



President's Message

Because We Are Different

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

A Heart That Loves Everyone

Among the poems that Ki no Tsurayuki (872–945) included in *The Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times*, the first imperially-sponsored anthology of waka poetry, is his own love poem: “The way of this world, / Like the winds / Blowing across it, / Is to think lovingly / Of someone unseen.”

Reading this as a love poem, it can be understood in its own way. However, someone has proposed that this poem is actually about a truth of which we are hardly aware: that, at the bottom of our hearts, we love and feel goodwill toward all things existing in the world.

In reality, though, we can see that conditions are not as this poem describes. Different ways of thinking and seeing things lead people to argue, show hostility, and cut ties with one another. It even leads countries to fire weapons at each other. Unfortunately, conflict between religions still exists as a real problem—many people suffer and worry because they are unable to accept that other people are different from them, even going so far as to enter into futile fights with them.

In these conditions, one thing we can do is make it our personal norm to acknowledge that other people are different from us and accept those differences simply as differences. To do this, we should first realize that “I, too, have feelings of love for all things in this world and a kind heart.” By doing so, we will start to see the nobleness of the differences between ourselves and others.

The Meaning and Nobleness of Our Differences

We were all born due to different causes and conditions. In addition, as we've grown up, we have gone through experiences unique to each of us that have built the character traits that form “me.”

Therefore, it is quite natural that your way of thinking and seeing things, to say nothing of your ethnicity and appearance, is different from other people. To make these differences into a reason to fight with or exclude others is tantamount to denying your own individuality.

In the world of religion, it is natural that, according to their karmic conditions,





people take different paths toward liberation. Some people find liberation through the teachings of Christianity and others through the teachings of Islam or Buddhism. People seeking serenity have many teachings to look up to and believe. In order to bring peace of mind to all of the people living here on Earth, different religions and religious denominations have developed specific characteristics that complement each other.

Religions are bound together in their teaching of love and compassion in order to guide people toward peace of mind. Then, when the love and compassion that come from religion work on us and consequently “the love for others and a kind heart” buried within us is unearthed, we cannot stop ourselves from putting it into practice. In terms of Buddhist teaching, this is the bodhisattva way of life.

Sometimes, we suddenly feel the differences between ourselves and others and are unable to be kind to them. When this happens, it is easier to accept these differences if we turn our eyes—which have been looking outward—inward to our own hearts.

When I participate in international conferences and encounter someone with a different opinion, I feel it is splendid that he or she has a way of thinking that I do not. After all, through that difference, I have the opportunity to learn that there is still so much that I myself do not yet know. Instead of loudly insisting upon our own opinions and trying to ram our horns through the shields of each other's differences, aren't we all happier when we acknowledge our differences, accept them, get along with each other, and create the harmony that brings us all joy?

To quote from chapter 5 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs”: “The Dharma taught by the Tathagata is of a single flavor and a single attribute.” Thinking about the goal common to religions as well as the kind heart harbored deep down inside each and every one of us, we are all fellow passengers on spaceship Earth who can say—in the sense that we are promised peace of mind and happiness—that the truth of the universe is of a single flavor and a single attribute. Indeed, we have been entrusted with the mission of proving this to the world.

From *Kosei*, September 2019





On July 27, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of Dharma dissemination in the United States by holding a commemorative event in Las Vegas. During the convention, four members presented a combined Dharma Journey talk using the title “Satori Story.” We will feature these satori stories in installments in the September and October issues.

The Power to Live That I Found Through Sutra Recitation



Mr. Mike Sonksen
Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles

MY SATORI STORY begins with my wife, Emi, who brought me to Rissho Kosei-Kai fifteen years ago. Though I read *Siddhartha*, a novel by Hermann Hesse, in high school, I didn’t really come to understand Buddhism fully until the last several years with Emi. Moreover, even though Emi and I were married at the Los Angeles Dharma Center ten years ago by Rev. Toshiyuki Kodaka, who was then the minister of the Dharma center, and both of our children received baby blessings when they were born in 2009 and 2014, it was not until an accident happened at work five years ago that I started chanting the Lotus Sutra daily.

A tragic accident happened at my workplace where someone died, and this left me with trauma and insomnia. I was not at fault or responsible,



Mr. Mike Sonksen delivers his Dharma Journey talk at the U.S. Sangha 60th Anniversary Convention.

but I was there when it happened, and the entire series of events played over and over in my mind. I started to question my entire life and who I was up until that point.

I was paranoid and haunted for weeks and weeks; my mind was like a foolish monkey. I was drowning in my insecurities, examining my entire life with a microscope. I had just turned forty. My son had just been born and I had finished my master’s degree just before the accident. I hit rock bottom. I had never been so low. I had been planning to find a new job, but first I had to collect myself.

I was in a dark place and did not know what to do. I spoke to Rev. Takayuki Yoshizawa, a former minister of the Dharma center, in July of 2014, and he told me to recite the entire *Kyoten* (sutra readings) every morning for thirty days straight. I did what he said and immediately began to feel better. Day by day I started to feel more centered. I was rebuilding myself.

Passages jumped out at me, such as, “All sins are just like frost and dew, / So wisdom’s sun can melt them away. / Therefore, with a sincere heart and mind, / Reflect upon and cleanse the six sense organs.” I was doing my best to cleanse my six sense organs and the recitations were my refuge. These passages started to transform my thinking.

Day by day I began to rebuild myself. After thirty days, I decided to continue this daily practice.

I continue to recite the entire book every day, and it has been five years now. Besides reciting the sutras daily, I started going to our Dharma center

every Sunday. Prior to this I would only attend every few months.

A few months after I started chanting daily, I applied for jobs and was turned down for seven in a row. I didn't know what to do next, so I continued with my recitations and I started visiting old friends and guest speaking at schools I had worked at previously. One day out of the blue, one of those schools offered me a job that I did not even apply for. I ended up teaching there and got my professional career back on track.

The world we live in has never been so challenging, and without a strong worldview and some structured practice, we are all vulnerable to the tempest. Buddhism helps transform any situation into a point of growth.

Chanting my daily recitations has helped me become a more complete person. I am truly thankful to Rissho Kosei-kai for teaching me the Buddhist practice. I would like to express my gratitude to Founder Nikkyo Niwano.

The daily sutra recitations have really improved my concentration. I have become much more patient. I have learned that all things are impermanent and that it's important to cherish each moment.

Five years ago, Emi told me to deepen my faith. Through my daily practice and efforts to evolve, this is exactly what happened.

Rissho Kosei-kai and Buddhism have given me a structure to survive and thrive in order to support Emi, our kids, Skye and Eka, and also my students. As much as I have always had good intentions, Buddhism is what empowered me by providing a more effective means of actualizing my objectives.

Last year, we went to Japan to get our Gohonzon, the focus of devotion, with Rev. Hiroyasu Hosoyama,

the present minister of the Dharma center. This event further solidified my faith.

Emi now works with Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America. I am being promoted at the university I teach at and I have hosted a poetry event at the Los Angeles Dharma Center for the last year and a half. This event includes poets from across the city who share their poems aloud to the audience. Some of the poets are Buddhist, but many are just thoughtful writers I know from the area. It is always an inspiring event. I have been hosting poetry events for twenty years across Southern California, but the one I host at Rissho Kosei-kai is my favorite because the space brings out the best in all the participants. My friends from across Los Angeles love our Dharma center.

Thank you, Rissho Kosei-kai and Emi, for equipping me with this beautiful practice. It is the Buddha's arrangement, and I will continue to share the Dharma everywhere I go. There is still so much to learn and there are many days where I still feel like a baby just beginning to make sense of the world, but I have more faith and confidence now because I have a practice to rely on to transform any situation. For this I am deeply thankful.

I found satori through Buddhism and poetry. Thank you, Rissho Kosei-kai. Thank you, Emi.



The Two Teachers Who Guided Me on the Way



Ms. Mitsuyo Ikari
Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

HI EVERYONE, I am Mitsuyo Ikari from Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver in Canada. I am very honored to give my testimonial on this special occasion. I would like to talk about the highlights of my spiritual experiences, focusing on the earlier days of my life when I first met my Dharma parent, Rev. Kunio Sakaida, and then my mentor, Ms. Yuko Tanaka, who has been leading me since I was a student at Hoju Vocational College.

To start with, I will go back to the time when I had difficulties getting along with my parents, especially my mother. Around the time I entered high school, I started avoiding Rissho Kosei-kai even though I was a third-generation follower of the faith and my grandmother and mother were active members thanks to the support of my grandfather and father. Because of the loneliness caused by the lack of true communica-



Ms. Mitsuyo Ikari delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the U.S. Sangha 60th Anniversary Convention.

tion with my parents, I started smoking when I was sixteen years old and I drank a lot of coffee. It drove my mother crazy and she didn't know what to do. She went to Rev. Sakaida—who was then the minister of the Suibara Dharma Center in Niigata, Japan—for help, and he made time to see me in his office. It was then that I met the man who would later become my Dharma parent.

Looking back, I realize that Rev. Sakaida gave me deep compassion and love, and he also believed in the buddha-nature within me and connected me to the Buddha Way hoping that he would liberate me from suffering.

Rev. Sakaida also loved smoking, and he used to work as a reporter at Kosei Publishing Company. When I told him my dream of becoming a translator, he told me that I had good writing skills. I remember he gave me assignments—documents on Buddhism—to translate from English to Japanese to keep me connected to the Buddha Way. He sparked my interest by using his skillful means. Because he trusted me first, I was able to trust him, even though I hadn't yet regained trust in my parents.

He honored and respected everyone with any nature or desire, but I know he tried to keep me walking the Way even when I had a hard time doing so. He suggested that I go to Hoju Vocational College, so I made up mind and was able to pass the examination.

With profound compassion of the Buddha, Founder Niwano, and President Niwano, and thanks to an encounter with a roommate at the college, I was able to realize the emotions I had toward my mother. It took me some time to overcome the fear of facing

those emotions and acknowledge them within myself. When I was growing up, my mother had a hard time getting along with my grandparents, especially my grandmother. As I saw my mother getting emotional, I began to feel disgusted with her because she was not able to control her emotions. At the same time, unconsciously, I felt lonely because I was not able to depend on her.

I used smoking as a way to calm my mind and avoid admitting my ill feelings toward my mother, and I thought that was the way of living that suited me most. But by the time I graduated from Hoju Vocational College, I came to realize that it was a garment that concealed the buddha-nature within me.

When I talked with Rev. Sakaida, I thought I was always wearing a mask to keep up with him, but later I realized that Rev. Sakaida had already drawn out the buddha-nature hiding in me. I was looking at myself in a totally wrong way. This was the biggest change in my life, and a realization I had never had before in my spiritual journey.

The image of myself that I'd always had in my mind was driven away, and I was able to find my buddha-nature, which was a new image of myself that came to the surface.

When I was a second-year student at Hoju, I visited the Nerima Dharma Center in Tokyo for Dharma dissemination practice. This was when I met Ms. Tanaka, who is still my mentor today. Ms. Tanaka helps me see the Buddha's compassion in any situation. She shows me how to apply the teachings in daily life and shares her joyful and grateful spiritual experiences to help deepen my faith.

When I started studying and practicing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in English at the headquarters with fellow members of the sangha, I felt a joy I had never experienced before and I realized that my mission was to disseminate the teachings, in English, to the world. Ms. Tanaka told me that this must be the path the Buddha wanted me to walk, and that she honored my wish to spread the Dharma in English.

As I kept walking the path with her, my heart and

mind were gradually cleansed. I no longer needed to rely on smoking and drinking coffee, and I stopped both completely. Some people spend money and time at hospitals or workshops trying to find solutions to their problems with interpersonal relationships and addictions. Others are not aware of the cause of their problems and they continue to suffer. Thanks to the practice of self-reflection and the help of the sangha members, I was able to change myself by making a conscious effort to fix my relationship with my parents and overcome my addictions to cigarettes and coffee. It truly moves me to learn how the Dharma changes our lives.

A few years ago, on the back of the cover of my copy of the *Kyoten* (sutra readings), I found Rev. Sakaida's handwritten message, which he likely left for me to find and read later in my life. It says, "Guide living beings and bring the benefits of the teachings to them."

Even now I cannot help but feel a sense of wonder that I happened to find Rev. Sakaida's words when I needed them the most.

Following his advice, and based on some of the teachings from the National Leaders' Training last year, I made a twenty-year action plan of my own. My wish is to open a Dharma center in a public building in Vancouver. This is the first year of my plan. I hope that the Buddha will guide me to make my wish come true.

I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity to share my experiences and aspiration with you all today.

Thank you so much.

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 10, Teachers of the Dharma (2)



The Five Practices of Teachers of the Dharma

Having stated that any who delight in a verse or phrase of the Lotus Sutra will reach enlightenment, the Buddha continues by saying that those who receive and embrace, read, recite, expound, and copy so much as a verse of the sutra will also reach enlightenment. The passage is easy to overlook, as simple as it seems, but it names five important practices in which teachers of the Dharma ought to engage. Here is what each of the five practices represent:

“Receiving and embracing” means reaffirming our resolve to hear and accept the teaching.

“Reading” means learning the teaching repeatedly.

“Reciting” means planting the teaching within our minds so we can memorize it and know it by heart.

“Expounding” means explaining the teaching for the benefit of others.

“Copying” means making an effort to spread the teaching throughout the world.

Each of these five acts is essential to the true practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

Emissaries of the Tathagata

The great distinction of the Lotus Sutra is the importance it places on teaching for the benefit of others and spreading the teaching throughout the world, together with its emphasis on the fact that, without such action, human society can never be liberated.

This chapter contains the following passage, which can be considered as the first important point in the chapter: “If, after my passing, these good sons and good daughters are able, even secretly, to share even a single phrase of this Dharma Flower Sutra with one person, you should know that these people are emissaries of the Tathagata, sent by the Tathagata to carry out the Tathagata’s work. This is even more



so the case with those who teach for the sake of people gathered in a great assembly.”

The Three Rules of the Robe, Seat, and Abode of the Tathagata

But what kind of mindset should the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra have when they actively engage in spreading the Dharma? This is clearly stated in the next main point of the chapter, “The Three Rules of the Robe, Seat, and Abode of the Tathagata.” (“Rules” here means the correct path, standards, or norms.)

This section of the sutra contains the following passage: “After the passing of the Tathagata, if there are good sons and good daughters who desire to teach this Dharma Flower Sutra to the four groups, how should they teach it? These good sons and good daughters should enter the abode of the Tathagata, put on the robe of the Tathagata, and sit on the seat of the Tathagata. Then, for the sake of the four groups, they should widely proclaim this sutra.”



The four groups referred to here are the four classes of disciples: monks (*bhikshus*), nuns (*bhikshunis*), and male and female lay believers (*upasakas* and *upasikas*).

The three rules—entering the abode of the Tathagata, putting on the robe of the Tathagata, and sitting on the seat of the Tathagata—are not merely a teaching of great importance; they are also precious words to be appreciated with all of one’s being. Their meaning is explained immediately afterward: “The abode of the Tathagata is the great compassionate heart for all living beings. The robe of the Tathagata is the flexible and forbearing mind. The seat of the Tathagata is ‘the emptiness of all things.’”

In short, this passage states that we are to teach the Dharma on the threefold footing of a compassionate heart, a flexible and forbearing mind, and the wisdom grounded in the realization of emptiness.

The first two of these need no explanation, but the third one, the realization of emptiness, may require one. Here I would like to point out that there are two ways of understanding the teaching of emptiness. The first is the view that all things (dharmas) are empty, that all beings are not ultimately real, and that all phenomena are merely temporary manifestations that have come into being. This interpretation is of course correct, but this alone has nothing to say about human liberation.

We should, rather, regard the teaching of emptiness in more positive way. All things exist through the interaction of causes and conditions, but to say that no substance is fixed and permanent is not to intimate that nothing exists or that everything is “nothingness.” What comes into being through causes and conditions most definitely exists, but nothing is fixed and eternally unchanging. If we



hope for good phenomena, we ourselves have to create good causes and conditions.

Incidentally, chapter 2 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, “Expounding the Dharma,” says: “All things themselves are tranquil and empty in nature and attributes. They are neither great nor small, without origination or cessation, neither fixed nor moving, and neither advancing nor retreating. They are nondual, just like empty space. All living beings, however, make false and arbitrary assessments. They suppose that ‘this is one thing’ but ‘that is another thing,’ or ‘this is a gain’ but ‘that is a loss.’ Giving rise to such unwholesome ideas and creating all sorts of bad karma, they transmigrate in the six realms of existence.”

Here we find the view that all things are originally neither fixed nor discriminatory, and are equal within a great harmony. Phenomena are neither good nor evil in themselves—they’re only seen to be so by ordinary people. Because people have such false



views as “that is good” or “this is bad,” they have evil thoughts and experience suffering. It is a mistake to look at things discriminately and therefore suffer. Originally, all things are without discrimination and equal within a great harmony—in other words, all things are just as they should be. We human beings are no exception.

We were born into this world because there was a need for us to be born. This should make us keenly aware of the preciousness of having been born as human beings—something for which we should feel deep gratitude. Others were also born because there was a need for them to be born. So we must recognize and venerate their dignity as well.

In this sense, emptiness has none of the pessimism that might be ascribed to the first definition; rather, it

is very apparent that it honors life. Our joy in being sustained by this great life must flow out. In addition, we gain a strong feeling of fellowship toward all other people, who are also sustained by the Buddha’s compassion. The Buddha shows us, therefore, that when we teach the Dharma we must be mindful of “sitting on the seat of the Tathagata” on the basis of a thorough realization of emptiness.

To sum up the teaching of the three rules of the robe, seat, and abode of the Tathagata, when we expound the Lotus Sutra to others we must do so with great compassion based on a thorough realization of emptiness, and with a mind strong enough to be indifferent to both the praise and the censure of the world. This is the essence of this chapter.

This is an English translation of text that originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 104–9).

A Heart That Accepts Differences and Harmonizes with Others

IN July, Rissho Kosei-kai commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of Dharma dissemination in the United States. Along with some three hundred members who participated in the assembly held in Las Vegas, I renewed my gratitude for the growth of the U.S. sangha and vowed to rededicate myself to the further dissemination of the Dharma.

In the same month, our organization also commemorated the forty-eighth anniversary of the inauguration of our Dharma center in Brazil.

What I witnessed in common between both sanghas was the presence of young people and children who were actively taking part in the commemorative events by exerting their individuality while working together in harmony. They were filled with enthusiasm to help and please everyone who attended the events.

As explained in the President's Message for this month, these young people seemed to be the very embodiments of the bodhisattvas who exhibit "the love for others and a kind heart"—qualities that live in each of us.

In August, the tenth World Assembly of Religions for Peace was held in Germany. The theme of this gathering was "Caring for Our Common Future: Advancing Shared Well-Being," and its purpose was to discuss ways that people of religious faiths can collaborate to contribute to world peace by overcoming mutual differences. Let us also be mindful to live every day in harmony with others by recognizing and accepting our differences.

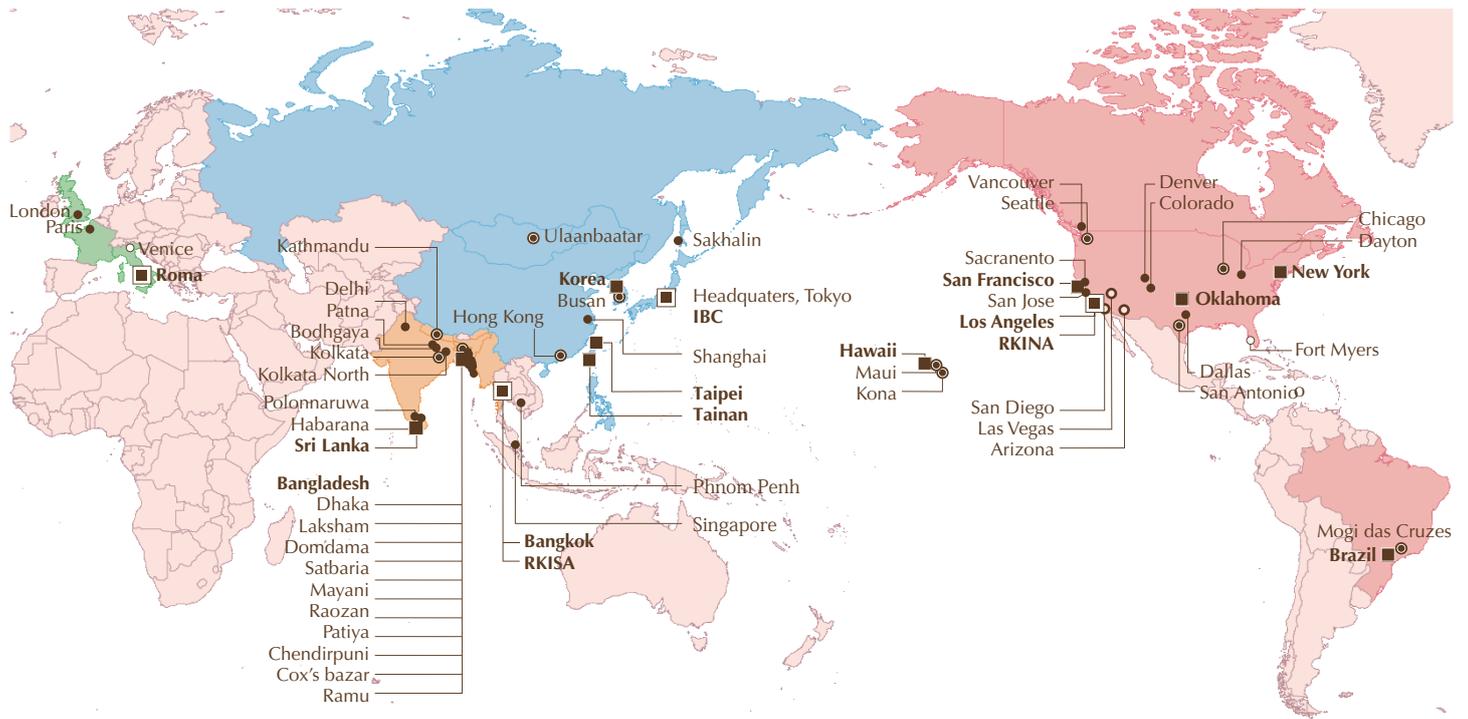
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