

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



6
2020

VOL. 177

Founder's Essay

Remembering the Importance of Humbling Yourself

No matter what his monastic or lay disciples asked him, Shakyamuni Buddha would always praise them, saying, “Good! Good! You have asked an excellent question.” Then he would carefully explain the answer until they understood. He never looked at them with an incredulous expression, as if to say, “You don’t even understand that?” Because of this, simply meeting Shakyamuni or hearing his voice brightened his disciples’ hearts like sunshine bursting out from behind the clouds.

Among the members who are assigned responsibilities at Dharma centers, I see some who grow because of it, but there are also those for whom it has the opposite effect. What makes the difference? I believe it comes from whether they understand the notion that

everyone is learning from them, or if they feel that they are learning from everyone else. When others respond, “Yes, yes!” and accept whatever you say, it’s easy to allow it to puff up your ego. This can, in turn, expose your bad habits.

Being appointed to a Dharma role means receiving the gift of practicing reverence for others’ buddha-nature. If you think to yourself, “How many times do I have to say it until they understand?” this is proof that you are beginning to become arrogant. The heart of humility is feeling grateful to the members for causing you to take the Buddha’s compassion to heart.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 186–87

Living the Lotus Vol. 177 (June 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.

Do Not Be Defeated by a Lazy Mind

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Knowing the Importance of Diligence

There is a funny verse in a Japanese song from the 1960s (“Sudara Bushi,” by the Crazy Cats) that perfectly expresses the workings of our minds. It goes, “I know, but I just can’t help it.”

We are apt to either not do what we should, or do what we decided not to. We often reflect on our behavior and say to ourselves, “I know, but I just can’t help it,” just as the song says, don’t we?

Buddhism teaches us that it is important to “always be diligent.” The teachings of Confucianism and other ancient philosophies explain the importance of always learning and making the effort to lead a virtuous life. The reason for this is that the cultivation of the human mind has no ending point where we can say, “This is good enough.”

Generally speaking, the Buddha Way is called “the unsurpassable Way,” which means “the very best Way that no other exceeds.” However, I think it is better to interpret this as meaning, “Even if you think you’ve awakened to it, that is not the final goal. There is no end to the number of opportunities for you to open your eyes to wisdom.” This stimulates us to aim for further progress.

It is important to always be diligent, but we are liable to be defeated by thoughts such as, “It can’t hurt to let things slide, just a little bit.”

Chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra, “Peaceful and Agreeable Practices,” gives us these lines of scripture: “They will rid themselves of laziness / And all thoughts of indolence. / They will free themselves from worries / And teach the Dharma compassionately.” The Buddha must have understood that we sometimes feel like letting our practice slide, and therefore he expounded this chapter, which allows us to clear away the various worries and delusions that spring forth and, with a peaceful mind of our own accord, agreeably and joyfully be diligent in the practice.





Someone Is Waiting for You

“Always studying and mastering something. What could be happier than that?” These are Confucius’s words. The meaning is that, just like children who repeatedly imitate the actions of the adults they admire, when we have objectives and continue our studies in order to achieve them, there is no way that the experience would not be enjoyable.

This also applies to the world of faith. “Try to keep a smile in mind,” “Don’t forget to be grateful,” and so on—if we can realize our daily goals and the purpose of our faith, no matter what these may be, then all we have to do is be diligent so we live up to our ideals. When this becomes habit, our joy is further increased.

With this in mind, understanding the goals and purpose behind why you have faith and the reason you’re being diligent every day becomes the foundation of joyfully being diligent.

However, even though we know this, it is only human to be defeated by the temptations of our innermost hearts. Frankly, I think it is natural to get distracted or want to take it easy, and occasionally it’s necessary to have a place for our minds to escape to. At such times, it’s fine to do so, as long as we don’t forget our goals and purpose.

I do not think, for example, that just because a sutra recitation or a gathering of the sangha has been decided upon, you should force yourself to do it if you aren’t feeling well or if you’re tired because you’ve been very busy. In other words, in order to continue being diligent, you should avoid forcing yourself, and rest when you need to.

“Peaceful and Agreeable Practices” also says, “Show compassion for all, / And never have a thought of laziness.” These verses mean that when you are actively thinking of other people, your mind will not get tired or lazy. You might call to mind the image of a mother willing to take on any hardship for the sake of her child, no matter how tired she feels. Put differently, this is like when you realize that someone is waiting for your help, and you become far removed from the self-centered mind as your desire to help that person comes springing forth and every action of your diligence is turned into happiness and joy.

The world, not only Japan, is suffering from various difficulties. The scripture tells us to “teach the Dharma compassionately.” Don’t you have someone nearby who is waiting for you to do so?

From *Kosei*, June 2020





Following the Way Single-Mindedly



Mrs. Chen Yoshie
Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei, Taiwan, on February 4, 2020, during the memorial day ceremony for Founder Nikkyo Niwano.

ON December 9, 2019, thanks to the warm support of my fellow sangha members, I was able to have the Gohonzon (an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as the focus of devotion, bestowed from the Tokyo headquarters) enshrined in the altar of my home in Vietnam. Today, with a deep feeling of gratitude for this blessing, I would like to reflect on my Dharma journey.

I was born to a kind and caring father and a cheerful mother as the youngest of their four children. In addition to my parents, my paternal grandmother was also a member of Rissho Kosei-kai, which means I'm a third-generation member.

I started going to the Dharma center when I was still in my mother's womb. When I was in elementary school, I joined the fife-and-drum band and took part in volunteer cleanup activities. I also participated in group pilgrimages to the Tokyo headquarters. When I became a junior high student, I joined Dharma study sessions as part of the student group.

As a college student, I attended training sessions at the Nagoya Dharma Center and participated in a parade during the Gifu Nobunaga Festival with other student-group members. I attended Dharma center activities whenever I was invited. However, because some people in Japan had distrust and suspicion toward religion, being a member of Rissho Kosei-kai was something embarrassing for me. I never talked about it at school, keeping it even from my close friends.

After graduating from college, I began working for a hotel. I liked the hospitality business, and this job felt like my calling. I was pleased to see the customers' happy faces. I found the work rewarding, but the sense of satisfaction I felt was only temporary, and I gradually began to wonder if it was the kind of life I really wanted.

One day during that time, an issue of Rissho

Kosei-kai's weekly newspaper, *Kosei Shimbun*, caught my eye even though I didn't normally read the paper. It was a special issue on the passing of Founder Nikkyo Niwano, and it featured many photos of the Founder and a large number of people who had gathered for the funeral to say farewell to him.

Looking at those photos, I was convinced that the Founder's life had been a most wonderful one. I wished strongly that I would be able to live like him. As I liked English and children, I thought I would become an English teacher and work to help children become positive about their future. In order to make this wish come true, I went to England to improve my English. I felt as if the Founder encouraged me to do so.

I learned a lot of important things in England, but the most precious of all was realizing the value of having a religious faith. There were thousands of students in England from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. While meeting many of them, the traits that attracted me most were generosity and open-mindedness, which I found in people who had religious faith. I also learned the value of Buddhism from a Turkish woman who was Muslim. She excitedly explained to me a teaching that I later recognized as the Eightfold Path.



Mrs. Chen delivers a Dharma Journey talk at Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei.

After I came back to Japan, I was eager to learn more about Buddhism and Rissho Kosei-kai. Up until that point I'd been passive about faith, but now I was seeking faith on my own accord. I began to take part in the activities of the Dharma center again. I was happy to study Buddhism and assist with the youth group. My devotion was recognized, and I was put in charge of general affairs for the youth group. I served in that role for one and a half years.

During that time, I went to the Dharma center almost every day and thought about how to motivate more people to come to its events and activities. While I was performing my role as best I could, I felt that a power greater than me was working to support me. At that time I had only shallow knowledge about Buddhism, and I couldn't explain Rissho Kosei-kai to others very well. However, by following the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, leading a life closely linked to the Three Treasures (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), and engaging in the Dharma center's activities single-mindedly, I began to realize that there is truth in this world and the Buddha is always protecting us. I'd found the key to a happy life.

Thanks to this realization, I began to think of hardships as a message from the Buddha that it was necessary for me to grow. I set my mind on always living powerfully and positively wherever I went, whoever I met, and whatever circumstances I came across.

A few years after this, I married a Taiwanese man I'd met while studying in England, and we moved to Taiwan together. There are Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma centers in Taiwan, which was a relief to my parents. Since I'd realized through my experience with the youth group that serving at the Dharma center would set my life in order, I visited it as often as I could.

While struggling with the language barrier in Taiwan, I experienced childbirth, child-rearing, and other life events. As the Taipei Dharma Center was close to my home, however, I continued my involve-

ment in activities such as worshipping, performing center duties, or practicing donation. Enveloped in the warmth of the sangha, I could live every day free of anxiety.

My husband and I lived with my husband's parents, and since I'd grown up hearing the importance of "respect for parents," "ancestor appreciation," and "bodhisattva practice" through Rissho Kosei-kai's activities, I thought it was a good opportunity to practice filial piety. I enjoyed life with my in-laws, who are kind and open-minded.

During this time, the Taipei Dharma Center underwent a change. The minister, Mr. Chien Ru-Lian, who was fluent in Japanese, was succeeded by his daughter, Mrs. Chien Miao-Fang, the present minister. It was a big shift, as the baton of the Dharma was relayed from the generation that understood Japanese (they were in school while Taiwan was under Japanese rule between 1895 and 1945) to the generation that didn't. This was a challenge for the new minister Rev. Chien Miao-Fang because she couldn't share the Dharma guidance, which was written in Japanese, instantly with members who only understood Chinese. I volunteered to be a bridge between the two languages as much as possible.

After a while, however, I was asked to move to Vietnam to help my husband, whose company was located there. My heart ached as I had to give up my role in the Taipei Dharma Center, but I tore myself from Taiwan and moved to Vietnam with my three children.

There was no Dharma center or sangha in Vietnam, meaning that my only support was morning and evening sutra recitation. Thanks to sutra recitation, I could continue to have the Buddha as the center of my life—it also nourished me spiritually and helped me live every day positively. Even though I was no longer in Taiwan, I often thought about what I could do to support the Taipei Dharma Center.

Then, one day in 2019, six years after I'd moved to Vietnam, Rev. Chien suggested that I receive the Gohonzon, bestowed by the Tokyo headquarters. I was truly happy to hear her words since this had been my long-cherished hope, but I couldn't readily accept her offer because I was desperately struggling to make up for the loss of an experienced staffer who'd quit my husband's company earlier that year. Although I'd been helping my husband with his work for three years at that point, I was far from a sufficient substitute for the staff member, who had seventeen years of experience.

Rev. Chien told me that if I wished from the bottom of my heart to receive the Gohonzon, a path would open up on its own. I truly wished to receive the headquarters-bestowed Gohonzon, but I was equally concerned about my husband. He was extremely busy with his work and I was afraid that my further engagement with the faith might make him busier, as I wouldn't be able to help him with his work as much as I wished and he would need to take care of the children more often. When I told him my wish to receive the Gohonzon, however, he simply said, "Okay, fine." My in-laws also accepted my wish happily.

On the day of enshrinement at my home, Rev. Chien and twenty sangha members of the Taipei Dharma Center flew all the way from Taiwan to Vietnam to participate in the ceremony. It was definitely the most significant event in my life.

I was deeply moved to receive warm words of congratulation from many people. I have walked the path on my Dharma journey keeping in mind the phrase "following the way single-mindedly." But while I was grateful for the congratulatory words, I also felt tense—I couldn't help but think that the crucial stage of my life had only just begun in terms of my career, child-rearing, and disseminating the faith. I believe the Buddha has arranged this opportunity to make me take a step forward to deepen my faith.

My wish right now is to share more about Rissho Kosei-kai with my family in Taiwan. As the first step in this, I hope to take my in-laws on a group pilgrimage to the Tokyo headquarters, which the Taipei Dharma Center is currently planning. My grand dream is to join all of you and, as Founder Niwano showed us throughout his life, continue following the Way vigorously and single-mindedly with the Buddha's teaching as my guide, praying for the happiness of all people.

Lastly, I would like to express my deep gratitude for this wonderful opportunity. Thank you very much.



Mrs. Chen (second from right, front row) after the Gohonzon enshrinement ceremony at her home.

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 16

The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata (1)



The doctrine of the ultimate reality of all things was explained in chapter 2, “Skillful Means,” the pillar of the first half of the sutra. The doctrine is summed up in this line: “From the first to the last, such an ultimate identity.” This is to say that although everything we see or sense displays differences (in appearance, nature, embodiment, potential, function, cause, condition, effect, or reward), everything is equal in that all things function according to the Dharma. This is a strict philosophical truth, but simply understanding it does not immediately lead to liberation and the feeling that life is worth living.

Accordingly, Shakyamuni expounded this truth step by step using concepts that humans could understand—namely that the ultimate substance of humankind is buddha-nature. Even though he had clearly stated this from the beginning, it was hard for the congregation at large to grasp the truth. So, he used parables and stories of his previous lives to draw his listeners in, preparing their minds little by little to accept the truth.

The Declaration of the Eternal Life of the Buddha

In this chapter, “The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata,” the truth is clearly revealed: the life span of the Buddha is immeasurable, the Buddha with eternal life is called the Eternal Original Buddha, and Shakyamuni Buddha is the Eternal Original Buddha. The chapter also explains that humankind and all other things are given life by the Eternal Original Buddha and that they are his children. In this way, the cold and philosophical perception of the ultimate reality of all things becomes filled with human warmth, and people begin to feel gratitude upon realizing that, deep inside, they are caused to live by the Eternal Buddha’s compassion. At this stage comes true happiness and a sense of the worth of being alive.

The philosophical perception taught in the first half of the Lotus Sutra is now, in the second half, given a spiritual lift as it takes on the highest ideal of a religious teaching. This chapter is thus considered to embody the spirit not only of the Lotus Sutra but also of all the scriptures of Buddhism.

The truth is explained rationally at first, but in the parable of the good physician it is put into terms that are easily understood by all. In this sense, the parable forms an important part of the chapter.

The Parable of the Good Physician

This parable tells of a physician renowned for his knowledge and skill with medicines, for he can cure any disease.

This physician has many children, and once, when he has to go away to attend to a matter, his children drink some of his poisonous medicines. Such an event would never have happened if he’d been at home, but in his absence the children pass the time doing as they please, which leads to this tragedy.

As the poison begins to work, the children throw themselves on the ground in agony. At this point, the physician comes home. Some of the children are not





so badly affected, but some are delirious and have completely lost their senses. Still, they are all overjoyed to see their father come home.

They welcome him home and tell him that they have, in their stupidity, mistakenly drunk poisonous medicines. They beg him to cure them and save their lives.

The physician sees how his children are suffering and sets about compounding curative herbs of pleasing colors, tastes, and smells. He then gives this medicine to the children, telling them, “This is an excellent medicine. You should take this medicine immediately. It will quickly eliminate your suffering and ensure that hereafter you never become sick again.”

The children who are not so badly affected and have not lost their senses take the medicine and are immediately cured, but the ones in whom the poison has worked deeply will not take the very medicine they begged for—being out of their minds, they do not like the color and smell.

The physician thinks to himself, *These children are to be pitied. The poison has completely distorted their thinking. I must devise some skillful means to make them take this medicine.*

He then gathers the children together and tells them that he is getting on in years and will soon die. Still, he has affairs to attend to and must go away again. He will leave the medicine he has prepared for them.

With this, he sets out. He has not been gone long before he sends a servant back with word that he has died.

The children are shocked and thrown into sorrow at this news. They keenly feel their desolation for the first time, and the shock restores their senses. The medicine their father left now seems pleasant to look at and smell. They swallow it and are promptly cured. At this point, their father comes home, alive and well.

The Root Cause of All Kinds of Desire

The physician in this parable is the Buddha, and the children represent ourselves. The poisonous medicine symbolizes various earthly desires and the good medicine is the teaching of the Buddha.

Ordinary people are subject to all kinds of desires—they think that only what they can see with their eyes really exists and they become obsessed with it, causing them to develop greedy minds. Indeed, all our minds are taxed and in pain on account of seeing our own bodies, money, and other material things, as well as the events occurring around us, as the only things that really exist.

The Truth of Dependent Origination

Shakyamuni taught that all visible or apparent forms in the world are but temporary appearances brought into being by combinations of causes and conditions. If these causes and conditions did not exist, neither would these visible forms, and different causes and conditions would produce other visible forms accordingly. On the basis of this truth, he devised doctrines such as the Twelve Causes, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Six Perfections, and so on. These teachings enabled many people to set aside delusion and attain a peaceful state of mind.

To be continued

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. 156–63).



Realizing the Purpose of Our Faith

I HOPE everyone is doing well. A few months ago, hardly any of us anticipated that the novel coronavirus would spread so widely on a global scale.

Last month, President Nichiko Niwano told us in his message that we can lead our lives with a calm and peaceful mind if we have absolute faith in the Buddha's teaching and are always diligent in our practice. As the struggle against the coronavirus pandemic continues with no end at sight, some of us may get tired of it and begin to wonder if it's okay to let our guard down a little.

In his message for this month, President Niwano states the importance of realizing the purpose of our faith and always thinking of other people in order to not be defeated by a lazy mind.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano made a great wish when he founded Rissho Kosei-kai: to "liberate people from suffering and make the world a peaceful place." This month, by making the Founder's wish the goal of our faith, I hope we will treasure each and every day and continue our diligence.

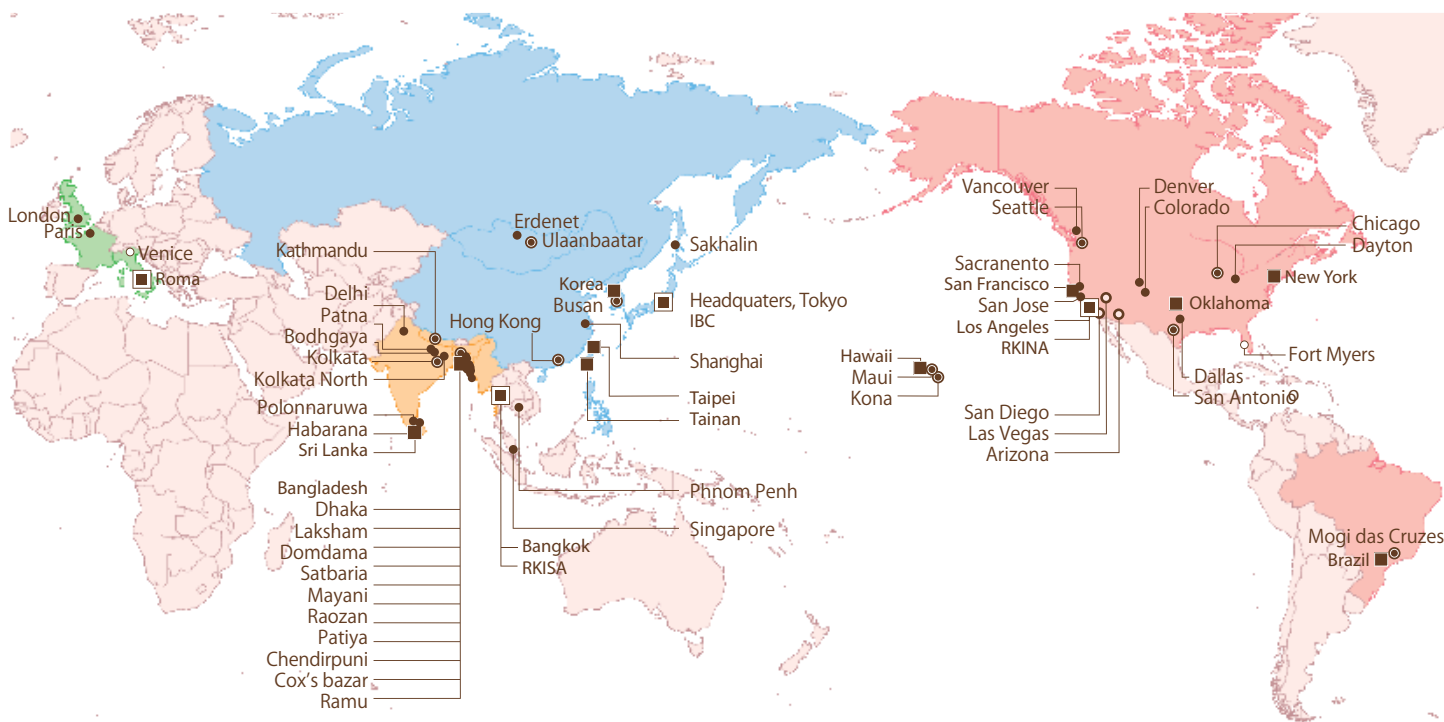
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