such brilliant, shining senior members at a Dharma center, I am sure that they are serving as models for younger generations, and that they are playing a vital role in their communities.

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## Roles Given by the Buddha Help Me Grow

by Rev. Hsiu-Fang Chien  
Taipei Dharma Center

*This Dharma experience speech was delivered at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo during the ceremony of the monthly memorial day for the Founder on March 4, 2016.*

EVERYONE, please guide me. My connection with Rissho Kosei-kai began with my father's joining Rissho Kosei-kai. At the time, my grandfather was the principal of a school in Taiwan, and my father used to go and play in the school grounds when he was a student. In those days, Taiwan was under Japanese rule, so Japanese soldiers were stationed at the school. Among the soldiers, there was a man who treated my father kindly. He gave my father his name card, and he and my father exchanged promises to see each other in Japan someday.

Thirty-five years later, in 1980, when my father took a business trip to Japan for the first time, he remembered the soldier's name card. Although a long time had passed, my father was able to meet him again. The soldier was Rev. Takao Ogino who was a board member of Rissho Kosei-kai at the headquarters at that time.

As he was asked by Rev. Ogino, my father participated in *hoza*, or the Dharma circle, at the Great Sacred Hall, and he was touched by seeing that experience for the first time. He asked Rev. Ogino how he could join Rissho Kosei-kai, and he became a



*Rev. Hsiu-Fang Chien delivers her Dharma experience at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo during the ceremony of the monthly memorial day for the Founder.*

member. After his return to Taiwan, my mother heard about Rissho Kosei-kai from him and soon also became a member. My parents started the Dharma dissemination earnestly. My father served as a liaison between Taiwan and Japan and coordinated things like asking the headquarters to send lecturers to Taiwan. My mother, who became a teacher, guided many of her fellow workers to Rissho Kosei-kai.

In those days, I regarded Rissho Kosei-kai as my parents' faith, but not my own. But, after my mother was killed in a traffic accident in 1987, my father gave priority to the Dharma dissemination rather than his job, and spent most of the day at the Dharma center. In order to support my father, I also visited the Dharma center and lent hand with general affairs. Later, I was appointed as a head of the Youth Group and then a chapter leader, but I didn't understand the teachings deeply and fulfilled the roles just out of my feelings for my father—I wanted to aid him with his role and to help him accomplish his wishes.

In 2007, my father passed away. At the time, I served as a chapter leader, and I thought I would like to quit my role because my father had died. However, Rev. Teruo Saito, then minister of the Taiwan Dharma Center, said that he would like a Taiwanese, not Japanese, to become the next minister and he wanted to recommend me for the next minister. I received this role only because I thought I had to fulfill my responsibility, not feeling much gratitude for it.

When I began my role as a minister, I faced a variety of challenges, one after another. One day, I served as a facilitator of *hoza* with about sixty to seventy members. When I gave the Dharma consultation to one member, a senior member said to me, "You are still a greenhorn and you are not entitled to give guidance to someone." Other members followed her as if to say to me, "Don't be presumptuous."

Since I experienced such humiliation and felt frustrated, I talked about my pain and distress to my

brothers, who were also leaders of the Sangha. I wanted them to give comfort but they said, “You are still not entitled to give the Dharma consultation to anyone, so you should just sit quietly like the Buddha,” and “It is no use complaining to anyone about your physical fatigue and sickness. No one feels pity for you.”

I had a very difficult time in those days, but bore up while holding back my tears. I thought, “I would like to quit Rissho Kosei-kai and live an easy life,” and “I originally started to help my father with Rissho Kosei-kai. Since he has already passed away, it doesn’t matter if I leave Rissho Kosei-kai.” I started to arrange my personal belongings in order to leave the Dharma center. However, some days later, something happened the next Sunday, .

A certain member came and asked me to explain about a passage from “Virtues,” chapter 1 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, “We submit ourselves to the one / Who has completed all hard things.” Another member asked me to explain about the four conditions for mastering the teachings of the Lotus Sutra that are taught in chapter 28 of the sutra “Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom.” While answering these questions, I realized, “It is not easy to practice and spread the Dharma,” and “It is important for me to practice the teachings of the Buddha, not just wishing for the accomplishment of my own desires.”

On the morning before the Sunday I planned to leave the Dharma center, I noticed the calligraphy on the sides of the altar, which says, “Tranquil and calm is this land of mine— / Filled with human and heavenly beings.” In that moment, my heart was filled with some warmth, feeling like the Buddha was telling me that I could necessarily be protected if I was to keep religious faith and do good things. Then, I made up my mind that this should be the way to follow.

Therefore, I thought deeply about President Niwano’s guidance again and again—“Let us revere the buddha-nature,” “Those who share the Dharma are nothing other than the practitioners,” “Let us communicate with people or deal with things from the standpoint of the parents,” and “Let us praise others.”

One day, a member came to me and said, “A certain member who is a company president can’t do his job, because he is suffering from depression, and has lost weight. His mother is worrying about him, but she doesn’t know what to do.” I asked the member to take him to the Dharma center. From that day on, I had a conversation with him during lunch time (in a form similar to a tea party) almost every day. As the days went by, we talked longer; sometimes we talked about four to five hours. During the conversation, a cup of coffee was my lunch. Every day I carefully listened to him as he spoke incoherently, and tried to find the cause of his disease in the depth of his mind and heart.

Later, through my repeated listening to him, he became aware of a desire in his heart to treasure his estranged mother. He gradually recovered from his disease, eventually being elected chief director of the association of printing companies. Through my encounter with him, I learned how important it is for me to listen to others talk. At the same time, I came to understand the depth of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and developed self-confidence to liberate people. I also realized that my spiritual growth would lead to others’ growth.

Last year, we held a ceremony to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Taipei Dharma Center. In the days before the ceremony, I met with the Dharma center leaders, inviting guests and members who had practiced together. After long consideration, we thought, “We still have not taken a step toward outside the center for thirty years,” “We celebrate the birthday of the Dharma center, so we should take this opportunity to visit and see all the members,” and “If we miss this chance, we can’t expect when the next one comes.” After repeated discussions with the chairperson of the board of trustees of the Taipei Dharma Center, we resolved to take a step toward outside so that nonmembers may take this opportunity to encounter the Buddha.

I sought the approval of the leaders, and as a result, many members visited other members’ homes to share the teaching. They had confidence in visiting members homes. We shared the work of making paper cranes. Because paper cranes are a little complicated

# Spiritual Journey

to fold, only a limited number of members could do it. And so they made an effort to fold them late into the night, and their hands got rough and dry. They enjoyed the preparation work, however, and the Dharma center was always filled with laughter.

On the day before the ceremony, members from the Toyoda Dharma Center in Japan visited and helped us prepare for the ceremony. Some of them folded paper cranes together with Taipei members, and others handed out paper cranes and flowers in the rain to people walking near the Dharma center, while appealing to them to join the ceremony.

That evening, the rain gradually began to fall harder, and we all felt too uneasy to sleep. However, as the saying goes, “If we earnestly pray, it will be answered.” The next day’s weather got better gradually, and in the afternoon, it was sunny enough to dry off the park benches when we carried out an outdoor program.

What impressed me most during the ceremony for the 30th anniversary was that we members of the Taipei Dharma Center could make our existence widely known for the first time. All members were so touched with gratitude. I think this is because the Buddha witnessed our merits being accumulated daily by the Toyoda members, who came to celebrate, and the Taipei members.

Looking back on my life, I think that the Buddha had extended his compassionate hand to me while I was not conscious of it. If I had not been born in the Chien’s family, if I hadn’t had the karmic connection with my parents, if I hadn’t encountered with Rissho Kosei-kai, if I hadn’t walked this way through experiencing various roles, including chapter leader, I would not be here as a minister now.

I have realized that everything is as it is, thanks to the protection of my ancestors, the merits I have received, and the support from my family and fellow people, not to my own power.

Thanks to the role as minister, I’m always filled with joy now. Previously, I had acted for the sake of others, but it was only superficial. But I realized that I would be able to lead people to the state of true liberation based on the Dharma.

The Founder said in his Dharma talk, “Imagine a mesh of net with a thousand openings, and if you are one of them, then are you worth of only one-thousandth of the whole net? Far from it! All the other openings in the net support the one that is you, just as you support the rest of the net. Even if one opening in the mesh breaks, the whole mesh of the net will be affected. If you truly understand this interdependence, you must be able to consider what you should do for those around you.”

We should not underestimate ourselves. Everyone has his or her own role to play and is an irreplaceable existence. So let us do our best.

Today is the memorial day for the Founder and the day before the 78th anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai. Fifty-two years ago today, the ceremony enshrining the Gohonzon was held here at the Great Sacred Hall. I appreciate President Niwano and all people, who have supported me, for the opportunity given me to speak about my Dharma experience on this auspicious day. I would like to walk the path, believing in the Buddha’s arrangements.

I would like to pledge myself before the Eternal Buddha to be diligent in the practice of the teachings in order to fulfill my life’s vocation as I wished to be born.

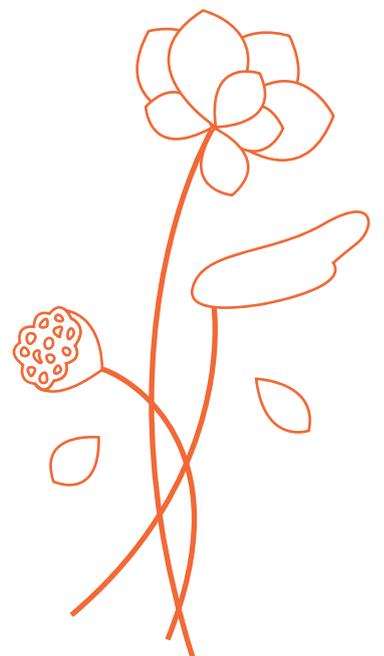
I would like to ask President Niwano and every one to guide me continuously.

Everyone, thank you.



*Rev. Chien (center, second row) and Sangha members of the Taipei Dharma Center.*

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# Child Care lifeline

## I Have Two Children, But I Cannot Feel That They Are Equally Lovable

**Q**

My daughter is now four years old. Recently, I've been having trouble finding her cute. A few days ago, when I carelessly dropped a dish and it broke, she instantly came to me and said, "Oh dear, you did it again! You just can't help it." The way she spoke was exactly as I do; she is completely without charm. I think my one-year-old son is more adorable than her, and I am spending more time with him. What can I do to solve my problem?



**A**

I think that even though you are having trouble seeing your daughter as "lovable," you are already a wonderful, kind mother.

I think you are suffering because you would like to feel that your child is more lovable, and want to give more affection to her. This desire to reflect on yourself and your daily life is something you should treasure.

In family education we say, that whatever she does reflects your own behavior, which means children will grow up under the influence of their parents. Children copy their mothers' words and actions and attitudes—in both good and bad aspects—as they really are. You said that "the way she spoke was exactly as you do." That is because she loves you very much and therefore imitates the way you speak. Children have no ill will when they speak that way; they are just copying what they hear every day.

Please accept "Parents' attitude is key to their children's education," when you drop and break a dish, if your daughter says, "Mom, you did it again! You just can't help it," please try saying to her with a warm heart, "I've broken a dish! Thank you for caring about me!"

Such gentleness from a sympathetic mother will penetrate the child's heart.

Your daughter must be feeling all the more lonely because you are spending more time with your younger child. However, she knows she is the older sister, and must be patient, even though she is a little girl. Still, she sometimes wants you to pay attention to her. I want you to understand that.

Moreover, please recognize and praise any good points

she has, regardless of how small they might be. Your daughter will feel her mother's love. Both adults and children become happier and more open-minded when they are praised.

If you continue to make such efforts, then I'm sure you will be able to feel that both of your children are equally lovable.



**Point 1** Read your daughter's feelings hidden behind her words and actions.

Please direct your attention to the feelings of your daughter, who instantly draws close to you when she sees you fail at something. Since you now give more help to younger one than the older, she needs your affection all the more. What she really wants is for you to care about her.

**Point 2** Education through example

A four-year-old child can do a lot of things, so it would be good to ask her to help with the household chores. While helping, if she breaks a dish or something like that, ask if she is okay rather than blaming her for what she has done. Then, when she sees someone else in a similar situation, she will be able to say to that person, "Are you okay?"

(Answers provided by the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education)

The Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education cooperates with us in producing this regular column. The institute believes that if parents change their thinking and behavior for the better, so will their children. The institute offers lectures and seminars for parents in various areas of Japan and in other countries, as well as giving personal advice to parents on childrearing. For decades, the institute's programs have helped parents with childrearing problems grow spiritually with their children to create harmonious, happy homes.

## Becoming Aware of Your Happiness

Your daughter wants to imitate whatever her mother does. You are a great source of pride for your daughter, aren't you? Your daughter has grown up so much that now she can act like her mother.

Buddhism teaches two great truths—"All things are impermanent" and "Nothing has an ego." The former signifies that everything is constantly changing, including all phenomena in this world. The latter means that everything in this world is interdependent on everything else, and cannot exist alone. Buddhism also teaches that we can attain peace of mind if we lead a life in accord with these two great truths.

When we apply these truths to the case of your daughter, then, we see that she has been developing in such a positive way that she can imitate her mother's behavior. She also has grown up to be a reliable big sister, thanks to the birth of her little brother. And you, of course, have grown to be a mother of two children. Since everyone is interdependent on everyone else, your present sufferings would not arise if any of these three persons were absent.

President Niwano taught us in his Dharma guidance about true happiness as follows: "The realization that the things you are most thankful for are the things that you already have is the discovery of true happiness" (*Kokoro no Manako o Hiraku* [Opening the Mind's Eye], p. 289).

"My daughter has grown up so much that now she can imitate what I do. My two children have been in good health." If you look at the things from such a joyful and pleasant viewpoint, you would see your daughter's words and actions as precious and adorable. Then you'll be able to become aware of the happiness you have been blessed with at this moment.

(Editorial Supervision by Department of Dharma Education & Human Resources Development, Rissho Kosei-kai)



Please give us your comments!



We welcome comments on our e-newsletter *Living the Lotus*.

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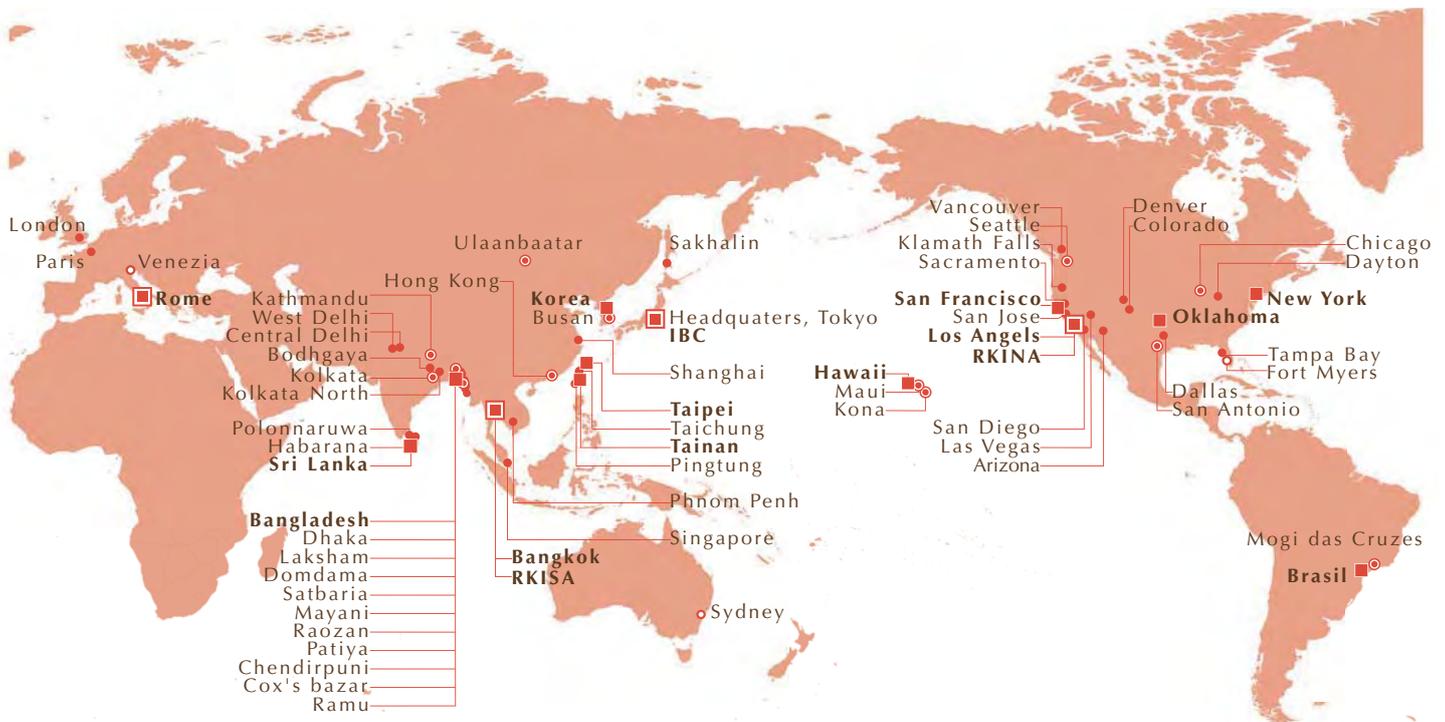
# Director's Column

## Why Do We Walk the Way of the Buddha?

**T**HIS is the story of what I experienced at the arrival terminal at the Ulaanbaatar airport. When checked-in baggage was brought in on a conveyor belt, one bag dropped off, after having been pushed off the belt by other baggage. Then one Mongolian passenger walked up to pick up the dropped bag, and placed it back on the conveyor. After a while another bag dropped off, and then another person walked there to place it back on the conveyor. When I saw their kindness in retrieving other passengers' baggage, I recalled the teaching of the Buddha that everyone innately possesses a pure Buddha-like heart.

If we fail to recognize our inner heart and if we fail to express it in our life, it will be most unfortunate. In various parts of the world now, on going wars and terror attacks around the world are fueling chain reactions of hatred. I think we are being challenged. Do we strive to live in the spirit of the Buddha and the heart of God in whatever conditions we may be? Or do we neglect the divine heart and mind that is ours? We may not always be able to live in the spirit of the Buddha and God 100 percent, but still we can make our sincerest efforts to live it through. I think the reason for our dedication on the Buddha Way is to always live in the spirit of the Buddha.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI  
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