

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

Never Abandoning Love

WHEN you get to the bottom of what the love between a married couple really is, it comes down to not giving up on one another.

Not giving up on each other requires forgiveness. No matter how much two people are in love, if they are right under each other's noses every day from morning till night, they will begin to gradually discover flaws in each other. And if they both find fault with every single thing and argue over their compatibility and the like, they won't be able to remain together for the rest of their lives.

When they marry, a man and woman—who had been strangers to one another up to that point—form a union, so they cannot expect to know everything about each other from the very beginning. Married life is about how to become one in heart and mind to

help and support one another, and how to combine your mutual efforts and grow together as human beings.

Recently, there has been a rising number of men who want to get married but are unsuccessful. Men who feel dejected complain, "For women, marriage is a seller's market, and we're in an era when men have no choice but to indulge them."

However, things like who must accommodate whom do not change with the times. When men and women accept each other's respective characteristics and ways of thinking, it gives birth to an atmosphere of mutual forgiveness.

From *Kaisozuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing Co.), pp. 78–79

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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

Allow Me to Help

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



We Live with Boundless Connections

This month's theme, "Allow Me to Help," is a familiar phrase for us Rissho Kosei-kai members that we use when we do something for others. Dr. Masahiro Mori (b. 1927), a specialist in robotics who is well known as a devout Buddhist, said "In Buddhism, we express our gratitude when we do something, because there is nothing that we can do solely by our own power" (*Imao ikite iku chikara, rokuharamitsu* [The Six Perfections, the power to live the present], Kyoiku Hyoronsha, 2009).

For example, people may suppose that they are standing by their own power, but Dr. Mori writes, "In fact, it is thanks to the support from the ground under their feet and the presence of gravity. So instead of supposing that there is only one cause for what they do or that they do something solely by their own power, they should recognize that everything they do is made possible through the power of others."

Rev. Shundo Aoyama of the Soto sect of Japanese Buddhism wrote about this in easily understood words: "Everything in this world, no matter how small, exists in a state of interrelatedness and they are all connected to each other" (*Doro ga aru kara hana ga saku* [Because there is mud, the flowers bloom], Gentosha, 2016). This means that all things come into being and perish through the workings of interconnected causes and conditions, in other words, dependent origination. And the expression born of this religious worldview is "allow me to help."

In this sense, it can be said that this phrase primarily involves our thoughts of gratitude toward the great force at work that continually causes us to live. The feeling is one of "thanks to everything, I am able to help others."

Furthermore, "allow me to help" can also be used to express humility about your own actions. At such a time, however, it may be the case that a gap occurs between the feelings of the speaker and those of the listener. The person we are talking to may suppose that our attitude is one of hypocritical courtesy, that is, that we are superficially polite, but have a conceited way of saying things or that we seem humble but are actually demonstrating our ego.

If such a misunderstanding takes place, then in some cases I think it might be better



to use the more subjective phrase “I’ll do it,” but because “allow me to help” is a phrase we members of Rissho Kosei-kai frequently use, and because we do feel that “thanks to everything, I am able to do something,” we hope that we can say naturally “allow me to help.”

Being Thankful to the Buddha

We habitually say “allow me to help” without really thinking about it. This is, as I just said, an expression of our feelings that “thanks to everything, I can take this on” and “I am grateful to be able to help.” However, if we forget the “thanks to everything” or the “I am grateful” mindset, then our ego is showing its face and making us think, “I am doing this” or “I will help you.”

In that case, adding “thanks to everything” or “I am grateful” when we say “allow me to help” already shows the sincerity of our feelings. Like the old saying that in everything, the proper form is important, if we repeatedly say the sentence, “thanks to everything, I am grateful that I am able to help,” then the principle of dependent origination will be etched on our hearts, and we will be able to always say those words from the heart. Ideally, in that case, this practice of gratitude, saying “allow me to help,” will be just like the free and unhindered conduct of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and will lead us to happiness and joy without attachments.

However, even though we say “allow me to help” from the heart and we are coming to terms with our thoughts of gratitude to the gods and the buddhas, in some cases that may not necessarily lead directly to joy and happiness. I hear that in the field of caregiving and volunteer work, there are not a few people who must deal with complex emotions. Therefore, it is only natural that some of them may occasionally grumble or complain, saying things like “This is too hard” or “There is no way I will do that.”

Therefore, I think it is important that we people of faith nurture the thought of taking refuge in the Buddha in the course of our daily lives and set our sights on realizing and being grateful for being caused to live by the great force of the universe.

From *Kosei*, May 2017



Finding the Buddha through My Grandmothers' Practice

by Mrs. Joanna Keiko Tanaka-Clark
Hawaii Dharma Center

This testimony was given at the Hawaii Dharma Center in September 2016.

GOOD morning. Thank you, everyone, for allowing me to go on this continuing journey with Risho Kosei-kai and to share my testimony with you today.

My name is Joanna Keiko Tanaka-Clark. I've been married for thirty years to my husband, who is very supportive, and I am also very fortunate to have a daughter who is now twenty-four years old.

I worked for the same company for twenty-eight years until I retired in 2014 due to my health issues. I was diagnosed with a connective tissue disease that affects the eyes and major blood vessels. My father passed away at the age of thirty-four as did my brother when he was twenty-four. They both died of aortic valve dissections. My daughter has also been diagnosed with Marfan syndrome, but has been symptom-free so far.

In 1993, a year after my daughter was born, I had surgery to replace an enlarged aorta valve to prevent a dissection. The doctors were so amazed at how quickly I recovered and returned to work.

However, recently in the last five years I've had to spend time in ICU three times for dissections and bleeding in the brain. I am no longer able to work because I need to

keep my stress level down and manage my blood pressure. I sometimes feel lightheaded, tired, dizzy, and weak due to the various medications that I take. All I can do to feel better is to lie down and rest and wait it through till I feel better.

Recently, it seems that I have become very emotional. I cry about everything remotely sad. I believe it is connected to how I feel physically. It's very difficult to explain but when my physical being is not feeling well, my mental state is also affected.

My grandmother was a Buddhist and a very devoted member of Soka Gakkai International in Hawaii. When I was young, I spent a lot of time with her and she often told me the reason she prayed was so that good things would happen for her family and that all of our hardships or sufferings would go away. I never really understood the practice of "religion." Hardship and suffering happens whether or not you are a devotee. Good things also happen to everybody. Nothing of about religion made any sense to me—the rituals, the praying, the worship, etc.

When I was about seven or eight years old, I had surgery on my foot to remove a tumor and was hospitalized. For three months, every day, I prayed hard to go home because I was so afraid of being in the hospital room together with other children who came from Vietnam after the war.

They had burn scars over their entire bodies; or missing legs and arms. It was traumatizing and so frightening to hear them scream at night in the dark for weeks and weeks. I endured this and every night I prayed so I could go home. But to no avail. I was unable to go home. From that time, I've realized that prayers do not help. I stopped believing in prayer. These were my early beliefs and thoughts about religion.

In late 1990s I was introduced to Risho Kosei-kai by Karen Fujii. We became friends in the seventh grade, she has been my best friend for over forty years. Although we both had different groups of friends before we met, something drew us together and we've stayed the best of friends



Mrs. Joanna Keiko Tanaka-Clark.

ever since. She once told me that we must have known each other in our past lives and the Buddha brought us back together. She would always invite me to visit the Dharma center and attend its activities. She is an inspiration to me; she is always cheerful and always knows how to make me laugh and to enjoy living!

Last year I had the opportunity to participate in the Advanced Lotus Sutra Seminar. After reading, studying, and attending the seminar, I've learned that part of enduring "suffering," or what we believe are "hardships," is based on our own outlook.

Are we realizing the gratitude and thankfulness for the "goodness" in the situation or are we using our mind to focus on what we view as "badness" or "suffering" or the negative aspect. My experience in the hospital as a child could have been different if I had looked at my situation differently. A "suffering" or "hardship" can become nonexistent if I find something that is enjoyable or of interest or to learn from it.

Also I learned that "faith and discernment must go together" as discussed in chapter 4, p. 63 in the book *Buddhism for Today*. It says, "This kind of faith [blind belief] is not a firm faith in the true sense of the term but merely a narrow faith. A true religion can always be understood through reason; this kind of understanding is called discernment." In order to have true power, we need to listen to the preaching and read the Sutra in order to understand the Buddha's teaching.

For example, this might sound trivial or unnoticeable in our everyday, fast-paced life, but when I spent time in the hospital recently, I found joy each time when nurses came to take my blood and I could barely feel the needle. I was so happy and grateful for the blood-draw technician's careful, steady hand. Or looking outside the window and seeing the beautiful sky and trees. Strong appreciation of the simple things.

As a human being I make choices every day. What I choose to do and how I choose to react to others or situations is a choice. The Lotus Sutra teaches us to use our

mind with a compassionate heart, especially when challenged by circumstances and anger is triggered. "Do not return hatred for hatred." It will only put you in a vicious cycle. I've learned to look at other options as to why I perceived someone did something negative or dismissive to me or others. Because it may not be about me, it could be something about what's bothering them or the fact of their ignorance. So now I can address them with a compassionate heart.

Recently I notice something about myself and other people around me. I noticed that I am usually quick to make judgments about others or point out the negative; it's almost a natural human reaction. No one is perfect, and we all have our own disorderly characters and beliefs. I learned that there is no benefit to anyone in harboring anger or discomfort toward others. I should not act purposely to cause problems for others and instead seek to understand their differences. I have been given this opportunity to use tactful means and share the teaching that creates self-awareness; especially with the people close to me.

Last September, JoAnn Ozaki and I attended the Advanced Dharma Teacher Class in San Francisco. I am usually a solitary person. I don't talk to strangers too much and mind my own business, especially when I fly on an airplane.

On our way back from the seminar, we had very short layover in Los Angeles. As we boarded the plane, and got closer to our seats, I noticed that there were Muslim-looking young men sitting all around. A man sitting in front of JoAnn and another Muslim-looking person sitting behind her was constantly hitting her chair. I was scared thinking of the worse things that could happen. Then to make things even more suspicious, after takeoff, the man in the back went to the bathroom, followed by a woman wearing a headscarf who stood in line to go to the bathroom.

Then after her, another man stood up to go to the bathroom. My paranoid mind was thinking that there was a

Spiritual Journey

bomb in the bathroom. Also I thought that the young man next to me was going to hurt me with something; climb over the seats and attack everyone. I was very scared but decided to offer him a cookie but he refused it. When I went to the bathroom and opened the door to return to my seat, that guy next to me was standing right in front of my face, which really startled me.

With courage I decided to converse with him and asked the person next to me whether I could offer him some water. His voice was so sweet. I began a conversation and decided to open up my buddha-nature. He was the sweetest young man and he even told me he loves the Aloha sign on the tower and loved living in Hawaii. He thought it was the best place in the world.

He shared his experience with me that when he was in San Diego, people made funny faces at him when he said thank you. He was a graduate of Farrington High School and currently attending the University of Hawaii working on a political science degree. As a student at UH, he was involved in legislature that gave pay raises for teachers of extracurricular activities. He enjoyed helping people and someday he would like to become governor of this State of Hawaii.

Of all the people, I had been afraid of him because he looked a certain way. I felt very shameful that I might have treated him badly based on what he looked like. I'm glad that I was able to use my buddha-nature to truly see him and sincerely hope the best for him. I hope he will be able to become whoever he would like to be someday.

In chapter 12, "Devadatta," of the Lotus Sutra, I have learned a striking lesson that everything happens for a reason. In "Devadatta" in the second paragraph, p. 156, it states: "If a man endures all persecution and adversity and continues to practice religious disciplines, his hardships will become an indirect cause of his becoming a buddha."

I am thankful that if it wasn't for my devastating illness, I would not have had the opportunity to go the classes held at the Dharma center and learn about what it is to become a buddha.

I am thankful to Rev. Meya, Karen Fujii, and JoAnn Ozaki for believing in me as being worthy to attend the classes, and Janice Tom for being my patient mentor at the Dharma center. I have truly enjoyed the experience and look forward to continuing my journey with Rissho Kosei-kai.

In perspective, our paths in life are usually not predicted by ourselves. Most of us cannot predict what our lives will end up being. Not even those who are fortunate enough to have had a direct vision or goal in life. There are many aspects that can happen or journeys that cannot be possibly foreseen.

My aspiration is to continue to be aware of the limitation of life and to embrace being grateful for everything I have and for the people in my life. Appreciate and enjoy the simple things more and choose how to live better every day. It's our choice that we make now that will predict our future. So let us choose wisely and say yes more often than not.

Thank you very much.

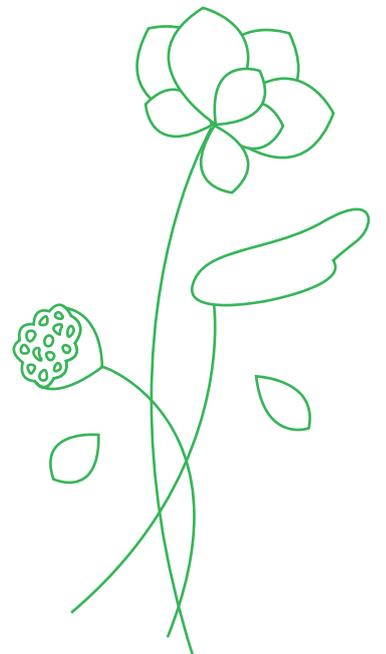


Mrs. Tanaka-Clark (right) offering flowers at the altar of the Dharma Center during the ceremony for Founder Niwano's entrance into nirvana.

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Childcare lifeline

I am anxious about my son, who wants to do everything for himself.

Q

My five-year-old son wants to do everything by himself, saying, “I’ll do it.” I get annoyed, especially when I am rushing to get things done, including household chores. How can I deal with this?



A

I think you are a wonderful mother. You have nurtured your son by helping him to develop self-reliance, so that he tries to do everything by himself.

Early childhood is a stage of human development during which the child learns and grows in many ways toward being independent. Because they are full of curiosity, they have an interest in all things that they can see and touch, and try to experience everything. So they are always moving and running around, and never stay still for a second. On those occasions I hope you will cultivate your son’s interest carefully. I would like you to nurture his curiosity and watch over how he develops it.

I think, if parents are allowed to scold a child during his or her childhood, it should be limited to only two conditions, as follows:

1. When they playing in a dangerous way.
2. When they do not observe a social regulation or rule.

Childhood is also a period of training toward adulthood. It is important to have your son do what he wishes to do, unless it is something dangerous or something that causes trouble to others.

When you are in a hurry to do something, please tell your son, “I am busy now, so I have no time enough to see you now. Please do it later again.” I think your child will understand your wish, if you

always respond to his desire or interest right away in daily life. Because everything is a first experience for your child during his childhood, he may not do things as well as you wish, but his unflagging efforts to learn from what he experienced will bring him toughness and lead to his having the “power to live.”



Point Children grow up repeating their failures many times.

If you always say “no” to everything he does, he will feel unmotivated. As often as you can, give him an opportunity to experience as much as possible. I hope you will be a mother who will be happy to accept your child’s failures.

(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.

Your Son Is Making His Best Efforts, Too.

YOU are such a wonderful mother, wholeheartedly interacting with your son and taking good care of him every day, in spite of your terribly busy schedule. Meanwhile, your son is also striving just as hard as his mother is, isn't he?

President Nichiko Niwano teaches us in his book that "If we take to heart the idea that we have all been given the Life of the Buddha, and devote ourselves each day to walking the Buddha Way, we will only meet with wonderful things" (*Kokoro no manako o hiraku* [Opening the Mind's Eye], p. 63).

It's exactly when you have a mountain of things to do that it's important to take a breath, and see your child from the viewpoint President Niwano refers to. Then, you'll be able to discover your child's budding spiritual development in his attitude of self-reliance, as he tries to do things for himself, firmly saying, "I'll do it!" In this way, you will feel love toward your son rather than annoyance. If you start to feel irritated with him when you are in a hurry, why don't you begin by saying the following words to him: "Great! Keep it up! You can do it!"

(Supervised by the Department of Dharma Education and Human Resources Development)



Please give us your comments!



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

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Director's Column

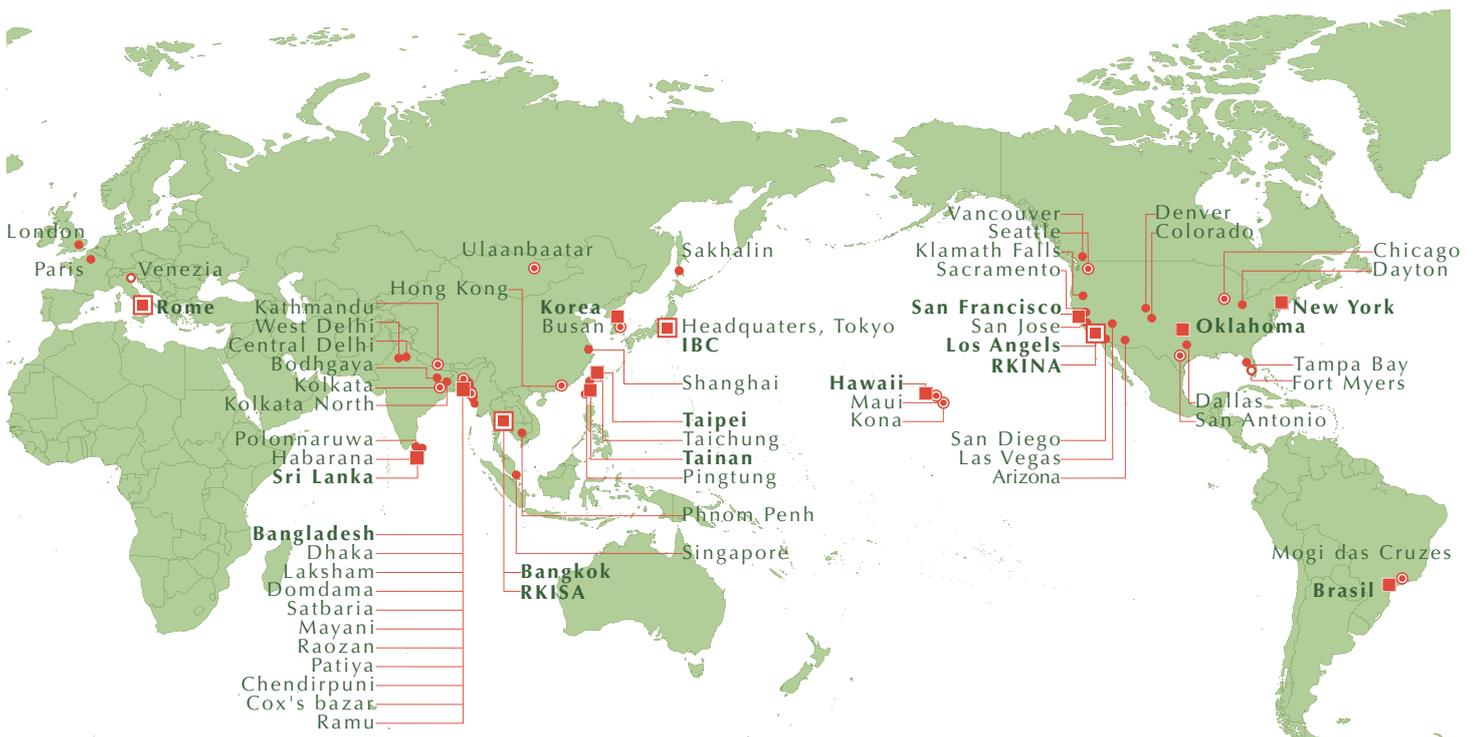
Benefiting Others with Gratitude

SOMEONE in a Japanese volunteer organization once said to me, “When people of Rissho Kosei-kai offer service, they always say, ‘I am grateful for being given an opportunity to offer my service.’ I am always impressed with their sincere and humble attitude.” Actually, the attitude of benefiting others with gratitude, which we Rissho Kosei-kai members all embrace, is what Founder Nikkyo Niwano showed us with his life.

Twenty some years ago, I had a chance to witness Founder Niwano’s presence at a Japanese interfaith meeting. When he entered the meeting room, leaders of various faiths there all stood up and greeted Founder Niwano. Their faces were filled with joy from meeting with the Founder. After sitting at a table, he said, “We’ve had a very successful year. This is because of the wonderful efforts by all of you.” He did not in the least refer to his own efforts, and from the words in which he solely expressed his deepest gratitude to each and every one present, I felt his utmost appreciation for all the work and consideration of the people involved. I saw Founder Niwano shining in radiance.

We are able to serve others thanks to wondrous karmic connections. I wish to continue to render support to others with gratitude.

Rev. Shoko Mizutani
 Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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