

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

The People around You Are Guaranteed to Change

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

I SUPPOSE that everyone can comprehend the meaning of the words “Change yourself, and others will change accordingly.” As to whether people really understand the truth of these words, you’ll know they do not when they raise questions such as “If I’m not in the wrong, why is it that I’m the one who has to change?” and “Even if I change, is there any guarantee that the other person will also change?” This teaching is the part of the Lotus Sutra that is, as the sutra says, “difficult to enter and difficult to understand.”

It is extremely difficult to enter the world of the Buddha’s Dharma while we are still clinging to our own notions of common sense and self-interest. But when we learn how all things arise interdependently, we come to understand that in this interconnected world it is impossible for one side to be absolutely right or the other side to be absolutely wrong. Likewise, we realize it is not possible for us to change ourselves without having an effect on others.

The fact that all things arise interdependently shows us that nothing stays the same or exists on its own; everything in existence always changes in mutual relation to other things.

If you give practicing this teaching a try, you will come to completely understand the world of the Buddha’s Dharma and think to yourself, “Why, of course!”

Kaiso zuikan 8 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 260–61

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.

The Joy of Having Something to Believe In—Concentration

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Does Losing Our Composure Disqualify Us as Bodhisattvas?

We learn the teachings of the Buddha, use our compassionate minds to be considerate of others, and strive to grow as human beings through such practices. These are called “bodhisattva practices” and are summed up as six guiding objectives in the teaching known as the Six Paramitas. One of these six, concentration, was explained by Founder Niwano as indicating “a state of mind determined to always follow the truth” and “a quiet, calm state of mind that does not doubt or get upset, no matter what happens.” Therefore, concentration is a state of mind expected of all bodhisattvas, rather than a guideline for our behavior.

Is it possible, though, to have such a settled frame of mind, no matter what happens? And if we are unable to do so, are we disqualified as bodhisattvas? Because we are human beings, it is extremely difficult to never have doubts or become upset. If our minds become unsettled, in my understanding, this does not mean that we are disqualified as bodhisattvas.

Every day, we encounter various people and events. According to the teaching of impermanence, every moment is part of a series of new encounters full of productivity and change. During that process, we may sometimes get upset or lose our composure. Although we all have minds of tranquility, like the Buddha's, our minds are sometimes unsettled by anger or greed; because we are only human, I think it is important that we fully accept this fact. Only by squarely facing the reality that our minds are sometimes unsettled can we aspire to attain an unperturbed state of being and want to grasp something that we can trust from the bottom of our hearts. In fact, many of you have connected with the Dharma in this way, haven't you?

So, the fact that we human beings have doubts and worries is important. If something shakes up our minds, it is proof that we are alive. If we can fully accept such events and be grateful for having received a life as a human being—capable of seeking the truth (the Dharma)—then this acceptance itself is one bodhisattva-like level of concentration in which our minds are determined to “follow the truth.”

Seeing the Moon of the Truth

To quote a Buddhist poem by Zen master Ikkyu (1394–1481), “In a cloudless sky, / A single moon / Shines brightly, / And yet we get lost / In the darkness of this floating world.” Just as the moonlight helps us walk at night, so the moon of the truth always illuminates us. Nevertheless, those who do not look for the truth live with anxiety, impatience, and fear constantly in their minds, as if they are groping along as they walk through the dark night.

Shortly before his death, Shakyamuni expounded the teaching “Make yourself the light; make the Dharma your light,” which means “believe in the truth and depend on yourself as you follow that truth. Take refuge in the Dharma.” We could say this aphorism is like the moonlight that helps us walk at night. In other words, it is important to make a habit of trying to match your behavior and the issue before you with fundamental truths—such as “all things are in a state of constant change,” and “all things arise through causes and conditions.” If doing so makes your mind even a little calmer and more at ease, it will lead to relief from anxiety and suffering.

Zenjo, the Japanese word for “concentration”—by which we mean a calm, settled state of mind—is generally understood as the peaceful state of mind achieved through meditation. There are many kinds of meditation and concentration, but I believe that the key is to take a good look at your current behavior and the reality in front of you, accept them, and make every effort to focus your mind on the truth. And then, that this practice is simply explained by the teaching “Make yourself the light; make the Dharma your light,” and that we have encountered it as well as a faith that always puts our minds at ease, is something for which we truly feel joy.

The season of moon-viewing is now upon us. And though we are all bathed in the same moonlight, there are people who cannot live peaceful lives. The many practices of benefitting others described in the Six Paramitas, the first of which is the practice of donation, help us to shine the light of compassion into the minds of those who need it most. Our concentration—our admiring the moon of the truth—is a bodhisattva practice that forms the basis for doing so.

From *Kosei*, September 2022

Spiritual Journey

How Acknowledgment and Remorse Awakened Me to My Gratitude for My Mother

Mr. Amarbayasgal Munguntsetseg
Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

This Dharma Journey talk originally appeared in Japanese in the July 2022 issue of Kosei, a monthly magazine published by Kosei Publishing.

I WAS born in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, in 1997. My mother had already divorced my father before she gave birth to me, so I was raised by my mother and grandmother. Although our lives were not easy, I still have many good memories of my mother, who was cheerful and a good cook. This peaceful way of life did not last long, however.

When I was a third grader, my mother left home for work, and we started living apart. We still saw each other regularly until my school life got busier; then I only spent time with her during long vacations such as summer break. When I was with her, I always felt the relief of her unfailing love and compassion.

I first noticed a change in my mother when I was in my first year of high school. I visited her during summer break, and her boyfriend was frequenting her apartment. He always accompanied her when she went out, and she was so restrained by him that she couldn't even hang out with her friends. Around that time, I often saw her drink and had a bad hunch about it. The following year, she broke up with her boyfriend and started to live with me and my grandmother again. But by then she was no longer able to live without alcohol.

She drank beer almost every day until she couldn't take another sip. Then she would just go to bed and lie down. She would get so drunk that she couldn't do any more chores or take care of her stuff; we couldn't even hold a conversation. As I couldn't stand seeing my mother like that, I asked her many times to stop drinking, but she only ever gave me halfhearted replies.

What had changed my mother so much? Where on earth had my cheerful and kind mother gone? I was

worried about her, but I was also filled with shame and resentment as I saw her changing into a different person. As a result, we began to have more quarrels and arguments.

Time passed, but the situation remained unchanged. In July 2014, however, an incident occurred during which I exploded in anger. Every year all my relatives spent the summer at a vacation rental in Gorkhi Terelj National Park, sixty-five kilometers northeast of Ulaanbaatar. We visited that year as well, and one night my mother drank with some of our relatives.

I was going to hang out with my friends the next day, so my mother had given me some allowance money.



Mr. Amarbayasgal Munguntsetseg

When I looked in my wallet, I realized the money was not there. Right away, I had a bad feeling about it because my mother had once spent my grandmother's money on alcohol. I asked my mother if she had taken the money out of my wallet; she said she hadn't, but she didn't look me in the eye. No matter how many times I asked her the question, she still gave me the same answer. I couldn't stand it anymore, and I slapped her cheek out of anger, shouted "That's enough!" and ran out of the room.

I stayed at my friend's house that night. The following day, as I took the bus back to the vacation rental, I looked at the hand I had slapped my mother with and felt very remorseful for what I had done.

I arrived back late at night. My grandmother heard what had happened the preceding night and said, "It was understandable that you got angry, but it was no reason to slap your mother." In Mongolia, we have a deep-rooted culture of respect for our parents and elders. We consider it rude to drink or smoke in front of our elders, and of course, slapping or hitting one's parent is regarded as an immoral, reprehensible act.

Three days later, my mother, who was then sober, told me that she had taken the money. Like my grandmother, she told me next that it was not good to slap one's parents. I was going to apologize, but her words made me feel abandoned, and instead I blamed her coldheartedly, saying "I knew you were lying."

Sorrow welled up within my heart when I thought that my mother would still be as kind as before if it weren't for the drinking. I also felt sad because my mother didn't understand that I was just worried about her health. I hoped only to lead a peaceful life with my family so that my mother would revert to her old self and speak kindly to me.

In reality, no matter how much time passed, my regret for having slapped my mother wouldn't leave my heart. I always wanted to talk about my wrongful deed with somebody and ask for forgiveness, but I couldn't do so, even with my closest friends. I was so afraid they would think of me as a horrible person who had slapped his own mother. It was at this stage that I had a chance to connect to Rissho Kosei-kai.

After graduating from high school, I worked part-time and hung out with my friends every day.

My aunt had a friend who was a member of the Ulaanbaatar Chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai. One day my aunt asked me, "Do you want to come with me to a Buddhist community gathering?" I was not really into it, but I couldn't turn it down because it was an offer from a relative. I was surprised that in the *hoza* session, or "Dharma circle," participants frankly shared their suffering or joy with other participants, but at the same time, I thought it would be nice to have a place where I could feel free to disclose my own feelings. I joined a *hoza* session three times with my aunt, but after that, I began to visit the chapter by myself.

In June 2017, a group from Rissho Kosei-kai's Tama Division visited the Ulaanbaatar Chapter to support our Dharma dissemination activities. During the program, we had a *hoza* session facilitated by the group leader Rev. Hisae Baba, then minister of the Tachikawa Dharma Center in Tokyo. I plucked up the courage to talk about my mother's alcoholism. After listening attentively to my wish that my mother would recover from her addiction, Rev. Baba taught me the importance of ancestor appreciation and of putting the teaching "If you change, others will change accordingly" into practice.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we often hear the phrase "If you change, others will change accordingly." It teaches that we should take the initiative to study, learn how to see things, and lead our lives in light of the Buddha's teachings; all things in this world are interrelated, and consequently, if we change ourselves, people and circumstances surrounding us will also naturally change for the better. This teaching suggested to me that polishing my mind and heart and applying the proper way of seeing things could improve my relationship with my mother. Learning the phrase and its intent encouraged me to regain hope for a brighter life.

After the Rev. Baba's *hoza* session, I was determined that even if I saw my mother drinking, I would try to suppress my anger, focus on housework, and remember to express my respect and appreciation to my ancestors for giving me life. From then on, I was gradually more able to control my feelings and not be swayed by my mother's words and actions. In addition, I could interact with her with a calm and peaceful mind.

Spiritual Journey

On experiencing such a significant change in my own mind, I longed to learn more about the Buddha's teachings.

Later, while studying nursing at a junior college, I participated in *hoza* sessions at the chapter twice a month. It was not long before I got to know that Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters has a human resource development institution called Gakurin Seminary, where youth members study and learn about the faith through lectures and Dharma dissemination training programs. Then, I heard they also had a Gakurin Overseas Leaders Certification Course that accepts overseas youth members for its two-year program, and I wished to go to Japan and study the teachings in greater depth.

In May 2019, I took an entrance exam for the Gakurin Overseas Leaders Certification Course, and fortunately, I passed the exam required to enter the seminary. My mother and grandmother were delighted about my acceptance and said, "We know you can do it! We wish you luck in the two-year program!"

In April 2020, my new life started at Gakurin. Though I was spending meaningful time devoting myself to studying Japanese, the memory of slapping my mother remained deep in my mind. I tried many times to forget it, but as I watched TV programs or other media featuring parent-child relationships, the scene of that moment would come back to me, and I couldn't forgive myself. I was so afraid of disappointing others that I couldn't disclose my suffering to anyone. Yet, in my second year at Gakurin, the time finally came to talk about it.

In October 2021, we did a two-week Dharma dissemination training, which included a pilgrimage to Mount Minobu, a sacred mountain of Nichiren Buddhism located in Yamanashi. Thirteen staff members and students of the Gakurin Seminary participated in that training, wearing white ceremonial Buddhist robes, aiming for the summit of the mountain, and reciting aloud the *O-daimoku*, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, which means "I take refuge in the Lotus Sutra."

In a pre-guidance meeting, Rev. Yoshie Otomo, deputy director of Gakurin Daiju Group, advised us: "Shishin-kaku Temple stands at the top of Mount

Minobu. The Japanese word *shishin* means "contemplating or calling to mind one's parents." Please leave the heavy loads that are on your minds, especially those about your parents, on the mountain, and come back with fresh minds." On hearing her guidance, the nightmare—that I had slapped my mother—came back to my mind.

"Please forgive me." I strongly wished this to be so. Then, I could no longer keep a lid on my emotions, and I told my story to Mr. Ryosuke Hagiwara, a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai International, and Ms. Adilbish Badamkhorloo, a staff member of the Gakurin Daiju Group who is in charge of overseas students. I said to them, "I wronged my mother. What should I do?" In response to my question, they kindly advised me: "Acknowledgment and remorse have two levels of practice. The first level is to acknowledge your past mistaken thoughts and actions in the presence of others."

At 10 a.m. on the following day, we began the pilgrimage to Mount Minobu, setting out for the summit. While walking to the top, we all hit flat, fan-shaped drums and recited the *O-daimoku* aloud and in unison. As my steps progressed, the words of Rev. Otomo echoed in my mind: "Please leave the heavy loads that are on your minds on the mountain and come back with fresh minds." Before I knew it, I was thinking about my parents.

When I was little, my mother had to leave home for work and became addicted to alcohol. As for my father, I don't even know his name. I found myself having to go through painful feelings and experiences because of my parents. But at the same time, I realized that if my parents and ancestors had not passed the baton in the relay of life to the next generation, I wouldn't have been born into this world. Thanks to my encounter with the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I have become aware that I received the gift of life, and I am sustained by all other things in the world. I have been through many challenges, but once I realized that each past event influenced the present, feelings of gratitude welled up for my mother, who gave birth to me. I made up my mind that I would talk about my past wrongful deed to Mr. Hagiwara and Ms. Badamkhorloo.

Spiritual Journey

That night, I had a *hoza* session with them. Though I had made up my mind while I was climbing the mountain, I was too nervous to speak out. Gradually, I began to feel relieved and secure as I saw them trying to listen to me carefully. I finally said in a trembling voice, “The mountain gave me the courage to acknowledge my past mistake and talk about it. I would like to share it with you now.” I told them that I had slapped my mother, always suffered from a feeling of regret for not having apologized to her, and been worried that my beloved mother would abandon me. While talking, my mind became filled with feelings of regret and remorse for my action toward my mother, and I couldn’t hold back tears. They kindly said, with tears in their eyes, “It was great of you to acknowledge your past wrongful deed and express your remorse for it.” They rejoiced in my spiritual growth as if it were their own, and I realized how thankful I was to have a sangha, fellow members of the same faith.

The following day, I talked about my past mistake in a *hoza* session facilitated by Rev. Otomo. Rev. Otomo advised me, “You love your mother so much that you were able to reflect on, acknowledge, and express your remorse for your past wrongful deed today. Please share these feelings with your mother.”

After I completed the Dharma dissemination training program, I had a video call with my mother. I talked about my experiences and learning during the program, including the pilgrimage to Mount Minobu. At last, after seven years, I was able to apologize to my mother. She looked delighted, and she told me she had forgiven me soon after I had slapped her. Seeing the warmhearted expression on my mother’s face, I experienced the same feelings of happiness and peace as I had in my childhood.

Last March, I returned to Mongolia and started living with my family again. In September, I will go back to the junior nursing college from which I took a two-year leave. My mother still drinks sometimes, but I no longer feel as angry as I used to. This is because I learned it is necessary to understand the reasons for her drinking, rather than decide whether drinking itself is right or wrong.

I had always thought I was the victim; the one who had been through challenging and painful circumstances due to my mother’s alcoholism. However, I can now imagine how hard it must have been for her to support the household by herself and to have to live apart from her son. I think drinking was the only way for her to alleviate her feelings of loneliness. When I came to understand that my mother was also suffering, I grew to want to support her, and I felt a deep appreciation for being able to live with my family.

When I performed my acknowledgment and remorse in the *hoza* session, my sangha drew close to me and alleviated my suffering. Likewise, if I notice my mother is about to rely on drinking, I will draw close to her and ease her suffering.



Mr. Munguntsetseg at Mount Minobu with his Gakurin fellow students.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

Shakyamuni Buddha's Entering Nirvana

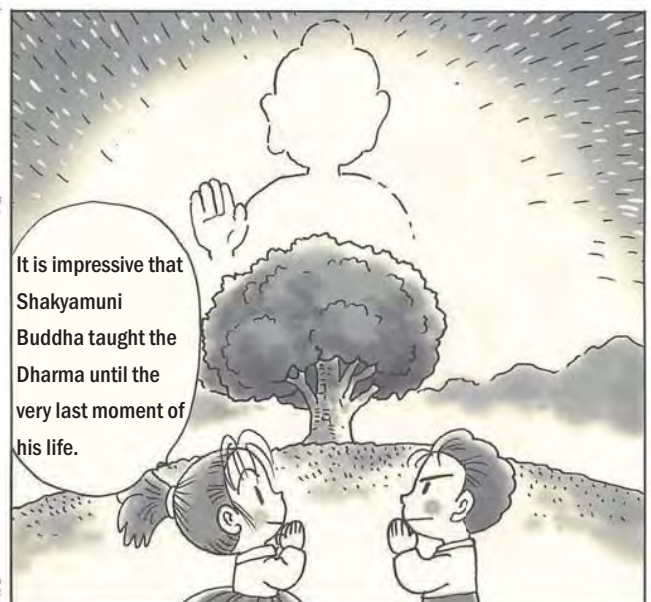
Shakyamuni Buddha's life of eighty years ended at Kushinagara; this event is called "Shakyamuni Buddha's entering nirvana." According to the Japanese calendar, it is thought to have happened at midnight on February 15. It is said that when Shakyamuni Buddha entered nirvana, an earthquake suddenly occurred, and thunder roared.

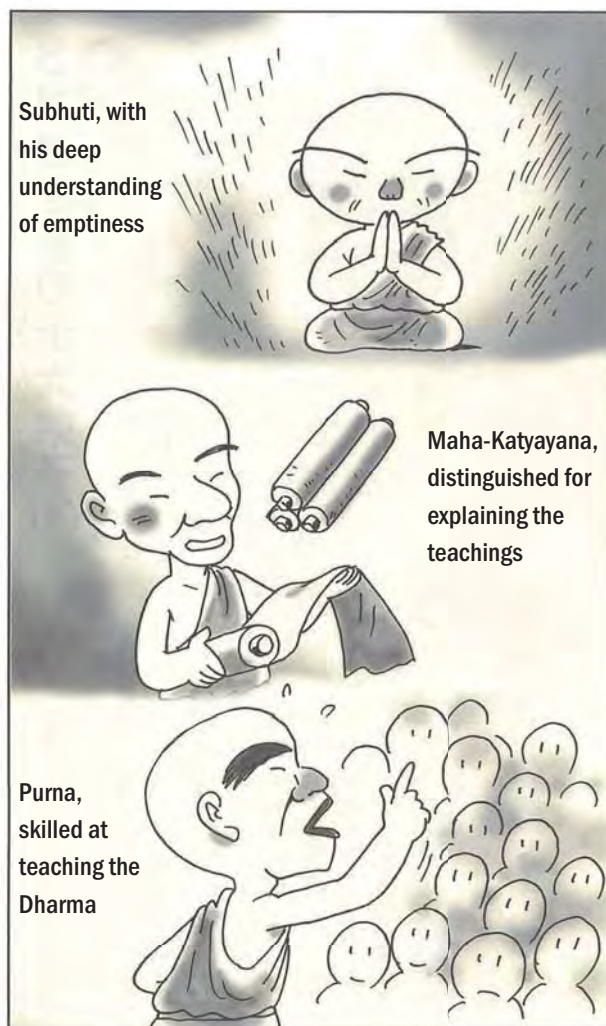
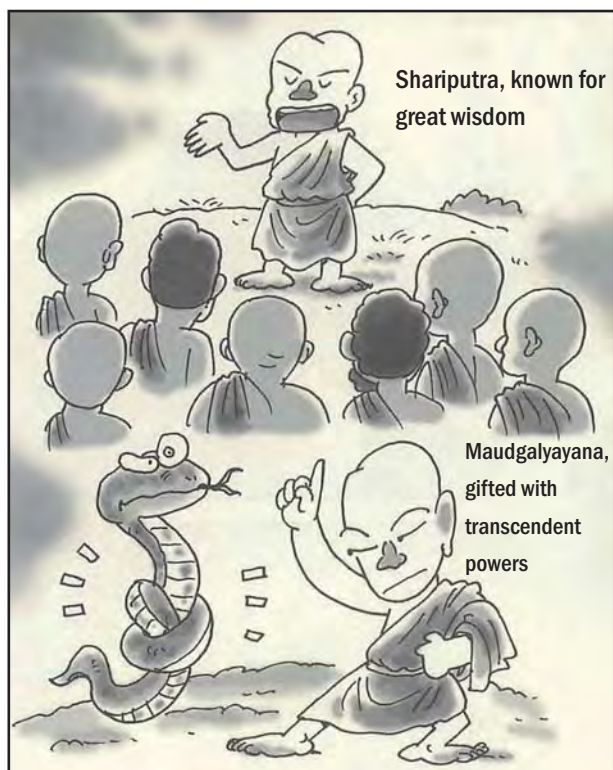
Shakyamuni Buddha left this message for his disciples with the last of his strength before he expired: "I will leave some words to all of you. All phenomena are always changing. Endeavor to practice my teachings diligently."



Did You Know?

Shakyamuni Buddha also conveyed these last words to his disciples: "You must rely on yourselves and no one else. You must make the Dharma your light and support, and rely on nothing else." This address is remembered in Buddhism as the teaching of "Make yourself the light; make the Dharma your light." Through these words, we can feel Shakyamuni Buddha's warm intention to encourage his disciples, who devoted themselves to hard practices.





The Ten Great Disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha—Part 1

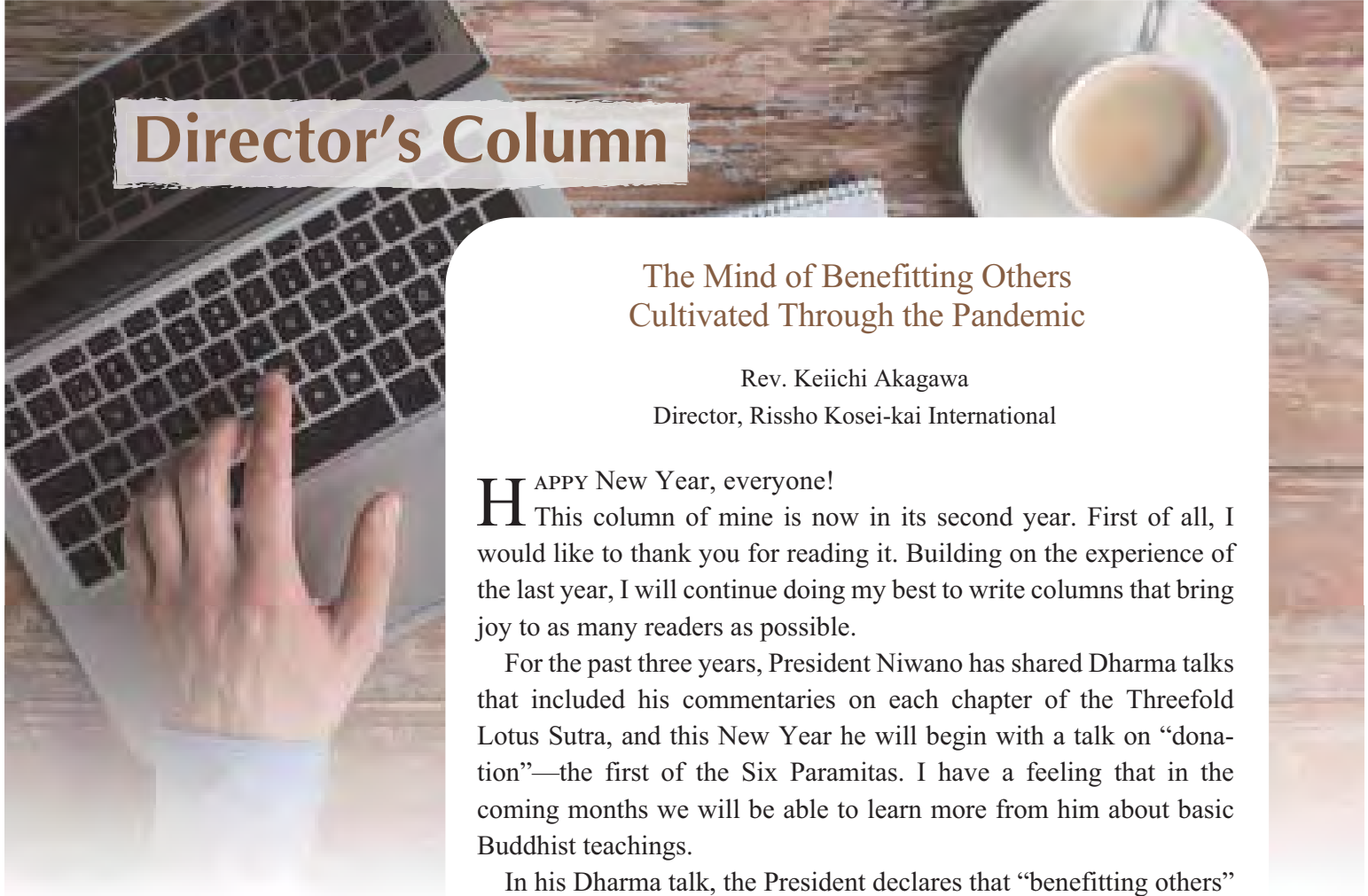
Shakyamuni Buddha had many disciples who had their own unique abilities. They contributed their talents to working together in Dharma dissemination and managing the organization. The ten great disciples are the most well known among them.

Shariputra was known for his great wisdom. Maudgalyayana had transcendent powers. Subhuti stood out from the others in his understanding of the doctrine of emptiness.

Maha-Katyayana was good at explaining the Dharma in a way that was easy to understand. Purna was foremost among the teachers of the Dharma, and he engaged in Dharma dissemination at his home throughout his lifetime.

Did You Know?

Transcendent powers are special abilities of seeing, hearing, and feeling what ordinary people cannot. Legend has it that Maudgalyayana learned of his mother's suffering in the realm of hungry spirits through his transcendent powers. Her greedy and selfish deeds, accumulated in her past life, had caused her suffering. He asked many good friends in the Sangha, with whom he practiced the teachings, to transfer their merits to his mother, while he himself made offerings and donations to those good friends. At last, he liberated his mother from the realm of hungry spirits.



Director's Column

Letting Go of Our Self-Centeredness

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

HELLO, readers of the Director's Column. The third summer of the COVID-19 pandemic is nearing an end. I think many of you are tired of the scorching heat, aren't you? I wish all of you good health.

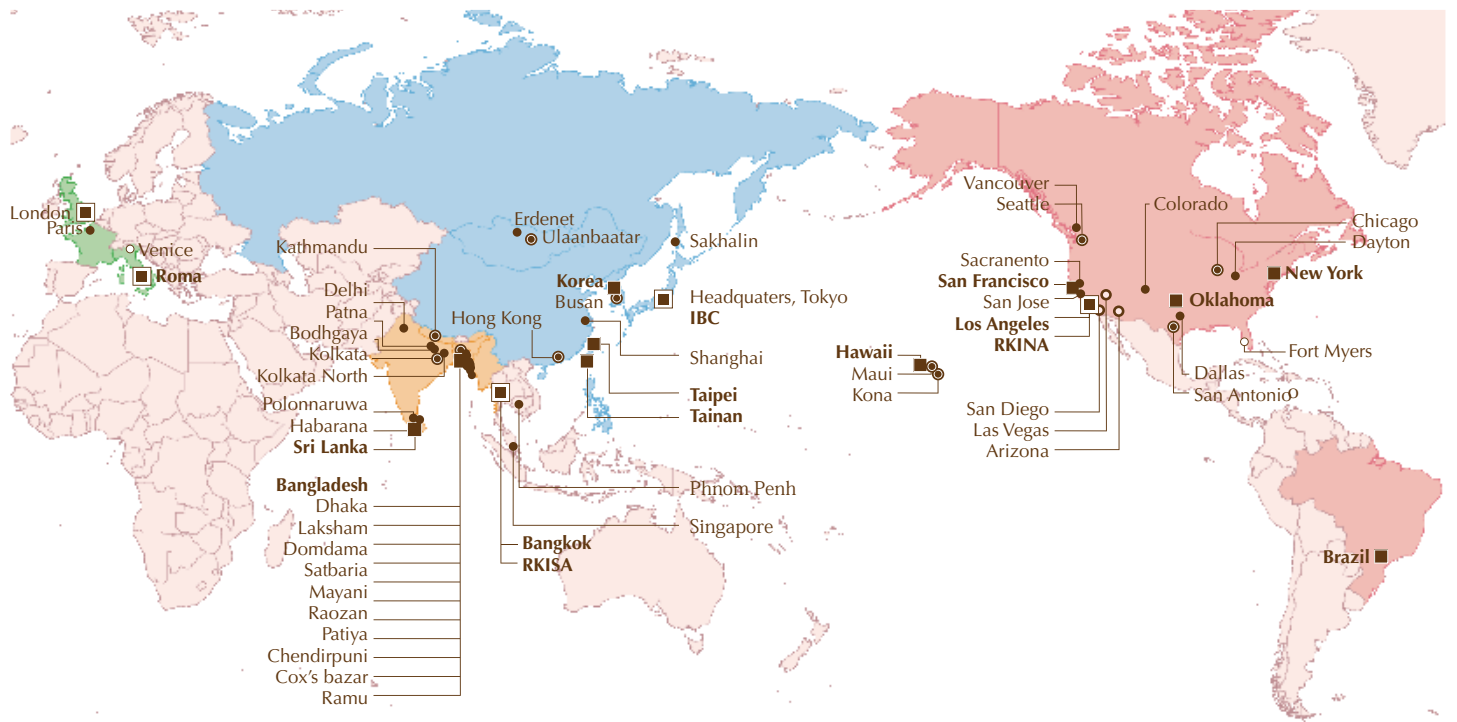
In his message for this month, titled "The Joy of Having Something to Believe In," President Nichiko Niwano explains the virtue of concentration in an easy-to-understand manner. For those of us who strive to practice Buddhism in daily life, President Niwano reminds us that "every moment is part of a series of new encounters, full of productivity and change." Amid that process, our minds are sometimes unsettled by doubts, upsets, anger, or greed. President Niwano carefully shows us how to return to a settled state of mind.

As Rissho Kosei-kai members, we share the so-called basic experience of diligence—overcoming our various sufferings by learning and practicing the Dharma and receiving compassionate support from the sangha. Through this experience we learn that our efforts to let go of self-centeredness through introspection will bring an end to our suffering. From this month's message on concentration, I've learned how we can set our minds in accordance with the truth.





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