

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Good Listeners Make Good Nurturers

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

PEOPLE who visit our Dharma centers often say to me, “Kosei-kai members are all such great listeners!” When I ask what makes this so, they tell me that members listen with warm smiles and nod often. This makes people feel comfortable, and it’s why Kosei-kai members are easy to talk to.

People who are uncomfortable speaking in public are often hesitant because they think they’ll be laughed at if they say what they’re thinking. Speaking is giving expression to oneself, so whether people listen to you is the same as whether they accept you. If others listen to you intently by nodding in affirmation, the joy of being accepted by others makes you feel comfortable speaking. Everyone is able to speak as freely as they want if others listen to them sincerely.

And when people can talk about anything without hesitation, they also open their hearts. This is why when we listen to people sincerely in *hoza*, they can be forthcoming and speak frankly about themselves. In today’s society, what people want most is someone who listens to them, don’t they? I think the most appealing thing about Kosei-kai is our ability to listen empathetically to anyone, no matter the issues they raise.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 136–37

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

Let's Return to Our Starting Point

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

From One to Ten and Back Again

Sen no Rikyu (1522–91), founder of the Senke school of the Japanese Way of Tea, wrote didactic poems describing his understanding of the tea ceremony. In them, we recognize many lessons common to those who seek the Way, such as, “Practice means learning things from one to ten, / And then going back to the beginning.”

When we're beginners in the faith, we're taught many things by our seniors, we seek out and learn the teachings for ourselves, and we gradually make the Buddha's teachings our own. When we join a Dharma circle (*hoza*), we're inspired by others' stories of being liberated by the Dharma and we feel more motivated to seek the Way. We also become more aware of our own shortcomings and become diligent in our practice. The repetition of this process is the definition of “seeking the Way.”

However, as we get used to this process, our initial enthusiasm and desire for seeking the Way may diminish as we start to feel like we already know it. We tend to lose sight of the original purpose of our faith, which is to continue refining ourselves.

Instead of saying you've learned ten things and that's good enough, tell yourself that when you've learned ten things, that means it's time to go back to the first thing and review it. By doing so, you'll notice something you didn't notice when you first learned it, therefore moving closer to the true meaning of the teaching. I think this is the meaning of Rikyu's poem.

Similarly, in the Lotus Sutra's concluding chapter, “Encouragement from the Bodhisattva Universal Sage,” we're taught the importance of always returning to the starting point—which in turn perfectly summarizes the entire Lotus Sutra.

In his later years, Founder Niwano often mentioned the “four requirements” that appear in chapter 28. This is because these four requirements cover all the teachings of the Lotus Sutra—from the introductory chapter on—in easily understandable language. Believing we are safeguarded by the buddhas, performing many good deeds, practicing together with friends in the faith, and practicing consideration for others as we pray for the happiness of society as a whole—these four requirements are our starting point and the basis of our seeking and believing in the Buddha Way.

The Mind of the Way and the Mind of a Child

Although we can understand the importance of returning to the starting point to deepen our learning, in reality, some of us may be unable to continue daily sutra recitation with the enthusiasm we had as beginners.

The phrase “love the Dharma” is attributed to Zhiyi (538–97), the fourth patriarch of the Tiantai (Jpn., Tendai) school of Chinese Buddhism. This phrase means seeking the Dharma with a pure, innocent mind. Zhiyi interpreted the “encouragement” of “Encouragement from the Bodhisattva Universal Sage” as “loving the Dharma.”

The earnest wish to hear the Buddha's teachings is like the feeling we have when we fall in love with someone—when we want to know more about them (the Dharma), walk together with them, and pursue them with a pure mind. In order to return to the starting point of faith and diligently practice it, the desire to seek the Way must be a dynamic force, like falling in love.

That said, however, when it comes to caring for our daily lives in this world, sometimes we may struggle to maintain at full measure our devotion to the faith. In order to live, we can't ignore profit and self-interest, which may make our neglect of diligent practice unavoidable. Even so, as long as we don't forget the pure, innocent desire, like that of young children, to create a good society for everyone and be happy together, we can always return to the feelings we had when we were beginners. In other words, it's important that we don't lose both the mind of the Way (道心, *doshin*) and the mind of a child (童心, *doshin*).

The word “encouragement” means “to make others feel enthusiastic about something,” but in “Encouragement from the Bodhisattva Universal Sage,” those who practice the teachings of the Buddha are praised with the words “well done” and by having their heads stroked. Similarly, when we are engaged in the daily practice of the Buddha Way, the Buddha is always warmly watching over and encouraging us.

With this in mind, even steadfast, diligent practice gains momentum and becomes enjoyable. By returning to the starting point, we realize that sutra recitation, *hoza* sessions, and interactions with our fellow sangha members are all joyful events that encourage us anew.

From *Kosei*, October 2021

Spiritual Journey

Practicing the Bodhisattva Way with Gratitude and Joy

Ms. Du Jifung
Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei

The following is based on a Dharma Journey talk that took place at the Taipei Dharma Center on May 25, 2020, during the ceremony for the monthly memorial day for the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World. It was later revised to include an event that occurred after the talk.

HELLO, everyone. I am Du Jifung, a member of the third group of the Taipei Dharma Center. It's a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity today to share my Dharma Journey.

I got married and moved to Taipei in March, 1994. I had the opportunity to visit the Taipei Dharma Center for the first time when my mother-in-law, Chen Huangyuqyin, who was very enthusiastic about Rissho Kosei-kai activities, took me here.

I had a job when I got married, but I quit and became a full-time homemaker after giving birth to my first daughter. My mother-in-law didn't force me to visit the Dharma center, but she would often suggest that I bring my children to have a pleasant time here when I could. Soon, I began to visit the Dharma center simply because I wanted to.

In the summer of 2010, the Taipei Dharma Center carried out a program called the Family Group Pilgrimage to Rissho Kosei-kai Headquarters. Taking my mother-in-law's advice, I participated in the program and visited the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo with my daughter and son. During the trip, my kids joined a program called the Suganuma Kids Camp, held at Suganuma in Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture, the birthplace of Founder Nikkyo Niwano. Their program included participants from the Ulaanbaatar chapter in Mongolia as well as many of the Dharma centers in Japan.

While my kids were at camp, I took part in seminars about Rissho Kosei-kai activities and family education. Through talking with Japanese members at the headquarters, I realized the profundity of the Buddha's teachings and the importance of putting them into practice at home. During the seminars,

I learned that everyone can become a bodhisattva by practicing the teachings, sharing them with others, establishing peace at home, and respecting one's ancestors.

On November 14, 2010, my beloved mother-in-law passed away at the age of eighty. Even in her later years, she was able to take care of everything in her life herself. She wasn't a leader at the Dharma center, but she dedicated her whole body and soul to the bodhisattva practice, along with other sangha members, and connected many people with the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. I believe she had no regrets in her life, but she always hoped that her children and grandchildren would inherit the Dharma. Making her wish my own, I will continue to engage in Rissho Kosei-kai's activities with a joyful mind. I especially like the sutra recitation and discussing the Dharma with my senior members. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for these senior members—they take good care of me as if I were their daughter.



Ms. Du delivers her Dharma Journey talk at Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei.

In early March this year, I suddenly had a bloody discharge and went through an endoscopy of my stomach and large intestine. I was worried I was seriously ill. Rev. Chien Hsiu-Fang, minister of the Taipei Dharma Center, cared about me and suggested that I make a vow to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World to practice the bodhisattva way. Fortunately, it turned out that I had mild reflux esophagitis, gastritis, and hemorrhoids. I felt as if a big weight had been taken off my chest when I heard there was no abnormality in my large intestine.

On April 7, one day before the anniversary of the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, I was preparing fruits and vegetables to be offered at the Dharma center's altar when I got a phone call from the local court informing me of a problem with our family grave. A large earthquake that had struck central Taiwan on September 21, 1999, had caused our family's gravestone to move into the neighboring gravesite. Although the court had notified us to return the gravestone to its original position, we'd inadvertently failed to follow the order in time. The court informed me that the owner of the neighboring gravesite had filed a lawsuit, and if we didn't follow the injunction, the court would foreclose on our house on April 20. I asked the court's attorney and clerk for advice, but they told me the problem couldn't be settled unless the other person dropped the lawsuit.

I had no objection to moving the gravestone and clearing the site, but I didn't understand why we should pay the penalty of 150,000 Taiwan dollars (roughly \$5,500). My husband's aunt used to take care of family matters like this, but she'd suffered a stroke not long before and I didn't want to put another heavy responsibility on her. So, my husband and I discussed the matter and decided to take care of it ourselves.

I was worried that the owner of the neighboring gravesite would add claims we couldn't deal with. Rev. Chien was aware of our concerns and instructed

us to ask the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World to help us so this person would lend us an understanding ear and our penalty would be minimal. Initially we had a hard time finding a contractor to clear the gravesite, but thanks to the help of our friends, we located one. The forecast for the day of the work was rainy, but the weather in Hsinchu, where our family grave is located, was mild. The contractor used a steam shovel and the work went smoothly; the clearing of the site only took two days. The owner of the neighboring site was satisfied with the result and went with us to the court to drop the lawsuit. I felt as if another big weight had been removed from my chest.

However, a short time later, on the morning of May 29, I received a call from a friend that my husband had suddenly collapsed at the local sports arena, where he went every day to stay healthy. When I immediately called Rev. Chien for advice, she said, "Please stay calm. He'll be all right. I will make a prayer offering to the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni right away. Call me again anytime you feel uneasy."

Thanks to the lifesaving measures taken at the scene for more than twenty minutes, my husband began breathing again even though he remained unconscious and his condition didn't seem to improve. The doctor at the hospital asked my family whether we wanted them to cut open his trachea and put him on a ventilator. The doctor explained that even if he was put on a ventilator, he would not necessarily get better and might be in a vegetative state. I discussed this with my children and told the doctor that we would not put him on a ventilator.

Fortunately, my husband miraculously survived. He remained in a coma for forty days, but one day when Rev. Chien came to visit him in the hospital, he suddenly regained consciousness and called to her. After that, his condition began to improve and he was able to leave the hospital. He has since visited the

Spiritual Journey

Dharma center with me more than once and he is now able to recite the Threefold Lotus Sutra in a clear voice.

Through Rissho Kosei-kai activities, I've learned the importance of always putting the teachings into practice. If we practice the teachings as we are taught, we will surely receive the divine protection of the gods and buddhas. In our time of need, bodhisattvas are always reaching out to us and guiding us on the path of liberation so we can overcome our difficulties.

Like my mother-in-law who led me to the teachings, I will continue to practice the bodhisattva way with gratitude and joy in my heart.

Thank you very much, everyone.

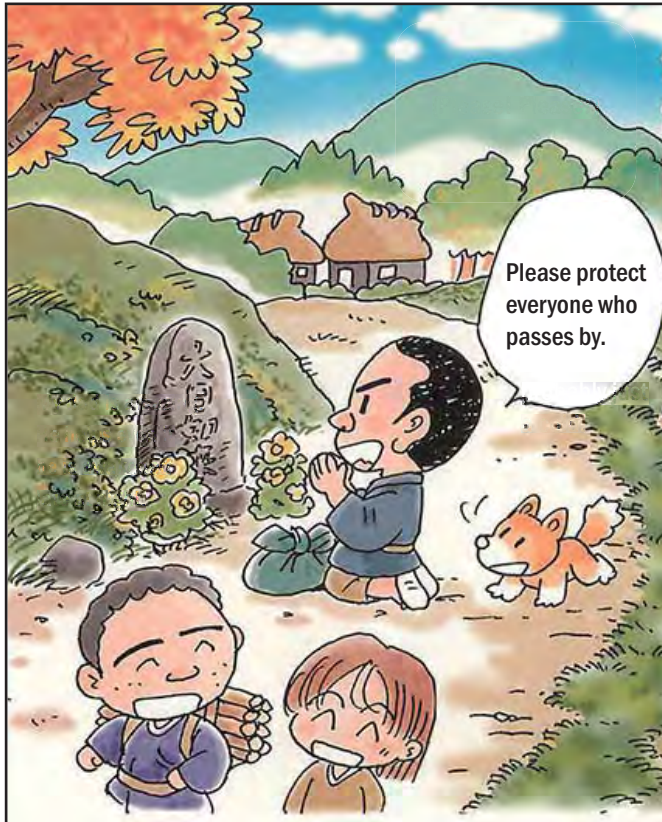


Ms. Du (second from left) participates in a Dharma circle.



An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

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



The Founder in His Childhood

The Founder worked hard ever since he was a child. Because he was tall for his age, he began plowing the fields with his father when he was in fourth grade (nine to ten years old).

He also earned an allowance by gathering wood for fuel in the mountains and taking it into town to sell. This was how he saved money to buy the books he wanted to read, such as biographies of famous people.

When he was in elementary school, he abided by the teaching of Mr. Denkichirō Daikō, the school's principal, who told him to revere the gods and the buddhas. He always bowed and put his palms together in front of the image of Dainichi Nyorai that was on the path to his school.



Did You Know?

In Suganuma, the Founder's hometown, many gods and buddhas—such as the buddha Dainichi Nyorai (the Tathagata Mahavairocana), the Koyasu Kannon (the painless-birth Kannon), and Oike Benzaiten—were enshrined. The tutelary deity of Suganuma was also enshrined at Suwa jinja, a local Shinto shrine. In his childhood, the Founder always put his palms together and bowed when passing the gods and buddhas no matter how much of a hurry he was in.



The Founder in His Youth

When the Founder was sixteen years old, he left for Tokyo. He soon returned home, however, after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. The following year, he went to Tokyo again to find work.


He worked for a charcoal store where he only had one day off a month; his wages were half that of another worker who was the same age as him. But he never complained about the low wages and he worked sincerely, following his father's teachings.

Every day, the Founder woke up early and cleaned the house and the store. After finishing breakfast, he went around taking customers' orders. In the



afternoon, he delivered the charcoal to them. In the evening, he cut the charcoal for the next day's orders and put them in sacks. This was his daily routine.

Because the Founder was such a hard worker, the storekeeper treated him like a younger brother. The storekeeper trusted the Founder so much that he even asked for his advice on business.



Director's Column

Always Remembering Our Initial Rejoicing and Resolution

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

In his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano discusses the concluding chapter (chapter 28) of the Lotus Sutra, “Encouragement from the Bodhisattva Universal Sage.” I trust that the title of his message, “Let’s Return to Our Starting Point,” is infused with his desire that members will establish anew the important attitude of Buddhist practice and walk the unsurpassable Way.

Our daily dedication to the bodhisattva way embodies the practice of perfection in benefitting both ourselves and others. For this to happen, I hope each of us will always remember the joy and resolution we had when we started to follow the Buddhist path. The Lotus Sutra clearly indicates this joy and resolution—we see it in the Buddha’s expounding of the merits of initial rejoicing over the Lotus Sutra (chapter 18), in the four great shravakas’ remorse for their past contentment with lesser teachings (chapter 4), and in other chapters as well.

Whenever I recite chapter 28, I’m reminded of the late years of Founder Nikkyo Niwano. Every time he made a Dharma talk in the Great Sacred Hall on monthly memorial days, he would speak about how we can fulfill the four requirements in this chapter, always explaining it in an easily understandable way.

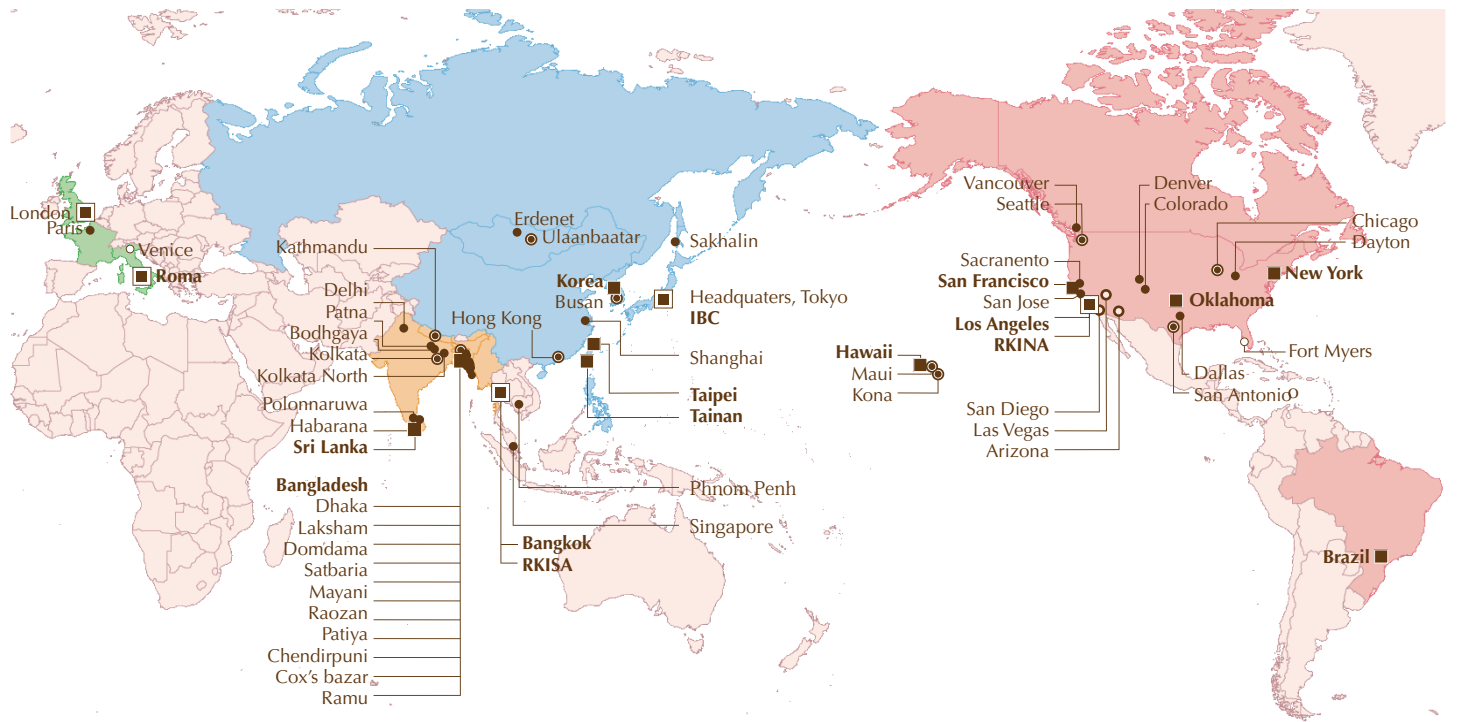
In his message this month, President Niwano reminds us of the four requirements: “believing that we are safeguarded by the buddhas,” “performing many good deeds,” “practicing together with friends in the faith,” and “practicing consideration for others as we pray for the happiness of society as a whole.” Keeping the four requirements in mind and always remembering our first rejoicing and resolution, let us all strive to pursue the bodhisattva way with further diligence.



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



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