

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Two Models for Our Practice

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

EVEN though we may have convinced ourselves that we've basically mastered the teaching, as soon as we run into the types of problems that crop up in real life, we raise a crying fuss and end up right back where we were before we started our practice.

The law of causation is a basic teaching of Buddhism that states that all things arise interdependently according to conditions. A "condition" is an encounter. Therefore, it's fair to say that our spiritual practice consists of turning our encounters in positive directions.

One model for doing this is shown in chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra, "Devadatta," which teaches us that regardless of how unpleasant the situations we face are—or how disagreeable the people we encounter—we should accept them all as teachers who can help us become genuine practitioners.

Another model is Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect's practice of revering buddha nature, which is taught in chapter 20. This chapter tells us that no matter how a person appears to us now, we should regard him or her as a future buddha by practicing in the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, who reveres all people.

The Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–82) often used the phrase "seeds of buddhahood." We've all been given the seeds to become buddhas, but unless we water them and expose them to sunlight, we won't be able to help those seeds sprout, grow, and bloom.

Every time you run into difficulties, recall these two models, accept your troubles as auspicious conditions, and aim to make your encounters with others positive. By doing this, you will gradually become a genuine practitioner of the Buddha's teaching.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 72–73

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.

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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 Message

Living Thoughtfully

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Without Making Distinctions

From the time we wake up in the morning until the time we go to bed, we unknowingly divide our many actions into important and not-so-important ones, don't we? We can't neglect sutra recitation, but family greetings tend to become halfhearted . . . and so on.

"The single most important thing is your mind today, in this moment." So declared Zen master Dokyo Etan, a.k.a. Shoju Rojin (1642–1721). But getting up in the morning, getting dressed, washing our face, greeting our family members, and, after that, performing sutra recitation, going to work, and discussing business—each and every one of these actions is "the single most important thing." In other words, we should thoroughly devote ourselves to each of these actions and approach them all with the same thoughtfulness.

However, doing so is difficult, not only because we're busy, but because we make distinctions about things. In truth, everything we do has significance and value, but we think some things deserve more effort, so we pay more attention to them. Or we decide that we can let some, conveniently for us, "slide by"—but they then become expressions of insincere words and actions, don't they?

I was taught the phrase "there is no ranking the beauty of flowers." If we look at things without any superficial judgments such as likes and dislikes, we can accept them all as important and meaningful.

The "shoju" in Shoju Rojin is a translation of *samadhi*, which means leaving behind your own thoughts and concentrating your mind on one thing. In order to concentrate on the actions of "today, in this moment," we need to forget about what is convenient.

Thinking of Other People

Now let's consider living thoughtfully from another angle. To take an example from my home, in winter it takes some time for the hot water to start flowing, meaning that cold water comes out of the faucet for a while. So, instead of letting it go to waste, we collect it in a container and use it for the humidifier. This kind of resourcefulness—not letting even a small amount of water go to waste—is an example of one small action that can lead to living thoughtfully. And this is true not only of water: paying a little attention to things we usually don't notice can lead to making better use of them.

Even activities like reading poetry that uses forms such as *tanka* and *haiku* can train us to pay attention to the moment in our everyday lives and focus our mind on our surroundings.

Here is a poem by Tachibana Akemi (1812–68): “When new leaves come out, / No matter what mountain you look at / Or what kind of tree you see, / What a beautiful sight to behold.” This cheerful poem reflects the current season. Observing the colors and changes of the four seasons, as this poet does, can lead to feeling happy in our ordinary lives and nurturing the mind of cherishing and valuing this time right now.

However, if we only have a vague notion of what living thoughtfully means, we're apt to be swept away by our habitual lifestyles. How can we make our behavior and actions, at all times and in all places, become naturally thoughtful?

Chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound,” describes the many samadhis attained by the Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound. The basis of every one of these samadhis is a bodhisattva vow, such as, “I will liberate not only those people with whom I have a connection, but also those with whom I do not yet have a connection,” or “just like a torch lighting up its surroundings, I will shine forth upon people the bright light of wisdom.”

In other words, whether we make a vow to help someone nearby or to bring happiness to someone in a distant land, we can't help but live our lives thoughtfully when we devote ourselves to performing even a single action like washing our face.

This is a state of mind in which we can accept everything we see as “a beautiful sight to behold,” and as long as we do so, our days will always be full of feelings of happiness.

From *Kosei*, May 2021

Spiritual Journey

Appreciating the Gift of Life Sustained by the Eternal Buddha

Souphatta Leuxa
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at Rissho Kosei-kai's Ome Retreat Center in Tokyo on February 16, 2021, during Sotsurin Seppo-e, a ceremony in which graduating Gakurin Seminary overseas students present their own Dharma Journeys.

GOOD morning, everyone. My name is Souphatta Leuxa, and I was born in 1989 in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Ms. Benjaporn Kueakulboot, who is a youth member of the Bangkok Dharma Center, connected me with the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai and suggested that I study at Gakurin with her. We both made it a goal to enter the Gakuin Overseas Students Course and were fortunate to pass the entry exam.

Among the many important lessons I have learned during my life at Gakurin, three specific learnings remain in my heart.

First, I learned the power of sangha. Thanks to encounters with my fellow sangha members at Gakurin, I was able to realize that my life is supported by many people and discovered new wishes within my heart. Before coming to Japan, I had often found myself struggling and enduring sufferings alone. As I had experienced a time when I felt no one understood me, I found I could not open my mind to the other students when I first entered Gakurin. I would often hide in the bathroom at Gakurin, as it was the only place where I could feel at ease. One day, when I had locked myself in the bathroom, some worried students came to check on me, asking "Souphatta, are you feeling okay?" I suddenly came to understand that as they knocked on the door of the bathroom, they also knocked on the door of my heart. Thanks to their continuous kind and warm support, I was able to open my mind little by little and share my feelings with others. Living in the dormitory with my sangha members, I learned that all circumstances and phenomena can be changed by shifting my mind, that no one can live alone, and that all people in this world are interconnected.

I eventually noticed that I had developed a strong desire to become a Dharma disseminator who wants to address global issues and treasure other sangha members. On the other hand, I was also worried whether I could be helpful in a world that is rapidly changing. However, just as Founder Nikkyo Niwano always dedicated himself to the bodhisattva practice for world peace because of his earnest desire to "liberate people from suffering and make the world a better place," I would like to follow in his footsteps and do my best to cherish all encounters with the people in front of me, and grow close to them and revere them by placing my palms together respectfully.

The second lesson is the importance of Dharma circles. Because I was not good at presenting myself, I did not like to participate in Dharma circles. Last year, I took part in Dharma dissemination training at Ome Retreat Center. During the training, Ms. Masayo Okumura, whose husband Mr. Yoshio Okumura is a staff member of Gakurin Daiju Group, joined our Dharma circle, even though she had just left the hospital. Even though I was in good health, I wanted to run away from the Dharma circle. However, Ms. Okumura listened attentively to my story. As I felt her kindness and warmheartedness during the Dharma circle, I cried tears of gratitude. In that moment, I became aware of the importance of Dharma circles for the first time. Afterward, I learned from Ms. Yoshiko Oishi, who was a student in the Gakurin Special Course, that the Buddha is pleased when a Dharma circle is filled with gratitude. In such a Dharma circle, people share their thoughts and feelings, grow closer to each other, and bring their buddha nature to light. Listening to Ms. Oishi,

Spiritual Journey

I hoped all the Dharma circles I join will be filled with gratitude, and I believe it will let me get closer to achieving my goal of making a sangha in which people are cheerful, kind, and warmhearted. I will strive to continue my practice in Dharma circles with a mind of gratitude for the rest of my time at Gakurin and after going back to the Bangkok Dharma Center.

The third lesson I've learned at Gakurin is to cherish and embrace myself. Before we could move onto the second grade, we had to pass a promotion examination. Unfortunately, Ms. Kueakulboot, who invited me to Gakuin, didn't pass the exam and had to go back to her country. This weighed so heavily on my mind that I didn't know how to continue my practice at Gakurin, and I wished to go back to my country. I talked with Rev. Yoshie Otomo, deputy director of Gakurin Daiju Group, who kindly said, "Please care about yourself first, and embrace yourself." Her words opened my eyes and made me realize that I was always obsessed with the circumstances around me. I realized the first thing I should do was to understand myself, so I tried my best to deeply reflect upon myself and listen carefully to my heart. I believed that I would be able to understand and embrace myself if I could accept everything about myself, both good and bad, and see myself as I was. The other day, Rev. Otomo also taught me that cherishing and embracing myself equals taking good care of my body and mind. She added that if I can care for my body and mind, I will be able to appreciate all the people around me, and we can all support each other, cultivate our minds, and grow together. This will let us bring our buddha nature to light. With this in mind, I would like to cherish and embrace myself, whose life is sustained by the great life force—the Eternal Original Buddha.

Looking back on my life, I was so obsessed with many sufferings in life that I could not deeply appreciate my life. I'm now sincerely grateful to my fellow sangha members at Gakurin for accepting everything about me. I am truly happy to be alive today. Becoming

aware of the preciousness of my life, I'm deeply grateful for all the support I have received from the Buddha, my ancestors, and all the people who were always watching over me behind the scenes. Reflecting deeply upon myself during my time at Gakurin allowed me to realize the importance of a compassionate mind, and I feel as if I have been reborn by putting my learnings into practice in daily life.

After discussions with Rev. Shoko Mizutani, minister of the Bangkok Dharma Center, I decided to not go back to my country after graduation and continue my practice of the teachings at the Bangkok Dharma Center. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to him for his kind permission. As I graduate from Gakurin, I have set a goal to become a person who undertakes bodhisattva practice anytime, anywhere, and for anyone, and to help and support as many people as possible. To achieve my goal, I would like to keep in mind everything I learned at Gakurin. As I hope to eventually go back to my country with confidence in myself, I vow to continue my diligence under the guidance of Rev. Mizutani, dedicate myself to religious roles at the Dharma center, and cultivate my mind and heart.

Thank you very much for listening.



Ms. Leuxa (front, third from left) with her teachers and fellow students after the ceremony.

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

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 27 The Former Deeds of King Wondrous Adornment

Here we have the story of King Wondrous Adornment, his wife, Pure Virtue, and their two sons, the princes Pure Treasury and Pure Eyes, who existed long ago in the distant past.

The Story of King Wondrous Adornment

The king's wife and sons are followers of the Buddha's Dharma, and the princes want the king to give up his preoccupation with other teachings and recognize the rare excellence of this Dharma. When the princes happen to hear that a buddha named Thunderous Cloud Voice Constellation King Flowering Wisdom is expounding the highest teaching of all, the Dharma Flower Sutra, they ardently wish to get the king to listen. They consult their mother, who advises them that, in order to move the king's heart, they should try using their transcendent powers to display some sort of marvel.

So, the princes go before the king, jump into the sky, and walk in midair. They spout fire and water from their heads and feet, dive freely into the earth, and do all sorts of incredible things. The king is astonished, and when he asks them where they learned such transcendent powers, they reply that their master is the Buddha Thunderous Cloud Voice Constellation King Flowering Wisdom, who teaches the Dharma Flower Sutra. The king immediately wishes to see this buddha, and the overjoyed princes, not wanting to lose the opportunity, go to their mother and get her permission to leave home and devote themselves to studying the Way under the buddha.

The princes' influence brings not only the king, but also his wife as well as ministers, court ladies, and many other citizens of the nation to the buddha to hear the Dharma. The buddha assures King Wondrous Adornment that he will gain enlightenment as a buddha, and the king, upon hearing this, gives his kingdom to his brother and, along with his attendants, leaves his palace and home to pursue the faith.

Good Causes and Conditions Guide Us to Encounter the Lotus Sutra

After long practice, the king attains the high state called the Samadhi of Adornment with All Pure Merits. He reports to the buddha that he owes this entirely to his sons,





the princes. The buddha confirms that this is indeed true and that a good friend or a good teacher is certainly a great cause and condition that guides and transforms people, enabling them to see the buddha and moving them to seek the buddha's wisdom.

Indeed, we should realize the importance of causal relationship: it is because we practiced the wondrous Dharma in our past lives that we can learn the Lotus Sutra today—the merits from our deeds became the cause that brought us to encounter that good friend or teacher (the condition).

Therefore, if we communicate the Dharma to as many people as possible in this life, we can attain the biggest assurance that we will encounter the wondrous Dharma in our next life. This is the lesson we should learn from the story of King Wondrous Adornment, and it is the first point in this chapter.

Connecting People Close to Us with the Teaching of the Buddha

The princes' transcendent powers signify the total transformation of their characters, and, consequently, the conduct of their daily lives, through their learning of the Buddha's teachings and their faith in them. By demonstrating these changes to their father, the princes demonstrate the value of the Buddha Dharma and spark the king's desire to seek the Supreme Perfect Awakening.

While it is important, when leading people, to expound the Buddha Dharma, what really works is demonstration and action. This is particularly true when the people we are trying to reach are family members or work colleagues, because no matter what we may say about the Dharma, unless our conduct is admirable, we are likely to make others despise or doubt the Buddha Dharma. This is why the king's story takes the form it does.

The princes' mother is a wise woman in encouraging their demonstration. Their father, the king, is incomparably admirable too in that he is ready to set aside his prejudices and turn his ear to the truth. In order to grasp the truth, a person must have just this kind of mental flexibility.

Religious Faith of Leaders

Another important issue in this chapter is the influence that the king's religious beliefs and practices have on the government ministers and citizens of the nation. As a practical matter, we must seriously consider the appropriateness of the influence of religious faith on people in positions of leadership in society.





Religious faith is fundamentally an individual matter, and when politics or power becomes involved, faith is liable to become corrupted. But when a respected leader has faith in the True Dharma, many people are affected as a matter of course, and there is nothing tarnished or tarnishing about such an influence. In fact, it is a most wholesome influence of exactly the right kind. This is why we should want those who lead large numbers of people to develop an appropriate sense of religious faith for themselves. However, there is absolutely no need for them to force that faith on the people they lead. If, thanks to their healthy religious sensibilities, their character is virtuous and dignified, it cannot fail to have a positive influence on many of the people they lead. This is another significant lesson in this chapter.

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. 216–21.





Director's Column

Crossroads to Happiness

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

IN his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano elucidates the importance of living thoughtfully by not making judgments for our own convenience, so that everything we come across in our lives becomes an important and meaningful encounter.

In our daily lives, we often make distinctions between what we think is important versus not-so-important depending on whether we think it benefits us. This often proves incorrect because, as ordinary human beings, our minds are under the influence of selfish desires and often confuse right and wrong. We must review our ways of thinking and acknowledge what is truly important. This is the key point in our practice of the Dharma, and being aware of this in our everyday lives is what enables us to find the right path to happiness.

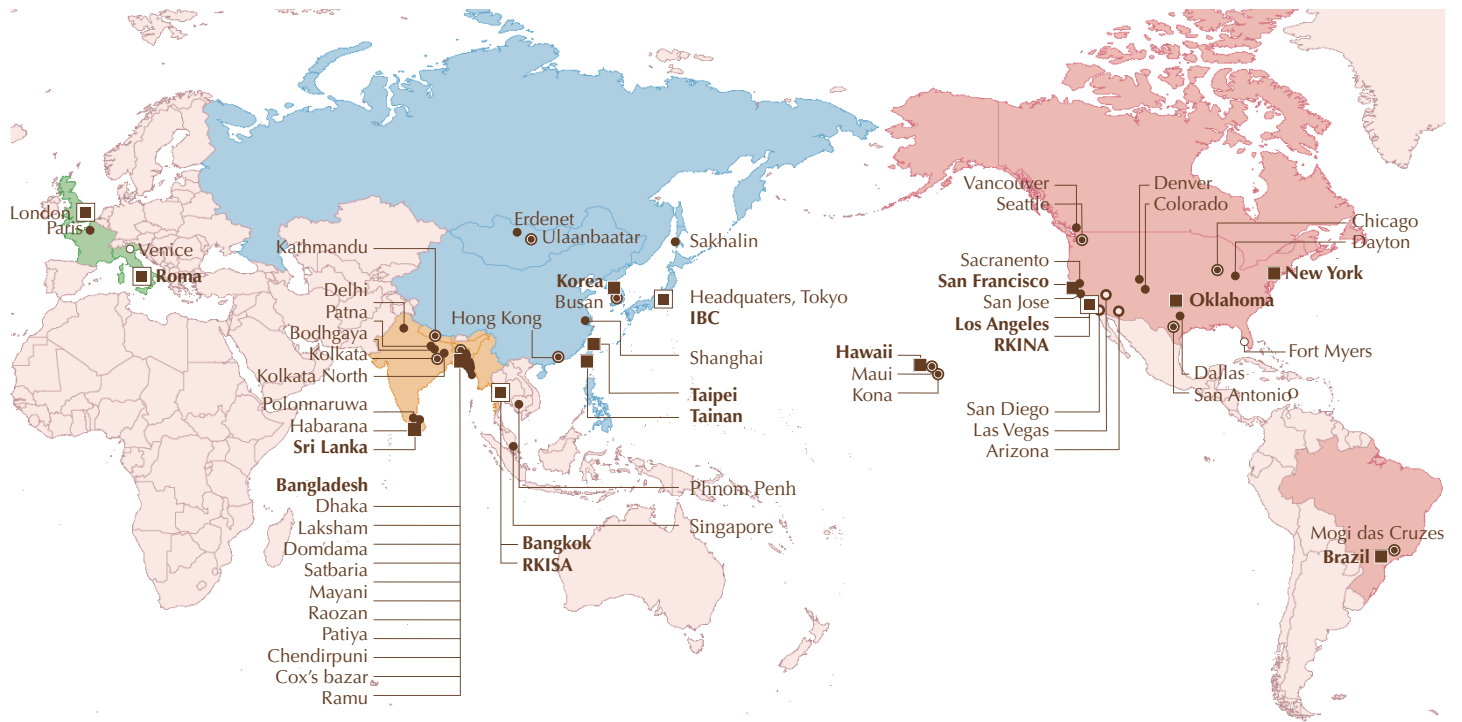
Putting others first is one of the ageless mottoes guiding Rissho Kosei-kai members in their practice of the faith. It refills us with a refreshed mind of faith at times when we are likely to come off the track to the truth.

As you know, the word “mindfulness” means cherishing and valuing this present moment, which I believe resonates with the samadhi concept that President Niwano explains in his message. If we are mindful both internally and externally, focusing on the movement of the mind and cherishing our relationships with all people and things around us, I believe a feeling of happiness will arise in the minds of all people.

This month, I hope we will all live thoughtfully each and every day and continue our practice of the Dharma with further diligence.



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