

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



Founder's Essay

Difficult Problems are the Fuel that Lights a Fire Under You

PEOPLE say that if you beckon the goddess of good fortune, imploring her to pay a visit to your family, she comes along with her younger sister, the harbinger of misfortune. That's because the pitfalls in life are the flip side of good fortune. In the same way, when you turn misfortune over, you discover the sprouts of happiness hidden underneath.

There are times when, despite the fact that you yourself feel that you are working as hard as you can, your efforts are misunderstood by others and you end up on their bad side. Now and again you find yourself giving something all you have, but it produces nothing but the opposite of what you intend. Anyone would become depressed when this drags on. But in my case, when the kind of problems crop up that turn normal people pale and cause them to bury their heads in their hands, I tell

myself that things are about to get interesting! I accept what is unfavorable as a blessing, take contrary conditions as favorable ones, and strive for a solution. That's because I think doing so is to practice the Buddha Way.

When I was young, someone once said to me, "You are the type of person who slacks off when days are uneventful and monotonous, but when something happens it stirs you to action." Difficult problems are the fuel that lights a fire under me!

If you give it everything you have, there will always be someone who sees and recognizes your efforts. And even if nobody takes notice, the Buddha is witness to all. I think that one who is convinced of this is a true person of faith.

From *Kaisozuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 128–29

Living the Lotus Vol. 156 (September 2018)

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Living the Lotus is published monthly by
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Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.

In the Service of All Life

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Serving Gratefully

In order to go on living, from time to time we must procure the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. Regarding this matter, Buddhism teaches us “to seek them through correct means of living.” This is “right living,” the fifth practice of the Eightfold Path, and it applies to those of us who live in contemporary society by telling us, “make your livelihood through the right work.” However, it is difficult to determine, from among the various kinds of work, which types are correct and which are not. Therefore, what does “right” mean in the case of “right work”?

Someone taught me the phrase, “The farmer is in the service of the crops, the cowherd is in the service of the cows, and the teacher is in the service of the children.” The two Chinese characters of the word “work” (Jpn., *shigoto*) are written as “in the service of” and “something.” “In the service of” means to follow a noble form of existence. Therefore, the persons or things that make up the substance of your work should be thought of with respect, reverence, and gratitude, and you should take up the role or task you are given with all of your might. Such an attitude demonstrates, in my opinion, the meaning of “right.”

Furthermore, Dr. Ko Hirasawa, who served as president of Kyoto University from 1957 to 1963, once wrote: “In the morning, start your work with ambition and enthusiasm. In the evening, when that day’s work is done, you should have gratitude, and as the tension unwinds, with quiet joy, you will feel like putting your hands together reverently toward all things in the universe” (*Ikiyo kyo mo yorokonde* [Let us live today with joy], Chichi Shuppansha, 1995). The feeling of putting your hands together reverently before all things, this thought of gratitude, is the foundation of our right living—not only in the case of our work, of course, but across every aspect of our daily lives. When you have this feeling, you can let go of any thought of complaint or dissatisfaction, and joyfully immerse yourself in whatever task you see before you.



The Right Way to Live Your Life

I think we can say that the right way to live life is not limited to work, but refers to making our best effort to do whatever our everyday lives put before us. This includes housework and child-rearing, of course, and taking care of someone else or even being cared for, which is, at that time and for that person, a role that has been given to him or her by the gods and the buddhas—in other words, this role is what the universe has decreed for him or her and to gladly accept it and joyfully practice it is none other than right living.

Shakyamuni wished that “All living beings in the universe have happiness, tranquility, and live in peace and comfort.” Although we may think that this is some out-of-reach, major undertaking, that is not at all the case. We are all capable of making a contribution to the happiness of all life, if each and every one of us, by not being negligent in even one tiny frame of our daily lives, are diligent in the right way of living. By doing so, our efforts form a great wave with the power to build the world of Shakyamuni’s wish. The reason this happens is because all of us are connected, in matter and mind, to all life around the world, like a fine web.

Incidentally, in thinking about the Eightfold Path, the following words of Hajime Nakamura (1912–99), a Japanese scholar of Indology and Buddhology, caught my eye: “Right view is the beginning of practice and it is also the end. You must always be sure to never stray from right view” (*Genshi bukkyo no seikatsu rinri* [Ethics of life in early Buddhism], Shunjusha, 1995).

We are apt to wonder whether or not we are capable of attaining each of the virtues of right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, and this month’s theme of right living. However, the basis of all of them is right view, which means seeing things just the way they are, and as the Japanese monk and scholar Jiun Sonja (1718–1804) asserted, “If you aren’t seeing right, everything else is darkness.”

Rissho Kosei-kai Cofounder Myoko Naganuma, while devoting herself to the liberation of our members, often gave them strict advice, such as “Don’t sleep late in the morning.” I think that she was telling us that the Buddha’s teaching shines forth only when we apply ourselves to the basics, and that faith is the very stuff of living life, each and every day. On September 10, we observe the memorial day of Cofounder Naganuma.

From *Kosei*, September 2018





HELP —Hello Eternal Loving Presence



by Ms. Lonni Fain
Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay

I was brought up in a small town in North Carolina. My family expected the youth to be educated, well-mannered, and know some form of spiritual guidance. North Carolina is commonly known as the “Bible Belt,” so usually the guidance came from Christianity. As a youth going to church, we were asked to do many activities as ushering, food prep, cleaning, and summer bible studies.

It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I received a gift from my neighbor who was of the Muslim faith. She told me that she had studied many doctrines of religion before finding comfort in teachings of Allah. She said that I should have my own path and form my own relationship with a higher power. She said once that relationship is formed, I can name the higher power. I chose Universal Life Force. I have walked into many different churches practicing many doctrines: Christian, Jewish, Catholic, etc. What I find comfort in is knowing that most religions practice love, compassion, and peace. So it's no coinci-

dence that I would find my way to these practices, but through a path I had not expected.

In October of 2013, I was suffering from life's troubles of relationships or lack thereof. I kept wondering what I had done in the past lives to create such rejection in this one. So on a Sunday morning I decided to do a fast, and let go of food and electronics for the day. I felt the best way to clear my mind would be to go for a spiritual walk. I felt that if I let go of things for the day then maybe I would receive some message back. Little did I know the wisdom that was to follow. During my walk I gained many messages through meditation and was about to make my way home when a stern voice said, “Keep walking.” I thought I had gained some insight on things, so I answered, “Are you sure?” So again the voice said, “Keep walking,” so I kept walking. Within a few steps the truth came to be revealed to me and one thing that was said was “In your next life there will be joy and peace.” I thought, “Wow, I'm going to heaven when I leave this life,” but little did I know that my next life would start the next day.

I had not received the Dharma yet; that would come later in the day. As I walked back towards home I passed by the Unitarian Universalists campus, which was home to Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay. The UU morning service was over so I was able to talk to a member and ask what Rissho Kosei-kai was and received information on their services. Later that day I would end my spiritual journey attending a service on Buddhism, something I knew almost nothing about.

In my quest to walk a spiritual life I had learned of



Ms. Fain (second from right) participates in hoza at the Tampa Bay Dharma Center.

many doctrines in religious faith but never Buddhism. I met with Rev. Nick Ozuna and the sangha there and learned my first teaching. Rev. Ozuna spoke of how I was responsible for my own sufferings. Not the people who I thought caused my suffering, but just me. Those people were living their happy lives while I was suffering for nothing. I had heard this before, but that day I truly received it. He spoke of the Four Noble Truths and how this practice would help to see the cause of my suffering. His talk, and the kindness I felt from the sangha there, was a much needed end to a day, but it was just the beginning of my next life.

I would continue to go to services and classes taught there as well as research Buddhism on my own. On November 12, 2013, I joined Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay with great joy and peace. Shortly after joining, Rev. Ozuna shared with the sangha that we would be taking on a new journey with Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA) and that he would be moving to Los Angeles. I knew I had to learn as much as I could before he left. I would learn how to set the altar for the Dharma center and learn the fundamental teachings that I could practice in my daily life. I really didn't know if the Dharma center would stay around, but other members there wanted things to go on and we stepped up and kept things going. After Rev. Ozuna left a few months later, I started to teach a class on Basic Buddhism along with another leader of the sangha and we just kept doing what we felt the Buddha would want.

I do remember sometimes how I was left alone to set up the altar, since Rev. Ozuna showed me how to do it and entrusted me with it before he left. I wanted to show others how to do it but they didn't seem to be interested. It seemed to frustrate me but then I was told by Rev. Ken Nagata of RKINA how I was chosen to be there for the Buddha. He spoke of how I was to give my time to make sure that care was given to each sacred item and take pride in how it looked. Also, I learned to have a positive attitude while I did this so that when I shared the Dharma, it would come from a

positive place. This advice would change the way I see things every day.

I had spoken to Rev. Ozuna before he left on what it would take to become a Dharma Teacher because I wanted to be there to conduct ceremonies in his absence. He called me a few months after moving and encouraged me to elevate my practice by inviting me to take the Advanced Seminar on the Lotus Sutra. I felt the changes in me of wanting to be there for others. I had become one of the leaders. I would go on to complete the two-year Advanced Seminar as well as many online courses offered by RKINA.

I found that the teachings of the Lotus Sutra allowed me to better understand the lessons in my own life. For example, in chapter 20, the Bodhisattva Never Despise comes through in my life with my step-father. He never holds a grudge or gets mad over petty things. He says it is a waste of his energy. Having him and meeting my Dharma brothers and sisters during classes helped me to self-reflect on how I should try to live my life.

When I came to reflect on my relationships, I thought I had met someone who was the perfect guy for me, but I never told him my true feelings. We had a great friendship and he had mentioned having feelings for me so I just thought he was waiting for the right time to go to the next level. Well that day came, as I saw pictures of his new younger girlfriend. I asked what he thought about us and he told me he never knew that I had feelings for him. I was broken. My sangha family would help me and show me how the teachings would help me look at my suffering from a different perspective. It would be a year before my friend and I would speak again and when we did I thanked him for being honest to his path and I realized it wasn't up to him to know my feelings. This helped me to see his buddha-nature more clearly, just like the Bodhisattva Never Despise. Because of my Buddhist practice and self-reflection, I was able to start rebuilding our friendship and now we are honest friends years later. I trust the teaching that everything changes, especially our growth if we practice diligently.

Spiritual Journey

Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings truly resounded within me. The things that stand out the most have been the stories I've heard of Japan regarding Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Cofounder Myoko Naganuma and their devotion to sharing this wonderful Dharma. To think that such a simple thought of meeting in someone's home and doing missionary work to help others would truly become known over the world as Rissho Kosei-kai is simply amazing. In 2016, I had the chance to visit Japan for the first time for the fourth World Sangha Assembly and was deeply moved by the people I met and the experiences I had. Over 1,000 people attended from all over the world and I could sense how committed people were to these teachings no matter where they came from or what kind of background they had. At a small *hoza* following the ceremony for the World Sangha Assembly, we happened to be joined by Rev. Masuo Nezu, a former secretary to Founder Niwano. I was so overwhelmed with receiving this merit and being able to talk with him directly. Through this great encounter, I came to learn more about Rissho Kosei-kai's history and Founder's and Cofounder's spirit. On this same trip, I had the honor of receiving my Gohonzon along with 798 others. To walk across the sacred stage in the Great Sacred Hall at the organization's Tokyo headquarters is something that's beyond explanation and I will treasure it for the rest of my life.

I found that the hopes and dreams of our leaders are truly there in Japan. If I hadn't been a member then, the spiritual joy that I found in Japan would defiantly make me want to join. I was able to feel the spirit of the Buddha everywhere we visited. I was so grateful to Founder and Cofounder for the path that they left for us.

Since Rev. Ozuna moved away from Tampa Bay, attendance had dropped significantly. As the new leader, I learned to be flexible and learn that people come and go on their own path and that I just have to be there for them when they need me. Sometimes I would end up being the only one there. Sometimes

this would be frustrating and discouraging since I made the effort to be there, but I came to learn this was a precious opportunity for me. It would make me give my all to the day. I make sure to properly set up the altar as if the Buddha was there just for me and I would go through the practice of sutra recitation with sincerity. Even if I am by myself, I usually feel the spirit of the ancestors with me welcoming the Buddha and the teachings.

Lately, I have been able to attend the Online Sangha offered by RKINA. This has been a great opportunity for me to keep connected with the larger sangha and help encourage my practice. I am always so grateful to participate in *hoza* and listen to the practice of other members and it reminds me of the true value of Rissho Kosei-kai as a means of finding happiness through working with others. I find great peace in the teachings that I have received from Rissho Kosei-kai over the years and I know that this is only the beginning. I just can't wait to see what the Buddha has in store for me. I know that I'm responsible for my own sufferings, but through the teachings, I have come to learn how to transform them into new opportunities. This I have found is the true compassion of the Buddha. I am extremely grateful for all the compassion the Buddha has given me so far, and I know I will be ready for whatever the Buddha brings me next.



Ms. Fain (center) participates in an event at the Unity Association in 2015.

Living the
 **LOTUS**

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings

Chapter 3, Ten Merits

The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

This chapter explains the spiritual merits that are obtained through understanding and practicing the teachings in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the kinds of good deeds we will be able to accomplish, and the ways in which we can be useful to other people and to the world.

The questioner, the Bodhisattva Great Adornment, asks where this teaching comes from, where it leads, and where it abides. The Buddha answers that the teaching originally comes from the innermost mind of the buddhas; that its purpose is to lead all people to aspire to Supreme Perfect Awakening, that is, the wisdom of the buddhas; and that it abides only where people are practicing the bodhisattva way.

The Buddhas' Wish

The innermost mind of the buddhas is the wish that all life shall fulfill itself after its nature. This is the fundamental desire of the buddhas, and if only we human beings would live in accord with this desire our troubles would end. But ordinary people are prisoners of a willful self, living according to the dictates of that self, which they cling to, and thus bring suffering on themselves.

We can say that the enlightenment of the buddhas means to perceive the way, in all circumstances, in which all things in the universe subsist and have their being according to their nature.

Applied to human beings, this means seeing that the true way to live is to live as they are. But ordinary people so little understand how to live as they are that Shakyamuni resorted to all sorts of explanations of his teaching, depending upon the circumstances of his listeners. These adapted instructions have been described as teaching through skillful means.

Teaching through skillful means is an admirable

and gratifying thing, but it brings up difficulties if, with changes in circumstances and the position of the person, it happens that one fails to grasp the exact situation at any given time.



Giving Rise to the Aspiration to Awakening

Thus, it happens that the man of understanding is awakened to seek the supreme truth that applies to all people in all conditions, which is described as “giving

rise to the aspiration to awakening,” and the object of the teaching of the Innumerable Meanings is to give rise to this aspiration.

Only in Practice Lies Its True Value

Now, in the response to the question of where the teaching abides, where it really is, where its true value is, we see that it is not in books or in the mind, but in practice. Indeed, only in practice does the teaching come alive.

These three things—the origin of the teaching in the mind of the buddhas, its objective in stirring the aspiration to awakening, and one’s own diligent practice—are elements of such paramount importance, pervading not only the Innumerable Meanings but all Mahayana teachings (the teachings of the Great Vehicle) as well, that it is essential here to grasp and keep them firmly in mind.

Returning to the text of the sutra itself, we next read the Buddha’s explanation of the first of the ten merits, which is the most important of all ten merits:

“First of all, this sutra can make a bodhisattva who has not yet aspired to awakening aspire to it; one who lacks kindness aspire to compassion; one who likes

killing aspire to great mercy; one who is envious rejoice for others; one who has attachments aspire to nonattachment; one who is miserly aspire to generosity; one who is arrogant aspire to keeping the precepts; one who is angry aspire to forbearance; one who is lazy aspire to diligence; one who is distracted aspire to meditation; one who is ignorant aspire to wisdom; one who does not think of liberating others aspire to liberating them; one who commits the ten evils aspire to the ten virtues; one who is drawn to what is conditioned aspire to what is unconditioned; one who is regressing aspire to progressing; one who commits defiling acts aspire to purity; and one who has many delusions aspire to extinguish them. Good children, this is called the first unimaginably powerful merit of this sutra.”

The meaning of the above passage should be clear. What is important for us is to discern why there is such merit in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 1, Introductory



The Meaning and Synopsis

This chapter, called “Introductory,” is the beginning, or prologue, of an exceedingly long exposition. But even though it is a prologue, its substance is not meager, for it suggests and prepares the way for the great truth about to be revealed.

For anyone reading the Lotus Sutra for the first time, it is enough to feel that there is something impressive here, without appreciation of the suggestion and preparation. But for one who studies the sutra over and over and seeks to explain it to others, it becomes important to be aware of this suggestion and preparation and to understand its meaning. It will not do to dismiss this chapter simply because it is the introductory part.

Like the preceding Sutra of Innumerable Mean-

ings, the Lotus Sutra opens with a statement of the setting and an enumeration of the principal personages in the crowd assembled to hear the Buddha speak. We are told that, having expounded the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the Buddha entered samadhi, or a state of deep concentration. The assembled multitude, which included monks and nuns as well as lay people, Hindu deities, and spirit-demons not even human, all placed their hands together in gratitude and gazed upon the Buddha, when suddenly a ray of light was sent forth from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows. This light illuminated every quarter of this world, all worlds beyond the heavens, and even the depths of the Avici purgatory.

This extraordinary event filled the assembly with

admiration, but it occurred only to the Bodhisattva Maitreya to wonder what it meant. Finding no answer in himself, he questioned that great one, that repository of wisdom, the Bodhisattva Manjushri.

Manjushri presents an answer, first in prose, then in verse, pointing out that in distant ages past there had been a buddha called Light of the Sun and the Moon. Manjushri explains this buddha's teaching, and then proceeds, surprisingly enough, to say that after he died another and yet another buddha appeared, to the number of twenty thousand buddhas, all bearing the same name, Light of the Sun and the Moon.

Next, Manjushri tells how the last of them taught the Innumerable Meanings for the benefit of humankind and then entered a state of deep concentration, whereupon, as had just happened with the present Shakyamuni Buddha, a ray of light sprang from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows and illuminated countless worlds. Manjushri continues, "When Light of the Sun and the Moon arose from his meditative concentration, he expounded . . . the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma . . . [and] at midnight entered into nirvana."

Manjushri concludes that the present tathagata, Shakyamuni, is about to teach the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma for the liberation of all people and to make the world just and beautiful. With the poetic version of this, the chapter closes.



The Form of the Lotus Sutra

As may be seen from this synopsis, the Lotus Sutra is in the form of a kind of drama in which all sorts of surpassingly extraordinary occurrences appear. We may gather that the intent of the compilers of the sutra was to use familiar symbolic devices and drama to touch the spirits of the hearers and to bring them bit by bit to an understanding of the truth set forth by

Shakyamuni: a truth so deep that the people of the time could by no means grasp it completely. It is important to understand this.

This is an English translation of text originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 24–32).



The Right way to Live

How are you, everyone? Are you suffering from the remaining summertime warmth? This summer, Japan was grilled by extreme heat! A “violent” heat wave has blanketed Japan every day. It looks we have to wait awhile further before we can enjoy cool air of autumn.

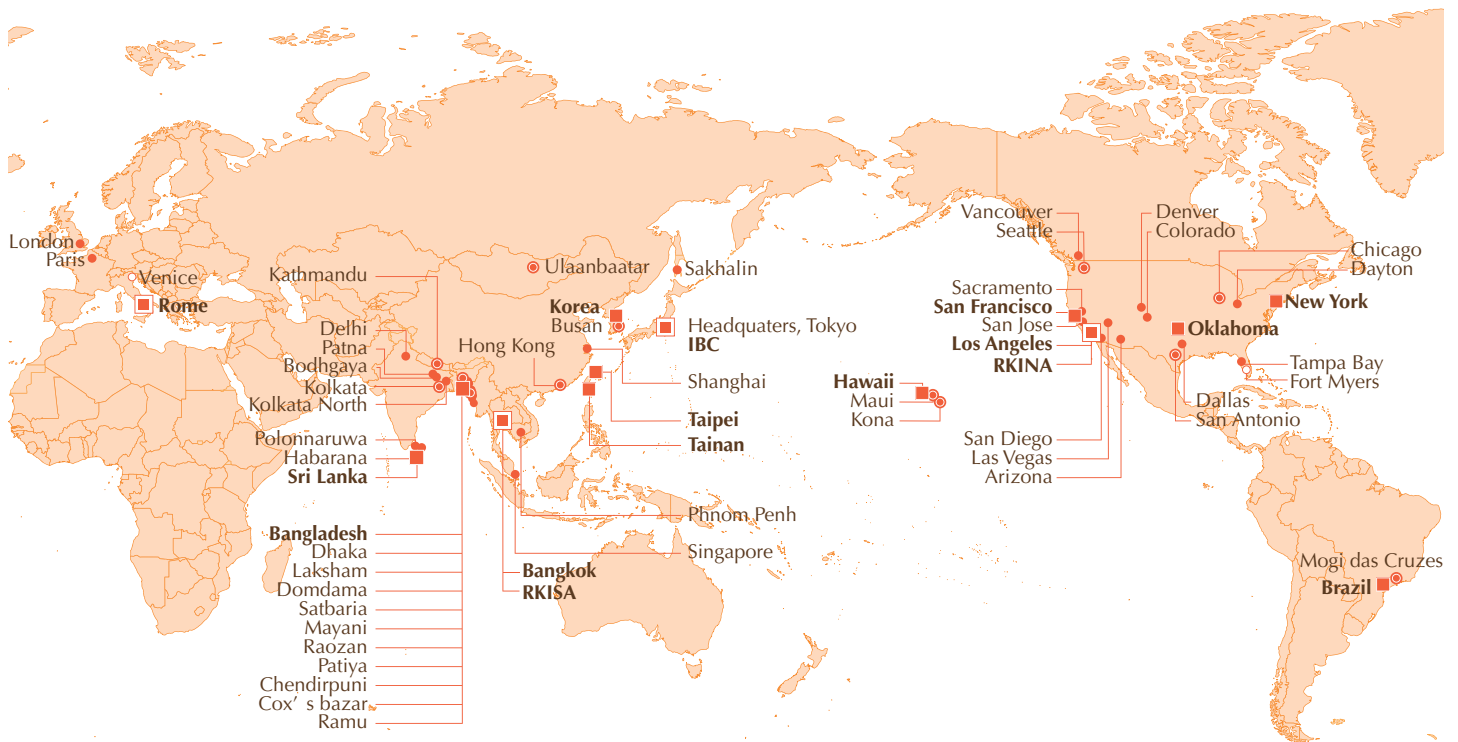
Speaking of the hot summer, the summer of 2006, when the Centennial of the Founder’s Birth was celebrated, was also “hot.” Prior to the third World Sangha Assembly in October, Rissho Kosei-kai International held the Family Pilgrimage Program from North America in August at Tokyo headquarters. Some seventy members, including a three generation family, participated. I remember that a youth member who participated in the program for the first time shared his feelings enthusiastically, saying that not even a second had been wasted during the program.

Now I worship the Buddha in the Great Sacred Hall and the Precious Stupa of the One Vehicle every day as a matter of course. Reflecting on the Family Pilgrimage Program, I cannot help but renew my deep appreciation for being able to do this every day.

We can say that “right living” part of the Eightfold Path means to put our home in order, with the Buddhist altar at its center. I hope we will renew our gratitude for the protection of our revered Buddha, for the noble teachings, and for the fellow members of the wonderful sangha, who are always supporting us. With gratitude in our minds, let us apply ourselves diligently to all things that come before our eyes.

Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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2018

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