

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

4
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Founder's Essay

People Who Are Liked by Everyone

IN the springtime, the month of April is a season for many new encounters. Since hiring and job transfers in Japan generally follow the financial year's calendar, young people in particular worry about their personal relationships with new bosses and coworkers, and are at pains to find some way of endearing themselves to others. But the most sure-fire way to do this is for we ourselves to learn to really like other people.

A lot of people are troubled by the fact that they can't attract romantic interest; but aren't such people are obsessed with presenting only a favorable image of themselves to others? Looking smug and talking over people's heads, they don't pay even the slightest attention to the all-important other person. Learning to like others is the easier way, because people naturally become fond of those who like them.

A bodhisattva called Regarder of the Sounds of the World appears in the Lotus Sutra. Manifesting in thirty-three different incarnations, the Sound Regarder never fails to come to the aid of anyone. This bodhisattva's name (Skt., Avalokiteśvara) means to peer inside another's heart and know their wishes.

There are people who are resigned to a lack of affinity with others because of their inability to flatter people, since they are no good at speaking. However, we should understand the bodhisattva's "kind words" that the Threefold Lotus Sutra teaches us, means listening more, rather than talking a lot. If you can lend a sympathetic ear to anyone's words on any subject, then you will become a person who is liked by everyone.

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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

Becoming a Person of Complete Harmony

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



With a Single Greeting

In a certain workplace, one employee was very polite about his morning greetings. He looked squarely at his coworkers and, while saying, “Good morning,” slowly bowed his head. It is a small thing, but some coworkers were said to find his overly polite behavior to be a nuisance in the midst of a hectic morning.

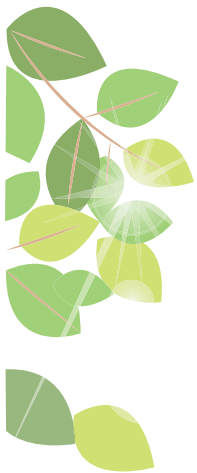
After a while, however, the workplace environment started to change. Even the people who until then had simply said “Hi” as they passed by each other started to turn squarely to each other and exchange greetings and gradually, the air in the workplace became calmer.

Being in complete harmony indicates the quality of a personality that is “fully contented and without shortcomings or faults.” Therefore, when we talk about becoming such a person, we mean something akin to an ideal human being which is, for Buddhists, a person just like the Buddha. However, I do not think that this ideal is some distant goal.

If we suppose that the working of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas gives people peace of mind and satisfaction, causing them to feel they want to get along with others as well as bring harmony to their environment, then the person who, with a single morning greeting, moves people’s minds and brings harmony to the workplace is none other than a person of complete harmony. While we human beings do have many shortcomings, this could be called proof that we all possess the buddha-nature. In the same way, whenever we experience new encounters, such as at school or in the workplace, we could say that the conclusive factor in making these human relationships harmonious lies in paying reverence to the buddha-nature in others through the exchange of greetings.

People Who Know Sadness

The essence of human nature is the buddha-nature; and there are numerous stories that show us that human nature is naturally perfect and harmonious. In Edo-period Japan, in Yoshino in modern-day Nara Prefecture, there lived a man named Seikuro



who was a pious devotee of the Jodo Shin (True Pure Land) sect. (Pious devotees of the Jodo Shin sect like Seikuro are called *myokonin*, which literally means wonderfully excellent people.) When money was stolen from his house while he was out, Seikuro said, “Anyone who would enter my house to steal must have been in great difficulty. I am glad that there happened to be some money in my house for that person to take.” He went on to say, “I was allowed to be a ‘person who was robbed,’ guided by the Buddha’s compassion. Nothing could make me happier now.”

Another pious devotee, Monodane Kichibei of Osaka, said, “Anyone can rejoice when times are good. But whatever difficulty you may encounter, at the bottom of that difficulty there is the Buddha Dharma.” His remarks inform us that the joy of realizing “the seed of gratitude” that difficulties teach us is itself the highest pleasure and the true value of faith.

There was nothing in these two men’s minds but their gratitude to the Buddha for their lives and their compassion and consideration toward other people. Being well-rounded is the quality of a personality that is totally contented and lacks nothing, and it can be said that this quality represents none other than a warm feeling of satisfaction capable of receiving, with gratitude, whatever may happen.

Incidentally, the aforementioned Seikuro lost his father early on. While living in poverty with his mother, he met his wife but lost her to death when he was only thirty-three years old. Precisely because he thoroughly experienced sadness and suffering, he understood the pain in people’s hearts. And that understanding became the source of his compassion, which may have given rise to the wisdom in him to help other people.

There is a statue of a bodhisattva seated in the half-lotus position, enshrined at the temple Chuguji in Nara, that is famous for its gentle, slight smile. The literary critic Katsuichiro Kamei (1907–66) penned the following description of its smile: “It may be at one with lament that is welling forth from sorrow and sadness.” In other words, deep in the mind of the bodhisattva are intense sufferings and thoughts that words cannot fully describe.

As indicated by the Buddhist phrase “perfection in compassion and wisdom (*hi chi enman*),” which refers to the ideal nature of a human being, Shakyamuni and, indeed, all of us are considered to have wished to be born in this world in order to fulfill the vow to manifest as much compassion and wisdom as possible.

From *Kosei*, April 2018





Obsession Was the Origin of All Sufferings



by Rev. Masatoshi Shimamura
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia

This Dharma Sharing (Spiritual Journey) speech by Rev. Masatoshi Shimamura was presented at the ceremony for Founder's Memorial Day held in the Great Sacred Hall on March 4, 2018.

GOOD morning everyone. I am Masatoshi Shimamura, currently serving as director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia. In the regions of South and Southeast Asia, Rissho Kosei-kai has its Dharma centers in three countries: Thailand, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. In addition to those countries, there are also some chapters and hoza centers in India, Nepal, Singapore, and Cambodia, and I am in charge of disseminating the teachings in those countries.

I was born on September 6, 1963 as the first son of the Shimamura family that was running a furniture retail store at Edogawa Ward in Tokyo.

Although I did not have difficulty in accepting the faith thanks to my mother who was a pious devotee of the teaching, I did not participate at all in the activities of the Students' Group of the Edogawa Dharma Center partly because I was busy with my club activities at school. Nevertheless, when my high school entrance examination was close at hand, an older

member of the Students' Group took the trouble to come to my house to give care and guidance to me. During our conversations, he cheered me up because I was nervous before the entrance examination. I was touched by his kindness so deeply that I started to take part in the activities of the Student's Group after entering high school.

In the late 1970s, the Students' Group of the Edogawa Dharma Center held an annual training program during summer vacation at the Ome Retreat Center in western Tokyo. I also joined the program. I was impressed with lectures by Dharma instructors of the Youth Department. I also participated in the *hoza* sessions, in which the fellow participants empathized with one another and shed tears of emotion together. In the course of these activities, I began to feel the joy of the faith little by little.

At the third grade in high school, I was moved by the Founder who dedicated himself to promoting world peace, traveling around the world on that mission. I aspired to become a person who was able to assist him by acquiring an English-speaking ability. With that hope in mind, I enrolled in the Japan branch school of Temple University, in Tokyo. By taking classes in English, I acquired an American way of thinking, namely, you must be independent and clearly express ideas.

Very soon after I started studying in the university with great hope, however, the problem of debt came up. Sales at my parents' furniture store decreased due to the recession, and my parents were not able to repay their bank loan. The amount of loan was about three million Japanese yen, but it was unlikely that they would be able to pay it off only with the sales from the store. As the eldest son, I felt I shared the



Rev. Shimamura delivers his personal spiritual experience in the Great Sacred Hall, Tokyo.

responsibility to repay the debt, so I made up my mind to quit the school and start to work. I went to meet the head of the Students' Group, asking for guidance.

After listening carefully to my talk, he encouraged me by saying:

"Since you entered the university in order to fulfill the vow to make yourself a helpful person for the Founder, you must never quit the university. Instead, you should look for a part-time job that enables you to help your parents to repay the loan. And, you should also do your duty diligently for the Students' Group, praying for the Buddha's blessing, especially in these times when you are in difficulty. I understand that these things must be hard for you, but I am sure that they will definitely become a treasure of your life."

The head of the Students' Group was a junior high school teacher who had overcome financial difficulty and had graduated from university with an income from delivering newspapers. Precisely because it was the guidance from a person who had been through financial difficulty as a student, I accepted it seriously. Soon, I looked for a job that fit the condition that I could go to university, while doing my duty at the Dharma center and helping my parents repay the bank loan. And, I started to work at Yoshinoya, a fast food chain of *gyudon* (beef bowl) restaurants, from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m. four days a week.

Thanks to the Buddha's arrangement, I was able to earn as much income as I had expected, and I was able to help my parents to repay the loan regularly and pay my school fees by myself. But, on the other hand, I felt chronic fatigue because of lack of sleep, which made it difficult for me to keep my concentration in class. Moreover, I felt major stress because my grades did not improve. As life continued in this way, before long, my mind became full of complaints.

I felt frustrated when I just saw my parents having

meals together, and I was also driven by a violent impulse when I saw my father having a drink when I left my home for the part-time job. In those days, my fatigue and mental stress built up until they were about to reach the very limit, so I was always irritating and in a very bad temper.

The person who healed my mind was a senior member at the Edogawa Dharma Center. He accepted and embraced my complaints with all his heart. "I know that it is bad, but sometimes I feel like hitting my parents," I said, as I tearfully revealed my feelings to him. He answered, "You are right. You can hit, but not your parents. Hit me, considering me as your parents." His face was also full of tears.

Listening to his words, I was able to come to my senses. At first I started the job myself, wishing to help my parents (who had been suffering from repaying the loan) to feel at ease as much as possible. I became overly conscious of my own hardships, however, and blamed my parents, forgetting my original intention. What troubled me were this contradictory feelings within myself.

I was able to get myself together for a while after I received encouragement from the senior member. However, when I was very tired, I again fell into a bad temper, and I got myself together again thanks to the senior member's encouragement. One day when I was emotionally unstable, I happened to see a documentary TV program that featured a story about child labor in Bangladesh.

In the TV program, I saw a girl who looked to be ten years old carrying a cage containing bricks with her mother. The girl was not able to go to school or play with friends, and she only carried bricks every day in the cage. Yet, her face was beaming with a bright smile. "Why? Why doesn't she forget smile in such a harsh situation?" I looked for an answer in earnest: "It is perhaps because she feels joy in helping her parents, before thinking about school or friends, and also because she and other children who are

Spiritual Journey

under similar circumstances are encouraging one another.”

Through watching her, I realized that, “My sufferings come from my obsession with hardships. I was not able to feel the joy in helping my parents. Indeed I could appreciate the words of encouragement by the senior member and others only for a short time, and I soon became concerned only with my own hardships. This is the very origin of my sufferings. I was making a big mistake to believe that I would live with sufferings for my entire life, though in fact my sufferings would only last until I graduate from university.”

When I realized this, I became convinced that I could overcome my suffering. I felt strongly that, “I am blessed, as I can help my parents. I am blessed, as I have the members of sangha who kindly encourage me. If I can build a strong mindset to find a source of gratitude even within a harsh condition, it will be a treasure throughout my life. Although the sufferings actually exist, they can last only for a short time until graduation. That is no big problem that makes me lose sight.”

Relieved from the spiritual torment, I felt as if the emotions I had suppressed till then came forth with a burst. Then, I realized what was even more important. That is: What did my parents think about me when I was blaming them due to my own sufferings? When my mind opened to my parents, I remembered my mother cooking nutritious meals for me with her whole heart. I also remembered my father’s happy smile when I had a drink with him. There are no parents who do not care their children’s hardships. I was truly a stupid son who was not able to recognize the love of my parents. This stupid son was deluded enough to believe that he was performing filial piety for his parents, yet he gave no consideration to his parents, who were going through hardships much harsher than his. I was truly self-centered. I was really arrogant. I would like to take this opportunity to

apologize to my parents, who have already passed away. I apologize my lack of filial love, and I also would like to express my gratitude for the profound love and kindness that my parents had lavished on me when they raised me and guided me.

Upon graduating from the university, I entered the Rissho Kosei-kai Seminary. Thanks to the Buddha’s arrangement, I was given the opportunity to study at a university in Thailand after graduating from the seminary. Since then, I have been doing my duty, treasuring my karmic connections with South Asia.

In 2016, when Bodhgaya, one of the sacred places for Buddhists (where Shakyamuni attained enlightenment), was struck by an enormous flood, an area leader of the Bodhgaya Hoza sought shelter at another member’s house, because her house was damaged by the downpour. A girl of the member’s family always talked to her, joking around. The area leader was a bit annoyed and asked the girl, “Why are you making jokes when I suffer?” The girl answered, “I would like to encourage you because you are now facing a difficult time.” Soon after that, the area leader reflected the conversation in front of other members, saying, “I was not able to recognize the kindness of other people because I had been totally caught with my own problems. I was so sorry.”

The mental state of the area leader at Bodhgaya was exactly that of myself in the past. Because of the damage her house had suffered, she felt as if the flood had taken everything from her, and she took everything that had happened as the source of suffering. In fact, however, all of her family members were safe, and she had kind and warm friends of the sangha who received her to their house temporarily as a shelter. Indeed, the fact that her house was broken down caused her to suffer, but she did not face a life-threatening problem. It was the house she built from scratch, so if she wants it, she may be able to build a new one. And, the most important of all, she

she was able to feel the warmth of the sangha and reflected the importance of “being liberated by others and liberating others” through her experience of the disaster. Listening to her reflections, I remembered the sufferings that I had experienced in the past. And, that made me deepen my awareness and consideration of others. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my thanks to her.

Today, we have the honor of the presence of chair of the Rissho Kosei-kai Bodhgaya Dharma Center, the local subsidiary established at Bodhgaya. Thanks to the area leader’s and the chair’s diligence in dissemination, we are going to start the construction of Bodhgaya Hoza Center at a place which was donated by a local member.

Tomorrow, we will observe the eightieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai’s founding. As the President taught us in the New Year’s message, I should repay my debt of gratitude to the unsparing dedication of the Founder, the Cofounder, as well as a number of leaders and members preceding us who built the cornerstone of our founding, and I hope I will dedicate myself to disseminating the teachings proactively and creatively. I also rededicate myself to spreading the sangha in South Asia, which is cheerful, kind, and warmhearted, further and further.

The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, President Niwano, thank you very much. Everyone, thank you so much.



The inauguration of the Bodhgaya Hoza in 2016.

The 7 Parables of the Lotus Sutra



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower
of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 8: The Assurance of Buddhahood
Given to the Five Hundred Disciples

The Parable of the Gem in the Robe

There was a man who lived in poverty. One day he visited the house of his close friend. The friend was very rich and treated him to dinner. The man ate his fill, then got drunk and fell asleep in his wealthy friend's house.



Meanwhile, his friend had to leave on official business. The friend decided to sew a priceless gem in the lining of the man's robe as a gift, because he knew that the man had sunk into poverty. Since the man was fast asleep, he didn't notice what was happening.

After waking up, the poor man left his friend's house and wandered until he reached another country, where he worked hard to earn his food and clothing. He was satisfied with what little income he brought in. One day, the man happened to run into his wealthy friend on the road. Surprised to see the poor man's shabby appearance, the friend told him about the gem in the robe, and showed it to him. The man was delighted, and thanks to the gem he was able to live a life free from poverty and want.



Commentary

The man who lived in poverty indicates us as ordinary human beings, and his close friend expresses the Buddha. A priceless gem symbolizes the teaching of the One Vehicle. The Buddha gave various teachings to people who were suffering in their lives, in order to liberate them. All the teachings of the Buddha are for the purpose of leading all human beings to buddhahood. Each one of us is different from one another and while it may appear that we all walk different paths, in fact we possess the life of the Buddha equally and we all are sustained by one immense Life—our lives are manifestations of its working. It is called the One Vehicle.

To possess the gem unknowingly is to walk the path to become a buddha even though we are unaware of doing so.

We are not an existence that has an unchanging or everlasting nature, instead, we are a phenomenon that arises through interdependent origination. However, we believe that our visible appearances are our true selves, and so we continue to suffer swayed by earthly desires. Just like as the poor man in this story, even if we are satisfied with delicious food and drink for a moment, we may return to poverty as soon as the conditions change, and so we will never achieve a fulfilled life.

Hence the Buddha explained to us the law of interdependent origination and guided us to the way to find inner peace by releasing our mind from selfish desires. Such a state (nirvana of the two vehicles) is the same as that of the poor man in the story, who is satisfied with the meager income from his menial work.

When the poor man ran into his friend, his friend let him know the presence of the gem in the robe. This symbolizes how the Buddha gave us the prediction that we too can become buddhas.

The gem in the robe does not signify spiritual peace only for oneself. It is a priceless gem, which indicates the teaching of the One Vehicle. Through knowing the teaching, we realize that the path which we have walked is connected to the path to become buddhas. The path to become a buddha is the way of living in which we always wish to make those around us happy and make best effort to achieve this goal (bodhisattva path). Such a way of living demonstrates what we should be as those who inherently possess the Buddha's life. If you only realize the presence of the gem, you can surely be a warm light that will illuminate others and the community wherever you are—because you already have the brilliant gem in your heart.

Editorial supervision by the Chuo Academic Research Institute





Exchanging Greetings Is an Act of Revering the Buddha-Nature

RECENTLY I had an opportunity to hear a speech by Dr. Yoshihide Uchiyama, the director of the track and field club of Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, which had won the Hakone Ekiden long-distance relay running race for four consecutive years.

He told us that when it comes to raising good athletes, it goes without saying that it is important to help them to improve their records; but what is even more important is to help them cultivate their character and improve as human beings.

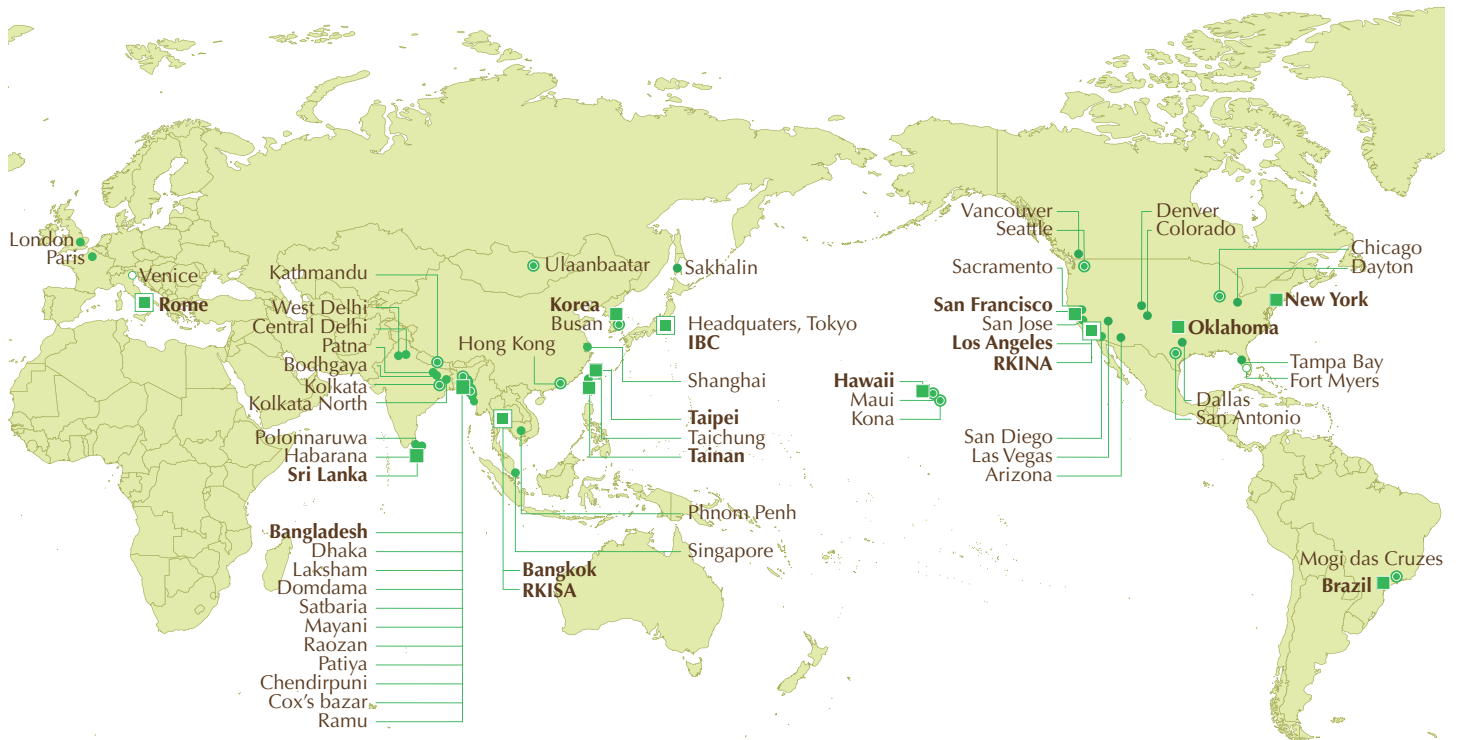
He also said that the members of the club had made a set of rules for themselves, which included exchanging greetings, arranging their shoes together neatly at the entrance to the dormitory, and voluntarily cleaning the roads in the neighborhood of the dormitory. Through keeping these rules, their minds to care for others must have been cultivated, and their spirit of teamwork established.

We Rissho Kosei-kai members also learned the importance of exchanging greetings as one of the “three practices” in daily life. I have realized anew its importance by hearing what Dr. Uchiyama had to say.

In April, we hear the cheerful exchanges of greetings by pupils in the first grade of elementary school. Though the exchange of greetings is a casual, everyday event, we hope we would practice it with all our heart, always caring for others.

Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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