Living the Lotus

Buddhism in Everyde

Founder's Reflections

OL. 192

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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How to Let Go of Desire

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

I N Buddhism, the celebration of equinox is a time to renew our vows to cross over from "this shore" of endless suffering to the "other shore" of liberation from suffering, which is the realm of the Buddha.

The Buddha promises us that "of those who hear the Dharma, none will fail to become a buddha." By the "Dharma," he meant the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, which can stir within anyone the aspiration to become a buddha, and ferry them to the Buddha's realm.

The Buddha does not dictate that those of us here on the shore of confusion first cast off desire to be liberated. Instead, the Buddha leads us to unconsciously let go of desire by teaching us to rejoice in generosity. He motivates us, often envious of others and easily dragged down by laziness, to willingly persevere by teaching us the true joy of living.

Buddhism is not a teaching that prohibits us from doing this or that. Instead, it skillfully guides us so that we can joyfully reach the realm of the Buddha without difficulty.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 178-79

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

Making Good Karmic Connections

Rev. Nichiko Niwano President of Rissho Kosei-kai

What Is the Greatest Karmic Connection?

We are living every day in the midst of various karmic connections. We could even say that through these connections, we are caused to live. Every encounter with another person, every encounter with something, and every conversation with a family member is brought about by the connections of that moment.

We hope that every one of those karmic connections will always be good. We hope that they will all be happy.

It is a fact of life, however, that things do not always happen according to our wishes. Especially when it comes to our relationships with other people, as soon as something unpleasant or disadvantageous occurs, we no longer feel that relationship is a good karmic connection.

Kurozumi Munetada (1780–1850), founder of Kurozumikyo, a Japanese new religion with roots in Shinto, said that no matter what happens, "If you think of both good and bad things as expressions of the will of the universe, then you will never suffer at all," because "if you live in a world of being grateful for everything, you will be grateful no matter how things turn out." In other words, all the workings of this world are entirely the arrangement of the gods and the buddhas—so among the karmic connections you happen to make, none are good or bad and, as long as your perspective is not self-centered, you will see that anything and everything is a necessary connection, for which you should be grateful.

Therefore I think that if we are able, through all of these connections, to learn and accept the truth, that is itself the original meaning of making good karmic connections.

For Buddhists, good karmic connections are those that transmit the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, as Rissho Kosei-kai members, we are already connected through the sangha and can be called happy people, blessed with the greatest of good karmic connections.

President's Message

Your Mental Outlook Is Important

Well, then, why do we want good karmic connections?

Many people may vaguely answer that good connections make them happy, but speaking from the perspective of the Buddha's teachings, we have all been born into this world because we ourselves are buddha nature. That is the essential reason for wanting good connections. Our minds are always seeking a state in which everything is peaceful and harmonious.

For people such as us, the key to always making good connections with the people and situations we encounter—while never giving in to selfish impulses that inadvertently slip out—is an attitude of learning what each of those connections has to teach us and reflecting upon what we have realized from those connections. The Buddha explains the teachings and manifests the truth to us in many different forms, so when you notice his advice embedded in your encounters with people and events, they all become good connections.

Chapter 27 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Former Deeds of King Wondrous Adornment," recounts the story of two sons who guide their parents to the teachings of the Buddha. This chapter describes how the father, King Wondrous Adornment, free of concerns for his social standing and losing face, listened to his sons' suggestions with a flexible mind and became, with humility, an enthusiastic practitioner of the Buddha Way.

Founder Niwano showed us that to make good karmic connections we should take the initiative in revering other people. He also said that if you abandon the petty ego that tries to make you look big, your interactions with people will form good connections. A change of mind leads to the development of a good connection, such that the child can even become the parent's teacher in life. My ears burn with recognition when I hear someone say that I am a stubborn old man who is incapable of being flexible and accepting suggestions from his children. Of course, we are all apt to behave selfishly within our own families, so we should admonish ourselves about the importance of a mental outlook that rigorously maintains, from one day to the next, our good connections.

Cofounder Myoko Naganuma, whose Annual Memorial Day we will observe on September 10, said that "If you really try to understand other people's feelings when you work on something together, you will be able to get along harmoniously with everyone." She was consistent in always showing consideration for other people. Just as she told us, "In liberating other people from suffering, sincere devotion is first and foremost," she remained true to her standard of acting compassionately. I think that she learned, from her personal experiences of suffering terribly from multiple illnesses and the sadness of living in poverty, the truth that good connections are formed through sincere devotion.

That being said, in thinking about how we should respond to the demands of those around us who are now suffering, could it be that we are overlooking some important karmic connections?

From Kosei, September 2021

Spiritual Journey

The Experience of Suffering Enriches Your Life

Mrs. Swapna Rani Barua Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the ceremony of Shakyamuni Buddha's Nirvana at Bangladesh Dharma Center on February 15, 2021.

I T's a great pleasure to have the opportunity to share my Dharma Journey on this significant day of Shakyamuni Buddha's Nirvana. I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you who are gathered here today.

My name is Swapna Rani Barua. I was born the eldest daughter of my father, Anil Chandra Barua, and my mother, Mari Prava Barua. I have four younger brothers. Currently, I live with my husband, Sukesh Talukder.

In 1980, I received my Secondary School Certification (SSC) at the age of seventeen. Then, I passed the Family Welfare Visitors (FWV) recruitment exam and became a licensed nurse after a year and a half of training. I was assigned to a Union Health and Family Welfare Center (UHFWC) operated under the government's Directorate General of Family Planning, but just as I was about to start my job, my father's business failed and I had to move with my parents and younger brothers from my home village of Damdama in Mirsharai, Chittagong District, to neighboring Ramgarh in Khagrachari District. Fortunately, I was able to continue working at UHFWC in that area. My father also started a new business, and my mother found a teaching position at a private elementary school. However, soon after we started life in our new town, my father became ill. My mother also lost her job because the elementary school where she worked was closed. My four younger brothers were still in school at the time, so I had to support them as well as my parents all by myself.

I worked very hard to provide for my family. They were always on my mind, even when I was working at my job. But I was only twenty years old and honestly didn't understand why I should feel responsible for their lives. Moreover, I wouldn't even think about getting married because I was afraid that no one would be able to support my younger brothers' education after I got married. Under the pressure of having to support my family all by myself, I became very hard on my parents and brothers. This situation continued for about twenty years before my entire family was finally able to return to our home village of Damdama.

After my younger brothers got married and became independent, I began a new chapter in my life. In 2003 I married my husband, Sukesh Talukder. In that same year, my husband and I were introduced to Rissho Kosei-kai by our relative, Mr. Protik Barua, and we joined the organization.

The teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai were different from those of the traditional Theravada Buddhism. They seemed like a completely new kind of teaching to me—"Be grateful for everything," "Put others first," and "Speak politely with a smile." I was fascinated by such teachings. In the hoza (Dharma circle) discussion



Mrs. Barua (dressed in orange) participates in the Dharma circle.

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that follows sutra recitation at the Dharma center, we wish for each other's happiness and share our sorrows. We also focus on the good qualities of other people, be as sincere as possible, and do good deeds to be of help to others. All of these Rissho Kosei-kai teachings have completely changed my life.

In 2005, I was granted the focus of devotion, an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, in Delhi, which is the most precious experience of my life.

In 2007, a group pilgrimage was organized to participate in the Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival held at Rissho Kosei-kai Headquarters in Tokyo, and I joined the group. I was moved by the sight of members paying their respects at the Great Sacred Hall. I also had a chance to listen to a Japanese member's Dharma Journey talk, which opened my eyes to the profundity of Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings. Just a year earlier, Rev. Teruo Saito, our former minister, had entrusted me to establish a hoza center in Damdama village. But it was when I visited the Headquarters that I vowed to draw on my experience there to convey the messages of Rissho Kosei-kai to Damdama and help many more people attain happiness.

The opening ceremony of the Damdama Hoza Center was held on October 20, 2007. As I had been appointed an area leader of the center, I was granted the privilege of bringing into the worship room our focus of devotion, a statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, which I held in both my arms while various musical instruments were being played. Even now I clearly remember how at that moment my heart was completely enveloped by the world of the Buddha.

I now realize that acting in accordance with the Buddha's teaching in our daily lives—in addition to the practice of connecting people with the Dharma and enhancing their connection with the Buddha—is the spiritual discipline Founder Niwano taught us, which allows us to feel the Buddha's compassion. That spiritual discipline is none other than the path to LIVING THE LOTUS SEPTEMBER 2021 happiness. Also, the opportunities to participate in various Rissho Kosei-kai seminars in Bangladesh and abroad have convinced me that if we want to attain true happiness, the shortest route is learning the Lotus Sutra.

I had often been torn between my concern for my family and my desire to prioritize my own life. But owing to the wondrous teachings of the Lotus Sutra, I gradually became able to reflect on myself and find peace of mind.

My husband and I were unable to have a child even after some time passed following our marriage, and the comments people often made around us seemed unkind to me, causing me to feel bitter and sad. However, after participating in leaders' education at the Dharma center, I realized that they said those things because they were actually worried about us as a couple. With this realization, I was able to deeply appreciate the people around us.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the guidance of Rev. Saito and Rev. Mitsuyuki Aritomi, our former ministers, for whom I have tremendous respect. They freed my husband and I from the pain of not having a child. On the day I received the role of area leader, Rev. Saito told my husband and I, "From now on, please give birth to innumerable children of the Dharma." We have treasured these words and will continue to do so for the rest of our lives. With the guidance of these two ministers, I have been able to have many Dharma children. Now every day I hope that my Dharma children will be even happier in the future.

In the beginning, I was greatly troubled by the fact that the people in my home village of Damdama were reluctant to accept Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings. But through learning about the role of a leader and the priceless value of performing Dharma duties in a leaders' education program, I became fully aware of the mission entrusted to me. As the two former ministers had taught me, I was called to be a leader who, by thinking of the people in the village with whom I

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shared the Dharma as my own children, could better empathize with their feelings.

Right now I am working at the practice of cultivating my heart and mind under the wonderful guidance of Rev. Takayuki Nagashima. He explains, "You'll find answers to your questions if you think of them in light of the words of the Founder and the President. And that's where you'll gain the strength to live."

I'd like to conclude my talk by making a vow to continue the practice of the Dharma together with my husband and everyone in the sangha and share the joy of practicing the teachings with many people. I pray for the happiness of all people.

Thank you for listening.



Mrs. Barua receives a letter of appreciation from Former Minister Rev. Aritomi for her devoted work.



An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Founder's Life and the History of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Father's Teaching

Jukichi, the Founder's father, was a person of few words. He was steadfast and silently went about his farming. Just like the Founder's grandfather, he used to give first-aid treatment to sick people, as he couldn't leave a person in trouble alone.

When the Founder was about to leave his hometown to work in Tokyo, his father offered these parting words: "Look for a place of work where the salary is low, the hours are long, and the work is hard."

The Founder reminisced later that these words laid the cornerstone for his later life.



🔘 Did You Know?

Jukuchi had also worked in Tokyo when he was twenty-three years old. During his stay in Tokyo he saw a lot of young country people going astray because of temptations. Therefore, Jukichi gave the Founder such strict advice so that he wouldn't fall into an idle lifestyle.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics



The Mother's Teaching

Mii, the Founder's mother, was a hard worker. She worked so hard into the night that he wondered when she went to bed.

She had many kinds of work to do: field labor, meal preparation, cleaning and washing, and patching clothes. In addition, she had the task of raising silkworms and weaving. So she hardly had time to rest. Even so, she always smiled and took loving care of her children.

The Founder mentions in his biography, *Lifetime Beginner*, that his mother was, for him, the embodiment of Hibo Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Maternal Compassion.



> Did You Know?

While the Founder was back in Suganuma, having returned from Tokyo after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, his mother passed away at the age of forty-three. The Founder wrote in his biography that "even today, when I think of the way she worked all her life without ever having known the meaning of true enjoyment, I cannot hold back my tears."

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Director's Column



"Catching" the Buddha's Message

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

R ISSHO Kosei-kai members are fortunate as we have been given life as human beings in this world and have been able to find the Lotus Sutra, which is hard to encounter, thanks to our karmic connections with Founder Nikkyo Niwano and President Nichiko Niwano, whose teachings are always guiding us to the true Dharma.

President Niwano's message for this month, "Making Good Karmic Connections," reflects the Founder's earnest wish that we all make the most of the Dharma that we have fortunately encountered, and become happy.

President Niwano explains that we have all been born into this world because we ourselves are buddha nature and therefore wish to make good karmic connections, and our minds are always seeking a state in which everything is peaceful and harmonious. However, we are not sure whether we can make full use of all the karmic connections we happen to make in our daily lives.

The President teaches us that "catching" (noticing) the Buddha's advice embedded in our encounters with people and events is the key to making the most of all karmic connections. He also reminds us of the importance of the Founder's words: "We should take initiative in revering other people" and "We should abandon the petty ego that tries to make us look big."

On September 10, Rissho Kosei-kai commemorates the annual memorial day for Cofounder Naganuma. Let us emulate the Cofounder, who practiced compassion throughout her life, and try to catch the Buddha's messages embedded in our everyday encounters.



We welcome comments on our newsletter *Living the Lotus*: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp.



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