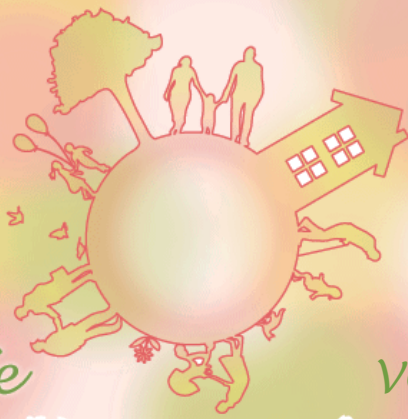


Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



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2019

VOL. 161

🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

Total Honesty

IF you have even a single person whom you can trust completely, can't you consider your life a success? I think it's safe to say that faith is the reason for this, because I believe that the foremost merit of having faith is the conviction that the Buddha sees all.

In the normal scheme of things, some people might get by with concealing as much as half of themselves from others, but those who embrace the Buddha within their hearts go with only 100 percent total honesty. Their reward for being unable to comfortably deceive people or take advantage of situations is having the inspiration to persevere—whether or not people see or know about the good they do, all the

buddhas and heavenly deities are their witnesses. These people are stouthearted and can leave the outcome of everything up to the Buddha.

Looking back on my entire life, I can say with confidence that my greatest joy is that I have come this far having had complete faith in the Buddha, with no doubts. I am reminded once again that, thanks to this faith, I have been able to trust every person I have met, in encounter after encounter, without any worries at all.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997),
pp. 190–191

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.



President's Message

Making a Mental Habit of Being Considerate of Others

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Desire Brings Forth Virtue

When you see someone in a public place who is having some difficulty, what do you do? I think many of you would approach the person and try to talk to him or her, but some of you, while concerned about that person, might wonder if your concern is a nuisance and hesitate to approach.

While this may be an overgeneralization, we usually make decisions by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of things, and we tend to react negatively toward that which may not benefit us. It is difficult for people to overcome their calculating minds.

Many of us may be concerned that talking to complete strangers might get us involved in their troubles. Some of you may, understandably, believe that doing so would not bring even an ounce of benefit.

But practices performed out of consideration for other people—even when we think they won't offer us anything—do benefit those who perform them, as they help us develop as human beings and attain noble minds. In this sense, we could say that the desire to help others and thereby develop as a human being brings forth virtue.

However, even if we understand this, when we see someone having difficulty and we want to help that person, some of us cannot pluck up the courage to make the first move and take action.

There is a passage in the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings (chapter two, "Expounding the Dharma") that says that "bodhisattva-mahasattvas are moved to heartfelt sympathy, give rise to great compassion, and want to relieve the suffering of living beings. Then they profoundly fathom all things." This teaches us that bodhisattvas look with compassion and empathy upon the people before them, raise their consideration for them, and resolve to liberate them from suffering. In order to do this, they must remove themselves from the delusions and attachments of their own self-centeredness and be diligent in their effort to perceive the reality of things.

In other words, even we who have difficulty casting off our calculating minds can, through diligent effort, overcome our attachment to self-interest. When this becomes a





mental habit, we will—in any situation and without weighing the advantages and disadvantages to ourselves—be able to naturally express our consideration for other people through our actions.

Everything Is One

“The falling snow / Must make her say, / ‘I’m cold, / I feel a chill.’ / So the mother goes / To place an umbrella / Over her dead child’s grave.”

This poem skillfully conveys the heartrending grief that a mother feels for the child she has lost. I feel it is teaching me that a bodhisattva’s feelings of consideration for other people are just like this mother’s.

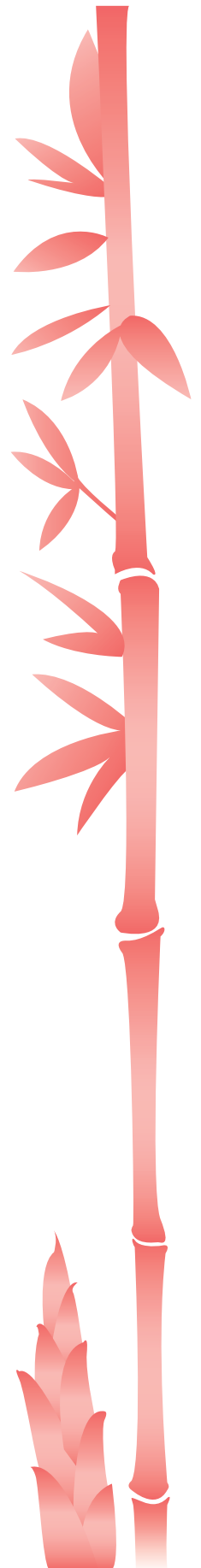
This mother goes on living, always at one in body and soul with her child. She can hear her child’s voice crying, “I’m cold, I feel a chill,” and as these thoughts well up in her mind, she obediently moves to act upon them. Surely I am not the only one who sees, in her actions, the compassion of a bodhisattva.

Removing yourself from the delusions and attachments of your own self-centeredness and being diligent in your effort to perceive the reality of things means seeing that yourself and others are one and the same, just as this mother does. Moreover, when we see that everything is one, we understand other people’s joys and sorrows, our empathy and compassion are stimulated, and our consideration for others moves into action. By adopting the perspective that “everything is one,” consideration for others becomes a mental habit.

I recall a time when I visited the birthplace of Founder Niwano in Tokamachi, Niigata Prefecture. Rain was beating down upon a bust of Founder Niwano that had been erected in the park, so I held an umbrella over my father. I also intend to make an even more diligent effort to become a person who can naturally act with consideration in any situation and for anyone.

Of course, as Zen master Shido Bunan (1603–76) teaches us, “When you act compassionately without knowing that you are being compassionate, you are a buddha.” Becoming one with other people, being unaware that you are acting compassionately—such consideration brings joy and cultivates the minds of others and yourself.

From *Kosei*, February 2019





The Merit of Forgetting Myself for the Sake of Others



Ms. Elizabeth Torres
Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio

This Dharma Journey talk was presented on October 28, 2018, during the enshrinement ceremony of the Gohonzon (the focus of devotion) at the Rissho Kosei-kai San Antonio Dharma Center.

HELLO, hola, onegai itashimasu. I am so honored to have this opportunity to share with you my Dharma journey on such an especially auspicious day such as this. I am humbled before this amazing audience, my treasure, my sangha.

I'm a fourth-generation Texan of Hispanic descent, so it's unsurprising that I was raised with a strong Catholic background. When I was in kindergarten, my dad told me that the purpose of going to Catholic service was to worship God. He also explained that since God is everywhere, you don't necessarily need to go to church to worship. From that point, nature became my church. As I continued my primary schooling at a private Catholic school, I struggled with my faith because I couldn't believe certain basic tenets. I shared my disbeliefs with my parents and I was told that faith is a gift.

Throughout my childhood my disbelief would cause family arguments, particularly when I was expected to publicly affirm my faith. Because I was still a child, I was strongly urged to participate in rituals and practices that I felt had no value to my spiritual growth. At these times I felt false and



Ms. Torres delivers her Dharma Journey talk during the enshrinement ceremony of the Gohonzon.

untrue to myself. I felt like I was missing something in my spiritual life, yet I had almost unshakeable hope and faith that my life was protected by something greater than me.

In high school, I earned good grades but I was a deviant. I was not attending school and I began breaking the law and committing minor crimes. I had a rebellious and irreverent attitude about the norms of society. I was arrested for stealing at a department store when I was fifteen years old and my dad had to arrange for my release from the detention center the day before our Thanksgiving holiday.

Oftentimes, my dad would remark that the reason I had trouble in my life was because I lacked faith. He would emphasize the importance of believing in something bigger than myself. Although I yearned for that faith, I continued to act selfishly and do as I pleased.

At university, I was introduced to the ideas of Buddhism in a world religions course. When I learned about Buddhism, I felt it most closely aligned to the beliefs I had cultivated by that time. Particularly the idea of a universal consciousness, which I have come to understand as the interconnectedness of all things. This would later prove to be my liberation.

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path made sense to me on an intellectual level, but I was not ready to cultivate the teachings into faith and apply it to my life. My life was still self-centered, and tended toward the hedonistic.

During my time at university I worked at Starbucks, where I would meet my future husband. It was a happy time. We bought a house together, and five years after getting married, we welcomed our beautiful daughter, Zoe. But I grew bored and unappreciative of the life I'd been given; I wanted adventure no matter the cost. I abused the trust others placed in me,

I am so very grateful for the intimate relationship I now have with my daughter as a result of the changes I've made in my life since awakening to the Dharma. I've experienced the merit of forgetting my ego for the sake of helping someone else. My heart has never been so grateful.

and I neglected to make time with my daughter a priority. I abused my body, my temple. I made choices I was deeply ashamed of, which led to my divorce after almost fifteen years of marriage. Following the divorce, I entered a very dark period in my life, and turned to alcohol and drugs for comfort.

What I didn't fully understand at the time was that my daughter sensed the instability of my character. Our relationship deteriorated, yet I continued living a lifestyle that was seemingly out of my control. My parents would tell me how my daughter would cry because she didn't know where I was when I hadn't returned home in time to take her to school.

In December 2015 I was arrested for a DWI. After I was convicted in the summer of 2016, I continued to drink to the point where I had difficulty successfully completing my probation. As a result of that, I was required to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and it was at this time that I discovered that I needed the support of others. I came to realize the importance of belonging to a community with common beliefs and values.

It was around this time that I decided to visit Rissho Kosei-kai in San Antonio. Despite living in this neighborhood for almost my entire life and often driving by daily, it took me nearly fifteen years to finally visit my local Dharma center. Once I attended a service, I regretted taking so long to visit. But someone much wiser than me reminded me, that when the student is

ready, the teacher will appear. From those early days at Rissho Kosei-kai, my sangha comforted me.

I was warmly welcomed during my first visit, and moved by the spirit and energy of the sutra recitation. I felt like I had arrived home. Over the course of several months I deepened my understanding by attending our basic Buddhism and Lotus Sutra study classes.

Soon after I started attending, I was invited to participate in the first annual Matoi Camp in Hawaii. [The *matoi* is a flag used by firemen during the Edo period in Japan. For Rissho Kosei-kai members, it symbolizes enthusiasm to disseminate the Dharma.] At the time, I felt like I didn't deserve this honor, but the sangha members reminded me of the precious state of my buddha-nature. I started to accept this truth and believe it.

The event was a tremendous fusion of our cultures in such a very special and meaningful place. Although I had initially expected Matoi Camp to be a learning experience, I was not prepared for the emotional bonding and personal growth that I would experience there. It was at this time that I knew without a doubt that I had found my spiritual home. I cannot express to you how my heart was filled with joy and love for my brothers and sisters of Rissho Kosei-kai as I embraced this experience of interconnectivity and mindful practice.

In spite of the new perspective I gained at Matoi Camp, I still had to face the sufferings of my life at

home. I still struggled with my relationship with my daughter. I saw her close relationship with her dad, and as a result I became resentful and created distance between my daughter and me. By this time I had stopped abusing alcohol, and I felt in touch with my emotions and engaged with my surroundings. Due to this clarity of mind, the fullness of our distance was even more apparent to me.

It took several months of self-reflection and meditation to realize that my suffering was caused from focusing on myself. Losing my ego never became so paramount. Through the teachings of the bodhisattva way, I realized it was her suffering that I should try to alleviate, and that I should be compassionate and understanding toward her life and be present to support her.

What a discovery! Once I started internalizing that truth and being present for her, our relationship took a turn for the better. I'm so happy I found this faith and my sangha as my daughter enters the challenging years ahead. As I think of her life, I'm reminded of the disruption and instability she experienced due to my actions. Contemplating her path, I realize that compassionately supporting my daughter liberates me from my suffering.

I am so very grateful for the intimate relationship I now have with my daughter as a result of the changes I've made in my life since awakening to the Dharma. I've experienced the merit of forgetting my ego for the sake of helping someone else. My heart has never been so grateful.

One of my favorite quotes from Founder Nikkyo Niwano is, "Everything is as you see it; true deliverance lies in our mental attitude to accept willingly what we are and to receive obediently what we are given." Everything is at it should be. I am profoundly grateful.

One of the most beautiful experiences I have had on my Dharma Journey is my reconnection to the faith in which I was raised. It's a special blessing to me that now, on Sundays, I exchange with my parents the seeds of wisdom we discover in our respective services. When I learned of Founder Niwano's wish to unite the world religions in harmony, I was overjoyed in this affirmation of my choice and felt even more confident in placing my faith in Rissho Kosei-kai.

Finally, I want to share something that I learned in the advanced seminar this year in Chicago: "ichi-go, ichi-e." I'm not confident in my understanding, but I believe this saying to mean through this one moment, and in this one encounter never to happen again, I experience a taste of the connection to eternity.

I am deeply grateful to the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, to Rissho Kosei-kai, Founder Niwano, President Niwano, and my beloved sangha. Thank you, muchas gracias, domo arigato gozaimasu.



Ms. Torres (right) participates in the ritual of offering candles to the altar at the beginning of the enshrinement ceremony.

Living the
**LOTUS**

The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 4, Faith and Understanding (2)

Even Though We Turn Our Backs on the Buddha

So runs the parable, as we saw in the first installment of this summary. The rich man of the story is, of course, the Buddha, while the wandering son represents all living beings. Though all of us are children of the Buddha, we are not aware of our lofty birth, and so of our own accord we turn our backs on the Way of the Buddha and go out to wander in a world of sufferings. But the bond of blood between parent and child is not to be denied, and though we may roam the world ignorant that we are children of the Buddha, ignorant of our buddha-nature, at some stage we instinctively draw near the abode of the Buddha. This is an affirmation that buddha-nature is inherent in all human beings—it is our true nature, and it is ineffably precious.

Though living beings may not know that the Buddha, before whose gate they stand, is their father, the Buddha clearly recognizes his own. This is a point of profound meaning. The Eternal Buddha, the great life of the universe, is always fully present within and around our minds and bodies, even if we are unaware of his presence. The Buddha awaits our notice. Truth is ever waiting to be known.

Living Beings Unconscious of Their Own Buddha-Nature

It was for this reason that Shakyamuni appeared in the world to make it known that the Eternal Buddha and humanity are of one substance. But because of the great depth of that teaching, people still think themselves too lowly to ever approach that other realm, and instead grow frightened and flee from the gate of the teaching.

This is why Shakyamuni employed servants who

look like ordinary people yet have higher capacity—*shravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, two kinds of servants who, from work in the Buddha's house, are firm in mind. Shakyamuni thought that if people like these went first, the lowly might believe that they could go as well, and join them to work in the house as servants. In other words, the Buddha never abandons humanity but seeks, in one way or another, to bring all to see their buddha-nature for themselves and awaken to it.

The Lowly State Is Necessary

In the parable, the poor son was first put to work clearing away filth, which is to say that he was made to practice clearing his mind of illusions. Through such practice, he became familiar with the Buddha's ways. He prepared for being made the Buddha's son, for being brought to that state in which he might have the same awakening as the Buddha.

But the son clung to his own lowly state in the belief that the enlightenment of the Buddha had nothing to do with him, being of a different order altogether. This is why he had to practice for so long.





This is an important lesson not to be overlooked: that the capacity to awaken to the state of the Buddha is only gained by long-continued practice. Thus, it is only after one becomes well grounded in the teaching and gradually achieves mental freedom that the keys are turned over and all the stores of the teaching are at hand.

Yet even so, and even though one is engaged in the important work of transmitting to others the teaching of the Buddha, there is no realization of actually being the Buddha's son, no awareness of the true nature that is identical in substance with the Buddha. Rather, one sees the Buddha as master and oneself as servant, with a clear line between.

Being Aware of Their Own Buddha-Nature

The Buddha, in teaching the Lotus Sutra before entering nirvana, set forth the great truth: that human beings are not different from the Buddha. The relationship between them is like that of a parent and a child, and therefore, anyone may succeed to all the riches of the Buddha. Anyone may attain buddhahood.

For the first time, it was made clear that all people may understand the Buddha's teaching and are enti-

tled to the untold riches (of the Buddha's enlightenment). The great joy of the poor son is the joy of all humanity.

All People Must Awaken to the Worth of Their True Nature

The spirit of the lesson in the parable may be stated in a few words. Human beings should set aside the thinking that they are lowly and deluded beings. Instead, they should awaken to the truth that they are children of the Buddha. In other words, all people must awaken to the worth of their true nature.

With such self-awareness, one becomes incapable of acting basely. Even though physical and mental desires may beset one as before, one is no longer upset or pained by them, and one may—of one's own accord—turn them in the right direction. This in itself is a great liberation.

This is an English translation of text originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Risho Kosei-kai's founder, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 63–68).

Forming a Habit of Being Considerate of Others

As members of Rissho Kosei-kai, many of you are likely in the middle of the annual midwinter training, reciting the Threefold Lotus Sutra at the Great Sacred Hall or at your local Dharma centers. It is not until this training session ends that many of us can truly feel that our new year has started.

This year, President Nichiko Niwano explains passages in the Threefold Lotus Sutra in his monthly Dharma messages. In his message for this month, he quoted a passage from chapter two of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, "Expounding the Dharma," which states that "bodhisattva-mahasattvas are moved to heartfelt sympathy, give rise to great compassion, and want to relieve the suffering of living beings. Then they profoundly fathom all things."

This is the Buddha's preaching to the bodhisattvas, asking them to empathize with the people before their eyes, increase their loving consideration for them, and resolve to liberate them from suffering.

To become the kind of person the Buddha wants us to be, President Niwano calls upon us to see that everything is one. In this vein, he asks us to make it a habit to be considerate of others by seeing ourselves and others united as one, like the mother who extends a helping hand to her child unconditionally.

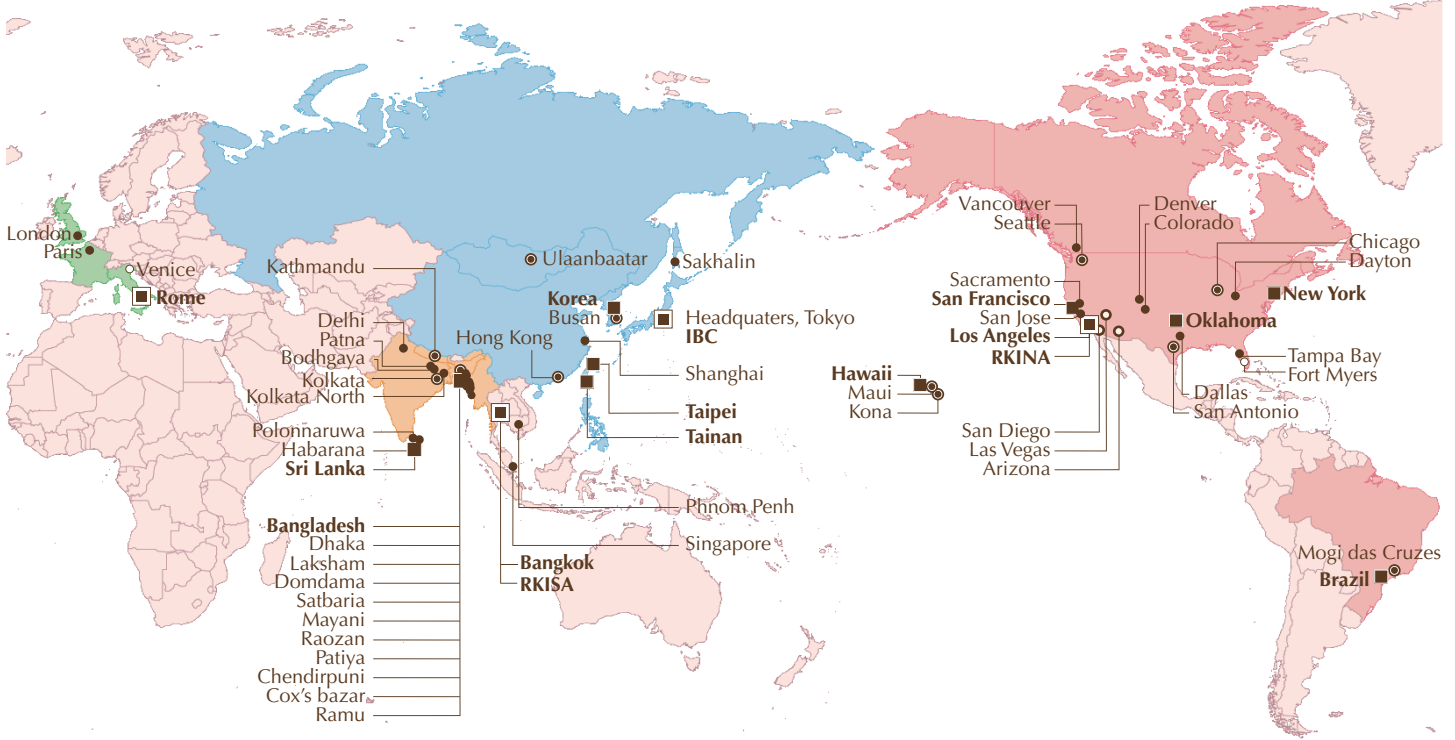
This month, let us strive diligently in the bodhisattva practice, setting a goal to become a person who can naturally practice consideration for all people!

Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



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