

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

The Cause of Suffering Is Within Yourself

AREN'T there those among us who wring their hands about why they alone seem to be miserable, when everyone around them appears to be happy? Such people tend to attribute the cause of their unhappiness to others. When you blame all of the bad things in your life on everyone around you, you never have to face your own inadequacies.

However, as long as you carry this idea around in your head, you only have two options; you can continue to blame those around you, or you can run away from the situation. In either case, you will never be able to escape your suffering. This is because the root of suffering is in fact your desire to have every-

thing go according to your wishes, and things do not necessarily work out the way you want them to. In short, the main cause of suffering does not lie outside yourself; it is within yourself, in that you cannot have things as you like.

Once you understand this point, the cause of your misery ceases to be your mother-in-law, husband, or your children, and it begins to dawn on you that it is enough to have the courage to change yourself. Once you grasp this, even though you are the only one who has changed, before you realize it the other person will have changed too, and you will be able to perceive the working of the Buddha in your life.

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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.

GUIDANCE
BY PRESIDENT NIWANO

Do Not Do What Is Wrong

by Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



What Is Wrongdoing?

From childhood we are often told, “Do not do what you have been taught is wrong.” Why should we not do something we are told is wrong? Furthermore, to begin with, what exactly does it mean to be wrong?

As is written in the Dhammapada: “Do something wrong, and afterward you will regret it.” In other words, avoiding to do something you know is wrong means you can pass your days without regret. Some people may think, “Oh, is that all this is about?” But by passing your days without regret, you will always be in a cheerful frame of mind and every day of your life can be enjoyable and fulfilling. There can be no greater joy than this.

Nevertheless, it can be rather difficult to pin down exactly what wrongdoing means. Definitions of the terms “good” and “evil” may change, depending on the person using them, the period in history, and the karmic connections. That is why many philosophers since ancient times have found them hard to define, saying that they are beyond human conceiving.

It has been said, however, that goodness means following a course that fosters life and that evil means going against the flow of life. Simply put, words and deeds that accord with the Truth, or the Dharma, imply goodness, while those that disrespect the sanctity of your own and others’ lives are evil. Also, the reason that Shakyamuni said, “Those who know the preciousness of their own selves, let them not connect themselves to evil,” is because awareness of the sanctity of life is at the root of not doing something wrong.

From this perspective, the ten evils taught by Buddhism are all actions that do harm to the sanctity of your own and others’ lives. They include: to unnecessarily take life; to steal from others; to become involved in immoral sexual relationships; to use language that is duplicitous or flattering; to speak ill of others, tell lies, or cheat; to cherish fierce desire or anger; and to hold wrong views.

Such behavior, in nearly all cases, causes people to hold a grudge, or makes people angry or sad, and is bound to bring about regret. In order to live without regret, do not do what is wrong—that is an ironclad rule of life.



On the other hand, the Edo-period Shingon priest Jiun Onko (1718–1804) said that “the ten good deeds are the practice hall of bodhisattvas.” In other words, not committing the ten evils means for us studying the Buddha Way and putting it into practice, and that itself is “the Way of humanity.”

Doing Good Deeds

Although we understand that we should not do what is wrong, sometimes we may tell lies or become angry. We cannot say absolutely that there is no chance that, without knowing it, we somehow hurt other people, or that accidentally, we might even be responsible for the death of someone. That is why Shakyamuni has given us the concrete teaching of not committing the ten evils, and thereby encouraged us to always be able to realize the sanctity of our own and others’ lives.

“Do not do what is wrong” brings to mind the verse of the precepts of the seven buddhas that sums up Buddhist thought. The first line of the verse, “Do no evil,” is in most cases read as a command to refrain from committing evil deeds. Zen master Dogen (1200–1253), however, interpreted this line as meaning that if you walk the Buddha Way and live with awareness of the sanctity of your own and others’ lives, you naturally will not do what is wrong. In other words, the phrase “do no evil,” rather than being a warning that we should not do what is wrong, is a phrase that shows us our true nature; that is, if we are truly aware of the sanctity of our own and others’ lives, we will do only good deeds. You will do nothing wrong precisely because you have realized what is important to you as a human being, thanks to having made a connection to the teaching of the Buddha. We cannot help but think of the peace of mind that ensues.

As for the people who have committed wrongful acts, just as in the saying, “those who are capable of evil are also capable of good,” once they return to their senses, they are more capable of walking the bodhisattva way than other people, with remorse that serves like the working of a springboard.

Finally, I would like to mention another saying of Shakyamuni’s. “If an action brings about no regret, and can be done happily and joyfully, that action embodies goodness”—so let us spend each day of our lives cheerfully and joyfully.

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How I Saw the Buddha in My Mother

by Nicola Tini
Rissho Kosei-kai of Rome

This religious testimony was delivered during the ceremony for the first day of the month and the uposatha day ceremony at the Fuchu Dharma Center, Japan, on July 1, 2015.

GOOD morning, everyone. My name is Nicola Tini. I came from the city of Rome in Italy, and I am a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Rome.

I am a first generation member of Rissho Kosei-kai because there are not very many Buddhists in Italy. As you know, my country is the home of the Vatican, the so-called “center of Christianity.”

Twenty-one years ago, I joined Rissho Kosei-kai (simply called Kosei-kai). At the time, I had heard about Buddhism at Sapienza University of Rome and I was highly interested in it. After some research and study, I heard about the Lotus Sutra, and I wanted to practice it. Among the many religious organizations based on the Lotus Sutra, I asked for information from Kosei-kai, sending a letter to the headquarters in Tokyo. They replied me telling me there was already a sincere member of Kosei-kai in Rome. So I met that member; his name is Koichi Kawamoto (presently, director of the Chuo Academic Research Center). He was studying religions in Rome and he could speak Italian very well. After meeting with him, I decided to join Kosei-kai.

At that time, my mother was in a deeply depressive state and she had fallen into alcoholism. I tried to help her, and I guided her to the Dharma. My mother became a faithful Buddhist and she chanted the *o-daimoku* and the Lotus Sutra every day. But she could not stop drinking, and our family situation became worse by the day. My sister didn't want to talk to her anymore, and my mother had many quarrels with my father.

Back then, I could not understand the situation, and my faith became weaker. I thought, why isn't the Buddha helping us? Why doesn't he heal my mother? What's wrong?

Even if in such a bad situation, my mother never lost hope, and she always chanted the *o-daimoku* and kept her faith in the Lotus Sutra. Many times, she was the one that encouraged me to do sutra recitation every day.

After some years had passed, my mother fell seriously ill due to alcoholism, and she had serious troubles with her liver and stomach. One day, when she vomited blood from her mouth, my father and I decided to take her to the hospital.

Her condition was very serious and she had to go into surgery. After the operation, the doctors told us that it wasn't certain that she would ever recover. Every day, each member of my family (my father, brother, sister, and me) went to see her. I chanted the *o-daimoku* for her while she was in that desperate condition.

Finally, she regained consciousness and, thanks to the transfusion of blood she had in the hospital, there was no more alcohol in her veins. So she was back to her normal self; the kind person I knew she was. She had a chance to ask for my father's forgiveness, and she made peace with my sister.

We brought her back home, and it seemed that all was going to end well. We were happy.

But after a few days, her condition became very bad and she lost consciousness. We had to take her back to the hospital. This time her situation seemed really desperate, and beyond any possible recovery.

One night, I was watching over her in the hospital.



Mr. Nicola serves the role of chanting leader at the Rissho Kosei-kai of Rome.

Spiritual Journey

Without Buddhism, I would probably not be able to handle such a hard situation, nor to face serious problems such as a parent's death in the hospital. It was in this situation that I realized how much Buddhism had helped me and changed my life.

Suddenly, she opened her eyes and looked at me. Then, she passed away. When it happened, I whispered in her ear not to worry, for I was sure that the Buddha was coming to bring her to the Land of the Tranquil Light. Without Buddhism, I would probably not be able to handle such a hard situation, nor to face serious problems such as a parent's death in the hospital. It was in this situation that I realized how much Buddhism had helped me and changed my life.

Someone could think, "Why are you happy with Buddhism? Your mother passed away and she wasn't healed of her sickness."

It is true; she wasn't healed. But she had the opportunity to regain her consciousness and to make peace with my father and sister and to ask forgiveness for what she did. I think both I and my family, and even my mother, learned a lot from this.

After her passing away, a Dharma center was established in Rome by Rissho Kosei-kai. I decided to work there to repay my debt of gratitude to the Buddha, to the high priest Nichiren, and to the Founder and Cofounder. I was admitted to work there as a staff member and now I have the wonderful opportunity to come here to Japan to attend the presentation ceremony for the Dharma Teacher certificate.

I hope that, as a Dharma teacher, I will be able to repay my debt of gratitude to my mother. I will do my best to work as a bodhisattva who has sprung up from the earth, and as a disciple of the Buddha and the Founder and Cofounder. I also would like to thank all of you for your warm hospitality and welcome.

Thank you very much.



Mr. Nicola (second from left) participated in the gathering with Rev. Kosho Niwano, president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, and the members living in Europe.

Child Care *lifeline*

How to deal with the four-year-old daughter who behaves violently against her little brother



My daughter is four years old and my son is ten months old. She is usually cheerful, but when the son tries to play with his elder sister's toys, she violently takes them away from him. She sometimes roughly throws a toy at him when I am not beside them. Whenever I encountered such a scene, I would find myself scolding my daughter emotionally. How should I deal with her without getting emotional?



A First of all, it is important to understand your daughter's sentiments. Her mind is filled with the feeling that her little brother is taking her mother's attention away from her. She has always held these feelings inside, but when she saw her brother trying to play with her own toys, those restrained feelings began to explode.

Please understand her loneliness, and hold her tightly in your arms, saying, "Yes, I know these toys are yours, and they are precious to you. I'm terribly sorry your brother tried to use them without your permission." When you show her such warm consideration, and she knows her mother understands what's in her mind, your daughter's heart will become gentler, and she will learn to be more considerate of her little brother. You can say to her, "Your brother wants to use this. What will you do? Will you let him use it? Wouldn't you be happy if someone kindly let you use something of theirs?" If you try to say this over and over, she will gradually become more willing to let him use her toys. If she can do it even little bit, please say to her, "Thank you very much. I'm really pleased with you. You're really wonderful!" It would be good for you to say to your son, "Let's say 'thank you' to your sister." Those words alone would help her feel that maybe she would like to allow him to use her toys again. Children are happy when their beloved mothers simply understand and recognize their feelings.

When see the situation solely from a parent's viewpoint, you will think, "Because she is an elder sister, or because she is four years old, she should let her younger brother use a toy." As a result, you tend to get emotional and say unintentionally, "Why have you done such a thing?"

If you would continue to do so, however, your elder daughter would tend to hit her younger brother or throw a toy at him while you are not present, or she could lie to you.

So after you have emotionally scolded her, it would be good for you to say then and there, "I'm so sorry to get mad at you. This toy is really precious to you, isn't it?"



(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.

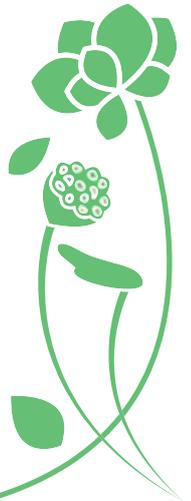
An Important Thing

I HAD an aunt, who had served as *shibuchō*, or a Chapter Head, at the Ogaki Dharma Center in western Japan. Her husband, my uncle, was drafted and sent to Manchuria during the Second World War. At the end of the war, he was detained in Siberia, where he died. My aunt struggled to raise two children in the face of economic difficulty. She was truly warm-hearted and always kept a smile on her face.

Recently the location where my uncle's body was buried was identified; it was in Russia, very close to the border with Mongolia. During this winter, I visited Mongolia and was surprised by its extreme cold. The highest temperature there was only -20°C . My uncle died in December of 1945. I felt my heart break when I thought about him dying in the midst of that terrible cold, hunger, severe forced labor, and the pain of never able to see his beloved wife and children.

At night in Ulaanbaatar, I recited the sutra, facing toward the place where he is resting. I heard him speak to me, "Let me tell you something important. Each and every life is precious. So never harm any one. My wish is for you to build a world in which all people can live happily. I wish that you will make Japan a nation that is filled with people who are always focused on building world peace. I count on you." The life of my uncle, together with his wish, is alive within my own life now.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International



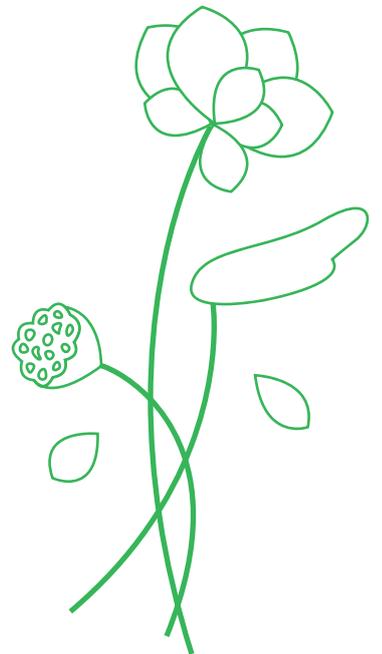
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