

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

Living Three Temporal States of Existence

BUDDHISM teaches us that our life is not limited to only this world, but extends across three temporal states of existence: the past, present, and future. This is precisely why it is important to live the present to its fullest. When we do so, we manifest the potential of our past, and the way we live the present also secures our future peace and security.

Losing sight of the fact that our life spans three temporal states of existence deprives us of a bearing on the purpose for our lives, and how we should live them. When this happens, we end up seeking momentary sensual pleasures, chasing after material wealth, and wasting resources without hesitation by living in a way that is destructive to the environment. We fall prey to a lifestyle in which we ourselves slam the door shut on our own futures.

It is said that living things have a propensity to push the evolutionary development of their unique characteristics to excess, and the result can sometimes be fatal for the species. There is a theory, for example, that having become too enormous to survive, dinosaurs may have gone extinct due in part to this tendency. Organizations and societies are no different. Everyone knows they must stop things in their tracks before reaching such a point, but it becomes impossible to actually bring things to a halt.

There is an urgent need to take fully to heart this understanding that our life extends across the three temporal states of existence.

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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 GUIDANCE

Wasting Time

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

In the Harmony of the Universe

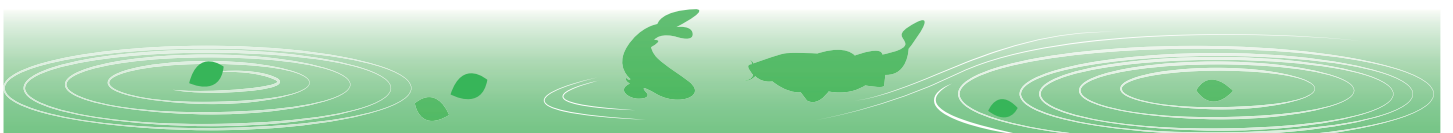
Many of us think that spending the whole day lolling around and doing nothing is an example of wasting time. We think that we should not squander the slightest bit of time but keep busy. We believe that is a meaningful way to spend our time, and that wasting time is no different than wasting life itself.

The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger (4 BCE–65 CE) left us the words “Live every day as if it were your last.” From ancient times, it has been widely felt that it is important not to waste time and to spend each day with this attitude. When we think about wasting time in light of the infinite expanse of the universe, however, what we see is a much broader, more relaxed point of view that is not shackled to time.

A book discussing the Buddha Way tells us that getting up in the morning and going to bed at night are all manifestations of wonderful workings. Our everyday lives are at all times maintained by the workings of wonderful forces. At this very moment, we are caused to live in this realm of great harmony within the infinite expanse of the universe, which is sustained by the unrestrained activity of that wonderfulness.

The wonder of the origin of the universe, the wonder of our receiving life as human beings here on our planet Earth that is replete with all elements that support the existence of living organisms, and the wonder of being caused to live right now, in the midst of the great harmony of the infinite expanse of the universe—thinking about how time is spent from this broad perspective, I feel that I should not say, based on my own narrow thinking, such things as “That is a waste of time” or “That is reckless indulgence.”

Doing nothing but lolling around may appear to be nothing else but laziness. Speaking in terms of the essence of the Buddha Dharma, however, we can perceive that not a single human being, thing, or phenomenon is without purpose. Just as in the expression, “The essence of the Dharma is neither deluded nor awakened; there are neither ordinary persons nor saints,” when we do not look at things from the egoistical perspective of making distinctions between ordinary persons and those considered saints, we can sense the great workings of the gods and the buddhas.



Perceiving Wonders

Well, then, for us human beings who live in this realm of harmony, what does it mean to “waste time”?

The Lotus Sutra teaches us that we all “have been born in this world with a wish.” It also teaches us that this wish is to bring happiness to as many people as possible. In other words, as members of this realm of harmony, and so that all of us can lead happy lives, we were born, and are caused to live, in order to maintain this harmony. Then, what we may call “wasting time” is, above all, words that hurt other people and self-centered attitudes that consider only what is good for oneself. An athlete has said, “Time is a part of life,” and perhaps in that sense, wasting time may indeed be considered wasting life.

While we may not know it and may be unaware of it, however, we are apt to waste life. I have learned that feeling keenly the impermanence of life, we can understand clearly that we should be grateful for being alive now and that realization gives rise to the aspiration to be diligent. Merely passing time aimlessly without the realization of the wonder of being alive now—and gratitude for it—may lead us to behave in ways that disturb harmony.

Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) wrote, “Reflect upon your own body and mind that will transmigrate in the realm of birth and death, and thereby give rise to the aspiration of the bodhisattvas who pray that other people will find happiness first.” Dogen is here arguing that when we contemplate impermanence and the wonder of the infinite expanse of the universe that sustains our world in exquisite balance, then as people who are building harmony, we must respect one another and lead our lives by getting along with each other.

In Japan these days we are welcoming the arrival of spring, when new plants and flowers sprout and bud. That we cherish the plants and flowers and enjoy them means that we have the sensibility to contemplate impermanence and the wonder of life. That is also an opportunity to recognize the importance of leading life to the fullest in the here and now.

From *Kosei*, April 2017



Spiritual Journey

My Encounter with the Dharma

by Mr. Robinson Kasozi
International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

This spiritual experience was delivered during IBC's Sunday Service on June 26, 2016.

GOOD morning everyone. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my spiritual experience in front of you today.

My name is Robinson Kasozi and I am from Uganda. When I first came to Japan, I started working at a company called Akiyama Shokai, a vehicle recycling and merchandizing company in Ibaraki Prefecture. That is where I first met Ms. Mitsuko Akiyama, my boss. Ms. Akiyama was like a mother in Japan to me. She was the one who guided me to Rissho Kosei-kai. Unfortunately, "Akiyama Mom" passed away in February 2013.

It has been eight years since I became a member of this Buddhist organization. Now, I have been practicing Buddhism at IBC of Rissho Kosei-kai together with my friends from Uganda and other non-Japanese fellow workers. At first, it was not so easy for me to have faith in Buddhism because I was born and raised in a Christian family.

Although it was not easy for me to have faith in the Buddha at first, "Akiyama Mom" had always treated me like her own child every day, and guided me by always saying, "You will surely be happy if you practice the Buddha's teaching." She accepted me the way I am and always embraced me in heart and body. Looking at "Akiyama Mom," I saw the Buddha's compassion in her. Thanks to her, I was able to encounter the Dharma and become a member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

We lived together like a family and always had meals together. She also took me on many overnight trips here and there, together with her family. She encouraged me to try all sorts of Japanese food, saying, "Robinson, try this. It's delicious." Thanks to her, now I can eat all kinds of Japanese foods. I like natto (fermented soybeans), oshinko (salted Japanese

pickles), miso soup, and salmon roes very much.

She always told me, "Robinson, all human beings, whether he or she is black or white, equally have parents. Nobody is born from a tree branch; everyone is given life by their parents. So your father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, great grandfather, great grandmother are very important for you. You must pay respect to all of them. Since you are living far away from your country now, you should try expressing your gratitude to your parents and ancestors by reciting the sutra every day." She also kindly taught me how to practice sutra recitation.

In 2011, the Gohonzon was enshrined at my home. "Mom" was very pleased that I was able to recite the sutra by myself every day at home.

The sad thing is, "Mom" suddenly passed away in 2013. But there is nothing to worry about, because she is always living in my heart and always watching over and protecting me. I would like to continue to follow her instructions, spread the Buddha's teachings to as many people as possible, and introduce them to the Dharma.

My dream is to build a Dharma center in Uganda and other countries in Africa. I'll make my dream



Mr. Kasozi delivers his spiritual experience during IBC's Sunday Service.

Spiritual Journey

come true someday. I'm sure "Mom" will be more pleased than anyone else when I achieve this dream. I will really appreciate all of your support towards this dream.

As my daily Dharma practice, I want to become a person who is cheerful, kind, and warmhearted, like Founder Niwano. In order to achieve this goal, I will try finding good points in others, and making as many sangha friends as possible. The only way is to practice the teachings of the Buddha repeatedly and ask for forgiveness from the Buddha, and forgive anyone that has done bad to you. So everyone here, please always pray to have eyes to see the best in others, a heart that forgives the worst, a mind that forgives the bad, and a soul that never loses faith. Faith and

prayers, both are invisible, but they make impossible things possible. So please pray always, and have faith, and you will win.

Since I started practicing the Buddha's teachings, I feel that the Buddha has guided me in many ways. So everyone here, I recommend you to practice the Buddha's teachings every day. You will be able to overcome the problems you have.

So "Mom," I vow to try my best from now on. I love you "Mom," and everyone here. I will love you the same way yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

I would like to show my gratitude to the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, President Niwano, Rev. Yoshinaga, and everyone here. Thank you for your kind attention.



Mr. Kasozi (second from left) participating in sutra recitation with the Akiyama family.



Childcare lifeline

How can I convey the preciousness of life to my child, who is absorbed in video games?



Q

I am concerned about the contents of the video games and card games that my second-grade son is playing. Many of the games involve battles, in which dead fighters can come back to life by “resuscitation cards” or “reset buttons.” Since I want him to realize the preciousness of life, I am worried about any influence these games can have on his mind.

A

You are such a wonderful mother, trying to convey the preciousness of life to your son, while simultaneously tackling many other concerns.

People develop their ways of thinking and their sense of value through their encounters. We hope that you will take the opportunity in your daily life to let your son understand that dead people do not really come back to life, and that our actual world is different from the virtual world of video games.

For this to happen, the child’s sentiment must be cultivated and enriched. You should also tell your son that there is “life” not only in animals and plants, but also in inanimate things, such as pencils, shoes, chairs, and toys, thereby helping him develop the feeling that he should use everything with care.


Children grow spiritually by experiencing emotions such as sorrow, suffering, pain, and dislike, which are to be felt when children make contact with plants or small animals in nature, or when they interact with many people. Raising animals is one such experience. If a pet which the child loves dies, he or she can no longer play with it. At such times, it is important for parents to share the sorrow with the child, make a small grave for the animal, and place flowers there. Through an experience like this, the child can learn that it is sad to witness the death of living things, but human beings must overcome the loss.


Also, if children experience the death of their grandfather or grandmother, they must face the fact that they cannot talk to them any longer. Through these sorrowful experiences, children will understand the meaning of death.

Another thing, which is just as important as telling children the preciousness of life, is having a close interaction between parents and children, with plenty of affec-

tion. Are you telling your son clearly, “You are a treasure to Father and Mother,” while frequently showing physical affection? People learn to appreciate the lives of others only when they have an experience of being valued themselves. So when you see your son showing consideration toward his friends and acting with kindness toward them, please say to him, “You are so kind! Your friends look very pleased. I am happy that you have become such a warm-hearted child!” Your praise would surely please your son, and would also allow him to reflect on his kind actions toward his friends, and the significance of being kind to others. These factors will work together to help your son grasp the significance of valuing the lives of others.

Children will grow just as they are reared. We hope that everyday interactions between parents and children will contribute to the cultivation of the children’s hearts and minds.

 **Point 1** Children should know that the dead will never come back to life.
.....
Because of the influence of games and TV, more than a few children believe that the dead can be revived. Adults have a role in teaching children the solemn reality of death.

 **Point 2** Children are entitled to believe in parents’ love.
.....
Only when children know that they are loved by their parents will they understand that others are equally precious. It is because children know they are precious beings loved by their parents that their desire to be kind to others will sprout and grow.

(Answers in this series are provided by the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education.)

“Childcare Lifeline” is produced every month with the cooperation of the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education. The institute believes that changes for the better in parents’ thinking and behavior will also bring about changes in their children. The institute holds lectures and seminars for parents throughout Japan and in other countries and also offers parents personal counseling on childrearing. Since its foundation in 1975, the institute’s programs have helped parents and children grow spiritually together to create harmonious, happy homes.

Passing Along the Preciousness of Life

PRESIDENT Nichiko Niwano teaches us in one of his books that “Countless living things exist in this world, and the fact that among all of them we were born as human beings is rare to the point of being astonishing, and therefore is something for which we should be grateful. Even though every one of us will die sooner or later, we are each being caused to live, and are alive, here and now. The foundation of living as a Buddhist consists of recognizing the preciousness of this miraculous life, and praising and paying reverence to all other lives” (*Kokoro no manako o hiraku* [Opening the Mind’s Eye], pp. 70–71).

In order for you to convey the preciousness of life to your son, it is necessary for him to learn by experience that there is a limit to life. Growing plants or keeping insects can provide good examples of such experiences, and are activities which you and your son can do together. By observing how living things grow and eventually die, both of you can learn firsthand that every life is limited. It would also be important for you to tell your son stories about his birth, conveying to him the wonder of being born.

In the process of having these interactions, you and your son will be able to develop an appreciation of the wonder and preciousness of how we are caused to live here and now. Such mother-and-child interactions, when they are repeated every day, would help your son cultivate in his heart and mind reverence for the preciousness of life.

(Editorial Supervision by the Department of Dharma Education & Human Resources Development, Rissho Kosei-kai)



Please give us your comments!



We welcome comments on our newsletter *Living the Lotus*.

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Director's Column

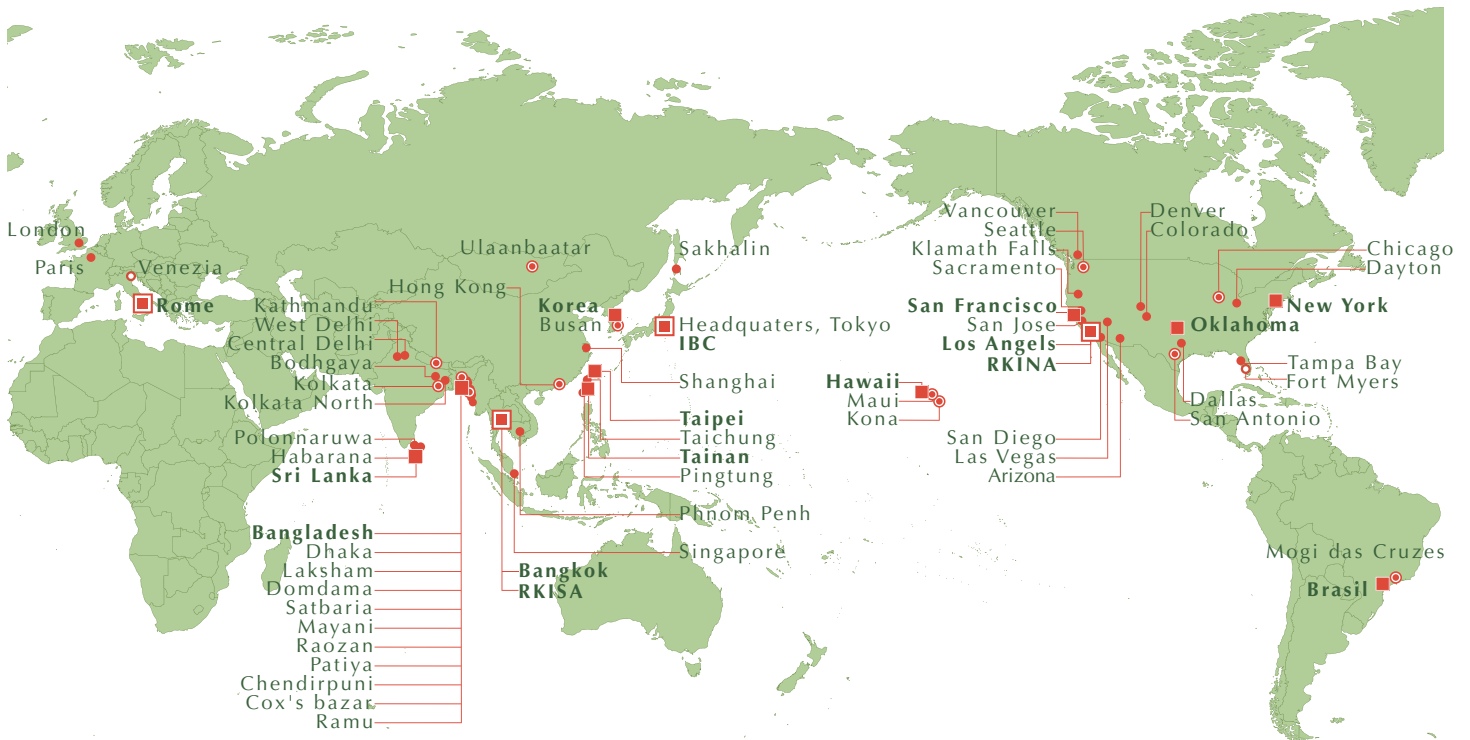
Light Up the World with Your Gratitude

Do you remember President Niwano's New Year's guidance? I asked members this at our Bangkok Dharma Center. They cheerfully responded, "Its theme is 'Being Thankful.'" Yes, they were right. In his guidance, President Niwano writes, "Let us express and practice our gratitude in our daily lives." So how is your practice going?

A member of the Bangkok sangha said, "I say 'thank you' more than a hundred times a day, as many customers visit my shop and I voice my thanks several times to each of them." Another member said, "As I live by myself, I have no one at home to whom I can express gratitude directly. So to everything, including the food I take, while putting palms together I say 'thank you.'" When I heard the Bangkok members share their joy of expressing thanks, I was convinced that the practice of gratitude brings us happiness.

We have also learned from President Niwano to be a light in the world. The light of gratitude shines in the world, chasing away the darkness of frustration, anger, and delusion. Let us keep expressing our gratitude and putting it into action in our daily lives.

Rev. Shoko Mizutani
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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