

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

The Secret to Persuasion Is Listening

GETTING people to accept even a single decision is no simple matter. When people are told, “This is how it’s been decided, so we all have to just go along with it,” they may appear to outwardly follow the decision, but we cannot say they wholeheartedly accept it. A single word can be understood in an endless variety of ways from the various standpoints of individual listeners. When you leave people’s doubts and worries up in the air, they turn into discontent.

So, you desperately attempt to convince people that you are right. However, rather than trying to always persuade others, it is more important to listen to their feelings. Then, accept those of their opinions that warrant agreement.

There is a famous quote from Abraham Lincoln.

If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend, . . . [which is] the great highroad to his reason, and which, when once gained, you will find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of your cause. . . . On the contrary, assume to dictate to his judgment, . . . or to mark him as one to be shunned and despised, and he will retreat within himself.

The secret to being loved is found in loving, and the secret to persuasion is found in listening.

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Living the Lotus

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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.

What Lies beyond Prayer

by Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



What Is Prayer?

There is an old *senryu* (a Japanese short poetic form that often depicts human foibles in a humorous or cynical manner) that goes: “With your hands together before the gods and the buddhas, / You ask for a hand to get what you want.” Certainly the people of every era have prayed to the gods and the buddhas to grant their wishes. Today, we also put our hands together and pray for success in term-end school examinations or for an illness to be cured, so there are actually quite a few instances when we pray to the gods and the buddhas.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano told us, “We are apt to think of faith as praying to the gods and the buddhas to be liberated from suffering and to have our wishes fulfilled.” He clearly explained that faith “is not merely praying to the gods and the buddhas, but it is aspiring to lead a life that accords with the truth that is the Buddha Dharma.”

By believing in the Buddha Dharma and making it your own, you will become a buddha yourself or recognize that you are a buddha. Faith in Buddhism lies in this direction and that is what Founder Niwano meant. In the first place, if you realize that you yourself are a buddha, then you no longer rely on the power of the gods and the buddhas, or of anyone else, and so you no longer pray for them to liberate you. This is the Buddha Way, that is, living your life based on the teaching that you should “Make yourself the light, make the Dharma your light.”

After the Muromachi era imperial court physician Saka Shibutsu (1327–1415) went to pray at the Ise Grand Shrine, he wrote: “If my heart has inner purity with nothing to pray for and my body has outer purity with nothing polluting it, then there is nothing separating the mind of the gods from my own mind. If I am the same as the gods, then why would I pray to receive or wish for something? This is how I humbly understand the meaning of a true shrine visit.”

We are apt to think of praying to the gods and the buddhas as a matter of course, but in Buddhism and in Shinto, a religion indigenous to Japan, as well, the nature of faith is seen



in its not requiring us to pray. At the very least, we can say that true prayer is not selfishly going “before the gods and the buddhas . . . and asking for a hand to get what you want.”

An Opportunity to Deepen Our Faith

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we can see many customary forms of praying and making wishes, such as offering sutra recitation in conjunction with a specific wish. If someone were to say that this does not represent the proper form of faith, that is not necessarily so. I think we cannot reject out of hand that people in painful or trying circumstances will desperately pray for some form of deliverance.

Prayer is something that arises from the most profound depths of life. The kanji character for “prayer” has the meaning “to give voice to seeking happiness from the gods.” Therefore, especially when we learn that other people are giving voice to or thinking, “I want to be freed from suffering,” it is natural we accept them wholeheartedly.

Rev. Tomoshi Okuda, a pastor of the Baptist Church in Japan who has been engaged in supporting the homeless, wrote in the June 2016 issue of Rissho Kosei-kai’s monthly magazine *Kosei* that “the meaning of prayer is ‘being together.’” That corresponds to the heart of a mother who prays for her sick child that, even at the cost of her own life, her child’s life be saved, and also to the Buddha’s mind of great compassion when he wishes that all human beings be liberated from suffering.

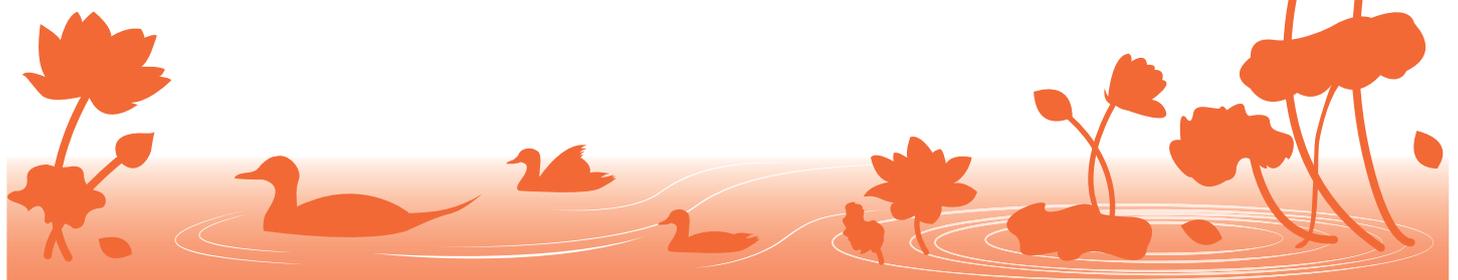
On the other hand, we should never forget the important thing that lies beyond prayer. That important thing is the Buddha’s wish that because birth, old age, sickness, and death are inseparable from human life, we should realize the rare significance of being alive here and now.

We tell people who pray to be freed from suffering that they might try, for instance, joining a *hoza* session or performing a service of offering prayers, or we occasionally accompany them to call upon someone who is worried about the same or a similar problem. All of these are skillful means to help others become aware of the Buddha’s wish that I just mentioned.

Morning and evening sutra recitation, one of our core practices of the faith in Rissho Kosei-kai, are a practice of the Dharma that keeps us always in contact with the mind of the Buddha while also helping us lead lives grounded in the teaching “Make yourself the light, make the Dharma your light.”

Whenever you meet face to face with the gods and the buddhas, whether it is through worship in conjunction with a specific wish or through prayer, you are receiving an opportunity that the Buddha gives you in the hope that you may realize something important. While giving this serious reflection, I hope that together we will continue to deepen our faith.

From *Kosei*, October 2016.



The Merit of Wholehearted Generosity Practice

by Mr. Yujiro Shida
Brazil Dharma Center

This Dharma experience was delivered during the ceremony of the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Brazil Dharma Center, 2016.

MY name is Yujiro Shida. I work as a computer-related system consultant, and I am married.

I could almost say that I was born and bred in the Dharma center, and from the time I was a young man, I have loved organizing youth seminars and trips with members of the Dharma center. The activities of the Brazil Dharma Center include a free treatment for asthma program, and I like to help as a volunteer. At the time we began the free treatment program, long lines of people appeared outside the Dharma center, and treatment was given to hundreds of children per day. In 1998, I launched the Dharma center's first newspaper; I edited and issued the newspaper on a monthly basis along with Mr. Prado, a journalist and a member of the Brazil Dharma Center. These are good memories.

Today, we celebrate the ceremony of the 45th



Mr. Shida delivers his Dharma experience during the ceremony of the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Brazil Dharma Center in 2016.

anniversary of the founding of the Brazil Dharma Center, so I would like to share my story about what happened to me around twenty years ago.

At that time, most of the members of the Dharma center were Japanese. Rev. Mori, then minister of the Dharma center, began the seminar on Buddhism in Japanese. I participated in the seminar, which deeply impressed me. Rev. Mori instructed us in the profound teachings of Buddhism by using many interesting examples, and I loved them so much.

One day, Rev. Mori used an example that was so impressive, I remember it even now. It was brought up during the time when he taught us about the Six Perfections.

Regarding the first teaching of the Six Perfections, donation, Rev. Mori taught us as follows: “We all wish for happiness. Desires for money and other material things are like water in a bathtub. If we try to draw water toward us in the bathtub, wishing for more, then the water will escape, passing under our arms. How about reversing the flow of the water? If we keep on pushing out the water forward, it returns to us.”

I remember his teaching even now, and I’m willing to wholeheartedly practice donation with gratitude.

I would like to share my recent experience.

Several years ago, I began to search for a profitable business, making a greater effort than I ever had. At that time, greed had gotten the better of me. Then I found a business opportunity and invested a lot of money in it. However, the business did not do well. I disagreed with my business partner, and I became irritated and unrestful at home. My wife understood my feelings very well, and supported me without complaining. She never blamed me or complained when I lost money or failed in business.

Finally, at the end of 2014, I gave up this business, losing all the money I had invested.

Spiritual Journey

To make matters worse, soon afterward, the landlord of my father's rented house suddenly told my father to move out. The landlord wanted to use the house for his own business. So my father had to hastily find a new house. It was a truly shocking incident. For about thirty years, my father had run a massage business there. We family members had known that we would have to move out from the house someday, but this was just too sudden. The landlord allowed us to take one month to leave the property. During this period, we had to find a house, then make a contract, raise money, and take out a bank loan to supply the funding deficiency. We worried about whether we could do these things in just a month.

All of us family members united in an effort to solve this major problem. As a result, we had an incredible experience of the Buddha's arrangement. We were able to find a house. The house was so ideal for both his job and charitable work that he could continue; it was just what my father had wished for.

I had to meet the disbursements with all my money in order to purchase the house, but I still was capable of making a donation to the Dharma center. I believe things developed in the positive manner solely due to all my family's practice of donation. My father is the

best model for me, and he started the free treatment for asthma program for the first time in the Dharma center. My elder brother, Koichi, has been doing his best as a leader at the Dharma center.

For the past several years, I had been too busy with my job to participate in the seminar on Buddhism at the Dharma center. Last year, however, thanks to the Buddha, I was given an opportunity to participate in the seminar once again. I'm grateful for the seminar. Through studying the karma and the teaching that "all things are impermanent," I could understand more clearly about things that had recently happened to me, such as the fact that my business didn't go well, and that we were able to find my father's house and purchase it. To be more specific, I learned how I should view things and accept them according to the right view from the Eightfold Path. In the case of someone who would hurt me, I would not blame that person or have any ill feelings toward them.

In particular, I love to do my job. I would like to vow to become the kind of person who can help many people as my father does, reducing my selfishness little by little each day, working harder, and aiming at the mutual benefit for all.



Mr. Shida (the second from right in the second row) participates in the seminar for the Associate Dharma Teachers.

Child Care lifeline

I worry about my daughter who is not good at making friends

Q

My daughter is in the first grade at elementary school. It seems that she spends most of her time alone during recess between classes. This is because almost all of her kindergarten friends are attending a nearby school, and she doesn't have any acquaintances. She doesn't say, "I am feeling lonely" or "I don't want to go to school," but I'm worried that, since she has so few friends, she won't be able to learn to be sociable, and won't become someone who can make friends easily.



A

You are carefully observing your daughter every day and watching over her. In the concern you're feeling for her, I sense your earnest wish that your daughter will learn to be sociable and be able to make friends with anyone.

I think your daughter is making her best effort to adapt to the new surroundings she encountered when she became a first grader. I think she is already perfect in everything she is doing.

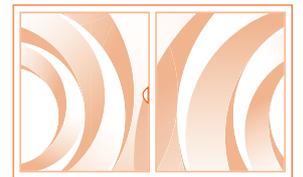
She is feeling a bit lonely and disturbed because she is separated from the friends she had in kindergarten. But she is trying to keep her wavering mind calm as best she can, though she is still a little girl. This situation will not continue forever. As you have experienced, the situation will change, depending on how you spend time with your daughter daily and how you communicate with her.

As a first step, it would be good to welcome her gently with a smile when she comes home from school. While she's eating a snack, it would also be good to ask her such questions as how things were at school, or how a certain friend of hers from kindergarten is doing after graduation. And you could relax her tension by showing your warm affection through talking with her.

Also, it would be nice to take many opportunities to show her how you are able to communicate with everyone you meet. And, if she comes back and says, "I had a good time today!" be happy to respond, "It was really nice, wasn't it?" When she feels satisfied with her contact with you, and her mind is balanced, she will be motivated to try

something new. Then she will make efforts toward making friends and studying. I think it will take time, but please continue to watch over her, having warm affection for her.

It will be all right. Your prayer will be sure to come true.



Point 1 To adore the child

No child thinks he or she not need friends. Everyone wants to have friends. Without telling her outright to actively make friends, please understand that she is trying in vain to make friends and is feeling lonely. What is necessary is that these feelings of hers are covered with your warm affection.

(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.

A Very Important Time in Life

Mother, I can feel your warm affection in wishing for the healthy growth of your daughter. For children in the first grade at elementary school, their previous lives have changed dramatically, and first grade represents a precious time for them, as their world expands.

During the six years of elementary school, children have their first opportunity to learn and experience a hierarchy. It is a new environment that includes a lot of older boys and girls. They have to perform group activities following the class schedule, and are not allowed to simply act as freely as they wish as individuals. This is a very different situation from when they are in nursery school or kindergarten.

For your daughter, every day is a succession of efforts and challenges, and I think she spends days doing her best to be sociable. Please make her relieved at home because she is striving to face her personal challenges in so many ways.

There is a passage from a poem by Rev. Yoshio Toui (1912–91), a Japanese educator and a Buddhist priest of the Jodo Shinshu sect, that says “There are a myriad of houses with the light on, but there is only one house waiting for me.” As he says, no matter how many homes there may be with the light on, the only light for your daughter is her family.

Please welcome your daughter warmly whenever she comes back home from school, because she makes her best effort there. Please listen to her stories of school attentively and praise her. Such acts of yours will be her strength, more than anything else. And your gentle nature as a mother and the warmth of the family as an illuminated home will surely give her great courage.

(Editorial Supervision by Department of Dharma Education & Human Resources Development, Rissho Kosei-kai)



Please give us your comments!



We welcome comments on our e-newsletter *Living the Lotus*.

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Director's Column

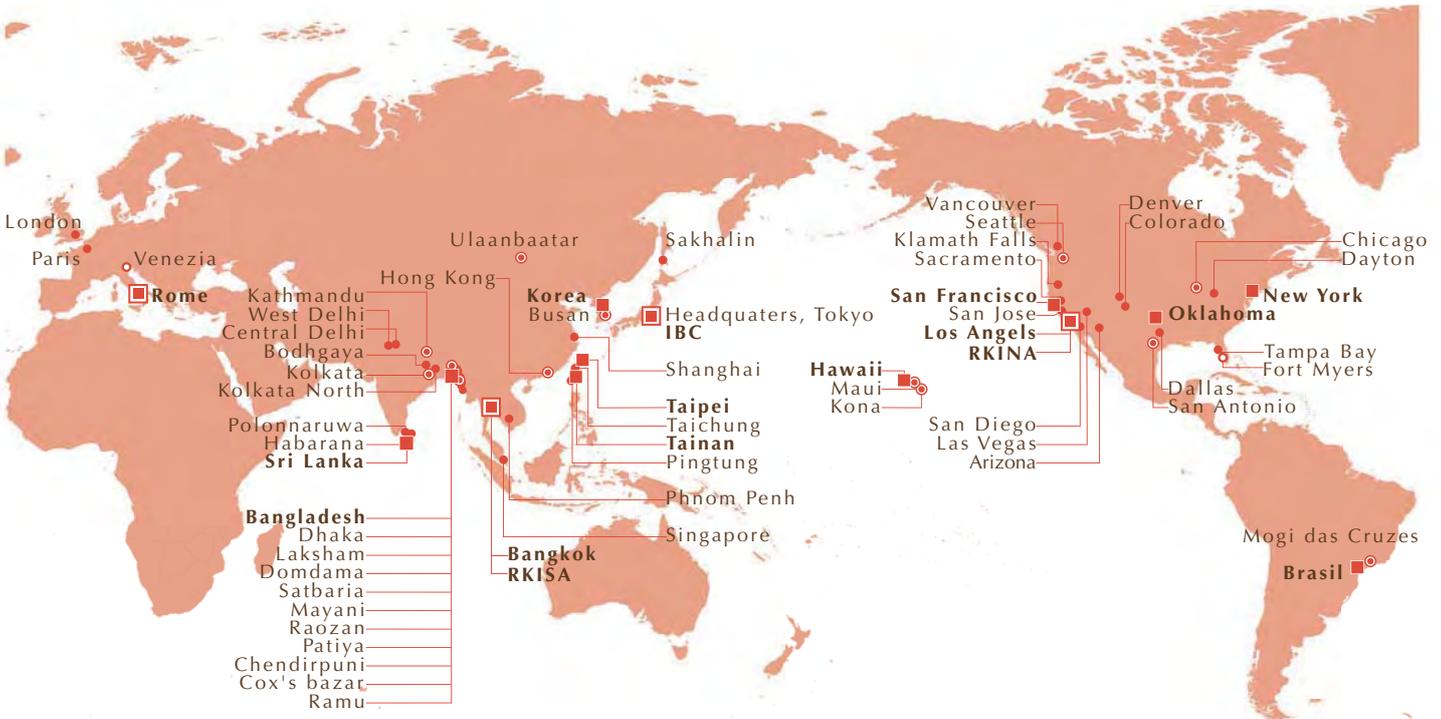
Celebrating Our 30th Wedding Anniversary

LAST month, my wife and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary. I first met my wife at an Ethiopian refugee camp in Sudan in 1985. She was a nurse and I was a coordinator in the Rissho Kosei-kai Sudan Medical Team. At the wedding party, we made a vow that we, who were connected because of the suffering of the refugees, would build a family which is appreciative and joyous in devoting itself for the happiness of others.

Through it all, my wife has been able to take care of my family, including the raising of our four children. It is because of her that I have been able to travel around Japan and around the world, working in high spirits for the wellbeing of individuals and society. I am also grateful to my children, who came with me and supported me when I was assigned as a minister in the US.

Although my wife is not feeling very well these days, she always helps me with a smile. It is my practice of gratitude to sometimes massage my wife's back and legs. My daughters and sons continue to make positive efforts in their lives. On this anniversary, we renewed our vow that the Mizutani Family will continue to pray and practice for the happiness of all.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International



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