

Let Us Develop Ourselves

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**“Raising Human Beings” Is the Overriding Issue for
Far-Sighted Society Creation and Nation Building**



I would like to wish you all a Happy New Year.

Last year was a major milestone for our organization, as we observed the eightieth year since its founding. From this year forward, I would like to join with all of you and continue to strive with diligence toward our one hundredth year.

With that in mind, my “Guidelines for Members’ Practice of the Faith for 2019” are as follows.

The universe and nature are constantly undergoing creation and change without any pause. Just like the truth of the universe, we must be steadfast, and we must always apply ourselves to facing everything that comes our way with a renewed spirit.

This year, our organization observes the eighty-first anniversary of its founding. The cornerstone of its history to this day has been built upon the unsparing dedication of our Founder and Cofounder, as well as many leaders and members who preceded us.

Looking toward the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, I hope that each of us will be firmly resolved to move forward

creatively and unceasingly to repay our debt of gratitude to our predecessors.

Although I said essentially the same thing last year, this is what you must always cherish as members of the organization.

This year's Guidelines for Members' Practice of the Faith include the phrase "to move forward creatively." This does not simply mean "to create new things."

Buddhism places importance on universal values, overcoming ways of seeing things in terms of winning or losing, success or failure, new or old. Cheerfulness, kindness, and warmheartedness have ultimately been what have truly empowered human behavior throughout the ages. I believe that the true sense of "moving forward creatively" is that each and every one of us generously demonstrates cheerfulness, kindness, and warmheartedness in our home, schools, workplaces, communities, and the world, by taking a step forward from who we have been.

Let us, without forgetting these basics, make the best use of our own personality traits and combine them with our familiar practice.

On the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the founding of our organization, I told you that, looking

ahead to its upcoming centennial, "Our important mission, the primary goal into which we must put all our efforts, is human resources development, or the raising of human beings."

"Raising human beings" is a phrase that can be found in an ancient Chinese text.

I introduced this passage in the Additional Remarks in some of my prior annual Guidelines for Members' Practice of the Faith. "Sowing seeds is best for a one-year plan; planting trees is best for a ten-year plan; and for a lifelong plan, nothing surpasses the raising of human beings." This passage is called "The Proverb of the Three Plantings."

Raising human beings is a lifelong plan—it is an overriding issue that human beings must engage in over the course of their entire lives in order to create a society and a nation that anticipates the future.

Moreover, one can compare the raising of people to the planting of trees, one by one, in the earth. If a tree properly takes root, it can thrive and grow indefinitely even if the person who planted it is no longer there. In the same way, the importance of raising human beings that become independent and thrive can be expressed by the phrase "raising human beings."

The Family Is the Foundation Where Children's Characters Are Built: Parental Attitudes Have a Decisive Influence on Children

From early childhood onward, children's interaction with their families and what they are taught at home are particularly important in actually raising a child.

It is said that the human brain has grown to 80 percent of an adult's brain function by the age of three, and that by the age of five or six the personality type is set. Memory and attentiveness are at their fullest around the age of 12 or 13, and by around 16 or 17 years of age we have a completed human being.

The family is the foundation where children's characters are built. Applying this to our members, when parents sit before the home altar and recite the sutra in the morning and evening to worship and give thanks to the focus of devotion, it has a decisive effect on the children who observe this. If children have been wrapped in cheerfulness, kindness, and warmheartedness by their parents, there is no question that they will naturally develop a well-rounded character.



On the other hand, it is said that children who see and hear the inconsiderate actions and words of their parents will naturally imitate them and adopt them as their own attitude. Also, if you forcefully control your children, even though it may seem that they obey you, they will soon develop a rebellious spirit and their minds will become distant.

When a bent pole is planted in the ground, there is no way that its shadow will be a straight line. If a straight pole is planted in the ground, then, logically, the shadow will be straight as well.

The words and actions of our children reflect the attitudes of their parents like a mirror. The various

problems with juveniles in our society reflect the inconsistencies in the adult world.

It is very important to realize that what we hope for in our children starts with the parents themselves.

Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), known as an authority on Eastern philosophy, wrote the following in one of his books: “The father should be the role model for the child. The mother should be the seat of compassion for the child. That is because the family is like a seed-bed for nurturing children.”

One must heed the fact that if the seed-bed for rice seedlings isn’t in good order, one can’t possibly hope for a good harvest in the fall.

Walking the Bodhisattva Way Is How the Buddha Hopes Most of All that Humans Will Live Their Lives

It is with this sort of thing in mind that I have repeatedly said to all of you, “Let us walk the bodhisattva way (the right path for humanity) with the compassion and consideration for others shown by the Buddha and our Founder and Cofounder, and by showing our basic human qualities of cheerfulness, kindness, and warmheartedness.”

As we know from the Lotus Sutra, “walking the bodhisattva way” is how the Buddha hopes most of all that humans will live their lives.

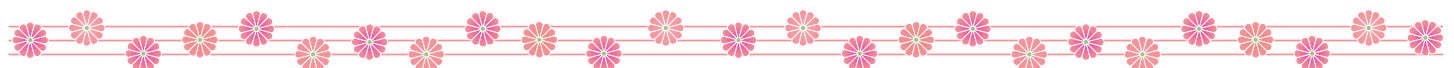
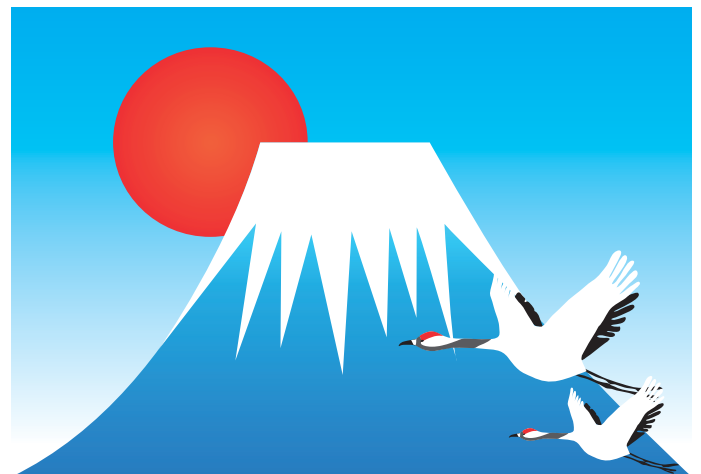
Bodhisattvas are people who thoroughly believe in and understand the teachings of the Buddha, and who are resolved to strive to practice toward the realm of the Buddha. Putting it another way, bodhisattvas are people who strive to make the Buddha’s mind their own mind. We are taught that compassion is the dynamic force in the lifestyle of a bodhisattva.

For each person aspiring to become a bodhisattva, what is indispensable above all else is the study and practice of the Dharma, which should be in line with the Buddha’s way of teaching, rather than something that is self-taught.

The first of the two Chinese characters that form

the word for “study and practice” is made up of two elements. The upper element means “wings” and the lower one means “white.” The element for “white” is a pictograph symbolizing a bird’s body. When a hatchling grows and it is around the time for it to leave the nest, it imitates its parents, repeatedly opening and flapping its wings. So, this Chinese character symbolizes a baby chick that is practicing in preparation of flight.

Like baby chicks hoping to leave the nest, by correctly understanding the teachings of the Buddha,



considering them in the light of one's own daily life, and by constantly repeating this—it is through this that one gradually gets close to the mind of the Buddha.

It is the sangha that observes, like a parent bird, such daily progress. Being among people of the same faith and therefore being able to practice the faith while being encouraged and taught is truly reassuring, and something to be grateful for.

But there may be some among our new members who hesitate, thinking “I’m not that good a person, so it’s very unlikely that I could become a bodhisattva.”

Needless to say, all human beings have defilements such as greed, anger, and ignorance. Defilements are usually thought to be bad, and they are understood to be attributes that one should not have. But actually, it is precisely because of the worry and suffering that results from defilements that our minds seek enlightenment (*satori*) in order to somehow resolve them.

In other words, realizing and helping other people realize that defilements and *satori* are of one piece is an extremely important point.

At the same time, we are also taught that every human being possesses the same compassion as the Buddha does.

If you pay attention to someone in trouble and are able to alleviate the pain of that person, you may feel a great joy larger than the joy you may feel when you yourself were liberated. When you pick up trash, even though nobody sees you doing it, do some fund-raising for a charity, or give up your seat on a public conveyance, you will feel indescribably refreshed. That in itself is proof that you have been endowed with the same compassionate heart as the Buddha.

Putting our faith in the abilities inherent in everyone, I hope that we ourselves will steadily take steps forward as bodhisattvas, while, by extension, making efforts to help raise as many bodhisattvas as possible.

Meanwhile, in Japan, with the succession to the Imperial Throne by Crown Prince Naruhito this

coming May, the curtain will come down on the Heisei era of Emperor Akihito at the end of April. One source of the era name “Heisei,” which means “A peaceful interior makes a peaceful exterior,” is a phrase from a classical Chinese text. The phrase expresses the thought that, for both humans and nations, if the interior is calm and peaceful, then that will be the pattern expressed in the external world.

It is crucial that we who have lived in the Heisei era firmly take the spirit of that era name to heart as we make the most of it in our daily lives.

The real-world problems for human beings cannot be solved by thinking that someone will save us while we wait for that to happen. As the Buddha entrusted the bodhisattvas who came springing up out of the earth (in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra) with the spreading of the Lotus Sutra, these problems can only be solved by the actions of the nameless multitude of people who are doing their best to live while they worry and suffer.

That is why you, without thinking poorly of yourself, should believe the teachings of the Buddha, understand them, and walk the bodhisattva way with the mind of compassion. This is the purpose of our making diligence, and it is also one of the main points of the Lotus Sutra.

It is my heart's desire that you etch this deeply in your minds, and that once again this year we will be able to move forward hand in hand.

Kosei Shimbun, January 6, 2019

