

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



2
2020

VOL. 173

Founder's Essay

Invoking the Wondrous Dharma

As chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata,” teaches us, when our own hearts become pure, this world, just as it is, becomes the world “always filled with heavenly beings and humans.” But since the world isn’t easily visible to us in this way, we instead only see society’s various blemishes. However, before focusing on the imperfections of the world around us, isn’t it more important to work hard at preventing the defilement of our minds?

Nichiren taught that “because you invoke the Wondrous Dharma, your buddha-nature is called forth and will surely reveal itself.” The Lotus Sutra is imbued with the wishes of the Buddha, all of the bodhisattvas, and people too numerous to count. When our minds become increasingly pure through the daily practice of reciting the *Kyoten* sutra readings in the mornings

and evenings, we realize that a person we thought of as a pain in the neck has an unblemished mind deep within them. Our hearts begin to ache at the poignancy of this person’s failure to recognize this.

A member from the Kuwana Dharma Center in Mie Prefecture gave a talk similar to this about her spiritual journey. When a group pilgrimage to perform voluntary service at the Great Sacred Hall in the organization’s Tokyo headquarters made her feel like she had been cleansed down to the bottom of her heart, she saw the statue of the Original Buddha smiling at her. She says she realized for the first time that “I couldn’t see the true image of the Buddha because until now my eyes were clouded. I couldn’t see everyone’s beautiful appearance.”

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 156–57

Living the Lotus Vol. 173 (February 2020)

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Living the Lotus is published monthly by
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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

Finding a Purpose in Life

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



“You Too Will Die”

This month, we observe the anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha entering nirvana (February 15) and we, as Buddhists, give praise to his virtues and further deepen our study of the Buddha's teachings. What is it, then, that Shakyamuni tells us through his own “death”?

To me, he is teaching us the truth that all living things, without exception, will die.

In Buddhism, there is the phrase “life and death are one and inseparable”—that is, living and dying are two sides of the same coin. In other words, what we call “life” actually consists of both living and dying. But we have difficulty accepting one half of that pair: death. For many people, it is something frightening that they want to avoid. However, this is exactly why Shakyamuni explained to us, through his own physical body, the truth of this world: that “you too will die.”

Shakyamuni is not, of course, only teaching us this one truth through his death. He is also teaching us the meaning of being born and living as human beings in the middle of the great stream of life into which all things are born and die.

Chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, “Teachers of the Dharma,” contains this line: “Out of compassion for living beings, they will be born in this human realm.” We can understand this passage as meaning that since Shakyamuni could hardly bear seeing the incessant worrying and suffering of human beings, he appeared in our world. However, this is not only true of Shakyamuni. Keeping this in mind, let's consider what it means for us to be alive.

The Meaning of Being Alive

“Teachers of the Dharma” also says, “Filled with heartfelt sympathy for living beings, they have vowed to be born among them.” In other words, we wished to be born into a world that has many sufferings. From a different perspective, suffering as well as joy exist in this *saha* world, and we human beings have the capability of grasping the truth (the way things really are), which is precisely why we are living here and now.



It is truly painful and tragic when our family members and the people close to us get sick or die. We ourselves cannot escape illness and death. However, when we've thoroughly experienced that pain, sadness, and fear, our eyes may open to the truth. Suffering, sadness, and pain point us toward liberation.

Here, "liberation" indicates finding the meaning of life—and even a reason to live. For instance, turning adversity into the power to change direction and move forward when life seems to have hit rock bottom.

When it comes to liberation as a reason to live, there's no need to take this too seriously. That is to say, the impetus for attaining this liberation could be, for example, doing your very best at cooking dinner or being cheerful when greeting people. No matter how insignificant actions like this may seem to be, taking joy in what only you can do brings joy to those around you. This is the true meaning of being alive and having a reason to live, isn't it?

The psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Emil Frankl (1905–97) said, "Human beings need not ask the meaning of life; they should only seek answers to the questions life poses to them." When it comes to regarding our fate, about which we can do nothing, what's important is to accept events as they happen and find something positive in them.

We could say that this awareness or awakening, when repeated, is life. The Buddhist monk Ryokan (1758–1831) wrote, "If one asks what is suffering in this world, the answer is that there are people who do not yet know the Dharma." Those of us who have accepted the Buddha's teachings are always receiving the Dharma of living with a purpose.

From *Kosei*, February 2020





Believing that Everyone Possesses Buddha-Nature



Rev. Yoshiaki Yamamoto

Former Minister of the International Buddhist Congregation

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Great Sacred Hall on November 10, 2019, during the ceremony celebrating the monthly memorial day for Cofounder Myoko Naganuma.

My name is Yoshiaki Yamamoto. I am very grateful for this opportunity to give a Dharma Journey talk on the monthly memorial day for Cofounder Myoko Naganuma, in the auspicious year when we will observe the 130th anniversary of her birth.

This year, I turned seventy. Today, I feel that I received a gift from the Buddha: the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the members of Rissho Kosei-kai who took such good care of me, and to the Buddha, Founder Niwano, President Niwano, and Cofounder Naganuma, who guided me to the most wonderful teaching, the Lotus Sutra.

I was born and raised in a coastal town on Chita Peninsula in Aichi Prefecture. My father was drafted during World War II and sent to China and the southern Pacific islands. He was a survivor of the Battle of Peleliu, in which most Japanese soldiers perished. As a survivor from fierce battlefields, my father was a

man of fortitude, and he raised me very strictly. He often gave me a smack to discipline me when I was a kid. After growing up in such an environment, I started becoming very secluded in my house. I hated my father.

At age twenty-three, I felt my energy declining, so I decided to turn to religion in order to change my relationship with my father. At first I thought I would consult a Christian minister, but I didn't have the strength to find and visit a suitable church, so I chose Rissho Kosei-kai, which my mother was a member of, without much thought. During this time, I also talked to my mother about my problem with my father.

My mother had joined Rissho Kosei-kai in 1962, and when I became a shut-in she went to the Chita Dharma Center often, probably to seek guidance from the minister or chapter leader about her troubled son. Rev. Masao Wakiya, then the minister of the Dharma center, kindly suggested that I stay in the Dharma center for a week if I found my relationship with my father unbearable.

I didn't want to stay at home, so I made up my mind and went to the Dharma center for a week. All I brought with me were some extra clothes. At that time, the center was a prefabricated house with a big stove inside, so I spent every day near the stove, reading books I found in the center. After a while, I began serving as a driver for Rev. Wakiya from time to time, going out for Dharma dissemination with a few members, and, finally, joining the activities of the youth group. I was only supposed to stay in the Dharma center for a week, but before I was even aware of it, three years had passed.

When I turned twenty-six, I talked to Rev. Wakiya.



Rev. Yamamoto delivers his Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall, Tokyo.

I said, “I was able to learn the importance of expressing gratitude toward parents. As I am now confident that I will be able to get along well with my father, I would like to go home.”

Rev. Wakiya said, “Rissho Kosei-kai has a seminary called Gakurin where you can study Buddhism. Why don’t you take an entrance exam?”

I took the exam, but I failed. Rev. Wakiya told me to try again. I thought a person like me would never be able to pass the exam. But I was grateful to Rev. Wakiya for allowing me to stay in the Dharma center for such a long time, so I applied to Gakurin once again and that time, luckily, I was able to pass. It’s thanks to that exam that I am here today.

After graduating from Gakurin Seminary, I was appointed minister of the Hawaii Dharma Center when I was thirty-five years old, and I spent ten years practicing the Dharma with the members there. In Hawaii, some 25 percent of the population are of Japanese descent. Among the members of the Hawaii Dharma Center, some people (immigrants from Japan) could speak Japanese, but many of their children and grandchildren spoke only English.

I was always wondering how I could help members who were in difficult situations: a youth who grew desperate and became a drug addict, a middle-aged man whose poultry farm went bankrupt, a Japanese woman who had a troubled relationship with her American husband. In pursuit of clues, I would recite the Threefold Lotus Sutra, read the books by Founder Niwano and President Nichiko Niwano, and visit members to support them in the Way. One day, a phrase in a book by the Founder caught my heart. It read, “Realizing and awakening to our own buddha-nature and revering the buddha-nature of everyone are the basics of the bodhisattva practice.”

While I was considering what “realizing our own buddha-nature” meant, a phrase in a passage of chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata,” appeared in my mind: “At last, when living beings humbly believe, / Are upright in character and gentle and flexible in mind, / And wish with all their hearts to see the Buddha / Even at the cost of their lives, / Then I and all the Sangha / Appear together on Divine Eagle Peak.”

I thought to myself, “The life of the Eternal

Buddha Shakyamuni enshrined in the Great Sacred Hall is filling my inner self, helping me to live, and leading me to liberation. First of all, I must wish to see the Buddha with all my heart to realize my own buddha-nature.”

So, with the mind of cherishing and longing for the Buddha, I chanted wholeheartedly, “I take refuge in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni—Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One,” all day, trying to see the Buddha. After I continually practiced this for three years, I suddenly became vividly aware that the life of the Buddha was truly inside me.

My experiences in Hawaii also taught me that people could overcome any problem or suffering in their lives and find peace if each family member realized and revered each other’s buddha-nature. I also learned that family is a form of dependent origination that receives the greatest blessings from the Buddha.

With this awareness, I returned to Japan and served as minister of the Tottori Dharma Center for four years, the Matsudo Dharma Center for seven years, and the Miyata Dharma Center for a year, during which I walked the Buddha Way with gratitude side by side with the Dharma center members.

When I was fifty-nine years old, I was appointed minister of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center. Sri Lanka is a small island nation with a population of about twenty million people. Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and others live in the country, and they speak different languages and have different faiths.

Most of the members of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center were Sinhalese Theravada Buddhists. It is said that Buddhism was transmitted to Sri Lanka around the third century BC. In fact, Buddhism in Sri Lanka has a longer history and tradition than in Japan. Rissho Kosei-kai members in Sri Lanka cherished their local temples and respected the priests. Most of the members spoke Sinhalese and didn’t speak English, but all we had was the Sinhalese version of the *Kyoten* sutra readings, which had been translated from English by a Sinhalese priest. Other than that, there was nothing in Sinhalese to use as teaching materials—there was no Threefold Lotus Sutra or its commentary by Founder Niwano, *Buddhism for Today*.

I wondered how I should communicate the teaching of the Lotus Sutra to the Dharma center members,

Spiritual Journey

and I decided to do what I'd learned as minister of the Hawaii Dharma Center: to teach them to realize and revere the life of the Buddha in ourselves and in all people. With the approval of President Niwano, I used the term "the Buddha" to mean "buddha-nature," telling the Sinhalese members that "the Buddha is inherent in all of you, so if you continue to revere it, express your gratitude, and pay homage to it, that practice will bring you great liberation. This is the important teaching of the Lotus Sutra."

As a concrete practice, I spoke about the importance of family members paying respect and showing gratitude to the Buddha within each other, and I taught that this practice would surely build a harmonious and peaceful family.

When I started to share the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, Mr. A, a founding member of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center, began to be radically abusive toward me. One day, he shouted abuse at me for over an hour, saying, "Yamamoto is incompetent, so therefore the number of members is decreasing. He is a useless minister. Because Founder Niwano entrusted me with the Dharma dissemination in Sri Lanka, I am the founder of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center. Yamamoto should leave this country, and I will refuse his reentry." From that point on, every time we had a ceremony, he threw the same accusation at me.

Until then, I had communicated to the members the importance of believing in the existence of the Buddha in all people and revering it, so I had to revere the Buddha in Mr. A so as to practice the Lotus Sutra no matter how I was treated. Meanwhile, my wife—who lived with me in Sri Lanka—worried about our safety, and she rented a safe-deposit box in a Japanese bank and told our children to use the money in case anything happened to their parents.

This situation continued for five years. Every time I returned to the Tokyo headquarters in November for the annual meetings, President Niwano kindly listened to my complaints and encouraged me.

Dharma centers overseas have to be registered according to local laws, and since Sri Lanka is a Theravada Buddhist country, it was difficult for us to get registered as a group of Mahayana Buddhism. The Sri Lankan government would not give us permission for a long time. Thanks to the efforts of

Rissho Kosei-kai leaders in Sri Lanka, however, we were finally able to get registered as a non-governmental social welfare organization under the name "Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation."

Mr. A was enraged that the name of the organization had changed. He said, "Founder Niwano entrusted me with the Dharma dissemination using the name Rissho Kosei-kai. I will leave this organization and fulfill my responsibility on my own."

Mr. A had connected most of the leaders and members of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center to the Dharma. I talked with my wife, saying, "We should hold on even if everyone leaves us. President Niwano has entrusted the Sri Lanka Dharma Center to us." To our surprise, all of the members decided to follow us. It seemed that Mr. A was also shocked by their decision.

As I do not speak Sinhalese, I could not share the teaching with any of the members in person or visit members by myself. But the members had seen how I'd continued to revere the Buddha in Mr. A for five years while he shouted at me. Looking back, I see that I received an opportunity from the Buddha to share the core teaching of the Lotus Sutra with the members in Sri Lanka through my relationship with Mr. A. Practicing the teaching of the Lotus Sutra to which Founder Niwano and President Niwano guided me and believing in the Buddha's existence and arrangement were both a blessing.

Taking advantage of the wonderful and strong relationships with neighbors and relatives of the members in Sri Lanka, we started a new style of Dharma dissemination called family *hoza*, in which members use their houses as a place to study and learn the teaching together. Members volunteer to let their homes be used for family *hoza*, and now there are about ninety such people.

In 2017, we constructed a new building for the Sri Lanka Dharma Center and held an inaugural ceremony for its completion. The ceremony also celebrated the enshrinement of the focus of devotion (a statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni), which was overseen by President-Designate Kosho Niwano. I felt my mind fill with great delight and deep gratitude when Rev. Kosho unveiled the Buddha statue as ten Theravada Buddhist monks chanted sutras.

At one time, Founder Niwano received a divine

prediction through Cofounder Naganuma that through Rissho Kosei-kai, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra would spread across the world. We are living in an age when a large number of foreigners are coming to Japan to work and support our country. I will dedicate myself to diligent practice so I can help connect people from many countries to the Dharma.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Buddha, Founder Niwano, President Niwano, Cofounder Naganuma, Rev. Wakiya, and all of the people who have supported me and enabled me to enjoy this wonderful life.

Thank you very much.



The Youth Seminar of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center in 2017

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 13, Encouragement to Hold Firm

(1)

In the opening of this chapter, thousands of bodhisattvas and others in the assembly declare their devotion and determination to keep the teaching alive through the ages. Then Shakyamuni's foster mother, Mahaprajapati, and his former wife, Yashodhara, are both in turn assured of buddhahood.

Here, then, following the story of the dragon king's daughter in the preceding chapter, "Devadatta," the doctrine of women's attainment of buddhahood is fully stated. These two women are *bhikshunis*, or nuns, who are highly cultivated and have accumulated virtue. They had the direct instruction of the Buddha and yet they are the last to be given assurance of buddhahood—even after the little dragon girl, who was an indirect disciple, having been taught by Manjushri.

We may find two lessons in this situation.

Accepting the Dharma with a Clean Mind

The first lesson is identical with that of Ananda and Rahula: namely, that it is difficult to influence people who are very close. (In this case, the woman who reared Shakyamuni from infancy and the woman who had been his wife and had borne him a son.)

Someone unrelated to his or her teacher, like the dragon king's daughter and Manjushri, often finds it easier to accept the Dharma than someone closely related, such as a parent or spouse. In the latter case, emotions get in the way.

We may thus see the deliberate delay in assurance here as a means of teaching this truth. There is no sense at all that the two *bhikshunis* are inferior to the dragon girl.

The second lesson in this passage is that as long as the teaching is rightly transmitted, it does not matter who imparts it. Similarly, as long as the teaching is accepted right away, it does not matter whether the

person is well educated or not, for all gain the same awakening of the Buddha.

We who are living today should be most grateful for this teaching, for liberation is at hand for anyone who has a clean mind and is truly receptive to the Dharma. It does not matter whether we are the Buddha's direct disciple or we live thousands of years after him. Nor does it matter what country or ethnic group we belong to.





The Bodhisattvas' Pledge to Disseminate the Teaching

This chapter mainly relates how the bodhisattvas and others in the assembly, deeply moved by what the Buddha has taught so far (especially his exposition in the previous chapter of the truth that all people equally possess buddha-nature), vow to protect and practice this precious teaching even at the cost of their lives.

“Encouragement to hold firm” usually means urging others to receive and retain the Buddha’s teaching. Interestingly, however, the chapter does not discuss encouraging others to hold firm, but the bodhisattvas’ own pledge to hold firm. The lesson here is that we cannot encourage others to do something unless we first resolve to do it ourselves; we cannot truly guide others to the teaching unless we practice it ourselves. In that sense, the title of this chapter has deep significance.

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. 133–36.



The Meaning of Being Alive

THIS month, we Buddhists observe the anniversary of Shakyamuni's entrance into nirvana. In the President's Message for this month, Rev. Nichiko Niwano tells us that Shakyamuni indicates through his own death the truth that all living beings, without exception, cannot escape it. He also teaches us the meaning of life as a human being: that, as implied in chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, "Teachers of the Dharma," we were born into this world out of a wish to bring liberation to all people.

The meaning of life lies in awakening to the role that each of us is given, trying our best to fulfill that role, and taking delight in making the people around us happy.

Some time ago, an elementary school student participated in a Rissho Kosei-kai study tour to a country affected by war. The students were there to meet children who had lost their parents in the war and to give them "Little Bags of Dreams" (small handmade bags containing toys and stationery, which are prepared by Rissho Kosei-kai members).

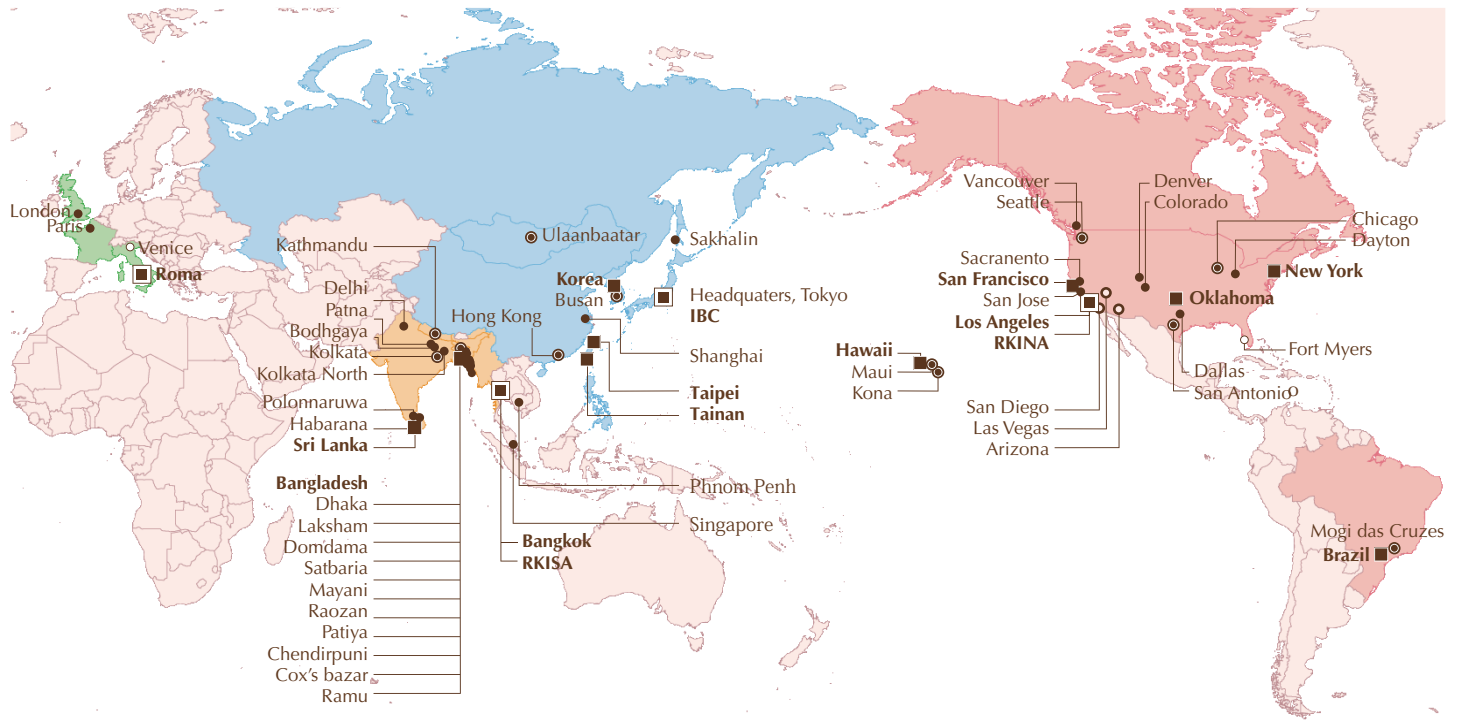
This student wore an artificial eye, which he couldn't keep in for a long time since doing so caused terrible pain. On that day, however, he actively played his role without taking off his artificial eye until all of the bags were handed out. His attitude to do the best he could in the present moment deeply impressed me.

I learned from him the attitude of accepting one's fate, about which one can do nothing, and always looking to the future. I hope each of us will brighten our own life in this world into which we wished to be born.

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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