

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life



Founder's Reflections

Becoming One with the Dharma

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

THE Buddha is always close at hand, continually expounding the Dharma to us. But if we don't have the desire to truly pursue the Buddha's teachings, we won't be able to see the Buddha, nor will we hear the Buddha's voice. This is why the starting point for our practice is reciting the Lotus Sutra assiduously. Moreover, we must not simply utter the words as they appear on the page; we must imprint them on our hearts by intently reading every single word as if the Buddha were speaking them to us personally.

When you recite the Lotus Sutra in this way, you will be deeply touched by realizing how much the Buddha cares about you. The preciousness of the Lotus Sutra and the compassion of the Buddha, who teaches you the merits of practicing the sutra step by step, will come home to you.

Then, as you try applying even just one of the Buddha's words from the sutra every day at work, and strive to interact with people from a heartfelt desire to share the teachings, before you realize it, you'll be a completely new person. Gradually, you'll become one with the Dharma, and your body will take on a brilliant radiance.

Kaiso zuikan 11 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 144–45

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.



All Beings Living Together Happily —the Six Paramitas

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Delusions Are Transformed into Wisdom

We human beings have minds that are greedy and want more than is necessary, minds that get angry and hate others due to our selfish thoughts, and even minds that forget the universal truths that apply to everything, such as nothing stays the same forever, and all things are made up of karmic connections. Our minds are convinced of the correctness of their thinking, rooted in self-centered greed and anger; this sows the seeds of our own suffering.

However, Mahayana Buddhist teachings, including the Lotus Sutra, teach us that anyone can be liberated from suffering and anxiety while still possessing these delusions that are part of worldly life. Indeed, precisely because we have delusions, we strive to improve our characters, and because we have uncertainties about life and death, we seek the truth. As a result, we who are full of delusions can encounter, in the truest sense, the teachings that bring liberation to everyone, not only ending our sufferings but also transforming our delusions into wisdom.

One of these teachings is the Six Paramitas, which we have been studying together this year. Looking back, I realize that these six virtues are all practices that form one side of a coin, and delusions such as greed, anger, and attachment form the other side. This means that the key phrase that turns the self-centered mind toward doing the work of a bodhisattva is always coming in and out of view. As the coin flips, the key phrase that turns the mental and physical being, who is caused to live here and now, away from anger and attachments and toward bodhisattva practices is none other than “the mind of benefitting other people.”

On a daily basis, we talk about our intentions and wishes to practice benefitting others. Of course, you are all aware of this, aren't you?

With “All Living Beings Together” in Our Hearts

When we perform sutra recitation, we chant, “May these merits / Extend universally to all / So that we and all living beings / Together accomplish the Buddha Way.” And every morning and evening, we take refuge in the Three Treasures, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, with the words: “all living beings together.” Aren't we always hoping and praying to be happy together, as we dedicate ourselves to this goal, putting our hands together reverently before the Buddha?

Rev. Daiei Kaneko (1881–1976), a priest of the Jodo Shinshu sect, picking up on the phrase “all living beings together” said that “No matter what practices you perform to benefit yourself, they are done together with living beings and by the same token, no matter what practices you perform to benefit others, they all become your own path, which is called the bodhisattva way.” He goes on to say that the hope to be with “all living beings together” means that everything you see and hear becomes a teaching of the True Dharma and everything you realize becomes a force pushing your mind to seek the Way. This leads to a life as a bodhisattva who is with “all living beings together” and that becomes, in and of itself, a part of the Way. Therein lies the great joy of practicing the Six Paramitas.

That said, when you pray to be with “all living beings together,” what are you doing for the person next to you? When you see, on TV or the Internet, some tragedy unfolding in a distant land, how does it move your mind, you who desire to be with “all living beings together”?

In reality, there's very little that one person can do, but I believe that each and every one of us is searching for how best to lead our lives and earnestly thinking about what we can do for the people around us; these efforts are one with the great working of the Buddha. Even if circumstances such as illness prevent you from doing anything for others, you can still wish to be with “all living beings together.” That wish becomes a prayer for the speedy recovery of those who have the same kind of illness. It becomes the power to get well and maintain a positive attitude that encourages others and clears away your own worries. And it can bring you great comfort while helping you come to terms with illness in a way that people blessed with good health may not be able to.

On New Year's Eve in Japan, the temple bells toll one hundred eight times. While listening to the bells ring out the same number of times as there are delusions, I hope that, even if this year brought us many difficulties, we will greet one another with the poem by Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828), “How beautiful! / The night sky, / on New Year's Eve,” and welcome the New Year with optimism and enthusiasm.

From *Kosei*, December 2022

Spiritual Journey

Hoping to See the Buddha's Bright Smile

Mr. Seo Sang Uk
Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea

This Dharma Journey talk was delivered at Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea on May 8, 2022, during the Ceremony of the Anniversary of Shakyamuni's Birth.

HELLO, everyone. I am very happy to share my spiritual experience on this auspicious day of the anniversary of the birth of Shakyamuni, who taught us that all living beings have buddha nature and can become buddhas.

My name is Seo Sang Uk, and I belong to the Yongsan chapter in Seoul. My mother's great-aunt was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai and was active at the Shinagawa Dharma Center in Tokyo. She connected my mother to the Dharma, and on October 15, 1980, my mother became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai in Korea. I also became a member but later stopped going to the Dharma center. In November of last year, on the day of the forty-ninth-day Buddhist memorial service for my mother, I visited the Dharma center for the first time in twenty-eight years and have since started visiting there again.

When I was small, my parents always quarreled. My father didn't work, he was drunk every day, and he abused us verbally and physically. I hated him. As I grew up, my hatred for my father grew stronger.

When I was in the fourth grade, at elementary school, I was often absent because I was receiving treatment for nephritis at a hospital away from home. I thought that it was easily okay to miss school. This mindset continued after I went to junior high and high school. I did not study, but drank alcohol and smoked cigarettes with friends every day in the hills behind the school.

My attitude made my mother very sad. She thought I would change if I learned Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings and tried different ways to make me go to the Dharma center; she gave me an allowance each time I went, so I began to go there to get money for cigarettes.

My mother's child of the faith, Ms. Sun Cane, who is now an active member of Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio in the United States, visited the Dharma center with me. The more bitter my mother's relations with my father became, the more enthusiastically she dedicated herself to her faith and Rissho Kosei-kai. Their quarrels increased because my father thought my mother's sutra recitation was too loud. However, despite my father's opposition, my mother continued to attend the Dharma center and eventually, as time went by, my father stopped complaining about her faith. Around this time, I joined my mother to do volunteer work at the Dharma center and attended members' memorial services until the Dharma center moved to its current location in Hannam-dong.



Mr. Seo Sang Uk polishes the signboard at the entrance to the Dharma center of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea.

I was twenty-three years old around the time when the new Dharma center building was completed in Hannam-dong. My relationship with my father was at its worst at that time. My mother couldn't stand our violent quarrels and asked Rev. Lee Book Sun, the then branch head, to allow me to stay at the Dharma center for a while. I remember that Rev. Lee was a very kind woman and a good cook.

In 1995, at the age of thirty-one, I began working in a hospital pharmacy and gradually drifted away from the Dharma center. The following year, in 1996, my father passed away. That year I quit the pharmacy and became a teacher at a cram school. I had stopped going to the Dharma center by that time. I worked devotedly for just twenty years and when I turned fifty, I quit my job, thinking I had worked long enough and that I should take some time off to relax and enjoy myself.

After I retired, I spent my time at home, drinking alcohol and watching movies on TV. I could do whatever I wanted without worrying about others seeing me, and I felt as if I were in heaven. However, as the days went by, the bottles of alcohol I drank gradually increased from one to two, and then from two to three.

A friend of mine was worried about my health and tried to make me stop drinking, telling me that I would die if I continued. But as I had already become addicted to alcohol, his advice went unheeded. My friend asked my mother to send me to the hospital, but my mother refused—she thought he was suggesting she should send me to a nursing home.

One day, I fell asleep drunk as usual, but this time I regained consciousness four days later in a hospital bed. Afterwards, I learned that the doctor in attendance had warned that if I woke up, I would have residual health problems, and if I did not wake up, I would remain in a vegetative state for the rest of my life. The name of the disease I was diagnosed

with was Wernicke's encephalopathy. Because I had been eating poorly and drinking only alcohol, my nutrition levels had deteriorated to such an extent that my body had become numb. I was exactly like a seventy-pound piece of burning wood that smelled of death.

I could do nothing without other people's care. What was especially humiliating was that I could not recognize my own physiological phenomena such as defecation. This experience made me quit both drinking and smoking. After about six months of rehabilitation, I left the hospital, despite my doctor's advice to stay longer for continued treatment. Because of this, for a while after I returned home, I had to ask my mother to roll me onto the floor when I went to the bathroom. Gradually, I could practice standing up with my hands on the wall for support and walking with the help of a walker. I will never forget the kindness of my mother, who took care of all my needs.

A year after I left the hospital, the top layer of my skin suddenly began to flake off from head to toe. I was told this was a symptom of a very rare disease, but fortunately, I recovered with no major aftereffects.

Around the time when I had almost regained my physical strength, my mother began to act strangely. She sometimes vomited, saying she had a headache or ringing in her ears. She would also eat to excess or say things that didn't make sense. The diagnosis was dementia.

My mother had always said that she didn't want to go to a nursing home, so I decided to care for her at home. At first, I didn't think that dementia was such an awful disease. However, my mother's disease progressed gradually and steadily, and eventually she became unable to control defecation. I remembered how my mother had taken care of everything for me, and I never found it disgusting to support my mother's toileting. If I had not had the experience of being cared for by my mother, I would have put her in a

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nursing home. I would be embarrassed to call it filial piety, but for the first time in my life, I was able to help my mother by being home with her.

Last summer, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, I was worried about my mother, who was losing her appetite day by day. One afternoon I found her lying unconscious in her room. As this started to happen repeatedly, I had no choice but to put her into a nursing home, and eight days later, she died of pneumonia. My mother had said “thank you” repeatedly until shortly before she passed away. She had made it a habit of saying “thank you” and “I’m grateful” before she ever suffered from dementia. I had informed my younger sister, living in the United States, of our mother’s condition, and she had returned to Korea a few days before our mother’s passing and took care of her until her last moment. For my sister, it was an invaluable time to practice filial piety for her mother.

I was thinking of having my mother cremated after she passed away and scattering her ashes on a mountain near our home. But I didn’t discuss it with my sister. In fact, my sister and I had spent more than forty years living as if we were strangers. I had hit my sister when I was a high school student, and since then she had refused to acknowledge me as an older brother.

After my mother’s funeral, my sister and I cleaned up the house and the Buddhist altar. My mother had been worried about me, her only son, and had joined Rissho Kosei-kai. My mother had never missed morning sutra recitation at the altar, but as her disease had progressed, the altar had been left unattended and mold and thick dust had developed.

As I was wiping it off, I suddenly saw an image of my sister as a child in front of me. She was wailing, saying, “You can forget bad things in the home by drinking and acting up, but what should I do?” While cleaning the altar, tears spontaneously welled up in my eyes as I remembered what had happened many

years ago. Then my sister said to me, “Now our family is only you and me. I’ve heard from your friend that you are trying to quit drinking and start your life over again. I’ve decided to forgive you.” Finally, after forty years of estrangement, my sister and I were able to make up. Then we talked and decided to place my mother’s ashes in an ossuary near our home. I gave the copy of the Threefold Lotus Sutra my mother had recited from to my sister, who was returning to the US.

The forty-ninth-day memorial service was held for my mother on November 7 of last year. On that day, I thought of visiting the Dharma center for the first time in a long while and attended the monthly memorial service. The minister Rev. Lee Hang Ja’s Dharma talk during the service caught me by surprise because it was as if she were talking about my life. I was especially surprised to hear her say “children choose their parents at birth.”

Did I choose to be born as the son of my father whom I hated so much? It sounded totally nonsensical to me then. However, looking back, I realize that my father and I had many similarities. When it came to alcohol, if my father drank 366 days out of 365, I drank 367 days out of 365. Just before he passed away, my father was reduced to skin and bones and looked like a piece of burning wood. I had brought my father to the hospital, but he had passed away one-and-a-half months later. Like my father, I was once reduced to seventy pounds, and my body was as hard as a piece of burning wood, but I survived thanks to my friend who took me to the hospital. If it were not for my friend, and above all, the merits that my mother had accumulated through her diligent practice of the Dharma, I would not be here today.

I went to the Dharma center on a cold day that made me shiver. On my way home, after hearing Rev. Lee’s Dharma talk, I thought of my mother. *My mother must have hoped that her son would stop*

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doing wrong, go to school every day, and live a normal life. . . . My mother must have walked down this path with that one thought in her mind. Why didn't I realize that at the time? I deeply regretted my past, irresponsible way of living. Sadly, my deep remorse cannot reach my parents now.

There was another thing that moved me when I began attending the Dharma center again. It is the way the sangha extends helping hands to others with wholeheartedness. I joined the members of the Dharma center's youth group to volunteer, and I visited a home for the disabled and helped clean the facility. I had participated in volunteer work at my workplace before, but I had been more interested in drinking with colleagues after the volunteer activity ended. I was impressed with the shining smiles of youth-group members who worked hard with pure hearts. I'm grateful for youth-group members who taught me, through their practice, the spirit of "putting others first."

I am like an elementary school student when it comes to Rissho Kosei-kai's faith. I could have died of my illness eight years ago, but I survived and am allowed to live an extended life. In the winter, my legs get stiff, and I find it difficult to walk, but when I think of my mother, my legs begin to move well.

"My brother's good health is my spiritual relief." So said my sister. Whenever I recall her words, they warm my heart. Now I know I am not alone anymore. From now on, I will give my best in everything I do for the sake of my deceased parents, my sister, and myself.

I visit the Dharma center to hear Rev. Lee's Dharma talk every month on the day the memorial service is held. I'm not confident that I can put her teachings fully into practice, but I will keep trying my best. When I revisited the Dharma center for the first time in twenty-eight years, I found that the center's atmosphere had changed a lot. Now we have

a much larger sangha of cheerful, kind, and warm-hearted people. I look forward to learning the Dharma together.

I promise to lead my life so that whenever someone asks me "How is the Buddha in your home?" I will be able to reply "Yes, he is smiling brightly."

Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, thank you very much. President Nichiko Niwano, thank you very much. Every member of the sangha, thank you very much.



Mr. Seo volunteers to clean the Dharma center.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism Peaceful Mind

The truth that “nirvana is tranquility” teaches that we can lead our everyday lives with peaceful minds if we fully understand the truths that “all things are impermanent” and “all things are devoid of self,” and if we practice the teaching in the right way.

No matter what happens, it is important to think that change is natural and make an effort to change things for the better. Furthermore, it is important to lead our daily lives with mutual cooperation, trying to make not only ourselves but also other people around us be better. Then we will have no more quarrels with others, our minds will stay calm, and we will all live in harmony together.



Did You Know?

Nirvana, literally meaning “blowing out,” represents a mental state in which the fire of defilements has been completely extinguished and a peaceful mind attained. This is the ideal state in Buddhism. Nirvana has also come to mean the state in which the flame of life is extinguished; it is therefore used as a metaphor for death.



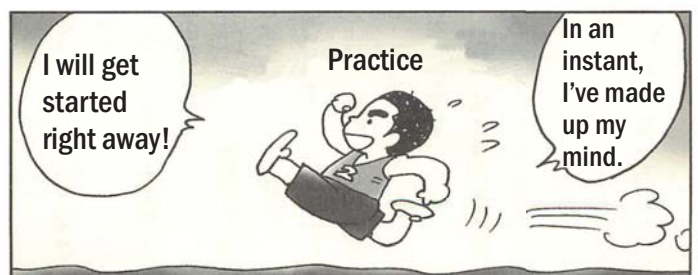
The Method to Resolve Suffering



The Four Noble Truths teach the root cause of human suffering and how to resolve it. Practicing the Four Noble Truths entails realizing four essential principles: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause, the truth of extinguishment, and the truth of the path.

We must realize that human life is filled with suffering caused by distress and difficulties. We must squarely face this reality and recognize it; this is the truth of suffering. The prime cause of suffering is clinging to anything at all; this is the truth of the cause of suffering. If we can completely suppress our desires, we can be free from suffering; this ideal state is the truth of the extinguishment of suffering. Finally, there is the right way to practice this process in our lives, by undertaking the Eightfold Path; this is the truth of the path to the extinguishment of suffering. This is the teaching of the Four Noble Truths.

In the next issue of *Living the Lotus*, we will learn about the Eightfold Path.



Did You Know?

The truth of suffering tells us to squarely face and recognize suffering. The Four Noble Truths are each explained in the following order: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the extinguishment of suffering, and the truth of the path to the extinguishment of suffering. However, to put the teaching into practice, we reverse the order of the truth of the path to the extinguishment of suffering and the truth of the extinguishment of suffering, because we first practice the path to the extinguishment of suffering and aim to attain the state in which suffering is extinguished.

Director's Column

Now Is the Time to Practice Benefitting Others

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

IT'S now *Shiwasu*, an older name for December in Japanese. There is a famous proverb that people often say around this time of year: "Time and tide wait for no man." It means that the years pass by one after another with no regard for human circumstances and without ever ceasing. As you read this column, how are you feeling about the past year?

Although the pandemic has entered its third year, we still don't see an end in sight. The Russian aggression in Ukraine that began in February continues. In many countries prices are rising, which has a considerable impact on people's lives. When we look at these various social realities, we must ask ourselves: How can Buddhist wisdom and compassion offer us hints toward solutions?

In this vein, I feel that what is asked of us, living in these turbulent times, is the practice of the Six Paramitas, which as President Niwano explained in his Dharma talk, means "to be with living beings, together." I think we are also asked to create a community of bodhisattvas. Surely I am not alone in the conviction that we are entering a most opportune time to practice benefitting others.



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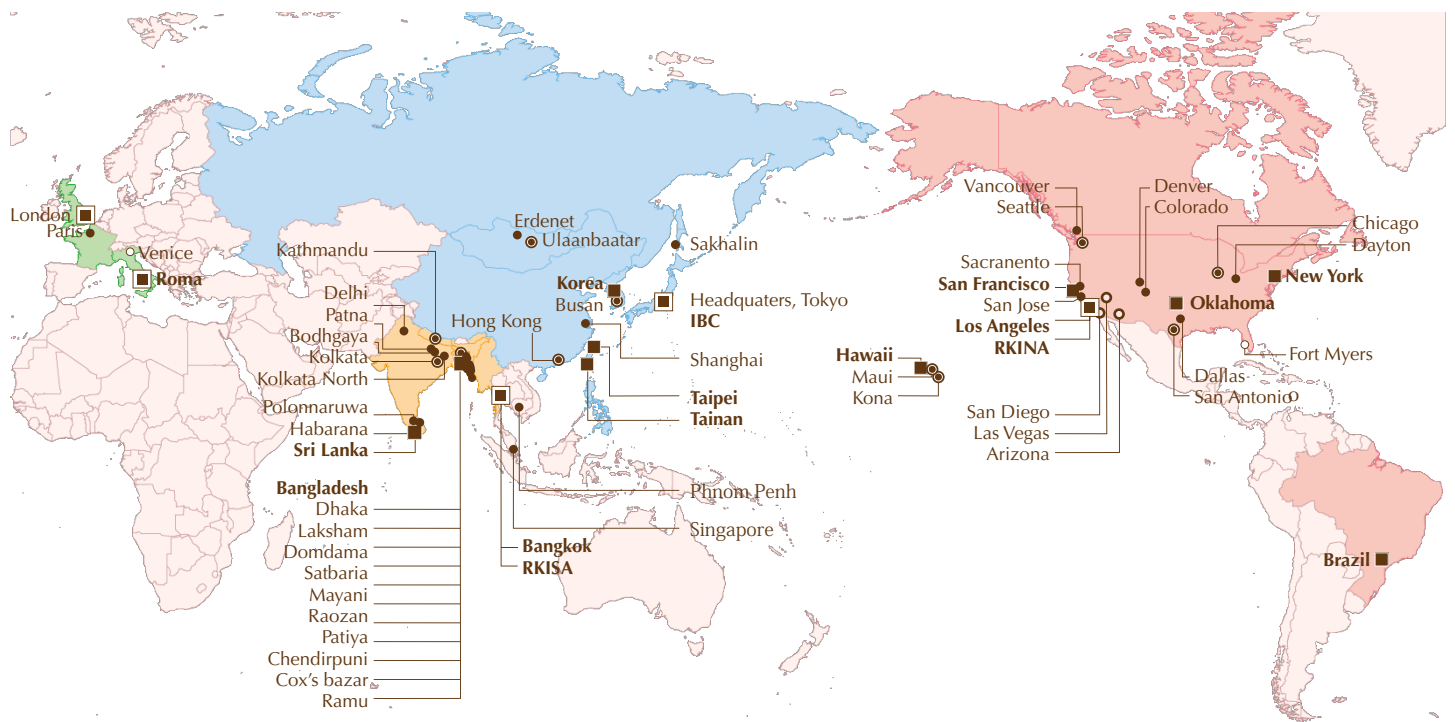
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