Out Pitch in a Critical Situation

In a baseball game, although a pitcher throws balls toward edges of the strike zone, he fails to throw the last ball as an out pitch there, which deviates to the middle of the zone. This is a second class pitcher. Pitching the last ball toward an edge of the strike zone makes the batter swing at it, which the home plate umpire may call a “ball,” causing the batter to swing out. This is how a real pitcher throws. I think the same is true of everything.

Everyone is trying as hard as he or she can, but at a very important moment one’s selfish ego often comes into view. Because our ego gets involved in our efforts, things do not turn out the way we wish. Even though you may be doing something for others, you won’t be liked, or you’ll incur someone’s displeasure.

You may diligently recite the sutra every day and be constantly busy performing activities, but if you waver in your religious faith in the Dharma (which is essential), your selfish ego will be revealed in a critical situation. And then the efforts you have accumulated so far will be wasted.

This principle can be compared to a numerical expression: zero multiplied by ten equals zero. When your faith is zero, your efforts will result in zero, even if you have tried ten times or hundred times. Having absolute faith and following the Dharma, any of your effort bears fruit, and there will be no failure. Everything you do will make people happy and produce religious merit.

From Kaisozuikan 7 (Kosei Publishing Co.), pp. 68–69
Basic Buddhism through Comics
by Mitsutoshi Furuya

The Truth That Eliminates Suffering, Gives Hope, and Unleashes Courage (The Four Noble Truths)

Truth of Suffering

What is the teaching called the Four Noble Truths? In this case, "Truth" means "to clarify or clearly understand." This doctrine helps us eradicate the suffering and worry we face in our daily lives, and lead us into a realm of absolute tranquility.

The Truth of Suffering is to look into the actual condition of suffering and worry. The Truth of Cause is to reflect upon and find the root cause of suffering, and fully realize it.

The Truth of Path is to practice the bodhisattva way, in order to eliminate suffering. The Truth of Extinction is the realm of tranquility in which suffering and worry are extinguished.

In Buddhism, we hear a lot about the Four Noble Truths.
We learn to correct the root of suffering in our daily life, and develop a peaceful state of mind.

The Four Noble Truths clarify the truths of suffering, the cause, the extinction, and the path.

It is easy to say, but hard to do.

Yes?

Oh! Hachi. What are you doing?

Well, Mrs. Kuma is hesitant to come in.

Oh! Mrs. Kuma is with you?

Yes, but she is shy.

Don’t be shy. Come on in.

How are you? It’s been a while...
“The single most important thing is the heart and mind of the present moment”—these are the words of the famous Zen master Dokyo Etan (1642–1721), commonly called Shoju Rojin (Old Man of Shoju) from his hermitage named Shoju-an (Hermitage of Right Perception) in Iiyama, Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture), where he dedicated himself to Zen training.

Etan proposed the idea of “living for this one day,” teaching people “No matter how difficult a time you are having, if you think that it is only for this one day, you will be able to bear it. Pleasure is the same. If you think that it will last only for one day, there is no reason to wallow in it.” What he is teaching here is that it is most important that one live this single day, today, with diligence, and that one such day after another follows. In other words, we must dedicate our whole being into each and every day. In order to achieve this, we should live by giving the greatest importance to the present moment of today. In effect, Etan teaches that allowing ourselves to be neglectful of the present by thinking about what may lie ahead will waste tomorrow, to say nothing of a lifetime.

We usually find it somewhat difficult, however, to give such importance to the present moment of today. Of course we understand the idea mentally, but in fact, while we say such things as “I will continue with morning and evening sutra recitation” or “I will stop smoking,” we end up putting things off until tomorrow and neglecting the present moment of today.

The Japanese theoretical physicist Haruo Saji has written about the present moment as follows:

“The fact that we feel a sense of freedom in how we might use the present moment, that is, this very moment in time, is proof that we are alive.

“The time we can make use of is not the past, it is not the future, it is only right now, this present moment.”

All of us live our lives only once, and we are the only ones who can live our own lives. Furthermore, the time we can use freely is only the present moment. In this impermanent world, in which we never know what may happen next, we might even say that to be neglectful of the present moment is to waste life itself.
Putting the Present Moment into Practice

Let us think about how we can give importance to the present moment.

In *Hagakure* (Hidden by the Leaves), a collection of commentaries about the warrior code of the samurai compiled in the early eighteenth century, we find the phrase, “Ato miyo sowaka” (Look over your shoulder, sowaka). “Sowaka (Skt., svaha)” is the incantation chanted at the end of Shingon, or mantras of Esoteric Buddhist sects, and to tell yourself to “look over your shoulder” is to thoroughly review your course of action and ask yourself whether you are forgetting something and whether you are doing what you should. When making an important decision, if you realize that you are starting to think up excuses for not acting quickly, then you should try chanting this Shingon incantation.

Another method is to announce your decision in front of many people. I also was taught this, and I have tested its effectiveness.

There are surely other methods. From a long time ago we have had the old saying, “The time is right when you are thinking of taking action,” which tells us the importance of not losing time and taking care of things in “the present moment, right now.” That is because, when we decide to do something or make up our mind to take action, the way of doing so that conforms to the truth is to readily follow the causal conditions to act by immediately putting our decision into practice. Put another way, we can lead our lives in step with the truth by bearing in mind to make the most of the present moment, right now.

The cells making up our bodies function together in harmony according to a universal truth, keeping us alive. However, our hearts and minds often lead us to egotistical feelings that want to have their own way and to avoid anything that is painful or troublesome. When that happens, things do not go smoothly and instead cause suffering, but when we move with the natural flow of universal truth, our hearts and minds and our actions are in harmony, and our bodies and our hearts and minds can feel at ease.

Shoju Rojin, whom I mentioned at the beginning, said that living each day to the fullest by taking action on what is in front of us brings us to “spiritual fitness and the secret of good health.” Whether it is quitting smoking or thinking about leading a healthier lifestyle, what matters most is developing the attitude to attach the greatest importance to “the present moment, right now.”

My name is Keisuke Sano, and I’m twenty-three years old. I’m in my second year at Gakurin seminary of Rissho Kosei-kai. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of Gakurin seminary. I am fortunate to be in the seminary during this 50th anniversary.

Before I came to Gakurin, I had lived in Fukui Prefecture, which is northeast of Kyoto and faces the Sea of Japan. There are five people in my family—my father, mother, elder sister, elder brother, and me. We have been members of Rissho Kosei-kai since my great-grandmother joined. I am the fourth generation following the faith. My mother has frequently taken my siblings and me to the Dharma center since the time we were children. We grew up among Sangha members.

It has been over a year since I entered Gakurin seminary. I have learned a lot of precious things and experienced many realizations in the past year. The most important thing that I learned was that my parents had always loved me and that I’d always been my parents’ concern.

From childhood, I had been unable to depend on my parents. My family was poor, so I was put up for adoption when I was an elementary school child. When I turned fifteen years old, I went back to my parents’. But I felt a distance between my parents and me, and I had no idea how I should interact with them. I thought that my parents put me up for adoption because I was an undesired and unnecessary child. I became obsessed with the feeling that my parents were always comparing me with my brighter brother. This feeling fanned my hatred of my parents, and I refused to talk with them. I concealed my true thoughts.

I fell into bad company at my high school, and I became antagonistic and bellicose. I dyed my hair silver like other bad boys did. I stopped going back to my home. I took to delinquency and acted bad, because I was eager to get my parents’ attention and concern. But at the same time, I kept feeling that I shouldn’t trouble them by doing bad things. These conflicting emotions were always in my heart. Because of this, I never felt comfortable. Above all things, I hated myself for having such emotional turmoil.

The then-minister of the Dharma center kindly reached out to me and helped me get out of such a situation. He attentively listened to me as my painful feelings spilled out, feelings that I had been almost unable to handle. He said with great consideration, “You are considering everything in a pessimistic way, as if you were some kind of tragic hero, but you just don’t realize that there are people living with much harder burdens.” And he suggested to me that I should carry out the tedori practice of visiting members’ homes in order to talk with them. Tedori is one of the important practices of Rissho Kosei-kai, in which we meet members in person to learn their recent situation and encourage them to come to the Dharma center’s activities. Through the practice, I realized that I am not the only one that has such bitter experiences. Then little by little I came to trust people. However, the relationship with my parents still remained unimproved.

Thereafter, I fortunately graduated from university and was given a chance to learn at Gakurin seminary. Honestly, I felt relieved, because I would be able to live apart from my parents. But after I entered
Gakurin, they called me frequently. I thought that they did so out of their loving concern for me, but it made me feel irritated nonetheless. In addition, I had been sending money home to help support the family. My family is still in need. I did it reluctantly, but I felt it was necessary. My parents expressed their thanks, but it somehow sounded suspicious to me.

Around this time, a two-month training session at a local Dharma center for first-year students began. I had more chances to carry out the tedori practice. The members I had visited were having trouble with their family members. I sincerely wished to liberate them from those troubled situations. I really wanted to see their conditions transformed so they could find a way out of their problems.

However, I suddenly wondered why all the members I had met during the session were suffering from family problems, so I went to see the minister and asked him for Dharma guidance. He said, “Every person you meet in the tedori practice is a Dharma connection that serves as a mirror reflecting your heart.” Then I recognized that it was I who should be the first to try to restore my family relationship.

Then the minister suggested to me that I talk with my parents, saying, “Why don’t you reveal your true feelings to your parents? I think they are waiting for you to do so.” With his guidance in mind, I went back to my parents’ home in Fukui Prefecture. It had been a long time since I had spoken face to face with my parents, and it made me very nervous in front of them. I said, “You always cared about my brother and never looked at me. I have been lonely since my childhood. I tried so hard to become the one that you desired me to be, but I just couldn’t. So I thought that I was undesired and unnecessary.” I could finally convey my honest feelings that I had held inside for so long.

I thought that they would say something hurtful in response, but they said, “We never knew that you have been holding such sorrow in your heart.” They also said, with smiling faces, “Thank you for sharing your true feelings with us.” As soon as I heard them say those words, everything that I had been holding inside—loneliness, grudges, and distrust towards my parents—vanished in a moment. We spent three hours enjoying our openhearted conversation.

My father said that after I left home for Gakurin, he had often cried because he missed me so much. I finally found out why my parents had called me many times. My mother said, “Of course we have always loved you and have watched as you grew. We know that you were always diligent in whatever you did and that you had been quietly patient, considering our family.” Through listening to them, I found out that throughout my life, I had always been supported and raised in the deep love of my parents.

I had made myself a tragic hero, being pessimistic about my life. I had been biased against my parents. I had never even tried to consider my parents’ feelings. To be honest, I had really always loved my parents. I realized that because I loved them, I wanted them to understand my loneliness. I saw clearly how my loneliness had turned into hatred. I finally became honest about my feelings after coming here to learn at Gakurin seminary.

Now I know that my perspective had become twisted and that I had lacked gratefulness; now, my aspiration is to become a warm person who can easily express gratitude towards others. In conclusion, I would like to say that my experiences at Gakurin have allowed me to realize that I would like to help people suffering from family problems or seeking their true selves.
Basic Buddhism through Comics

Continued from page 3

Are you kidding? Didn’t I see you yesterday?

Well, it has been a long time since I saw you yesterday.

What she’s saying doesn’t make sense.

Grandpa! She is having problems with Mr. Kuma. So I brought her to you for advice.

If that’s the case...

Come on in.

There’s nothing to worry about.

OK.

Everyone in the world wants peace. That’s why you should get the Nobles.

What? You think I want a Nobel Peace Prize?!

No, no. He means, “Be noble if you want to get a piece of the world.”

Nothing like that. It is too bad that you are both in the dark about this. I am talking about the Four Noble Truths.

Oh?

They are four gateways to the Dharma, that is, the Buddha’s teachings.
Oh, no, that's quite wrong. In this case, it means to give up the attachments preventing us from knowing these four truths clearly.

You are indeed a wise man, Grandpa.

Oh, I understand. If you give up those four, your trouble will be gone.

First, to clarify the Truth of Suffering. It means to stop trying to avoid suffering and instead face it squarely.

The Truth of Cause is to look deeply into suffering, and find its root cause. The Truth of Path means to live your life according to the Buddha’s Teachings.

If you do so, your physical and emotional suffering will be gone. That is called the Truth of Extinction.

I feel like all my troubles are gone.

What are you saying! I haven’t heard what you came to talk about.

Oh, that’s right.

Hey, snap out of it! No one can help you if you don’t talk with them first.

Hachi, you are right! The Truth of Suffering tells us the importance of honestly facing our suffering.
People usually want a quick fix, so they skip over the Truth of Suffering to get to the final three.

I am just like that, too.

This isn’t Chutes and Ladders, you know. There are no shortcuts.

First off, find the true nature of the problem: Who? what? and how?

I understand! Now, please tell us about your problem.

Well, actually it’s my husbands problem.

What’s happened to him?

His bad habit started again.

Mr. Kuma is a bad fellow, isn’t he, Grandpa?

Hach! We haven’t heard the whole story yet.

It’s his drinking. Lately he’s drinking every day. I’m worried about his health.

Yes, everyone knows that Mr. Kuma likes to drink...
When he comes home drunk, he complains about his job and yells at the kids.

Oh, that must be hard on your kids.

The next day, he is too hung-over to go to his job as a carpenter.

That is bad.

Yes. He’s becoming a problem for his foreman.

By the way, who is suffering? Mrs. Kuma? The kids? Mr. Kuma’s boss?

I think all of them are.

Well, in that case, please bring whoever is suffering here. Mrs. Kuma, you are not suffering, so you don’t need to be here.

Don’t say that! She is worried, you know.

The Truth of Suffering means nothing if the sufferers don’t acknowledge their own suffering.

Grandpa! I am suffering!

So I want you to tell me how you are suffering. You don’t need to use your husband or your kids as a pretext…

Oh, I’m sorry.
You're the one who is suffering.

My husband isn't working so he doesn't bring home money. He won't even look me in the face lately.

Of course it's hard on his foreman and the kids, but it's hardest on me.

Indeed! He doesn't bring home money, he drinks, and then he gripes at you, doesn't he?

That's right. He is impossible.

OK. Now, I understand how you are suffering from your husband's behavior. I clearly see your suffering.

Mr. Kuma's being unfair to her, Grandpa. Go give him a piece of your mind!

I would give Mr. Kuma advice if he came to me asking for it, but this is his wife's problem right now.

What? But isn't Mr. Kuma the bad guy?

She is the one who is suffering here.

First, let's clarify her suffering and then, in the second stage, we'll search for the cause of suffering and then finally, she can practice the Truth of Path which leads into the Truth of Extinction. These are the teachings of the Four Noble Truths.

Please continue to guide me.

All this talk about the Truth of Extinction and the Truth of Suffering has me confused, Grandpa.
Just because I’m a comedian, don’t take this story lightly.

In the real world there are people who don’t acknowledge their suffering.

There are those who give up without trying.

and those who try to run away from suffering, only to fall into deeper suffering.

In these cases, one needs to squarely face the problem, not make some half-hearted escape.

Just like Grandpa said.

“We must look deeply into the who, what, and how of the suffering.”

Now that Mrs. Kuma has locked squarely at her own suffering, she can search for the cause of her suffering.

Next comes the Truth of Cause, but this is enough for today.

To be continued
A series of seminars on family education are being held around the world. Lecturers from the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education are invited to speak at the seminars, in which participants learn how to communicate with their children in order to build happier families. Participants learn to use the principle of family education: “If parents change their hearts, their children will also change.”

Family education seminars have been held in the USA, Russia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Korea, India, Nepal, Thailand, and Cambodia. Many people have put what they learned about family education and communicating with children into practice, which helps many of them to develop happier family lives.

In addition, fathers and mothers who have learned the principles of family education express their joy to their friends, which provides a good opportunity to share their questions and problems about parental concerns.

World peace begins with the peace of each family. The principle of family education has been practiced worldwide, and it leaves families with a warm glow.

Recently, a family education seminar was held at Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata in Garia, India. This was my first chance to attend this type of seminar, and I had the opportunity to meet two kind, generous, and wise ladies: Rev. Takayo Maruyama, former head of the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education, and Ms. Yukiko Ojima, a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai International. Both of these ladies were like wise goddesses to me. I learned a lot from this memorable seminar, and I’m doing my best to apply what I learned in my everyday life.

The single most important thing I learned at the seminar concerned the “happiness of one’s life.” This “happiness” only increases more and more when we share it with others, and as they continue to pass it on, the process continues indefinitely. I have especially noticed this effect upon my little daughter. When I am happy, she also feels joy. Moreover, we share our happiness with each other. Actually, the mind of a child is just like a mirror in which his or her mental state is perfectly reflected.

My daughter was five years old at the time of the seminar. Since then, I have done my best to raise her according to the Buddha’s teachings so that she can develop positive human qualities and moral values as she grows up. Today, she is nine years old and has become my dear little friend, with whom I can easily discuss many problems. We are able to share our joys and sorrows, and we understand each other very well.

I always make an effort to control my anger. Perhaps I may not always succeed in doing so, but I strive to constantly provide an example of how a good person behaves. I try to display the qualities of kindness and sympathy before my daughter in order to help her grow up to be the right kind of person. I believe that if you heartily practice the teachings of the Buddha, your life will also be very pleasant, easy and peaceful.

Thank you.
WHEN I read the President’s Guidance of this month, “Right Now,” I recalled serving as the first five-day leader of chanting of the Threefold Lotus Sutra during mid-winter practice at the Great Sacred Hall last January.

When the second day was over, because of the extensive preparation involved and the tension I had been feeling, I thought, “Just three more days and I’ll be free.” Then I realized that I was not making much of the present moment, the “now.” Whenever any difficult situation in our life is over, another one is most likely waiting for us right around the corner. Such is life. I realized that if we continually keep on wishing that every hard situation we face would just be over with, we will soon find that life is passing us by. To do this is really to miss the value of this precious life.

Of course, it is important to try to change any difficult circumstance we are facing. But even if the situation stays the same, if we just change our point of view to the Buddha’s perspective, I believe we will always find an opportunity to learn valuable lessons or develop our potential. It is the wisdom of Buddhism that under any circumstance we can learn to appreciate the “now,” recognize the value of the “now,” and act in good faith at each moment with peace of mind.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International

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 Co-founder 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.

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Invisible Eyelashes: Seeing What Is Closest to Us
by Nikkyo Niwano

Combining time-honored Buddhist teachings and stories with examples from modern life, Founder Nikkyo Niwano shows us how we may attain a uniquely Buddhist way of reflecting on our everyday ways of thinking and being. We learn why attitude affects happiness, and how flexibility of mind helps us grow spiritually, making us more productive at work and better able to relate to others. Founder Niwano explains how taking a deep look at what is closest lets us see the way our individual lives fit into the universe. This book was originally published in 1994 and has now become available through Print-on-Demand, with new cover.

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