

Living the Lotus 1

Buddhism in Everyday Life 2023
VOL. 208



Los Angeles Dharma Center

Living the Lotus Vol. 208 (January 2023)

Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa

Editor: Sachi Mikawa

Copy Editor: Ayshea Wild

Living the Lotus is published monthly by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan.

TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 / FAX: +81-3-5341-1224

Email: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

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.

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.



Health Is the Greatest Benefit

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

We Are Always Healthy and Energetic

The first day of the year, January 1, is called *ganjitsu* [元日] in Japan. The character *gan* [元] of *ganjitsu* has three meanings—“origin,” “beginning,” and “totality.” We can all agree then on the importance of the custom of thinking about how to start the year ahead of us, deciding on a plan for how we hope to live this year, and building the spiritual base for it. What kind of aspirations are you all cherishing for 2023?

Reflecting on the past few years, which have been laden with sadness and many sufferings such as the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, natural disasters, and the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, I hope that we will all use our ingenuity to make 2023 a particularly healthy and energetic year.

You may wonder why I say such a thing, but in fact, the Japanese word *genki* [元気], meaning “be well” and “energetic,” has a deeper meaning than our common usage of it: In the Japanese word *genki* [元気], the character for “gen” is the same as the “gan” of *ganjitsu* [元日], described above.

According to Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), a great scholar of Eastern philosophy, the *ki* of *genki* means “vital energy,” which also signifies “the origin of all living beings in the universe.” From this perspective, we can see that the origin of all things, including human beings, overflows with vital energy and that is why, by our very nature, we possess an existence that is healthy and energetic.

Turning to Confucian thought, the *I Ching* (The Book of Changes) teaches us that the movement of the heavens—that is, the force of nature—has maintained order and harmony in a constant state of health since the universe began without ever stopping. This means that our bodies and minds, which are one with nature, receive blessings from nature and are inherently healthy.

In this sense too, I think it is important for us to lead healthy and energetic lives, while not doing things that impair the workings of the vital energy that we have been endowed with from the start.

Bodhisattva Practices Are Healthy Practices

In the Dhammapada, Shakyamuni says, “Health is the greatest benefit.” As long as we are alive, we want to be healthy, so when we hear these words, as spoken by Shakyamuni—a human being, just like us—we feel very close to him.

However, Shakyamuni goes on to say that, “Satisfaction is the greatest treasure, faith is the greatest friend, and nirvana (the extinguishment of greed, anger, and ignorance) is the greatest joy.” To reiterate what I said earlier, we are each inherently endowed with a healthy body and peaceful mind. But I interpret these words of the Buddha’s as a lesson for us: in order to put our bodies and minds to the best use, it is important that we know how to be satisfied with whatever is enough, get along with people around us, and not be swayed by greed, anger, or our self-centered minds.

It is natural that everyone gets sick and grows old, so being healthy does not merely mean having no illnesses or trouble with bodily functions. Shakyamuni teaches us that having gratitude for existing and leading a harmonious life with peace of mind are greater benefits for human beings; this is the meaning of truly being healthy.

As I have said before, for us members of Rissho Kosei-kai, good health means we lead our lives in a way that demonstrates we are living with the hope—as much as is possible in this world—that suffering decreases and happiness increases. When we apply this idea to reality, the bodhisattva practices of the Six Paramitas we perform while being considerate of others are an important part of our daily diligence and, at the same time, are nothing more than “practicing good health” in a manner that revitalizes our own inherent wellness and energy while also providing other people with wellness and energy.

When we wish for the happiness of other people, our own vital energy is working vigorously. The dictionary defines “well-being” as “health and happiness.” In wishing that people around the world enjoy days full of health and happiness, let’s put our wellness and energy to active use.

From *Kosei*, January 2023



Spiritual Journey

Moving Forward with the Five Practices in Mind

Ms. Jutarat Buphala
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the ceremony commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Bangkok Dharma Center, on October 9, 2022.

GOOD morning, everyone. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my Dharma Journey today on the fortieth anniversary of the Bangkok Dharma Center. I am Jutarat Buphala. On December 16, 1972, I was born in Nakhon Ratchasima province, northeast of Bangkok, Thailand. I am now remarried and have two daughters. Since joining Rissho Kosei-kai, I have put the teachings into practice in my everyday life. Currently, I serve as a board member of the Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation and a leader in Dharma dissemination, supporting mainly youth members' activities.

I have two older sisters and an older brother. My mother stayed home with us, and my father worked as a janitor at a village school. At the same time, my family ran a small general store and a rice mill in the village. Though my older siblings lived with my grandparents, I am the youngest and was a little kid, so I lived with my parents in housing on the school property where my father worked.

Instead of teaching us through discipline, my parents raised us to be people who could make our own decisions and choose the path we each wanted to take. My parents never told us to study or do homework, and as a result, we became responsible for what we had to do and took care of ourselves.

Until I finished elementary school, I often helped with my father's work. My main role was to clean the bathroom and draw up water from the well. There was no water tap in those days, so I went to the well, drew water with a bucket, and prepared a trolley to carry the water the next morning. When I started middle school, I also began living with my siblings at my grandparents' house, but my parents still lived in housing on the school property.

When I finished middle school, I asked my parents for their permission to go to school in Bangkok. My parents didn't ask me about school or study, but they gave a call to my sister, who lived in Bangkok at that time, and arranged my housing. I rarely had meals with my parents or talked to them when I was in middle school, but they always prioritized my thoughts and feelings and encouraged me to follow my dreams. They were role models for us children, encouraging us and accumulating merits by taking good care of their parents and helping their relatives and other people around them. In addition, they treasured the practice of respecting their ancestors, so my mother went to the temple every day.

Moreover, we learned the importance of respecting the Buddha's teachings. Therefore, I strive to support others, have a strong mindset, and lead my family and



Ms. Buphala delivers her Dharma Journey talk during the ceremony commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Bangkok Dharma Center.

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the people around me. Also, I have kept in mind that I should not cause trouble for others.

In 1988, when I was seventeen, my father passed away at age fifty-one. His death brought deep sorrow to my family. However, as my father had always taught us, my family decided to accept the reality and move forward into the future with an indomitable spirit. My mother, especially, never whined and always had a tenacious mind.

I have never heard my mother or siblings complain about the challenging situations that my family faced. Moreover, to enable me graduate from vocational school, they solved various problems without telling me that my family was in financial difficulties. Also, my brother quit his job in Thailand and went to Japan for work to support my family.

At that time, my mother often said to us “I can leave you nothing. You have to stand on your own two feet. You cannot expect help from others.” I kept these words in mind, so when I graduated from vocational school at nineteen, I decided to continue my studies while also working to bring home the bacon.

As exemplary Buddhists, my parents always practiced generosity and expressed their gratitude to their ancestors, which had a significant influence on my life. I am grateful to my parents for giving me the gift of life and always guiding me in difficult times. I would like to share the importance of generosity, respecting our ancestors, and studying and practicing the teachings of the Buddha with my daughters the way my parents did with me.

In 2001, when I was twenty-nine, I became a single parent. My first daughter was only four years old. Taking various matters into consideration, I decided to ask my mother and sisters, who were living in our hometown, to take care of my daughter, and I left her with them. Around that time, I started going to an English language school to improve my chances of finding work, which is where I met Ms. Amonrada Kaewphannarai; this encounter led me to join Rissho Kosei-kai.

Soon after becoming a member, I began to learn Founder Nikkyo Niwano’s teachings and Rissho Kosei-kai’s Dharma practices. Specifically, through *hoza*, “the Dharma circle,” I learned a Buddhist way

of seeing things to help solve various problems in life. This changed my way of thinking, and I began to hope to learn more about Buddhism and Founder Niwano’s teachings.

In 2001, I participated in a group pilgrimage to Rissho Kosei-kai’s headquarters in Tokyo. After returning from Tokyo, a member said to me “As a matter of fact, when I first met you, I didn’t like you as you were so unfriendly.” I was shocked and wondered what others thought of me. I asked my colleagues at work and learned, to my dismay, they had all felt the same way. After that, I made up my mind to change myself, and I started to practice one of Rissho Kosei-kai’s basic principles: “Change yourself, and others will also change.” Then, I decided to continue with the following five practices in my daily life:

1. Always keep smiling

There is a Buddhist teaching called the seven types of nonmaterial donation. My exemplary model is our Founder. His smile is so warm that whenever I see his smile in a picture, I also naturally smile. I wished to become like him someday, and I was determined to practice smiling at all times.

2. Exchanging greetings with others and expressing feelings of gratitude

At home and work, I have practiced exchanging greetings with others in the morning and evening and expressing my gratitude to them, which has brought smiles and joy to all of us, and I have made a lot of friends. I was a little shy at first, but I gradually got used to it, and I now practice it more naturally. I believe that initiating greetings and smiling have become a part of my character.

3. Understanding that every event has a cause

I used to live my life carefully, always watchful of not being bothered by others or causing trouble to others. I could not forgive people who were unpleasant or made me feel uncomfortable, and I would always get back at anyone who offended me. However, by learning and understanding the Founder’s teachings, I changed myself. I learned that every event or situation has causes or conditions that bring it about. After that, whenever a problem occurred, I could open my mind, change my attitude, and think about the cause of the problem.

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4. Helping each other and sharing happiness with others

When people reveal their problems and ask me for advice, I always try to listen to them carefully and attentively. Wishing to help ease their suffering, I draw close to them and give them advice in accordance with the Buddha's teachings.

5. Understanding and accepting all people around us

If we can understand and accept one another, as the Members' Vow of Rissho Kosei-kai indicates, we can bring peace to our families, communities, countries, and the world.

I have continued these five practices at home and in my workplace. In Thailand, we do not usually exchange morning greetings, but I try to apply the practice to everyday life within my family. For example, to make them sound more natural, we exchange morning and nighttime greetings in English. We say "Good morning" in the morning and "Good night" or "Have a sweet dream" before we go to bed.

One day when I came home, my second daughter

was waiting for me to have dinner with her. She said, "I had trouble at school today, so I want to tell you about it." I was pleased that my loving daughter was counting on me, and I was happy to consider the problem with her. I thought it was thanks to the merit I'd received through practicing the teachings at home.

I would like to study and practice Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings more and more. I will strive to continue my practices so that I can help ease the suffering of others and bring joy to my family, relatives, and friends. I look forward to celebrating the anniversary of the Bangkok Dharma Center with you again in ten and twenty years' time.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the revered Shakyamuni, the Founder, the President, the Minister, and all the staff and members of the Bangkok Dharma Center for listening to my Dharma Journey today. And I express my thanks also to my invaluable family who have always supported me, encouraged me, and stood by my side.

Thank you so much for your attention.



Ms. Buphala with her family in Kanchanaburi province.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

Seeing the World in the Right Way: Right View

Our lives are not all fun; they are also filled with struggles and hardships. The Four Noble Truths teach the way to a solution.

But, how exactly should we practice? One of the teachings that guide us to a concrete practice is the Eightfold Path: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

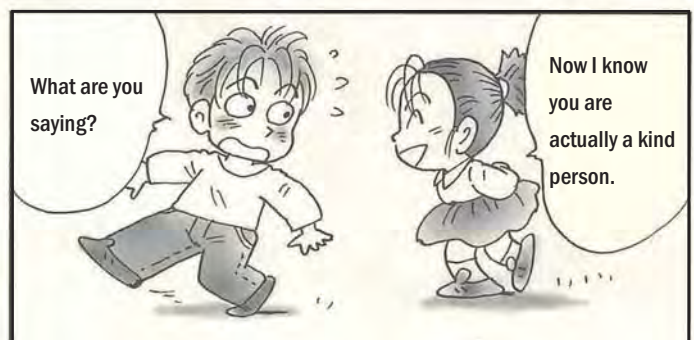
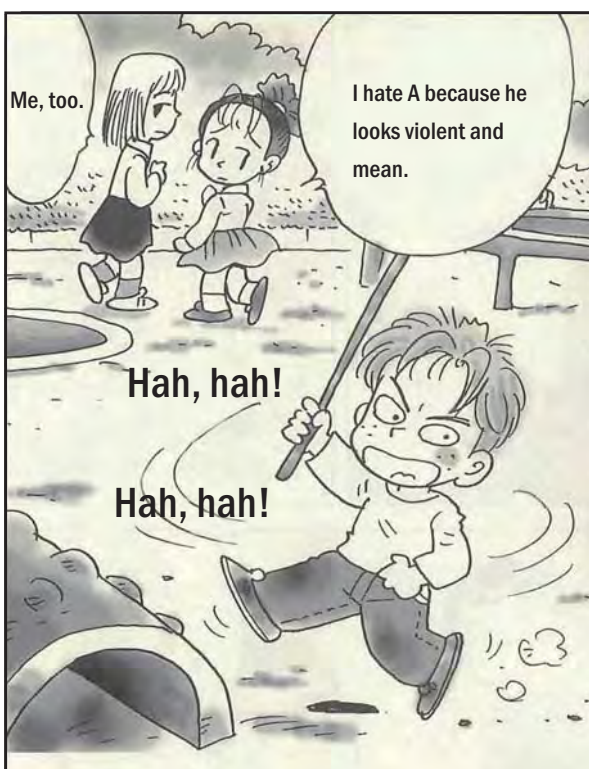
The word “right” means to be in accord with the outlook of the Buddha.

“Right view,” which comes first on the Eightfold Path, means seeing things rightly without self-centeredness or bias.

An example is as follows: You have a classmate, A, who is rumored to be rough, so you do not get close to him. However, when you become friends with him, you discover that he is cheerful and kind. I am sure that everyone has had a similar experience.

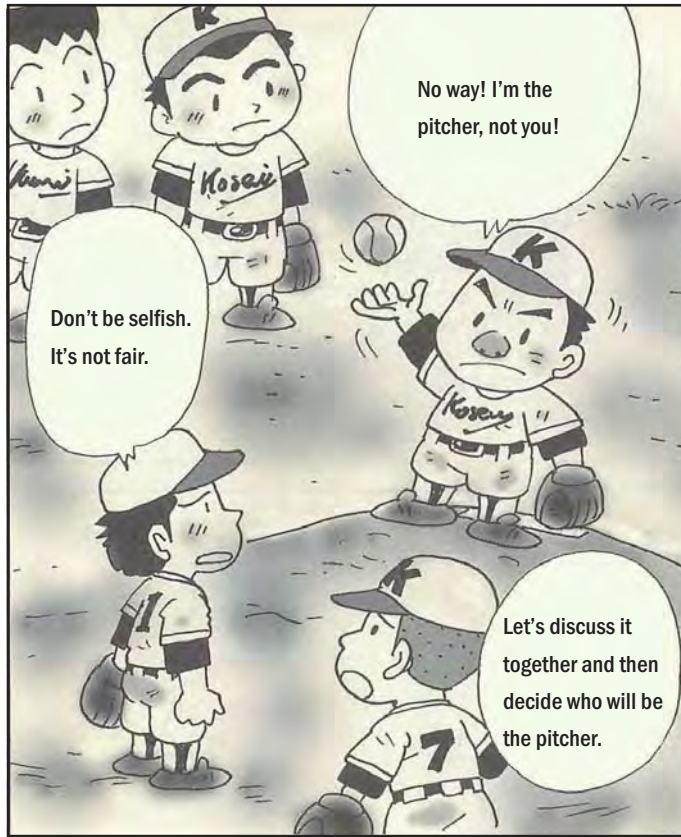
This example shows that if you had altered the outlook you had before making friends with A and viewed him rightly, you would have realized his true character sooner.

“Right view” also means listening rightly.





Thinking Broad-Mindedly: Right Thought



Right thought means properly considering what you see and hear, according to the situation you are facing, without any prejudiced inclinations toward your own standpoint. It entails casting aside greed or selfish desires that are driven by personal profit and self-centeredness.

Those who insist on their own ideas and ignore others' voices cannot be considered practitioners of right thought.

It is important to listen to the opinion of your friends, parents, teachers, and elders, and always check if your own opinion is right or not.





Germinating the Seeds of Awakening

Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

The Path to Happiness for All

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



Beginning this month, we are serializing translated sections from *Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Germinating the Seeds of Awakening), which is the first volume of a collection of Founder Niwano's selected monthly Dharma talks from January, 1989, through November, 1998.

Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, was born in Niigata Prefecture, Japan, in 1906. A longtime advocate of cooperation and dialogue between the world's religious faiths, Rev. Niwano promoted interreligious understanding as honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan), honorary president of Religions for Peace, and in various other capacities. He is the author of several books on Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, and spirituality, such as *Buddhism for Today*, *Lifetime Beginner*, *Buddhism for Everyday Life*, and more. Rev. Niwano passed away in 1999 at the age of 92.



“Living by aspiring” means to live your life cherishing ideals. I believe the universal ideal that humanity shares is the desire to pursue a path in life that can help all people find happiness. This path is what Buddhists call the aspiration to benefit others, which is fulfilled by living one’s life for the sake of the world and its people.

We never realize our aspirations if we only have a vague sense of them. We must not aspire vaguely, but emphatically, and not in passing, but continually. To aspire emphatically in this way is what is called “mindfulness of one’s aspirations” or “keeping our aspirations in mind.”

And if you have an aspiration, you must first of all express it in action. Without expressing it in action, no matter how mindful you are of your aspiration, you will end up aspiring in vain. By manifesting it in action, the aspiration that a person keeps in mind becomes a beacon that illuminates their corner of the world.

Day to day, many things happen in our lives. When our minds are captive to the things going on around us, we tend to zigzag on our path, and we can lose our bearings. But if we can keep the standards of our ideals high and hold fast to them, we will be able to proceed straight ahead without losing our bearings. And the strength of our confident stride will become increasingly powerful with every step we take.

When I was young, people often spoke of “aspirations,” and the adage on everyone’s lips was “A young man who develops an aspiration leaves his birthplace, and unless he completes his education, he is never to return, not even in death.”

But it saddens me to see that even though people today desire more than ever to make something of themselves, they have forgotten to have aspirations along the way. There may be people who conceal their aspirations within their hearts, and I hope that they will manifest their aspirations to their hearts’ content.

People seem to have gradually become alienated from self-respect and virtue now that the word “aspiration” has fallen out of use. In our hearts, we all should want to set our sights high. Otherwise, we will end up quickly compromising with the realities of the world, wanting to avoid difficult things, and drifting into an undemanding way of life.

An ideal is not something that yields value only when it is fully realized. The most important thing is the initial step you take toward your ideal. That is where the realization of your ideal begins.

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 20–21



Director's Column



Making a New Year's Resolution

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

I WOULD like to wish you a happy New Year. How did you see in the New Year? I trust everyone wishes to spend a year filled with happiness and energy.

“Being well and energetic” was the key phrase in President Nichiko Niwano’s message for this month. The past few years have been laden with sad and depressing events. As we ponder what these events have taught us, the President teaches us that it is all the more important, in such mournful times, to lead lives full of health and energy.

Like many other people, I’m losing the fight against aging; although I’ve always had confidence in my health, I have recently begun to undergo some unexpected changes in my body.

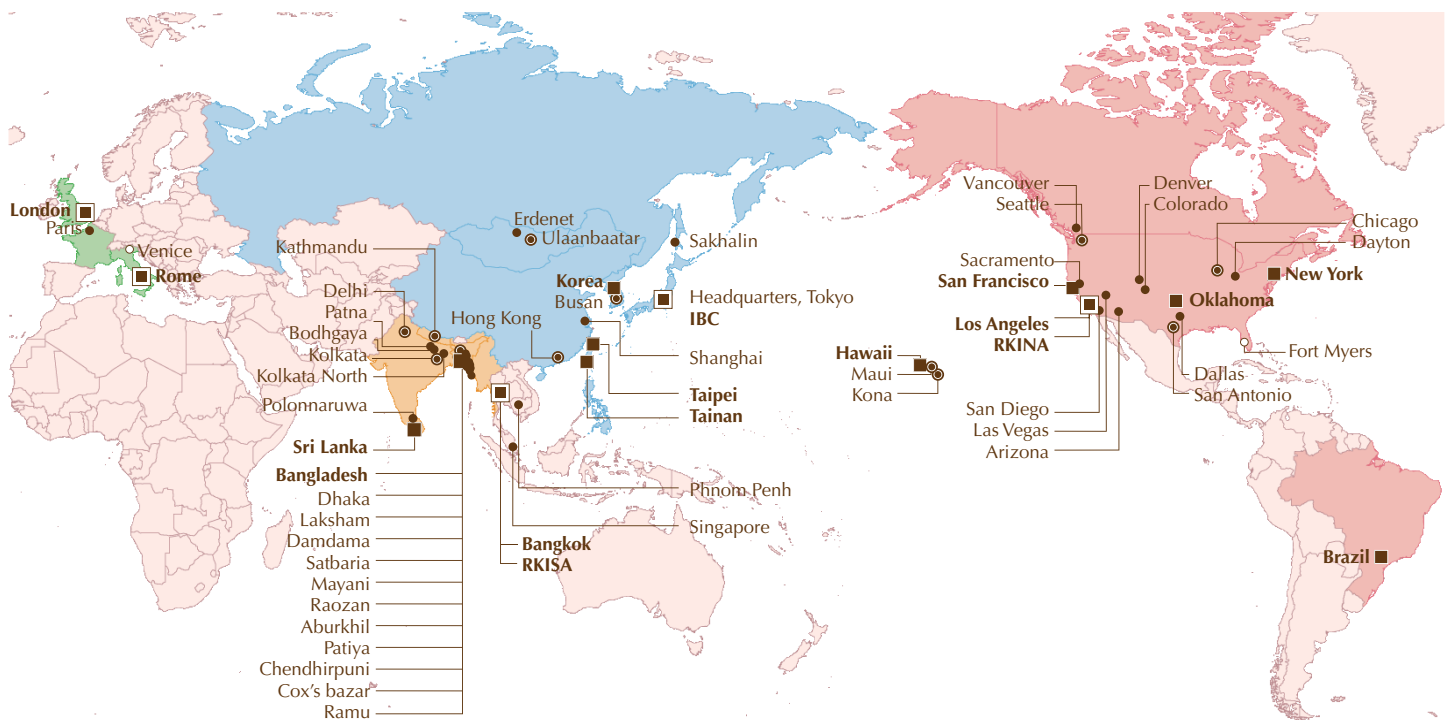
For example, I’ve been taking medicine for high blood pressure since last month. I’m pleased that the medicine works soon after I take it, but it is also true that the fact I can no longer maintain my health through my own effort alone impacted me. It was only after I began to lose my health that I realized its value, which I had taken for granted. I will take this experience as a wake-up call to reflect on my way of living and strive to enhance my awareness of the value of all things that I think only natural.

With this experience in mind, I have made the following New Year’s resolution: “Acknowledging that ‘health is the greatest merit,’ I will make 2023 a year filled with gratitude and energy.” What kind of New Year’s resolution do you have for yourself?





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