

Living the Lotus

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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START

New Year's Issue



New Year's Message

Practice the Dharma Cheerfully

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**Peace in the Nation and in the World Are Unattainable
without Cultivating Oneself and Managing One's Family**



President Nichiko Niwano in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall. In the background is an image of Mount Fuji painted by Founder Nikkyo Niwano, which was inspired by the works of Taikan Yokoyama (1868–1958), a master Japanese painter of modern times.

I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, there is a feeling that we are gradually returning to normal life in our towns and cities. Let us live each day with positive attitudes while still being careful about infection.

According to one survey, what people have valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic were family, health, time, and trust. Due to the spread of infection, many people in the general public have apparently been reflecting upon how they had been living their lives up until now, and they seem to be adopting a new sense of values. We, too, should aim at simplifying our lives, focusing on what is truly important.

Meanwhile, this past year has confronted us with an international crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Tens of thousands of lives have been sacrificed already. I pray with all of you that this war ends soon, and that there is a return to peaceful daily life. Please think about what you can be doing in this regard.

What each of us must strive for, first and foremost, is “inner peace.” It can be said that even war is ultimately triggered by the workings of the human heart. In recent times, we hear people saying, “that country is bad,” or “I can’t forgive that person.” Although these may be expressions of

honest feelings, from a religious point of view what's important is to reflect upon whether our own minds are truly peaceful.

Those who habitually hurt others around them with their words and actions are not persuasive, no matter how much they may advocate for peace. It's important to regularly look inside ourselves and ask, "What about me? Do I have a peaceful frame of mind?"

This way of thinking is something we must constantly carry with us. To use a familiar example, when we get up in the morning and it's raining, we unconsciously tend to think, "The weather is bad." We should break the habit of always complaining or being disaffected regarding events unfolding before us.

Even so, when we are driven by righteous indignation to feel that those who start wars cannot be forgiven, and that killing or injuring people is wrong, the religious approach is to first and foremost be firmly resolved to never do such things ourselves.

It is also very important that we practice *seika* (family governance) centered on a Buddhist altar within our households, the smallest units of society. It is through this practice that strong human education and character formation take place.

The Great Learning, one of the Four Books of Confucianism, has a passage that states, "[A person] should make his mind right, cultivate himself, then regulate the family, then govern the state, and finally lead the world into peace." Put another way, peace in the nation and in the world are not attainable without making one's own mind right, cultivating oneself, and managing one's family. Let us all take this to heart.

As I have often stressed previously, it is important to carry on the traditions of Japan, improving our own country first, and building a splendid country.

A distinctive characteristic of Japan is the unique emperor and imperial family system at the top, under which the people have become harmonious, building a rich culture that began with the founding of the country and that continues to the present day. Continuing that tradition and making Japan a splendid country, regardless of how globalized the world has become, is the most important footing to have. I believe that through this Japan will become world-class for the first time.

The name for Japan in ancient times was Yamato ("great peace"). The national ideal was to embrace the spirit of "a time of great peace" and "a time of great harmony."

In Article 1 of his Seventeen-Article Constitution, Prince Shotoku (574–622) stated that "harmony is precious."

With such a tradition, Japan should be a firmly peaceful nation; it's important to have its message spread to the entire world. An accumulation of the steadfast efforts for peace by each of us will eventually build a peaceful world.



What I would also like to have you bear in mind is that each of us should maintain an interest in the affairs of distant countries. Learning about other people who are facing difficult realities, thinking of them with compassion, and sharing in their suffering and sorrow will lead to deep prayer and motivate an action.

Closer to home, we have our own peace activities and undertakings, starting with our Donate-a-Meal Movement, and including Religions for Peace and the Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan). We participate from each platform with an independent and proactive posture.

Let Us All Rise with Gratitude in the Morning and Practice the Dharma Cheerfully and Actively

With these matters in mind, I have set forth my Guidelines for Members' Practice of the Faith for 2023 as follows.

To our immense joy, this year Rissho Kosei-kai celebrates its eighty-fifth anniversary. Let us all rise in the morning with gratitude and practice the Dharma cheerfully and actively.

This year again, while staying focused on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic, we should commit ourselves, together through our faith as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers, and as parents, to foster the boys and girls as well as adolescents who will be bearing the next generation. We must put our family relationships in order, with the aim of shaping their characters. We should also move forward to achieve a splendid country by carrying on its best traditions. I hope that we will all work creatively and earnestly toward these goals.

As I said to you last year as well, our important mission, the primary goal toward which we must strive with all our efforts, is human development, "the raising of human beings." This mission must include the members of all generations: "husbands and wives" mean young couples (young generation), "fathers and mothers" are those of us in the prime of our lives (middle-aged generation), and "parents" are those who are aged (senior generation). This is extremely important, not only for our membership, but for our society and our nation as well.

For this year's guidance I have added a sentence, "Let us all rise with gratitude in the morning and practice the Dharma cheerfully and actively."

Every morning during our sutra recitation we are filled with gratitude, with the feeling of "I am truly grateful" and "thanks to you." One could say that this is the wellspring for living each day courteously and to the fullest. As that accumulates, it leads to a fulfilling life.



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It goes without saying that one's mental attitude is essential. That is because the situations in front of our eyes can change endlessly, for the better or for the worse, depending on our state of mind.

For this reason, it is essential that we constantly refine and put our minds in order.

There is a passage in the Dhammapada: "The self is the only protector of the self. Who else could that protector be? With the self fully in control, one obtains a sublime refuge that is very difficult to achieve."

"Protector" here means a place to rely on, a place of refuge. By arranging and adjusting one's own mind, the self becomes a precious refuge itself.

The teachings of the Buddha are, of course, the supreme treasure. True value can only come from first studying Buddhism, then putting it into practice and finally mastering it. Not just to the level of simply learning and knowing. Unless one truly studies Buddhism to the point of being able to fully practice, one will not have really learned.

If one is tormented by worldly desires, an example of "the self is the only protector of the self" would be taking a better path using self-control and following the teachings.

In that sense, the first way for us to cultivate our minds is obviously by observing the three basic practices of our faith: 1. sutra recitation; 2. connecting people with the Dharma, enhancing their connection with the Dharma, and participating in Dharma circles; and 3. studying and practicing the Dharma. We should also have at hand the writings of those who can be called the sages of the faith. Their writings provide us with important objectives and ideals in our efforts to improve ourselves. I myself make it a habit to learn from everything, not only Buddhism but also Confucian thought and other teachings, while being mindful of not being carried away by everyday matters.

It is also meaningful to experience Nature. As the four seasons change, the trees and flowers, birds and insects also change and are renewed every day.

The Zen master Ekiho Miyazaki, who lived to the remarkable age of 106 and was the abbot of Eiheiji, the head temple of the Soto sect, has written, "In Nature is where Truth is practiced in silence."

We humans are prone to making negative comments about others and about the world at large. But I think that perhaps the liberation for each one of us should originally come from practicing Truth in silence, much like Nature.

The human mind is something that has evolved over a period of some hundreds of thousands of years from a merely biological, animal life to something that is capable of caring for others and of being affectionate.

Among the most precious functions of human emotions is the capacity to be compassionate. Not just having compassion for one's parents,



siblings, and children, and one's close relatives, but also having an interest in, and being sympathetic to, others, to society as a whole, and to the many countries of the world. We are taught that only when we possess this capacity, we can be called civilized people.

Those who feel deep compassion upon seeing others encountering difficulties—those are the ones who have the driving power to make the world a peaceful place.

To put it in the terminology of our organization, being touched by someone's sorrow, crying together with them, and fervently wishing for them to be liberated, somehow stirs a desire to spread the teachings of the Buddha. I believe that that is where the Buddha's compassion is demonstrated.

In the words of Kenji Miyazawa, a devout believer in the Lotus Sutra, "the eternally incomplete is complete." He means that living a life with the feeling that it is incomplete, whatever its duration, is completion in its true sense. For us as well, it's not that we should say "now I know it." Rather, we should continue searching and seeking the Way. That is truly cultivating the fields in the hearts and minds of each and every person.

This year as well, I hope that we will all refine our hearts together, rising with gratitude every day, energetic, lively, and diligent.

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