

# Living the Lotus 4

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

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*Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea*

## Living the Lotus Vol. 211 (April 2023)

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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.



## The Morning Is Important

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

### Opening Our Eyes to Being Grateful Every Day

As in a deep sleep of springtime  
Or the bosom of a loving mother.  
(Haruo Sato [1892–1964])

This poem conveys the warmth of a spring morning and a pleasant mood. Maybe that is why we find, in Chinese poetry, “In spring, sleeping a sleep that knows no dawn.” And in Japanese haiku poetry, “morning sleep” is a seasonal phrase associated with spring. It is nice to have such a day once in a while, isn’t it? But the morning is so important that we are often told “the morning is everything”; therefore, as the new fiscal year begins on April 1 in Japan, I would like to reconsider the significance of the morning, the start of the day.

First of all, speaking for myself, I now get up at four o’clock every morning. This is a habit I learned from one of my life mentors, Genshitsu Sen (b. 1923), the fifteenth Grand Master of the Urasenke School of the Japanese tea ceremony. Recently though, I often wake up once around three o’clock and get up and stop the alarm clock before it goes off at four. If I can accept that with aging my physical constitution is continuing to change so that I am able to use my time more effectively, then I suppose this is a fortunate development.

After I wash my face, the first thing I do is open the doors of the small shrine of our home altar that holds the Focus of Devotion. In the quiet of the early morning, when I put my hands together reverently and offer prayers, I experience a refreshing sensation because I have, in good health, greeted the Buddha again today. Being able to start my day with such gratitude is a source of vitality that lasts all day long.

There is still time before morning sutra recitation, so afterward I do such things as go to my study to read aloud modern and ancient aphorisms that I have been writing down for a long time and perform some light calisthenics and rowing exercises on an indoor exercise machine.

Just reading aloud aphorisms lifts my spirits, and exercise is very meaningful because it makes me feel positive about having done it. If you suffer from back pain, like I do, or if you

are worried about something, the constraints of pain and anxiety may make you feel weak or helpless. Therefore, I think it is important to put yourself in a positive frame of mind first thing in the morning by expressing gratitude, praying, and exercising.

### A Day That Starts with Shakyamuni's Birth Declaration

Greeting the gods and the buddhas and performing sutra recitation are essential to our morning routines, but we should also pay attention to the fact that putting our hands together reverently, which is part of both offering prayers and performing sutra recitation, helps us generate good health and vitality.

Last month, I talked a little about the book that sparked my interest in health, *Nishi shiki kenko ho* (The Nishi Method of Health) by Katsuzo Nishi (1884–1959). It says that by firmly pressing your hands together and continuing to put your palms together reverently at face level for forty minutes, you are using your hands to do what a sacred text of the ancient Greeks describes as, “Pressing your palms together and laying on of hands, which will heal all ailments,” and a Roman incantation describes as, “Pressing your palms together, which connects you to the gods.” In addition, the book notes that five minutes of reverently pressing the palms together “guarantees good health all day long.”

However, the important point is not that you put your hands together for a long time, but that the action of reverently pressing your palms together and paying homage connects you to the gods and the buddhas and that your feeling of piety relieves stress and has the potential to call forth natural healing powers and dormant energy. Moreover, if you wholeheartedly put your hands together reverently before the gods and the buddhas first thing in the morning, you deepen the mind of taking refuge and awaken your inherent vitality, don't you? That is what we are doing, every morning, when we put our hands together reverently.

Moreover, it is said that “a single day is a microcosm of a lifetime” and in that sense, waking up in the morning is just like the moment of your birth. When you welcome the morning feeling as fresh as if you were just born today, every day is a new day, and you can start your day with a positive frame of mind, free from the restraints of yesterday.

This is the month of Shakyamuni's birth, and it is significant that every morning, we contemplate the meaning of the declaration he made at his birth: “I alone am honored, in heaven and on earth.” Let's turn on the switch that starts the morning by receiving Shakyamuni's encouragement—his telling us that we are wonderful. That is the message found in his birth declaration, which itself is said to be an expression of praise, powerful as a newborn's cry, for the sanctity of all life.

From *Kosei*, April 2023



# Spiritual Journey

## Even Suffering Is an Essential Part of My Life

Mr. Shawn Richards  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the commemoration of Shakyamuni Buddha's nirvana, held at the Hawaii Dharma Center on February 12, 2023.*

**G**OOD morning. My name is Shawn Richards. I was born and raised in Arizona. My parents are Vince and Joan Richards, and I have a younger brother named Philip Richards.

Both my parents worked to give my brother and me all the opportunities that they didn't have growing up. My parents were nurturing and very active with us. They encouraged us to participate in sports, drama, band, and choir, and they always attended our events.

I struggled in school with academics and self-esteem. I was a late bloomer, and physically I was very short and skinny. I was active in choir and drama. I also made the soccer, diving, and tennis teams, but I could never sustain good enough grades to stay on the teams. I dropped out of high school during my senior year, but attended a different school the following year and received my diploma.

During that time, I also had a growth spurt and went from five foot six to six foot one. I started participating in two-player sand volleyball and competed at a high level. I enjoyed it very much and wanted to be a pro beach volleyball player. However, I tore the cartilage in my right knee so severely that my dream of becoming a pro beach volleyball player was over.

During the last few years of high school, I had become addicted to alcohol. I later dropped out of college because I was drinking too much. I thought I didn't need college as I had a good job, working as a computer programmer at my father's company, but I ended up getting two DUIs (driving under the influence) and lost my job.

Even after graduating from high school, I still played beach volleyball at a high level and received

monies for tournaments. I met my first wife at Grand Canyon University through my volleyball friends in March 1996, and in December of the same year, we got married and had a son, Riley Keala Richards. In 1998, we moved to Hawaii, where she was from. My drinking continued and worsened, and my wife



*Mr. Richards delivers his Dharma Journey talk during the commemoration of Shakyamuni Buddha's nirvana at the Hawaii Dharma Center.*



# Spiritual Journey

divorced me in 1999. To be near my son, I chose to remain in Hawaii. In 2000, I moved in with Kina, who is my current wife.

My drinking continued to get worse. I was diagnosed with alcoholic hepatitis in 2007. Doctors warned me that if I did not quit drinking, I would have cirrhosis of the liver. It was very difficult to stop drinking, and I continued to drink for another eleven years.

Kina was a strong anchor and kept our family together. Because of her, I could see Riley every other week. I was successful at work, but once outside of my job, I was very selfish, getting drunk, hanging out with the guys, and playing softball, baseball, and golf. In the meantime, Kina was working forty hours a week at her job, still taking care of the finances, and keeping our home clean. Words cannot express how truly grateful I am to her.

One of the past jobs I had was facility manager for a church, the Cathedral of Saint Andrew, in Honolulu. The interfaith conference was interesting, and I was particularly impressed with a Shinnyo-en Buddhist temple that had a great impact on the community.

Years later, at another job, I was introduced to Rissho Kosei-kai by my coworker, Karen Fujii, a chapter leader at the Hawaii Dharma Center. She approached me and took me to the Dharma center. I became a member in January, 2017, at age forty-seven.

I was excited to learn about Buddhism. I repeatedly read *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* and *Buddhism for Today*, both of which are Rissho Kosei-kai publications. I participated in the basic Buddhism classes and also researched Buddhism on the Internet. I constantly asked questions of Ms. Fujii. I started receiving roles at the Dharma center, participating in *dojo toban*, or “Dharma center duties,” and helping with special services. I participated in all activities and loved being active. I’ve always enjoyed helping others, and I felt like I belonged. Rissho Kosei-kai became a huge part of my daily life.

In March, 2018, I had my home altar enshrined. I was very happy and felt the presence of the Buddha and my ancestors at my home. My family were so happy with the changes in me, and I initiated Kina, Riley, and his girlfriend. I prayed daily at my home altar, and it helped me with my diligence, compassion, and perseverance.

I had thought my life was fine. I never realized how much I was suffering. When I learned about illusions, I thought they didn’t apply to me. I thought I was clever and did not have illusions. I believed I knew my own faults. However, I enjoyed the feeling of accomplishment through my practices; I practiced donations of money, time, and talent. I prided myself as being the one that members could turn to for technical advice, and I was always there for someone in need. It felt very good to be needed.

When I looked back at the past, I eventually realized that I was the one who had been suffering and the one who was being helped. It took me two years to realize this.

Soon after I’d had my home altar enshrined, I was invited to attend the Advanced Lotus Sutra Seminars hosted in Los Angeles by Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America. The seminars were to be held in several sessions over two years, beginning in April 2018. I was very excited for this wonderful opportunity, but I started drinking again shortly before the first session, even though I had not been drinking for a few months. I was drunk on the flight on the way to the first session. I felt out of place and insecure the whole time.

After I returned from the seminar, I thought about quitting the Dharma center many times. On the one hand, I felt no one in the Dharma center appreciated me, so I had arguments with Dharma center leaders and was constantly judging others and comparing myself to them. I was very arrogant. On the other hand, I was feeling great shame for the way I had behaved.

# Spiritual Journey

My drinking worsened to the point that I was drinking at work. During Dharma center duty, one of the leaders, Yumi Domingo, came to my side and listened to me. I was so desperate to change myself. After listening to me, she mentioned that there was a person she knew who rode a motorcycle and who used to drink like I do. That person, called Michael, had stopped drinking and now helped others who suffer with addiction. The name sounded very familiar to me. In fact, previously, when I had attended Alcoholics Anonymous, I had been given his phone number. A few months later, I made a call to Michael, and December 10, 2018, was the day of my last drink. I feel so grateful and appreciative of the Buddha for arranging these encounters.

I completed the Advanced Lotus Sutra Seminars the next year. Life started getting better, but after thirty-plus years of drinking, I was emotionally immature. It also took several months for my body to recover. I was getting better, but I still wanted to feel appreciated at the Dharma center. Honestly, I was very emotional and lashing out with anger instead of acknowledging my weaknesses and fears.

I told Rev. Laura Meya, minister of the Hawaii Dharma Center, that I was leaving the Dharma center in December 2019. Rev. Meya said, “No, you cannot quit. I will be by your side through your challenges.” Rev. Meya had been meeting with me once a week for several years.

During this time, Rev. Meya introduced me to a Japanese leader whose son, Chris, was having problems with drug addiction. Rev. Meya asked me whether I could help this young man. I agreed to help the leader’s son. I met with Chris numerous times at the Dharma center, listening and talking to him. I also talked to his mother and really wanted to support the mother during her difficult time. I felt the deep love she had for her son. She loved her son very much. Each time we talked, she bowed her head with tears in

her eyes and said, *Onegaishimasu* meaning “Please help him.” I was very moved and touched by the mother’s gesture. I helped and supported Chris through his recovery journey as I, myself, had been helped. Looking at Chris, I saw myself in him. He was me in the past. I realized I had made my parents and so many other people worry about me. Through my encounter with Chris, I reflected deeply and learned to be humble.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was able to attend the Dharma center every Sunday to broadcast the services via Zoom. I did not miss a Sunday in the entire year of 2021. I also shared the duty of checking the mail and doing weekly security checks while the Dharma center was closed. I helped many members with computer problems and other matters. With my newfound sobriety, I could help other people with alcoholism and addiction.

I found a new peace, a calm. I have had many challenges these last few years, and I am so thankful that I did not run away from those challenges. I deepened my faith and learned to practice acceptance and flexibility. I have also learned to be grateful for adversity. The more I’ve learned about myself, the more I’ve learned that there are many ways to view things.

A few months ago, I went for a checkup with my dermatologist and was told I seemed to have an extremely large melanoma on my back. He took the biopsy and nervously said it had all the characteristics of stage IV cancer. I had seen this mark on my back for years. I had felt tired, had backaches, and recently my liver enzymes had been elevated. I was surprised how calm I was about this probable diagnosis. I decided that no matter what I was going through, I would not drink. I would stay sober and keep practicing. I shared this with my chapter leader, Mae Takamoto, and Rev. Meya.

Rev. Meya asked whether I wanted to do an intensive Dharma practice. She told me I would come to



the Dharma center for twenty-one consecutive days and clean a certain area. After the cleaning, I would share what was on my mind with the reverend. I decided to do this practice.

I shared my thoughts on anything, and the reverend was listening. I don't know whether my conversation was all right, but the reverend just listened. On the third day, I received a phone call from my doctor and was informed that the spot was benign. I did not have cancer. Even with this result, I continued and completed the twenty-one-day practice.

On the first day of practice, the reverend had asked me, "If there were a person named Shawn in front of you, what would that Shawn ask you?" After a moment, I told Rev. Meya that he would ask me if I thought I was a good person and if I liked myself. On the last day of the practice, I realized that I am a good person. I do not like the things I have done in the past, but I understand they were part of my journey. The practice was very fruitful; I was getting calmer each day, and my reflections were getting deeper. I started to see positive changes in my life. I can now focus on what's in front of me instead of worrying about things that have not happened yet. And I have learned to accept things I cannot change.

My perspective is constantly expanding. One of my favorite examples from *Buddhism for Everyday Life*, one of Founder Niwano's books, is "Look down at a cone from above and you see a circle; look at it from the side and you see a triangle." Both are the truth. As the Buddha blesses me with opportunities, I try to be compassionate and listen. I want to understand what others are going through by trying to see from their perspective. Rev. Meya often reminds me of a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha, Purna, who does missionary work by taking a half step—walking with someone and being by their side, no more than a half step in front of them. Do not judge, have compassion, and be kind; be there for those in need.

Today I know my faith in the Buddha, love for the Dharma, and appreciation for the sangha have made me happier and more content. I am very grateful.



Mr. Richards with his wife, Kina.

# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

## The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

### Living with the Same Mind and Heart as the Buddha: Right Mindfulness

The kanji character for *nen* [念], meaning “mindfulness,” consists of two parts: *ima* [今], meaning “present time,” and *kokoro* [心], meaning “mind and heart.” So, *nen* represents the minds and hearts we have just at this moment.

Therefore, right mindfulness means living this moment with the same right mind and heart as the Buddha. Having the same mind and heart as the Buddha means being kind to all things, including human beings, animals, plants, soil, and water. Needless to say, please keep in mind being considerate of your family and friends.





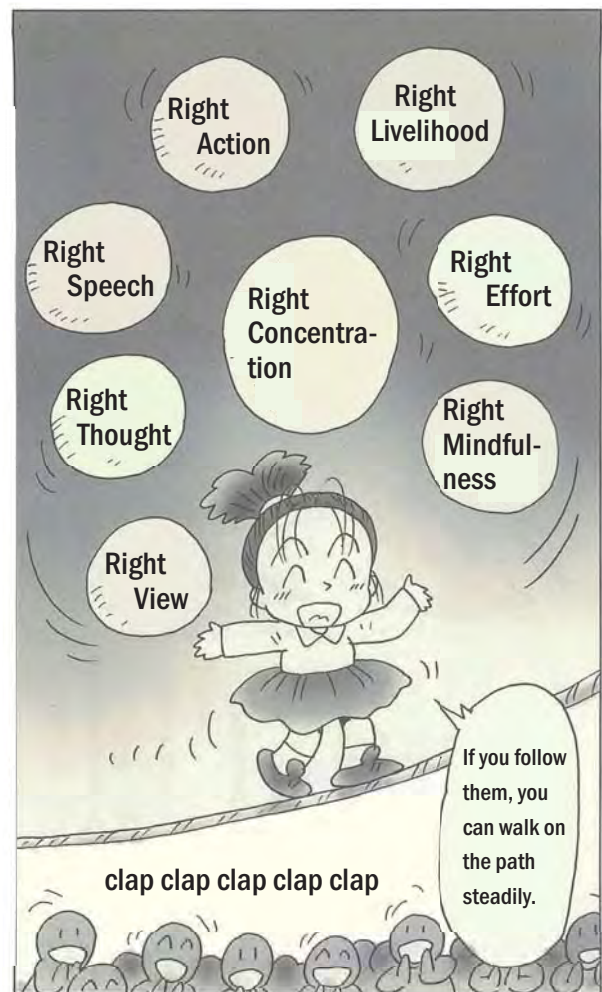


## Concentrating and Keeping the Mind Calm: Right Concentration

Right concentration refers to total concentration—always keeping the mind calm, always focusing, and never being swayed by changes in your surroundings.

If you follow well the teaching of the Eightfold Path you have learned, you will never be swayed by other things because your mind, and heart, is firmly focused on the teachings of the Buddha.

Let us make an effort to practice each part of the Eightfold Path in the right way.





## Chapter 1

### Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

## You Were Born to Become a Buddha (1)

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



### **The Way for Everyone to Become a Buddha**

It was in 1935, when I was twenty-eight, that I heard a lecture on the Lotus Sutra by Sukenobu Arai. Right away, I knew intuitively that the Lotus Sutra was the teaching that would bring happiness to all people, and my heart leapt with joy.

Mr. Arai was eager to teach the Lotus Sutra to someone, and I was just as eager to listen. Our aspirations matched perfectly, exactly as in the old Zen saying about the teacher and the disciple: “The hatchling and mother hen peck at the eggshell at the same time” (i.e., the teacher seizes the opportunity when the student is ready), and so I went to Mr. Arai’s home every day to hear him speak. It was with his encouragement that the two of us later founded Rissho Kosei-kai, which practices the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

The Buddha’s teachings are often styled the “84,000 Gates to the Dharma,” and while the teachings are so high in number, the one that matters the most is the teaching that “Everyone should follow the Way to become a buddha.” However, according to ordinary common sense in East Asia, a buddha is some kind of extraordinary being, so it’s hard for people to imagine that a person could ever become a buddha. This is no surprise.

When it comes to the word “Buddha,” there is one image that many people hold in common. They seem to think of the Buddha as the Great Life of the Universe: the one who gives the gift of life to everything in the world, whose body has the thirty-two



features of a superior being, who rescues all people from suffering, and who has the great compassion and mercy to fulfill people's wishes to be happy. The statue of The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni—Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One—that is enshrined on the altar of Rissho Kosei-kai's Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo embodies that image of the Buddha in artistic form.

Therefore, based on common sense, thinking that it's impossible to become a buddha, no matter how hard a person practices, is absolutely correct. However, the Lotus Sutra explicitly teaches that the aspiration of the Buddha is to make all people into buddhas. In the "Skillful Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we find the words, "You should know, Shariputra, / That from the beginning I made a vow, / Desiring all living beings / To be my equals, with no distinctions between us." In this passage, the Buddha is vowing "I will make all people buddhas, just like myself." Also, in the "Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata" chapter, the Buddha explains: "I am ever thinking: / "How can I cause living beings to / Embark upon the unsurpassable Way / And quickly accomplish embodiment as buddhas?"'" Here, the Buddha is saying "I am always thinking about how I can help people become buddhas without them ever losing their way."

Because the Buddha wishes that we, too, become buddhas, it is the natural endeavor of human beings to accept the Buddha's wish for us with gratitude and make great strides on the Way to buddhahood with confidence.

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 24–25



# Director's Column



## My Thoughts on the Cherry Blossom Season

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

**I** WOULD like to extend my greetings to all the readers of this column. I sincerely appreciate that you are taking the time to read my column again this month.

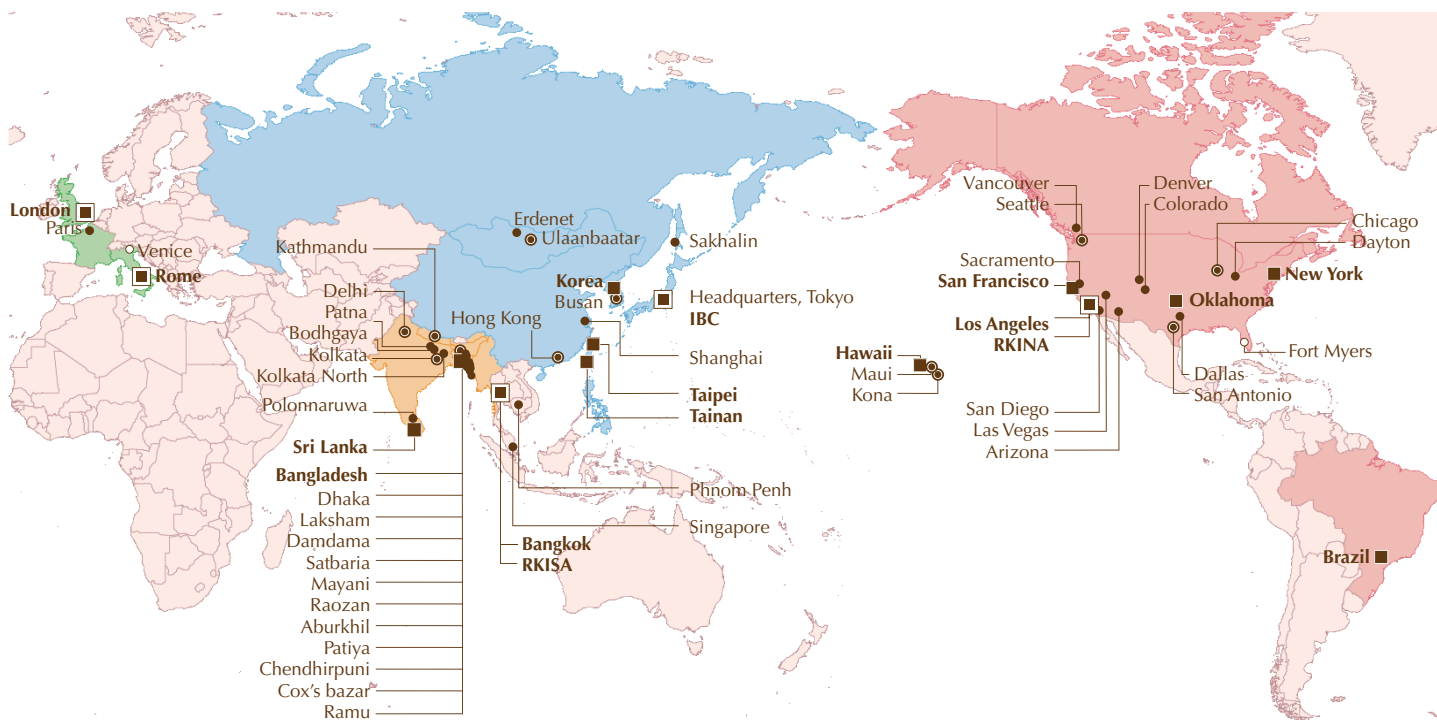
Since I was born and raised in Japan, where Mahayana Buddhism has deep roots, for me the month of April means the arrival of spring, when the blooming of the cherry blossom—the flower exemplifying Japan—and Shakyamuni Buddha's birthday coincide. Because these two events occur together, I feel that April, in particular, is a time when images of warmth, brightness, festiveness, and respect for the preciousness of life overlap and merge. How is the season unfolding for you?

In this month's Dharma talk, the President spoke about the significance of mornings. It is indeed important for all of us around the world to start each day by opening our eyes with gratitude and appreciation for life's preciousness. As Buddhists who study the principle of cause and effect, I think it should also be obvious to us that in order to experience meaningful mornings, we must also pay sufficient attention to how we spend our evenings. The President's Dharma talk reminded me that the habit "early to bed and early to rise" is good for our health and is the foundation for our robust practice of the bodhisattva way.





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