



Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

Passing Along the Important Things

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Create a Theme and Use Your Ingenuity to
Focus on What Is Important



I wish you all a very happy New Year.

Last year marked the 70th year since the end of the Second World War. I wrote last year for one of my two New Year's calligraphy scrolls the characters for *fukyō* (never despise). These words expressed my wish that we treasure the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Despise by not looking down on or belittling each other and that we walk the path of peace and harmony. There is a valuable cultural practice in Japan that is expressed with the words "begin and end with courtesy." The role and mission of our members is to fully comprehend that sort of essential thing, and to fully apply ourselves to making the country of each of us a peace-loving nation.

From a global perspective, large-scale terrorist acts and conflicts seem to be cascading. I would like for us to continue our steadfast work for peace and make good use of Japan's traditions and special qualities while watching the situation closely.

As you all know, since 1998 the General Goal of Risho Kosei-kai has been "Cultivating the fields in the heart and mind of each and every person." Since 2008 the organization has been promoting the enshrinement of an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as a focus of devotion at the home altars of all members. By doing this we have accomplished the basis of taking refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha).

Then in 2014 we marked the 50th anniversary of the building of the Great Sacred Hall. Along with reflecting upon the wishes of Founder Nikkyo Niwano embodied in the Great Sacred Hall, we vowed then that we would make a fresh start in the spirit of "starting out anew in the 51st year."

In keeping with this history and the course we are taking, it is clear that it was Founder Niwano's foremost desire that each and every one of us has an aspiration for buddhahood (a mind that seeks spiritual enlightenment and walks the Buddha Way) and a mind open to delight, and that we walk the Buddha Way and pass the Buddha's teaching along to all those who come after us.

Risho Kosei-kai's significant restructuring this year has focused on these wishes of the Founder..

New Year's Guidance

I am presenting the following as the Guidelines for Members' Practice of the Faith in 2016.

This year, too, without becoming overwhelmed by the complicated realities of our daily lives, we will find appropriate ways to focus constantly on the things that are important. With this in mind, we will begin our dissemination efforts under the themes we have each created for ourselves.

Let us clearly understand what Shakyamuni Buddha wished and then share it with others.

Let us walk the bodhisattva way (the right path for humanity) with the compassion and consideration for others shown by the Buddha, our Founder and Cofounder, and by showing our basic human qualities of cheerfulness, kindness, and warm-heartedness.

For the past four years, since 2012, my New Year's guidelines have included "additional remarks" but I am omitting them this year. I did so because I believe that you fellow believers have well understood the meaning of "letting us always remember to pray for those who perished in the great earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan as well as many other disasters," "the cultivation of human resources," and "letting us choose to do these things at the levels of the individual, the chapter, the Dharma center, and the entire organization, and by so doing contribute to our communities, our country, and the world." It is also because these are things we should continue to do over the coming months and years.

For this year's guidelines, I have primarily adopted three subjects—"themes," "Shakyamuni Buddha's wishes," and "the bodhisattva path."

As for "theme," broadly speaking there are short-term, mid-term, and long-term themes. Short-term themes are for the issues right in front of us that we have to deal with. Then there is a weighty theme, how we are to live our lives. Furthermore, as in the words "endeavor, endeavor, endeavor until you die, and then when you are reborn, endeavor," there is the theme of transcending this world and purifying our souls—we say that there is this sort of long-term theme, an eternal theme. (When I think along these lines, I can say that the question of how to live one's life is a mid-term theme.)

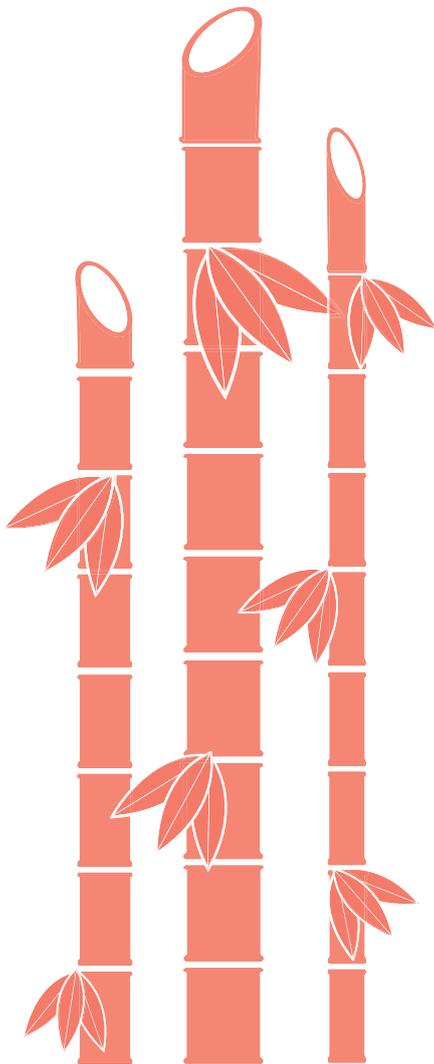
Depending on the person, there are probably some who prepare for the long-term themes first, working backwards from there to select mid-term and short-term themes. Some people might adopt short-term, mid-term, and long-term themes for a single objective. Even when contemplating themes, we should be flexible and innovative in focusing on the important things.

Always Focus on and Devote Yourselves to What Shakyamuni Wishes for Us

For this year I have also stated, "Let us clearly understand what Shakyamuni Buddha wished and then share it with others."

Just before he entered nirvana, Shakyamuni's last words to his disciples were, "Make yourself your light; make the Dharma your light." He wished for each and every person to live a purposeful life as an independent believer, and he wished us to be aware of the truth of the Dharma and to attain true liberation—these were the wishes of Shakyamuni.

As a matter of fact, however, one aspect of our faith is reliance on the Buddha to grant us our wishes and make our dreams come true. But Buddhism has always taught that the stronger your desires, the stronger your suffering, and let us rid ourselves of our attachments. It is important to grasp Shakyamuni's teaching directly without misinterpreting it.



Furthermore, suffering according to Shakyamuni meant things not going as we wish, referring to the eight sufferings: birth, aging, sickness, death, separation from what one likes, union with what one dislikes, not getting what one wants, and the suffering of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental constituents, and consciousness). However, when the Chinese character for “suffering” (*ku*) became used in writing the Japanese word *kurushimi*, meaning pain, it took on additional shadings to mean a variety of things, such as personal inconvenience, or distress as the result of a disaster or other troubles, and it has become difficult to convey the essence of the original Chinese word.

Of course, at the outset anyone can wish for worldly benefits. The things that happen around us can make us happy or sad. But when a wish comes true, when suffering goes away, that should not be the end of the story. Rather, it is crucial that we then focus on what Shakyamuni wished for us, and strive to get closer to the essence of Buddhism. We as members of the sangha should eventually play the most important role of guiding people we come into contact with to “make yourself your light; make the Dharma your light.”

The core of Shakyamuni’s teaching is that all things are impermanent, and all things are devoid of a separate self.

There is a well-known verse from the Dhammapada, “Difficult is it to be born as a human being; difficult is the existence of mortals, knowing they must eventually die; difficult is the hearing of the Dharma; rare is the appearance of the enlightened ones (buddhas).” It expresses the importance of becoming aware and awakening, through the Dharma of impermanence, to the miracle, preciousness, and blessing that is our own life and the lives of others.

Furthermore, as the doctrine of “all things are devoid of a separate self” teaches us, we are allowed to live thanks to the light of the sun, the water, the air, the animals and plants, the minerals—all the things in the universe. Our hands move, we can walk, we can eat, we can breathe, speak, and sleep. There are indeed so many things we are already blessed with.

Many believers, however difficult their situation, accept and reflect upon the fact that “it is all in the Buddha’s teachings,” and they find happiness and feel gratitude.

It is said that humans are the only creatures capable of gratitude, so being able to say thank you is the happiest thing for humans and gives us a purpose in life.

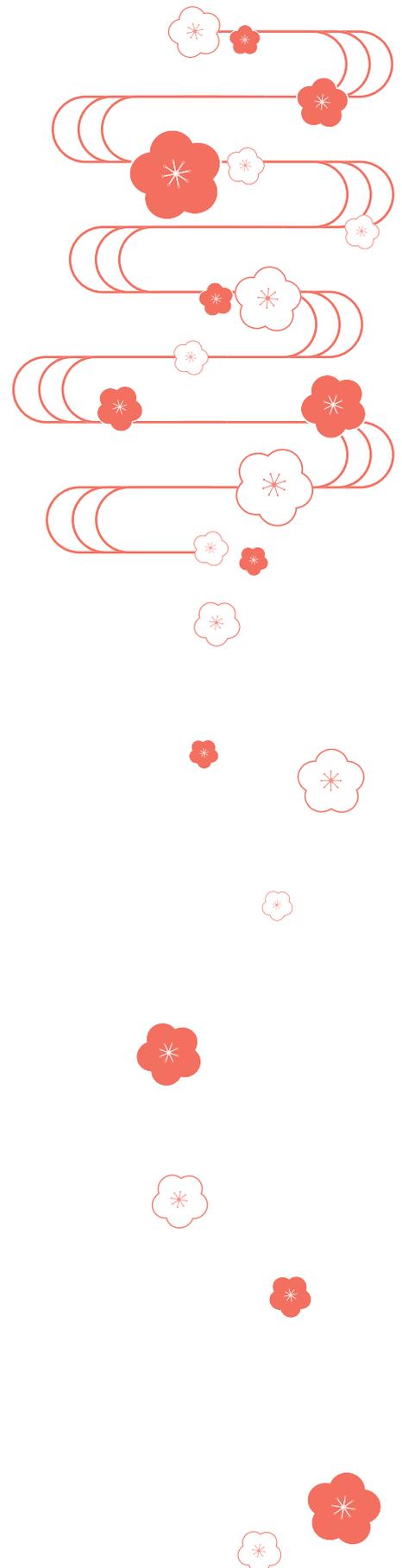
The Essence of Buddhist Giving Results from a Sense of Human Unity

After all, we walk the bodhisattva path by wishing for not just our own liberation but for everyone’s. The foremost practice for a bodhisattva is donation, which is first of Six Perfections.

Donation also embraces compassion, consideration for others, gifting, and joyful giving, among other things. In the spirit of all the senses of the word, we practice daily sharing the Dharma with others, donating our selves, and giving material goods or money.

When we hear the word “donation,” generally it is taken to mean giving material goods or money. But in the original sense, any act of kindness is a donation, be it in the workplace, community, or home; simply living earnestly in these places is a donation all by itself. Someone who delivers merchandise does it not only for a living but brings joy to the recipients. It would be no exaggeration to say that daily life is totally tied to donation.

Therefore donation can be a way of seeing oneself as not separate from others but as one with them. Shakyamuni taught that the things that exist in this world are here due to causes and conditions of endless interdependence, that everything is interrelated and that it all exists together as one life.



New Year's Guidance

The Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) expressed this as *jiko* (oneself) and *toko* (the self in others). He admonishes that, rather than thinking of oneself and the self in others as separate, we should see both as one and the same at their root.

Another person's joy is our joy, their sorrow is our sorrow. The essence of Buddhist donation is the natural action resulting from this sense of oneness with others.

To begin with, donation must be practiced. Sharing the Dharma is one form of donation. But if we wait to impart the Dharma to someone after we think we have mastered the whole of it, we will never begin. What is important is to impart with devotion just what we have learned and what has moved us. If this gladdens someone, we will be twice as glad.

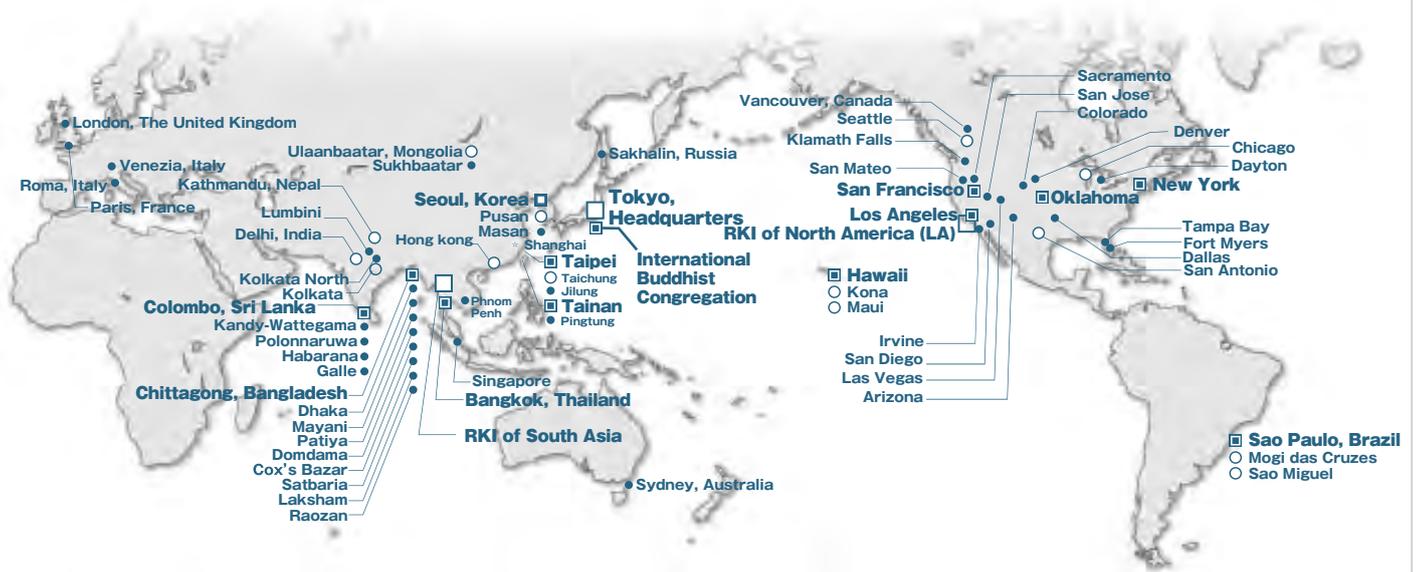
Something must always come out before something goes in. In Japanese the word for a door of a public facility is written with three characters meaning “exit-entrance-opening,” and people who want to use public transport must wait for others to alight. The Japanese word for “breathing” is written with two characters meaning “exhale-inhale,” and the one for “exhale” is first. Likewise, donation means giving before receiving.

Briefly speaking, religion clarifies how we should live. And as in the expression “Each day is a life in miniature,” our lives hinge after all on how fully we live the one day that is today. This year as well I would like all of us to devote ourselves to passing along these important things.

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Rissho Kosei-kai



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