



Toward a True and Independent Faith

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**A Milestone Marking the Eightieth Anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai:
A Resolution to Repay Our Debt of Gratitude to Our Predecessors Who Laid the Foundation**



I wish you all a Happy New Year.

In my annual Guidelines for Members' Practice of the Faith last year I said, "Let us express and practice our gratitude and thankfulness in our daily lives." I was delighted to learn from the ministers of our Dharma centers and various other people in the sangha that a great number of you embraced this as your theme and practiced it in your workplaces, neighborhoods, and homes. I also came to know this from the members' Dharma journey speeches in the Great Sacred Hall.

We are taught that if we delve deeply into the teachings of Shakyamuni, we will ultimately feel gratitude and thankfulness. We hope that we will continue to have this, the most important thing of all, always etched in our minds.

This year, our organization will observe the eightieth anniversary of its founding. During this eighty-year period of time, Founder Nikkyo Niwano served as president for fifty-four years, and I have done so for twenty-six years.

Looking back, both the Founder and I consistently

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conveyed the Buddha's teachings, which our members have taken to heart and put into practice. Simply stated, I believe that is nothing other than what our organization has pursued through its eighty-year history.

The period during which the Founder established Rissho Kosei-kai, and during which people began to gradually spread the Dharma, was also a tumultuous time of upheaval surrounding the Second World War. The people's foremost desire at that time was to be relieved of the suffering of poverty, illness, and conflict. The organization's leaders who preceded us, even while facing great difficulties of their own, made their best efforts to save many people, guiding them on the Buddha Way kindly, and at times sternly, by making full use of skillful means.

I think that, as a whole, the leaders of Rissho Kosei-kai in the past did not give talks that were too lengthy, yet they had the power to move people's minds using simple words. If at times what they said sounded brusque, there was deep compassion in their single-hearted desire for the happiness of other people.

The compassionate mindset of "I would like to liberate people from suffering somehow" has been passed down successively and forms the foundation of today's Rissho Kosei-kai.

It is with thoughts of gratitude for our many leaders and members preceding us that I give my Guidance for Members' Practice of the Faith for 2018 as follows.

The universe and nature are undergoing creation and change without a pause. Just like the truth of the universe, we must not stagnate, but always apply ourselves to facing everything that comes our way with a renewed spirit.

This year our organization observed the eightieth anniversary of its founding. The cornerstone of its history to this day has been built upon the unsparing dedication by our Founder and Cofounder, as well as a number of leaders and members preceding us.

During this most significant year, and looking toward the one-hundredth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai, I hope that each of us will be firmly resolved to move forward creatively and unceasingly to repay our debt of gratitude to our predecessors.

In the Guidance for the Members' Practice of the Faith, as well as the importance of repaying our debt of gratitude toward our predecessors, at the same time I conveyed that it is essential for both an organization and an individual to always aim for creativity.

With regard to this, Chinese classics, including the *Huainanzi*, contain the following memorable passages.

"When one reaches fifty years of age, one realizes he has made forty-nine mistakes."

"At sixty he has been transformed sixty times."

What they are saying is that when people turn fifty, they should reflect on how they have lived the previous forty-nine years and make a fresh start with a new attitude. When they turn sixty, they should aspire to make a transformation appropriate to their age.

Age fifty and age sixty are the stages in which we become, to a certain extent, complete as human beings. Be that as it may, we can continue to evolve without losing our freshness. This means that we should always undergo revitalization, or continuous creation, and I believe it is applicable to a person of any age.

 **Everybody Carries an Aspiration for Living Creatively—
We Need Only to Become Aware of and to Demonstrate It** 

But it seems the word "create" does not generally strike a familiar chord. The dictionary definition is, "to make something for the first time that did not exist until then." If that were all there were to it, then

it would be unavoidable that some would think it too high a hurdle.

I perceive "creation" in a more familiar way. Just as trees and plants grow little by little, day by day, I

think that small improvements such as “I’m now able to say the morning greeting,” “I realized this,” and “I’ve grown since yesterday” are all types of creation for each of the people who say these things.

It is said that the desire to grow more, to develop, and not to be complacent about the status quo is a human trait in all of us from the start. It is also said that we have the instinct to aim for an existence that is higher, more valuable, and greater even by a small degree.

Putting this in other words, I would say that we all already have in our minds an aspiration for living creatively; we merely have to become aware of this and display it.

The composite kanji character for “aspiration” (志)

contains the character for “ten” (十) and the character for “one” (一), below which is the character for “mind” (心). “Ten” represents the many cravings and desires that humans have, and “one” signifies that these cravings and desires have been converged into one.

When our minds are distracted by thoughts of “I want to do this, I want to do that,” it’s quite difficult to move forward. It’s important, first of all, to narrow our objectives down to a single one, and then to focus on it and get to work on it.

Put all your effort into the one objective, and when that is accomplished, tackle a new one. This repetition is how we can reinvigorate ourselves; it is, so to speak, constant creation.

We Must Put All Our Efforts into the Challenge of “Raising Human Beings”

Twenty years ago, when Rissho Kosei-kai observed the sixtieth anniversary of its founding, it announced the general objective, “Cultivating the Field in the Heart and Mind of Each and Every Person.” During the ensuing twenty years, efforts to revitalize faith have been made one by one, and Rissho Kosei-kai made steady progress in the direction of its goal.

Starting with the seventieth anniversary of the organization’s founding, we promoted and engaged in the enshrinement of the image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as the Gohonzon (the focus of devotion) in all members’ homes. It can be said that through this engagement, taking refuge in the Three Treasures, the fundamentals of Buddhism, has been accomplished in Rissho Kosei-kai. During the past ten years the number of the member households in which the Buddhist altar is in the center of everyday life has increased steadily, and our engagement has become widely accepted and taken root.

On the basis of these past developments, we should look over a century, from the founding of the organization to its upcoming centennial, and put all our efforts into our primary goal, that is, human resources development, or “raising human beings.” It is our most important mission.

Well, then, what sort of people should we culti-

vate? That would be none other than “people who walk the bodhisattva’s way (the path we must walk as human beings) with the loving-kindness and consideration for others shown by the Buddha and our Founder and Cofounder, and who have the natural human qualities (cheerfulness, kindness, and warm-heartedness).”

And how do we go about developing such human resources? This is done by thoroughly following the Three Basic Practices of the Faith, namely “reciting the sutras,” “guiding others to the faith, supporting our members in the Way, and attending *hoza* sessions,” and “studying and practicing the Dharma.”

There is a *waka* poem attributed to the early nineteenth century Japanese agricultural reformer, philosopher, and economist Ninomiya Sontoku: “When this autumn comes, / If it will bring rain or storms, / I cannot be sure; / So all I can do today / Is to weed the rice paddies.”

It means that he can’t know what will happen to the rice harvest when autumn arrives with its rains and storms, but regardless of that, the most important thing for him to do at the moment is to pull up the weeds he sees at hand.

This poem seems to be suggesting to us what we should be doing in the present moment.

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I myself have planted rice. One or two weeks after the seedlings have been planted in the rice paddies, weeds begin to grow and must be pulled. This task has to be done around three times, known as a first weeding, second weeding, and third weeding. The weeds that are pulled are not discarded but are buried in the paddy mud, becoming fertilizer for the rice plants.

In the same way, a steady implementation of the Three Basic Practices of the Faith forms the basis for advancing the development of our human resources. And when each one of us in our families and the sangha community encourage one another, learn from one another, and grow together, this eventually leads to welcoming the “harvest season of autumn.”

When people worry about things ahead of time, they end up not being able to put sufficient effort into the things that are at hand.

Yet the thing that is of foremost importance in our lives is always “that which is at hand, in front of us.” The reason is that the only time that we can actually use is “now,” not the past, not the future. Dealing with the events of this very instant, one by one, with care—this is what adds up to a life that is fulfilling.

Until a short while ago I had thought of our organization’s centennial as still being somewhat off in the

future. But now that it is only twenty years from now, I also have a considerable feeling of urgency.

Until now I have repeatedly told you all, “Let us fully understand the fundamental spirit that Shakyamuni wished to convey to us.”

That is to say, we should be aware of how much we have been blessed and discover the Buddha’s teaching in the midst of what at first glance seems to be an inconvenience. We should become aware that true happiness is the liberation of both ourselves and others. We should renew our attitude toward faith from that of seeking help from others to an independent faith, and be diligent by keeping in mind, “Make yourself the light; make the Dharma your light.” Plainly speaking, this is the path to true liberation taught by Shakyamuni, and it is what it means to “cultivate the field in the heart and mind.”

What I want as we approach the centennial of our founding is for as many of our members as possible to grow as Buddhists and as people who are truly religious.

I would like to join all of you in cultivating the fields in our hearts and minds, without haste and without rest, always and everywhere.

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