



THE WORLD OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 13

“Encouragement to Uphold the Sutra”

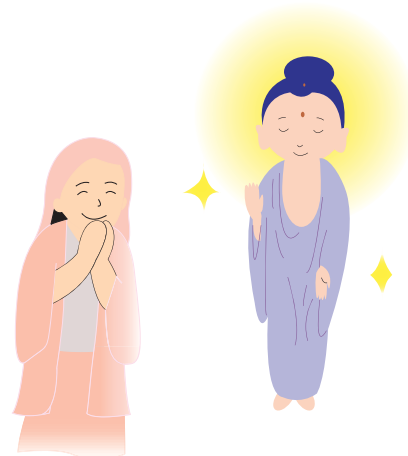
PEOPLE in the assembly, who had seen the dragon girl become a Buddha, were filled with great joy and made a vow in the presence of the Buddha. Then the Bodhisattva Medicine King and the Bodhisattva Great Delight in Preaching said, “After the extinction of the Buddha, we will devote ourselves wholeheartedly to spreading this teaching in this world, not sparing our bodies or our lives.” Next, the five hundred arhats and eight thousand people, both in training and trained, who already had been assured of becoming buddhas said to the Buddha, “We too will spread this teaching everywhere throughout other lands.”

Then the foster mother of the Buddha, the nun Mahaprajapati, along with six thousand nuns, in training and trained, rose from their seats. They put their palms together in complete attention, and gazed up at the face of the honored-one, without taking their eyes away for even a moment. The World-honored One sensed their feelings and gave them assurances of becoming buddhas.

Then the mother of Rahula, the nun Yashodhara, thought to herself, “In his assurances, the World-honored One has left only my name unmentioned.” The Buddha perceived her inner thoughts and gave her assurance. She became filled with joy along with all those gathered, and all expressed their appreciation to the Buddha. They then made a vow to proclaim the teaching everywhere throughout all the lands in other regions.

The World-honored One then looked at the many bodhisattva great ones gathered there. Because the Buddha kept silent, they whole-

heartedly said to him, “World-honored One, after the extinction of the Buddha, we will spread the teaching everywhere throughout the worlds in all directions. Please see us and protect us and give us strength. Though many ignorant people will curse and abuse us or attack us, we will endure it all. In the period of the Decay of the Dharma, there will be monks with twisted minds and fawning, crooked hearts, boasting and full of pride, claiming to have attained what they have not. There will be forest dwellers living in seclusion, pretending that they practice the true way while disrespecting and putting other people down. We will endure all such difficult things, embracing the teaching. We are emissaries of the World-honored One. Facing multitudes without fear, we will impart the teaching. May the Buddha live in peace and comfort. We will make this vow in the presence of the World-honored One, and the buddhas who have come from all directions. Please perceive our minds and give us your permission to impart the teaching in the period of the Decay of the Dharma.”



Thoughts When Eating Melon

Since the disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami last year, I often see and hear the Japanese word *kizuna*, meaning in English ties or bonds that connect things and people. It is used to refer to the ties of sympathy all Japanese feel for the victims of the disaster. At the same time, frequent news reports about the sad deaths of elderly people who lived alone make me think about the real meaning of “family” and “ties.”

I’ll begin with the meaning of family. The traditional Japanese view of the family is imbued with the age-old East Asian concept of filial piety, which calls on children to respect their parents and serve them well. The parents, of course, are expected to love their children and treat them well in turn, and this mutual affection binds them together. That Rissho Kosei-kai places importance on showing respect for one’s parents and making offerings and expressing reverence for one’s ancestors is not unrelated to this Japanese view of the family.

In Japan, the influence of Confucian thought, with its emphasis on filial piety, and the teachings of the Buddha, which have compassion at their core, have blended over time, and it seems to me that most Japanese have come to consider an ideal family as one bound by ties filled with the love and respect inherent in these religious and cultural traditions.

The poet Yamanoue no Okura (660–733), whose work appears in the *Manyoshu*, Japan’s oldest collection of poetry compiled in the eighth century, left us this verse describing the affection that parents have for their children: “When eating melon, my children come to mind. When tasting chestnuts, I miss them all the more. How is it that



they come to me? Flickering before my eyes, they do not let me sleep in peace.” Probably when the poet is away on a trip, the taste of his children’s favorite foods reminds him of his affection for them, and with his children’s faces floating before his eyes, he finds it difficult to fall asleep. This emotional state, described in poetry as ancient as the *Manyoshu*, is the essence of close family ties.

Threads of Respect and Affection

The concept of filial piety is demonstrated by the continuation from parents to children, from those who are older to those who are younger, and so on. Asian philosophy elucidates this concept with the



adage, “My happiness and well-being are gifts from my ancestors, and the fortune or misfortune of my children and grandchildren depends on my everyday deeds.” When we consider the bonds we have with our parents and grandparents, or with our children and grandchildren, we should rededicate ourselves to expressing our gratitude and reciprocating the kindnesses we received.

Of course, this does not change in the nuclear family that is common today, but a family in which three or four generations are living together is a rare environment that truly enables its members to cultivate a sense of gratitude. Since the family can be considered a microcosm of society, it has many positive aspects, but there can also be numerous complications in a large extended family.

Even though that is the case, we should gladly accept these complications. While some people may think of them as ordinary family problems, the challenges that arise within a family can offer us the best means for developing our humanity.

When we think about the family situation this way, even though the views of parents and grandparents may sometimes be annoying to the younger members of the family, and even though the older generations may sometimes feel as if their children or grandchildren come from outer space, living together on a daily basis provides many opportunities for learning how to better understand people with different life experiences and from a generation different from our own. Encountering such complications truly does provide the material that

helps to develop the human heart. Furthermore, as the poet and novelist Takuboku Ishikawa (1886–1912) confessed in a verse, “Today all of my friends seem to be more important than me, so I bring home flowers and speak closely with my wife,” it is one’s own family members who listen to and commiserate with the troubles we cannot talk about with anyone else.

In other words, by cultivating one another’s minds and showing one another kindness, family members spin threads of respect and affection that are genuine family ties. Then, in a home full of consideration and gratitude in which, for instance, the husband regularly performs daily sutra recitation and the wife does not fail to be sympathetic and speak considerately, these ties are never broken.

However, we should not think that such ties exist only among immediate family members. Rissho Kosei-kai’s Dharma centers form the nuclei of regional communities that create bonds of consideration with their neighbors, regardless of whether or not they are members of the sangha. Such approaches as friendly calls by members upon people who are living alone in their neighborhoods are bodhisattva practices that prevent people from feeling isolated and bring liberation to both body and mind. Such actions bring people together with the ties that result in true peace of mind.

And of course, showing real consideration for others in such ways is a perfect example of the practice of compassion.

From *Kosei*, July 2012. Translated by Kosei Publishing Co.





Smiles Are Like Flowers from Heaven

by Kosho Niwano

President-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai

Memories of a Strong, Broad Back

This next was something that happened when I was a child. The news on television was about the crisis caused by the holding of American hostages in the United States Embassy in the Iranian capital of Tehran, which began in 1979.

News about this situation was being broadcast day after day, and even a child could tell that something serious was taking place. Even so, it seemed to me that it was happening in some faraway country, but one night my complacency was shattered by unbelievable news. My grandfather [Rissho Kosei-kai founder Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, who then was serving as the honorary chairman of the World Conference of Religions for Peace] had announced he would go to Iran to offer himself in place of the hostages. He was trying hard to work out a plan, making arrangements with the governments of Japan and the United States, as well as with the Iranian Embassy in Japan. He really meant to go through with it.

Quite suddenly a frightening event taking place in a faraway country was intruding in our home life and was about to pull one of our precious family members away. However, it was impossible for me, a small child, to give voice to the words “Don’t go!” All I could do was simply be filled with fear and anxiety.

When I think back to that time, the memory that comes most clearly to me is of the imposing shape of my grandfather’s broad back when he had just returned home, changed into a comfortable dressing gown, and was quietly relaxing. Though his appearance was as usual and he looked like my kind grandfather and not someone caught up in a terrifying incident, he seemed awesome and unapproachable to me at that moment.

I had always loved my grandfather, and loved to hear his stories—of his youth in the countryside, of his coming to Tokyo and his apprenticeship in shops, of his time in the navy, of Rissho Kosei-kai in its first years, of the people he had met during the day, of foreign countries, and most of all about world peace. My grandfather’s stories always contained a frightening element, but in them he was always enjoying himself, being strong, reliable, and full of dreams and hope, and I was always thrilled to hear them.

My grandfather was always trying to make others happy and was loved by many people. I thought he was wonderful.

He had established Rissho Kosei-kai, had brought liberation to many people, and had promoted cooperation among religions and the movement for world peace, sometimes leading at the forefront and other times playing a less conspicuous but still vital role.



President-designate Kosho Niwano

President Nichiko Niwano's oldest daughter, Rev. Kosho Niwano was born in Tokyo. After graduating with a degree in Law from Gakushuin University, she studied at Gakurin Seminary, the training institution for Rissho Kosei-kai leaders. Presently, as she studies the Lotus Sutra, she continues to act as President-designate, making speeches for participants in the main ceremonies of Rissho Kosei-kai, and handling activities for interfaith cooperation at home and abroad. Married to Rev. Munehiro Niwano, she is mother of one son and three daughters.

Sometimes he met with Japan's prime minister or foreign heads of state, and he advocated the Brighter Society Movement, which sought improvements in life not only for members of Rissho Kosei-kai but for society as a whole, and I was very proud of him.

And now, our wonderful grandfather was offering to take the place of the American hostages, and leaving his daily affairs in the care of the family was prepared to travel to Tehran, with no guarantee of his safety.*

The words resounding in my heart were "he is the real thing."

I thought of him as our grandfather, I thought of him as our founder, but the founder was a person who transcended easy categorization—he was "the real thing."

How happy we are when we can encounter a true bodhisattva or find a genuine teacher we can look up to in this world!

Japan is now facing the unexpected reality that was thrust upon us by the twin disasters of the massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami of March 11, 2011. As the tragedy unfolded, the memory of how the founder looked to me on that day long ago rose up in my mind. I saw again his broad, strong back, as he single-mindedly moved forward, a bodhisattva fearing nothing, always steady and calm.

As long as we retain the vision of his strong broad back, we are sure to achieve whatever we set out to do.

Now is the time for me as an individual, and equally for every one of us, to become "the real thing," to become a true bodhisattva, to protect all living things together.

* In June 1980, Founder Niwano was invited by Iran to the International Conference on U.S. Interventions in Iran held at Tehran. During the conference he met with the Ayatollah Khomeini, political leaders, and diplomats and directly expressed his hopes to the Iranian foreign minister for a peaceful solution to the prolonged hostage crisis. The crisis ended in 1981 with an accord between the governments of the United States and Iran.

Building a Trusting Relationship with My Staff at Work

by Mr. Debashish Barua
Bangladeshi member of IBC

I was born and raised in a Buddhist family in Bangladesh. My family respected Buddhist temples and monks who strictly keep the precepts, and I have deeply revered Gotama Buddha from childhood. We offered prayers to the Buddha three times a day: in the morning, daytime, and evening.

When I was small, my mother used to tell me many stories of Gotama Buddha and his teachings. When I graduated from the University of Dhaka with a master's degree in biochemistry, I wanted to get a doctor's degree in Japan. So I came to Japan in 2002 and began to live with my elder sister's family in Warabi City, Saitama Prefecture. There are six members in all, and we have a Buddhist altar at home. Working part-time, I studied Japanese at a language school for two years. Then I became engaged in experiments and research as a research student at a company for three years.

But my father had a heart attack in 2006, and became paralyzed on his right side. I had to send money to support my family. So I gave up my studies and got a job at a genetic-related company in Chigasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture. I worked for some two years as a researcher there, but it was too far for me to commute. So I resigned, and found a new job at a chemical company in November of 2008, which is where I work now. I took over the tasks of research, testing, and analysis from my predecessor, and was doing this work at my own pace, following my schedule.



At the time, I wanted to practice the Buddha's teachings in a Buddhist organization, and found Risho Kosei-kai's International Buddhist Congregation (IBC) on the Internet. I participated in Sunday service in 2009 of my own accord, and I had a good impression. So I became a member in October of that year and received the Gohonzon, or the focus of devotion.

The following year, I attended mid-winter sutra recitation and also joined in the ARMS DOWN campaign. I asked passers-by for their signatures on the busy streets of Ginza and Harajuku in Tokyo, alongside Rev. Katsuji Suzuki and other youth members of IBC. We also solicited signatures at a Bangladeshi festival in Ikebukuro, also in Tokyo, gathering 200 signatures in all.

In January of this year, because of personnel changes, I was assigned to the product management department. My new job was to manage seven Japanese contract employees who were older than I. Until then, I had been doing my work by myself. This was my first opportunity to work alongside co-workers and subordinates in a group.

Since I started working in the new department, I had been caught up in dealing with complaints from customers and company staff day after day. There were many mistakes made, such as sending wrong or untested products to customers. No matter how hard I tried to reduce the incidence of these mistakes, the number of complaints didn't decrease. I sought the causes of these complaints and found several points. One of them was our inability to take immediate, suitable measures to fix these problems. So I asked seven workers to report to me as soon as they found mistakes so that I could take immediate action. But they hid their mistakes and didn't inform me about them. What should I do? I had a meeting with these people every day in search of a solution. They said nothing, looking down with troubled expressions,

and no effective solution was found. I was suffering every day and lost my appetite. I couldn't sleep well at night. I kept thinking about how I could reduce the number of mistakes. Finally, I began to consider of leaving the company. Seeing me so depressed, my brother-in-law also recommended a career change to me.

On February 18 this year, I called Ms. Yasuyo Suzuki at IBC and told her about my problems and feelings. She said, "We are all sustained by the same universal life-force. We are connected with each other through vibrations. Even if you are apart from others, the energy of your feelings and words are sure to reach them as vibrations. "The words 'thank you' have a wonderful power. Please try doing these two things at home." And I put Ms. Suzuki's advice into practice. The first was to express my gratitude to my staff one by one by saying, "Mr. So-and-So, thank you very much for always working with me." The second one was to pray for their happiness, saying, "Mr. So-and-So, I pray for your happiness."

Ms. Suzuki added, "To begin with, it's OK to do this just as a matter of form, even if you cannot say these words wholeheartedly. And you can say it in a low voice, or even silently. Please do this practice for ten days." Following her advice, I thanked them and prayed for their happiness in front of the Buddha at home. It was not difficult for me, because I didn't have to say these words directly to them.

On the third day, I became aware of something. In my view, we should not only believe Buddhism in our minds, but practice it in real life. That's the true sense of the teaching. So I began to think of how I could get along with my co-workers, instead of just praying for them.

And a good idea occurred to me. The seven people like drinking coffee and enjoy chatting about private matters during a break. They buy coffee from a vending machine. So, the next day I bought a bottle of coffee and brought it to the office. I made coffee for them. This action changed our relationship; they came to talk to me about private matters, such as their families and hobbies--fishing, tennis, and travel. In addition, they started to tell me about their

mistakes.

I said to them, "Please let me know when you find any mistakes. Take it easy, because I'll solve the problem." I tried creating an atmosphere where they could frankly report any of their mistakes to me. And they did.

In addition, they even worked with me to devise ways to reduce mistakes and suggested improving methods. One of them is to take notes when talking on the phone and report back to me. About three months have passed and there have been no serious mistakes made. By responding promptly to a mistake, we don't have to give customers trouble.

When something happens, I apologize to the customers on the phone for the mistake, and ask them to send back the product cash on delivery. Doing this kind of task is my role, and now I can fulfill my role properly. Ms. Suzuki said, "Even if there is no longer any problem, your work will go smoothly by assuring you are always thankful to your staff."

When we had an in-house party called Cherry Blossoms (an event held in the season of the flowers on April 15), the plant manager said, "Though we had a loss of 5 million yen last year because of delivery mistakes, we've had few mistakes this year." Now I enjoy working at this company. I'm glad that I have received a good result by practicing the teaching of the Buddha. I'm grateful to the Buddha and IBC members who have supported me. Thank you very much.



Mr. Debashish Barua gathering signatures for the ARMS DOWN! Campaign for Shared Security with other IBC members.

Truly Wealthy People



IT'S remarkable how people have recently developed a tendency to allow superficial things to determine their level of happiness, letting their quality of life be determined by the amount of money or material objects they have. Maybe this is because of the materialistic nature of modern society.

A Swedish proverb says, "The poor are not those who don't have much, but those who have many wants." Lao-tze, a Chinese philosopher of ancient times, also said, "He who knows how to stop with what is sufficient is rich with his own house and fields."* It is true, I think, that there are more and more people who want this and that, but who are not in the least spiritually rich. Although a person may be possessed of vast fortune, if that person doesn't know how to truly use that fortune to benefit others, he or she cannot be said to be wealthy in the true sense of the word.

On the other hand, although one may live a frugal life, if he or she thinks of others, with the capacity to put others' happiness first, we can say that this person is indeed wealthy. This principle must not only be applied to individuals.

Even though we may boast that our country has vast economic power, if we think of only our own benefit, and not those of other countries, ours cannot be called a true, advanced nation.

* This quote is from *Ta Te Ching: An All-New Translation*, translated by William Scott Wilson (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2010).

From *Kaisozuikan 6* (Kosei Publishing Co.), pp. 96-97

Living the Dharma at Home

Column

MY single life in the US was over at the end of last year, when I was able to reunite with my family and resume our life together here in Tokyo. I am very grateful that I can now spend precious time with my sons and daughters (who may leave home sometime in the future), and share time with my wife, who is truly my life partner.

One of the most important foci of Rissho Kosei-kai teachings is living the Buddha Dharma wherever you are. By practicing the teaching at home, our home becomes harmonious and peaceful. Through the practice, we can cultivate our hearts and minds, and deepen our understanding of the Buddha's wisdom. As a part of my Dharma practice, I greet my family each morning using words of gratitude. I am very grateful that recently we restarted family sutra recitation every morning.

By practicing the teachings, good things will happen. So let us all put further efforts into living the Dharma in our families.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI

SHAN ZAI

Buddha's Wisdom Changes Your Life

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR COMMENTS!

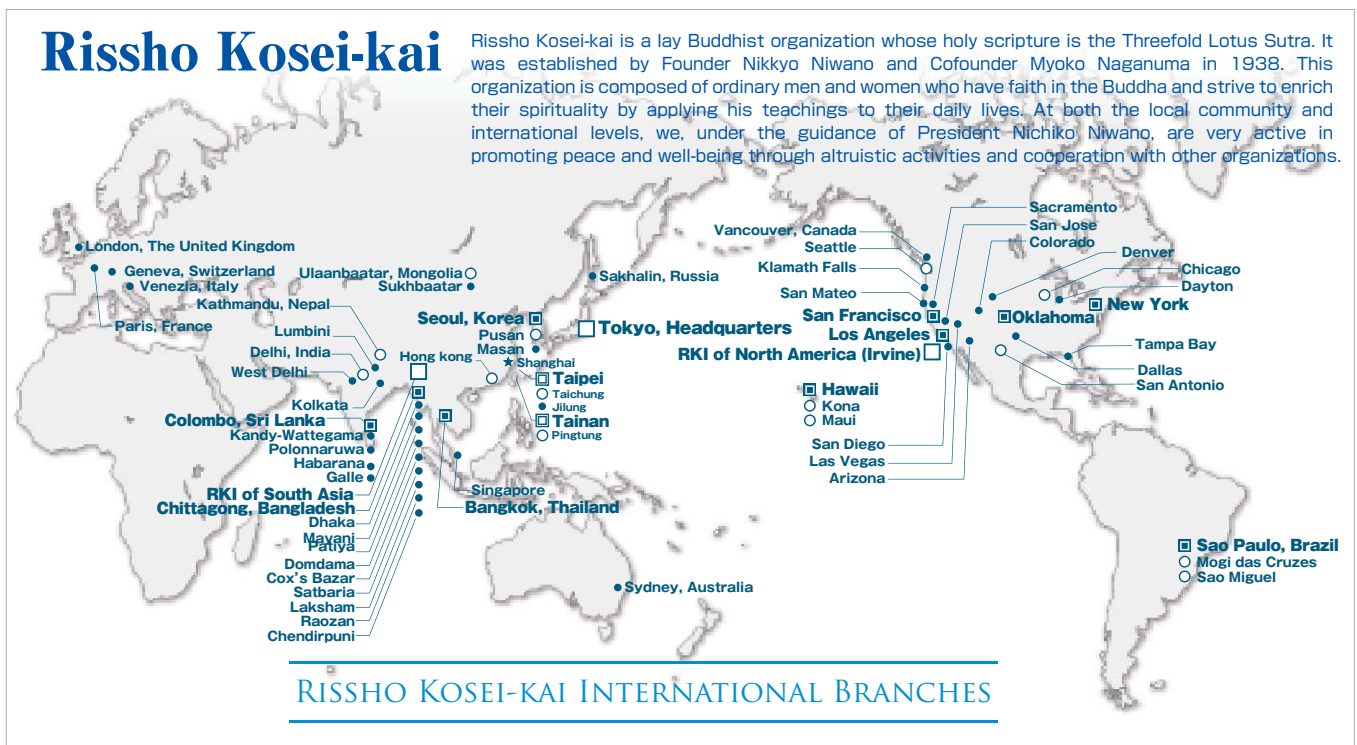
We welcome comments on our e-newsletter *Shan Zai*.

Please send us your comments to the following e-mail address.

E-mail: shanzai@kosei-kai.or.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai

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.



RISSHO KOSEI-KAI INTERNATIONAL BRANCHES

SHAN ZAI Vol. 82 (July 2012)

Published by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumonkan, 2-6-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, 166-8537 Japan TEL: 03-5341-1124 FAX: 03-5341-1224 E-mail: shanzai.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp
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