

Practice That Resonates with the Gods and the Buddhas

M IDWINTER sutra recitation has begun! Every morning we hurry to the Dharma center in the predawn darkness to recite the Lotus Sutra with all our hearts during the coldest time in the depths of winter.

When we finish this practice we feel purified, from every part of our bodies down to the very core of our hearts and minds. And it's this sense of purity that brings about a state of mind which resonates with the gods and the buddhas and invites their response.

In the course of the next ten years between now and the close of the twentieth century, the manner in which we continue to pray and the way we conduct ourselves will significantly alter the world of the twenty-first century that we will soon usher in. No matter how imposing the problems that the world must overcome may seem, pathways to solutions will surely come into view if each and every one of us starts off by undertaking spiritual disciplines that can transform ourselves for real.

By practicing the spiritual disciplines that overcome selfish desires and the attachment to the petty sense of self that easily manipulate us, one by one we should increase the number of companions who earnestly aspire to receive the wisdom of the gods and the buddhas. For us today, this is our most important task. I hope that all of you rededicate yourselves and renew your faith during this year's midwinter recitation.

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Living the Lotus Vol. 148 (January 2018) Senior Editor: Koichi Saito Editor: Eriko Kanao Copy Editors: Allan Carpenter, Naoki Taketani, Kazumasa Osaka, Katsuyuki Kikuchi

Living the Lotus is published monthly by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan. TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 FAX: +81-3-5341-1224 Email: living.the.lotus.rk-international @kosei-kai.or.jp 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

Living Brightly and Cheerfully



Make Yourself the Light

The morning of the first day of the year is called *gantan* and the Chinese character for *tan* resembles the appearance of the sun as it rises above the horizon. The year begins with the brisk sunlight of New Year's morning freshly invigorating our bodies and minds as we welcome the New Year.

Well, then, how do all of you hope to live in a year with such a beginning?

I think that we all have our own ideas and expectations, but one thing we all have in common is that we want the year to pass brightly and cheerfully.

In order for that to happen, there is something we must absolutely not forget. Namely, just like the sun that gives us the energy to live, we ourselves should be bright and cheerful so that we make other people feel peaceful and bring them joy. At times, a person is given encouragement from others or starts to feel at peace because of another person's brightness. But what is most important, I think, is to live brightly and cheerfully on your own.

However, there seem to be some people who sigh and say, with resignation, that it is difficult to be cheerful unless you were born with a sunny disposition. Even so, you should never give up trying.

In Buddhism, there is a teaching that says, "Make yourself the light; make the Dharma your light."

"Make yourself the light" means that you should live your life by making yourself your own light, which means that you have a backbone that makes it possible to lead an unswayable, confident lifestyle. And that backbone is the unwavering faith that all people, including yourself, are living, here and now, precious, irreplaceable lives, while your gratitude for the life you are now living is the oil necessary to keep lit the lamp that serves as your "backbone."

"Make the Dharma Your Light"

Once, there was a Zen priest called the "Legless Priest." When the war ended in 1945, he was twenty-five years old and stationed on the Korean Peninsula. From there, he was sent to an internment camp in Siberia, where both of his feet were lost





to frostbite, and they had to be amputated from the knees down. It is hard for us to imagine the hardships he suffered as a disabled person before he returned to Japan and the difficulties he faced after he returned to Japan at age twenty-six. However, when he was twenty-seven, this man, Rev. Doyu Ozawa, experienced what he describes as "a flash of light" in his mind. Realizing that "I suffer because I compare myself to other people," he set forth his thoughts.

"That I was born twenty-seven years ago is the origin of my mind that makes such comparisons. I will quit thinking that I was born twenty-seven years ago and I will make today the day of my birth just as I am: a man without legs. The person born today is completely brand new. Therefore, I have just been born today!"

From that day forward, his motto was, "I have just been born today." Therefore, he kept in mind that he should always be cheerful and certainly express his gratitude by giving thanks. He was able, with a kind face, to pursue a life by walking in the Buddha Way.

In order for us to live brightly and cheerfully, the important thing is what we set in place to serve as our backbone, whether or not we were born with a sunny disposition or into fortunate surroundings. For us Buddhists, it is the Buddha Dharma, as the Zen priest Ozawa shows us so clearly. This means living with the Dharma as the light of your lamp—that is, "Make the Dharma your light."

Looking at this from a different perspective, we can say that real brightness and cheerfulness come forth when we break through suffering and hardship, and in order to break through suffering and hardship, what is important is having a way of life fixed as your backbone, as was just mentioned, as well as the resolution to focus your mind and not let it be swayed by idle thoughts.

The haiku poet Kyoshi Takahama (1874–1959) wrote this forceful New Year's poem: "As the year changes, / We too all change, / So let's go forward." As this poem tells us, let each and every one of us renew ourselves and with a clean mind and a pure heart, look forward to passing the year brightly and cheerfully.

From Kosei, January 2018



LIVING THE LOTUS JANUARY 2018

Spiritual Journey



Embraced in the Buddha's Immeasurable Blessings



This Dharma journey speech was presented at the Ceremony for the Founder's Entrance into Nirvana, at the New York Dharma Center on October 4, 2016.

THANK you very much for this opportunity to share my spiritual experience on this important day commemorating the anniversary of Founder Niwano's entrance into nirvana.

Due to my husband's job transfer to Lexington, Massachusetts, in 2015, my family has lived in that city since the end of April of 2015.

It occurred in Japan during the New Year's holidays of 2015 before I moved to Lexington to join my husband. At the time my husband had returned home temporarily from Lexington. While he was driving a car, he suddenly said to me that he could not see well. As he looked strange, I took over the wheel when the car was stopped at a red light. Soon after I started the car, he fell into a fit of convulsions and lost his consciousness; he made a bowling sound as it happened. I was filled with fear that my husband was going to die, and I stopped the car and asked for help. A woman rushed to me, saying that she had a knowledge of nursing. She soon checked my husband's pulse and called an ambulance, while I could not do anything. My husband was hurriedly carried to a



Ms. Takahashi delivers her personal spiritual experience at the ceremony commemorating the anniversary of Founder Nikkyo Niwano's entrance into nirvana.

hospital by an ambulance, which happened to pass by, and received a treatment.

After that, my husband and I were introduced to a special hospital for further medical examination, where we were informed that his brain capillaries have congenital anomaly. The doctor diagnosed that excessive stress may have triggered a convulsion. Until he became fifty-one years old my husband had spent his life without the knowledge that he had the disease. Thanks to the treatments, he recovered consciousness shortly thereafter, and was diagnosed to suffer no aftereffects. His condition was not serious, to my relief. I told the doctor that my husband had to return to his job in America. Based on the examination, the doctor allowed him to get on an airplane. He also gave us a medical referral letter in English and a CD of his MRI scan. My husband took his flight to America as scheduled, five days after he had the convulsion.

While I was waiting for my departure for Lexington, I was tormented by all kinds of anxieties about my husband. "What should I do if he has a fit of convulsions again in America?" "He must go through a thorough medical treatment." "If he faints while he is driving, others could be hurt." Various thoughts came up one after another and I was overwhelmed by anxieties. Rev. Tanji, the minister of the Ageo Dharma Center in Saitama Prefecture, to which I belonged at the time, gave me a guidance, saying "Now is the time you should make an effort to approach the Buddha." Keeping her words in my mind, I came to Lexington in April, 2015. Since then, I have been practicing the teaching in the New York Dharma Center. My husband didn't want me to talk about his illness. He even got angry at me, saying that

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I exaggerated his sickness, which he himself thought was nothing serious. There was a distance between us—I, who wanted my husband receive a medical treatment, and my husband, who refused it—which could not easily be closed.

The second convulsion occurred in the middle of the night, eight months after he came back to Lexington. Since I didn't know what to do at all, I called Ms. Yoshie Norton, our area leader. She came to our home at once in spite of midnight. I was reassured by her presence and I was thankful to her. By the time she arrived at our home, however, my husband had recovered from the convulsion and he was sitting on his bed as if nothing had happened. I was in a panic with worry, but my husband looked he had no intention to go see a doctor. Ms. Norton was worried about us, and she looked for an emergency hospital and told us how to contact it. Later on, I also was able to meet the mother of a classmate of my child who was a patient-hospital coordinator, and talked to her about my husband's illness. Her husband is a pediatrician specializing in cerebral arteriovenous aneurysms. She told me to call her if anything happened and promised me her support. I was really grateful to her. I felt I was under the Buddha's protection. However, that did not mean that I was free from the problem. Even after that, I was constantly concerned about my husband's illness. I lived a happy life in many ways, but I was always afraid of the worst and my mind was filled with anxieties.

One day, I lost my key chain. It had all the keys I used in daily life, including those for the car, the doors of the house, and a storage unit. I didn't know what to do, and I was completely helpless. As I had no idea where I had lost my keys, I couldn't comprehend what had happened. It seemed as if someone had hidden the key chain from me.

I decided to ask a guidance from Rev. Fujita, minister of the New York Dharma Center. At first, I told her what my husband had told me when I lost the key

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chain. My husband was usually kind to me, but when he knew that I had lost the key chain, he said "This is absurd," probably because he was so astounded, and he became angry at me. I then told Rev. Fujita, "Though I was a little sad to hear my husband say so, I thought that I should accept whatever he would say to me, because it was I who lost the key chain." Rev. Fujita acknowledged my feeling by saying, "Oh, I see. It's admirable that you say that. Seeing your attitude, I have always thought you are really a kind wife." Then she asked me, "What do you want your husband to do for you?" I answered, "What concerns me most is his illness. I hope he will agree to receiving medical treatment. Also, as he was usually telling me that he wanted to leave his job and relax, I want to be a help for him so that he can quit the job as soon as possible and ease himself of the burden." She said, "You are always trying to be close to his mind and heart. That's wonderful," and again asked me "Has your husband asked you what kind of wife he wanted you to be?" At that moment, I realized that I had never talked about it with him. Rev. Fujita then suggested, "Why don't you ask him? The keys you lost might be the keys to your heart, and your husband's." Thanks to her advice, I was able to reflect on myself and found that I might have behaved according to my desire alone. That day I felt warmth in my heart as I thought that Rev. Fujita had understood my feelings, and I was also assigned with homework from her.

Later on, I asked my husband, "What kind of wife do you want me to become?" He replied to me with a smile, but his expression also seems to ask why I had brought up such an absurd question, and he said "Well, well, just leave me alone." I had always tried to be a wife who supported her husband mentally and physically by staying next to him, and I believed that I was actually able to do so. However, regarding his illness, the symptoms of which had appeared for the first time when he was past fifty, what I actually did

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was to demand that he receive medical treatment immediately and get a cure for the disease. Hearing him say, "Leave me alone," I realized that my strong demands may have caused stress to him. If he had accepted my demand and went to hospital, I would have asked him to cut down on his favorite alcohol for his health, and if he had been able to do so, I would have asked him to stop drinking completely. I must have continued to control him, asking him to do as I wanted in one way after another. I became aware, as in the words of Rev. Fujita, that my mind was not in accord with the key of my husband's mind. However, my husband had generously kept on hearing my selfish demands. Until then, my only wish had been that the sufferings before my eyes would be removed. Although I had been taught that all things occurring around us in our daily life are necessary for us, and they are manifested by the Buddha to benefit us, I saw my husband's illness as evil and only wished that my anxiety caused by it would be removed quickly. However, the Buddha always wished us happiness. I could accept both my husband's illness and losing the keys were the events that took place because they were necessary for me. When I had this precious realization, I found myself relieved of worries and felt relaxed as never before.

In May 2016, while driving on his way back home, my husband's car collided with a car from behind. A police officer, who happened to pass by, soon came to the scene and talked to him. However, my husband was in a panic and could not even say his name. The officer noticed that there was something strange with my husband, and called an ambulance. He was sent to a hospital. Fortunately enough, no one was injured. Receiving a call reporting the accident, I rushed to the hospital bringing with me the CD of his MRI scan and the medical referral letter I had brought from Japan. My husband was required to go through some medical examinations. However, he told me, "You don't need to show them to the doctor. Don't take them out." Before others in the hospital, he wore a smile of a sort I had never seen before, and said, "I am fine and I don't have any medical history, so let me go home at once." When he was asked about the amount of alcohol he usually drank, he answered only one third of the actual amount. Finally, I couldn't hand the MRI and the referral to the doctor. On that day we came home after the medical checkup was over.

The result of the examination we received in a week was completely the same as the one we had in Japan. As a consequence, we were told by the doctor that my husband should go to the hospital regularly. The hospital was the one Ms. Norton suggested we go to previously. Also, it was the hospital that the mother of one of my child's classmates had once told me was one of the best. My husband eventually began to be able to receive treatment at a reliable medical institution. I am now filled with gratitude for this wondrous arrangement of the Buddha. Through the accident, I was able to realize that I am sustained to live within the generous arrangements of the Buddha. The reality of the situation has not changed yet, but I feel refreshed and cheerful.

Thanks to the Founder's teachings, I am leading a happy life in the United States. I am not a match for the Founder, but I will apply myself diligently to the practice of the teachings, making it my aim to become a person like the Founder, who was so cheerful and broadminded. Thank you very much.



Ms. Takahashi participates in a hoza *Dharma circle (third from right).*



7 Parables of the Lotus Sutra

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma Chapter 4: Faith and Understanding

The Parable of the Rich Father and the Poor Son

A boy was born in a certain rich house. He ran away from home when he was young and wandered in another country, living in poverty for many years. His father was greatly pained by the loss of his only child and searched all over the country for his son. Eventually the father could not find his son and settled down in a certain town, and started to live in a grand mansion with many servants. The son wandered aimlessly until he reached the age of fifty, at which point he spontaneously reached his home country. He found himself standing right before the gate of his father's house, although he had no idea who dwelled within it. He peeped inside the gate and found that everything there was very beautiful and awe-inspiring. He thought, "If I linger here for too long, I might be caught and forced to work or worse," and ran away.



By the end of the twenty years of menial work, the son had become comfortable working in the rich man's house. Nevertheless, his abject mentality still remained. Eventually, the elder fell ill, and knowing that his death was approaching, he entrusted his son with the management of the storehouse that contained his wealth. Within a short time, the son became familiar with his father's entire household and all his possessions, and became confident of his ability to manage his father's house by himself. At long last the father was convinced of the spiritual growth of his son, and knowing that his end was near, he assembled all members of the house and declared, "This man is actually my real son, and all the wealth that I possess now belongs to my son." Having gained the immense treasure unexpectedly, the son was filled with a pleasure he had never felt before, thinking, "I had never thought of seeking this wealth, but it has come to me all by itself."



During all these years, not a single day had passed for the father without thinking of his lost son. Upon his first glance from inside the house, he recognized that the man standing at the gate was his son. Startled to see that his son had suddenly run away, he dispatched some attendants to bring the man back. When the son was caught by the attendants, he was so terrified that he fainted and collapsed to the ground. Seeing this from afar, the father decided not to bring his son back by force. He then sent two servants with disheveled appearances to talk to his son. The son was invited to work at the rich elder's house to shovel dung; he accepted the job and started working there without worries. The rich man purposely smeared his body with mud and dust, and worked with the laborers in order to get close to his son. He said to his son, "I feel like a father to you," and gave him a new name. For twenty years, the son continued to remove dung and clean filth.



Commentary

The rich father symbolizes the Buddha and the poor son symbolizes us human beings. We have run away from the Buddha and have been wandering aimlessly within the realm of human suffering. However, we are getting close to our parent, the Buddha, spontaneously, without even knowing it ourselves. That is because we are endowed with buddha-nature, even though we are unaware of it. When the Buddha found us, he immediately recognized us as his children. He is always thinking of us. The Buddha tries to lead us to enlightenment immediately, but we turn our back on the Buddha, thinking that the Buddha's awakening is not something that we can even think of approaching. At this juncture the Buddha uses skillful means to enable us to stay close to him in such a way that we can feel at ease. "Removing dung" symbolizes the fact that we have continued the practice of removing our delusions.

The poor son continued the practice diligently for twenty years, but he was still unable to overcome his abject mentality. Even though the Buddha said, "I feel like a father to you, so I will give you a new name," he made a clear distinction between himself and the Buddha. As a result of the many years of practice, the poor son has become familiar with the treasure in the storehouse (the Buddha's teachings) and has become the manager of the storehouse, but he does not think that the wealth is his. Just like the poor son in the parable, we are unable to recognize that we possess the treasure, that is, the buddha-nature.

Through the practice of the teachings, our confidence has grown gradually. Now the Buddha is telling us that "All living beings are my children, and I am their father. All living beings can become buddhas." Finally, we have come to realize that we are as one with the Buddha.

We already have encountered the Lotus Sutra. We therefore are able to get close to the Buddha immediately. To do so, we must at first cast away our sense of inferiority. Let us open up and say to ourselves, "I can become a buddha too; I am as one with the universe." Firm confidence will grow within us when we have faith in the Lotus Sutra and practice its teachings. When you encounter sufferings, please remember the father who is shoveling dung along with his son, wearing dirty clothes.

The Buddha is always with us.

Editorial supervision by the Chuo Academic Research Institute





Cherishing Each and Every Moment

ET me express the greetings of the season. I wish you all the best for this year.

When we greet the arrival of the New Year, strangely enough, we feel our minds and hearts are renewed, even though only one day has passed since the previous year. I am not sure what makes us feel that way, but I think the fact that there is such a turning point in our life is what is important. President Nichiko Niwano teaches us in his book *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, "Every moment is new, and every day is the first day of your life, never to be repeated. Today is the first day since the dawning of the universe—no day can be as wonderful as today" (Kosei Publishing, 2008, p. 40).

Every day we live a unique, new life. Any given encounter with people in front of us is therefore the first and the last for us.

On this occasion of making a start of the new year, I remind myself to always cherish the "present" and treasure every encounter. I would also like to live in a year brightly, joyfully, and cheerfully.

> Rev. Koichi Saito Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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