

Living the Lotus

New Year's Issue

Buddhism in Everyday Life

2021

“Let Us Reflect and Create”

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**The COVID-19 Pandemic Gives Us an Opportunity
to Reconsider What It Is that Human Beings Should Value Most**



I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Last year saw the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic, which has had a major effect on our daily lives. Approximately 1.6 million people have lost their lives to this virus. I would like to express my deepest sympathy.

In order to fully adopt preventive measures, Rissho Kosei-kai has closed the Great Sacred Hall in our Tokyo headquarters complex as well as all of our Dharma centers across Japan. Additionally, we have suspended or postponed most of our activities.

Moreover, this has affected us as individuals, causing us to find new approaches to every aspect of our daily lives, such as in our ways of working, our education, our child rearing, our caregiving, and our family matters.

Many people have had their income greatly reduced or have lost their jobs or been forced to close their businesses. It is particularly in such times as these that I implore you as good friends in the Dharma and as members of the sangha to cooperate and help one another in the spirit of consideration for others.



I look upon this COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for us to reconsider just what it is that human beings should actually value most.

The Japanese character 省, *shō*, has two meanings, depending on context—“reflect upon” and “eliminate.” I believe that living daily through the COVID-19 pandemic is revealing to us which things we should reflect upon, and which things we should eliminate.

According to one survey, when people were asked if they had taken on any new lifestyles or behaviors due to the prevalence of COVID-19, the most common answer (74 percent) was “I want to take good care of my family.” On the other hand, cases of domestic discord and of so-called “Corona divorces” have increased.

With these matters in mind, I offer my Guidelines for 2021 as follows.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our lifestyles went through some changes in 2020. Many people stayed at home—quarantining themselves and working from home. The true value of the family was measured.

In March of this year, Rissho Kosei-kai will celebrate its eighty-third anniversary. While we continue quarantining ourselves in our daily lives just as last year, we should commit ourselves together through our faith as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers, and as parents, to foster young boys and girls, as well as young people, who will bear the next generation, with the aim of shaping their character; and we should also strive to put our family relationships in order. I hope that we will all work creatively and earnestly to bring our families together.

By “husbands and wives,” I mean young couples. “Fathers and mothers” are those of us in the prime of their lives, and “parents” are those who are aged. Each should relate their experiences to their children and grandchildren and to their daughters-in-law and sons-in-law as well. My point is that I would like the members of all generations to do their best to assist in the rearing of the children and young people.

Last November, I had the opportunity to explain these guidelines to all Dharma center ministers at the annual meeting of the directors and leaders of Rissho Kosei-kai. On that occasion I quoted the work of Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), a noted authority on Eastern philosophy. The following is a summary of what I quoted.

In the home, children feel respect for their fathers and learn respect from them. They learn love from their mothers. To feel respect means respecting oneself and having a respectful attitude toward others. It is a feeling that arises toward something perceived to be higher, greater, or more excellent. In other words, it is a feeling of wanting to progress and improve.

Nowadays, however, there has been an emphasis on love for mothers, but respect for fathers has disappeared. The fathers these days are focused on their work and do not pay much attention to their households. They treat their homes as if they are lounges, and they take on a slovenly appearance. Because they are ashamed of this, they begin to practice some discipline. “Respect” and “shame” are of fundamental importance to human beings.

Children are pure, cheerful, and vigorous beings. They learn more from their

parents than from anything else. If the parents are not sound, in other words, if they are examples of how not to behave, this will have a negative influence on the future of the children. For that reason, mothers and fathers must resume their original parental roles.

I concluded by introducing the following quotation. “The father should be the role model for the child. The mother should be the seat of compassion for the child. That is because the family is like a seed-bed, nurturing the seedlings that are the children.”

This is what we must constantly be carefully working on. Even within Risho Kosei-kai there have been times when, in the heat of our dissemination activities, we have neglected caring for our families. I think that from now on it would be desirable to practice a devotion that places importance on both our Dharma mission and our families.

How Should We Nurture the Character of the Youth Who Will Carry the Future?

I told all of you that our important mission, the primary goal into which we must put all our efforts, is human resources development, or the raising of human beings.

The first root of this is the teaching at home within the family. Because wise family governance (putting family relationships in order) provides steadfast, solid character building with discipline as well, it is an enhancement to public education (schools), and it ties in with the “raising of human beings” in a true sense.

I have told you in the past that in order to actually put family relationships in order, it is essential that our homes have a Buddhist altar as the center of family life, and that we observe the “Three Practices” for the home—we exchange morning greetings, we respond clearly and positively when we are spoken to, and we line up our shoes neatly after taking them off. Observing these fundamentals will help form the basis of human education.

Furthermore, the most basic factor in the advancement of youth development is the important issue of how parents view their children.

Traditionally, it was the custom in Japan that children were considered to be blessings from the gods and the buddhas. They were welcomed as gifts and raised with a sense of wonder.

A while ago I had the pleasure of reading a book by Toshio Ota, the first president of Keiwa Gakuen High School in Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture. It seems that Mr. Ota, who is Christian, was sickly and frequently bullied as a child. He writes that at such times his mother comforted him by telling him the following.

“Right now you’re physically weak, and so you’re not asserting yourself. But just you wait! You’re going to grow up splendidly, and the day will come when you’ll do the work of God. I believe that day will come, so I’m not the least bit worried. For now, when people bully you and make you cry, just shake it off. It’s all right to cry.”

Mr. Ota reminisced that since adolescence, his wish was to be worthy of his mother’s trust.

I was moved by the story of his mother, who admired her son so and believed that he was born with a mission from God.

It is often said that “children learn from their parents’ example.” Everything the parents do, good or bad, influences their children.





There is an old anecdote concerning the Chinese statesman Xie An, who lived during the Jin Dynasty (260–420 CE). His wife was devoted to the education of their children. She asked him, “Why do you not show any interest in educating the children?” To which his answer was, “I teach the children constantly. Although I don’t do so verbally or with my hands, I believe I teach them with my entire body.” Rather than nagging them or striking them and calling it discipline, it is the example that we set as we go about our daily lives that is the foundation of children’s education.

There is also an anecdote, from the Warring States period in Japan (1467–1615), about the renowned warlord Hosokawa Yusai. It is said that in his declining years, when his grown sons would come visit, Hosokawa would receive them informally and warmly, but when his young grandsons would come visit, Hosokawa would meet them with formal correctness. When his chief retainer asked him why, Hosokawa is said to have responded, “Since they are going to amount to something great, I too must hold them in esteem when I receive them.”

In my own family, our late Founder had an unchanging routine from the time of morning sutra recitation to the time he would leave the house to go to the headquarters. We children would sometimes be late for the regular morning and evening sutra recitation, but the Founder always started them at a set time. Observing how he did this so naturally, I was struck by the thought, “He truly believes in the teachings.” I’m now convinced that the Founder, too, was teaching with his body.

In these ways, childhood education depends after all upon the parents’ self-awareness and attitude. Looking back and reflecting on our own lives, we should all want to make ourselves better examples for the children and young people who will be bearing the next generation.

Nurturing People and Endowing Them with an Abundance of Compassion Is Human Development in the True Sense

This coming March 11 will be the tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. There are more than forty thousand people who remain evacuated from their homes. Due to the nuclear power-plant disaster, there are also a great number of people who have not been able to return to their hometowns. Our hearts go out to those who are suffering. We will always ask ourselves what we need to do and continue to help them rebuild their lives.

At the time of that earthquake disaster, I quoted an adage from a classic Chinese work. “Sowing grain seeds is best for a one-year plan; planting trees is best for a ten-year plan; and for a lifelong plan, nothing surpasses the raising of human beings.” I believe that human development is more important than anything else in building a better community.

We must raise humans endowed with not just intelligence and reasoning, but also with the emotion and logic to understand the subtleties of the human mind, humans who are compassionate. If we fail to do this, it will not amount to human development in the true sense, and the creation of a spiritually rich society will not be possible.

The thirteenth-century Zen master Dogen wrote, “We should first help others to liberate themselves, even if we ourselves are not yet liberated.” Seeing others in need should awaken in us a compassionate desire to do something for them, even if we are lost or suffering. Rather than striving only for our own happiness, we must also make efforts toward the liberation of all people. We are taught that the spirit of the bodhisattva dwells in these mindsets.

In other words, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, parents, and our entire sangha share the role of raising our children to have the abundance of feeling and consideration of others that is indicated by one of the mottoes of Rissho Kosei-kai, “putting others first.” I would like all of you to join forces in applying yourselves to this primary goal.

And it is also my wish for this year that we help one another overcome the difficult situation that we are dealing with by deepening the bonds of family and the sangha.

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