

# Living the Lotus 11

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

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Chihkan Tower, a historical building  
in Tainan, Taiwan / Shutterstock

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan

## Living the Lotus Vol. 218 (November 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.

## Complaining in Moderation

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



### “Complaining” Is “Knowledge Stricken by Illness”

This summer in Japan was hot enough to be considered a natural disaster. But, even if that were not the case, we tend to complain, every time we open our mouths, about summer being hot and winter being cold. Generally speaking, “complaining” means expressing despair about things that are beyond the control of human beings, such as natural phenomena, past events, and so on. What sorts of things come to your mind when you hear the phrase, “expressing despair about something that is beyond the control of human beings”?

While the variety of complaints in daily life is itself interesting, it is the components of the second character *chi* [痴] of the Japanese word *guchi* [愚痴], “complaint,” that are particularly interesting to me. The character *chi* [知], “knowledge,” means the ability to understand and make decisions about things, and includes the intellect and wisdom that supports that process. But when this “knowledge” [知] is surrounded by *yamaidare* [癪], “illness,” it becomes “foolishness” [痴]. In other words, “complaining” can be interpreted as “knowledge stricken by illness.”

Of course, we human beings are defined by being equipped with the intelligence to think and act. Doctor of Science Haruo Saji (b. 1935) says that although human beings are made of the same basic elements that make up the universe, such as hydrogen and carbon, they are not physical objects, but rather, “amazing beings who think for themselves, act on their own, share their feelings, and coexist by helping each other” (*Juyonsai no tame no jikanron* [Time theory for fourteen year olds], Shunjusha, 2012). He says that “this is because human beings have the ability to imagine and speculate about the future and other people”—in other words, because we have minds.

However, with those same minds, we allow our self-centered desires and anger to mount, and we repeat the foolish actions that cause suffering to ourselves and others. The disease of complaining attacks the mind. So, what should we do to prevent our self-centered desires and anger from spiraling out of control? What is the key to curing the disease of complaining?

## Lend an Ear to Others' Complaints

Please call to mind Dr. Saji's words, which I just mentioned. We have the ability to cooperate with others, to be considerate of others, and to imagine and speculate about the future. So, all we have to do is put our abilities to use. When you feel like your selfish mind is about to emerge, try to look at things from several different angles and reflect on what other people have in mind. Or, as the Nirvana Sutra says, "Teach the truth of dependent origination to the disease of complaining": know that you are being caused to live by all existence, and try to expand that image. If, thereby, you can live a life of even a little bit more gratitude, your complaints will naturally decrease.

Speaking from the perspective of dependent origination, research shows that if parents in the home are always complaining or speaking ill of others, they cause their children to also complain more about things. Are we the cause of arousing the complaints of those around us, or are we the cause of awakening their wisdom? Depending on the state of our minds, we can have a different influence on those around us.

However, if you are never allowed to complain about anything, that may make you feel stifled. While you should not let greed or anger get the better of you, at times it may be necessary to complain in frustration or whine out of a sense of helplessness. Complaining may eventually become the starting point for you to realize that it is time to stop being attached to things that are beyond your control, to reconsider your situation, and to move forward with fresh feelings.

Because of this, I think it is important that we serve as receiving vessels who lend an ear to people's complaints.

Some people may say that it is difficult to listen to complaints all the time, but let's try to listen, considerately, to other people's pain and help them let out their complaints. And then, while together we explore the mind of wisdom that leads to life's breakthroughs, we will mutually foster spiritual health and vitality and refine ourselves as human beings.

From *Kosei*, November 2023



# Spiritual Journey

## Daily Buddhist Practices I Learned at Rissho Kosei-kai

Mrs. Kim Yeon Suk  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered at Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea in Seoul on May 27, 2023,  
during a ceremony celebrating the anniversary of Shakyamuni's birth.*

**H**ELLO, everyone. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to deliver my Dharma Journey talk on this auspicious occasion of the ceremony celebrating the anniversary of Shakyamuni's birth. My name is Kim Yeon Suk. I belong to the Busan chapter.

I was born in Yongchon, Gyeongsangbuk-do, in Korea on April 9, 1955, as the third daughter of eight siblings. I turned sixty-eight this year.

When I was twenty-three years old, I married my husband in an arranged marriage. We were both Catholic. We had a happy married life and engaged in volunteer activities at our church. In his early forties, my husband set up in business as a sales agent for a home electrical appliance manufacturer. His business went well, and he began going for a drink with his customers and business partners frequently. My husband was a quiet and gentle person. When he came back home after he'd been drinking, however, we often got into arguments, and gradually we quarreled more and more. I was proud, so whenever my husband complained to me, I gave him back two to three times as many complaints and didn't even greet him for a few days after each quarrel. Before long, he began to have an affair with a woman who was in charge of accounting at his company and demanded a divorce. I said that I couldn't divorce because we were Catholic. I also claimed that we could not divorce until our children were married. I behaved resolutely, but I felt indescribably miserable.

Meanwhile, my husband's business got into a tough situation. He ran up debts and his company finally went bankrupt. After the bankruptcy, he did manual labor to make a living, but one day he suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. Since this

happened a week before our daughter's wedding, my daughter had to have her wedding without her father in attendance. The aftereffects of the stroke caused my husband to become partially disabled. I did my best to care for him. For his rehabilitation, I made a packed lunch for my husband and myself every day, and we climbed a nearby hill together or did other exercises. This helped him recover from his disabilities within a year, and the following year he was able to attend our son's wedding ceremony.

After that, my husband worked at construction sites and other places. However, as he didn't bring any income home at all, I had to begin working part time, and the chasm between our hearts grew. Our children were already independent and now had their own families, so I finally signed the divorce papers in 2010. Because of this, I stopped going to the Catholic church.



*Mrs. Kim Yeon Suk delivers her Dharma Journey talk at Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea in Seoul, during the ceremony celebrating the anniversary of Shakyamuni's birth.*

I began to work part time at a store in a public bathhouse to make a living. This is where I met the head priest of a nearby Buddhist temple. When I told her the whole story, she said, “Because your ancestors’ grave has not been well taken care of, you are facing such a hardship. You should donate two dollars every day and offer a prayer for your ancestors for three years.” In 2013, I became a lay caretaker of her temple and began to perform duties, including the preparation of meals at the temple. At first, the priest treated me kindly and warmly as if she were my mother.

I went to the temple at seven every morning, prepared the priest’s breakfast, and engaged in the work of the kitchen and the priest’s living area. As I also had a duty at the main hall of the temple, I had so much work to do that I couldn’t take a rest during the day. Moreover, when ceremonies or events were held at the temple, I was so busy that I didn’t even have time to go home. I was oppressed with the heavy workload day after day without knowing if I was actually practicing the teaching.

I was exhausted, and the pain in my knees, due to aging, became severe. At the hospital, the doctor recommended surgery. However, the priest warned me against this, saying if I had surgery, I wouldn’t be able to walk for the rest of my life. So I gave up the idea. What’s more, the priest hurled words at me like a curse: “If you reconcile with your former husband, you will die. Because you are a luckless woman, if you leave this temple, things won’t go as you hope with your children and grandchildren, and your family will eventually be destroyed.” I couldn’t help but be frightened by what she said because they were the words of a priest who had undergone years of ascetic practices. I made up my mind to sacrifice my wellbeing for my loving family and continued to work hard, but the knee pain became so severe that I was eventually unable to walk. I decided to have an operation and left the temple.

I couldn’t sleep for days because I was worried in case, as the priest had predicted, leaving the temple would really bring misfortune to my family. I felt fear to such an extent that I heard the priest’s voice calling my name in an auditory hallucination. At that time, I was reminded of Mrs. Lee Young Soon, an assistant chapter head of the Seongbuk chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea in Seoul. Her father-in-law was a good friend of my father’s, and for that reason and others, she was always very nice to me.

While I was staying at Mrs. Lee’s place for a week, I confided in her, and I came to feel much better. Before the knee surgery, I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea with the guidance of Mrs. Lee. I belonged to the Busan chapter and had the posthumous name for all my ancestors, *sokaimyo*, enshrined in my home altar. After the surgery, while I was staying at home during the coronavirus pandemic, Mrs. Lee taught me how to recite the sutra. I slowly recited the *Kyoten*, “Sutra Readings,” a copy of which I received before the enshrinement ceremony. On the second day after I’d started the sutra recitation, I suddenly felt as if something hot jumped into my heart, and then the Buddha’s words written in the sutra seeped into my mind. I felt something was welling up in my mind. It was a sense of security, a feeling that I would be all right if I lived in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching. From the next day onward, I recited the sutra at six every morning. I was soon relieved of my fear and could sleep at night.

A year after the knee surgery, I visited the Busan chapter, where I listened to a Dharma talk by Rev. Lee Hang Ja, the minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea, for the first time. The minister said that being alive here and now is something to be grateful for because we are allowed to live thanks to the support of all people and all things. When I heard her talk, I felt my eyes were being opened. She also said, “We should be grateful for being awake in the morning,

the air we breathe, and the sunshine we receive—all things in this world are things to be thankful for. If we keep a mind of gratitude, we will be blessed with many more things for which we can be grateful.” Her way of explaining the Buddha’s teaching was so easy to understand. At that time, I made up my mind to continue to practice this teaching.

My daughter lived in Australia after she married. When she returned to Korea, she mediated between my husband and me, and I began to live with him again. At that time, I realized that because my husband had partially lost his memory due to the aftereffects of the stroke, he didn’t even remember that he’d had an affair, and he believed that I was the cause of the divorce and blamed everything on me. So, we had a lot of twists and turns before getting back together, but after a while, we remarried, and this year marks our eighth wedding anniversary.

Recently, when I got home from the Dharma center, my husband asked me, “What did you learn at the Dharma center today?” So I answered, “I learned the importance of treating my husband with kindness and a warm heart.” The following day, he asked me again “What did you learn today?” I answered, “They encouraged me to love my husband.” Then he said, “Oh, is that right? That is really a good temple. I hope you will do your best to keep on going there.” As what he said sounded funny, we laughed together.

In the beginning, I could hardly greet my husband, so I practiced greeting him in the restroom mirror, saying “Hi, how was your day?” and “Thank you for working hard again today.” I was a little shy the first time, but when I actually said the words to my husband, while also stroking his cheeks, he looked upset and said, “Oh, what happened to you?” But he didn’t seem to dislike it. Perhaps because of this, he came to like Rissho Kosei-kai. We promised to hold a general memorial service for the ancestors of both our families at least once a year and decided to make a

donation on the occasion as a token of our gratitude. For that, we are saving money together every month.

I’m currently taking care of two elementary school kids after school who are the children of a friend of my daughter’s. I teach them the three positive habits I learned at Rissho Kosei-kai: exchange cheerful greetings, respond clearly when you’re called, and arrange your shoes together neatly when you take them off. I also teach them the importance of expressing gratitude with words. Both kids instantly put the habits into practice. It is very heartwarming to see their honest attitudes and engaging with them gives me the strength to live cheerfully.

I thought that unless I shared this teaching and happiness with other people, the teaching would be wasted, and that was not what I wanted to happen. So I called Mrs. A, whom I’d become acquainted with at the temple I used to go to, hoping that I could share the teaching with her. I said to her, “I’ve recently been going to a temple where I can learn how to practice the Buddha’s teaching in daily life. Their guidance is so wonderful that I don’t want to keep it only to myself. Why don’t you listen to the guidance with me?” When I explained to her a small part of what I had been learning, she instantly said, “I would love to go there too.”

Mrs. A’s husband had never worked steadily, so she had difficulty making ends meet. Mrs. A is a care worker. She has a bit of a stubborn streak, and it seemed that complaints and dissatisfaction were building up in her mind because things weren’t going as she wanted. I listened to what she had to say wholeheartedly, trying to understand her feelings. Then she calmed down and said, “Mrs. Kim, I am so glad to have been able to meet you. When I talked about my worries to others, they always tried to teach me how to solve the problem. However, you always listen to all of my feelings. I have never met anyone like you.” I used to take it for granted that other

people would do things for me. Otherwise, I felt lonely and dissatisfied. But thanks to the encounter with Mrs. A, I can now feel gratitude even for small things. Since I've begun to accept things with gratitude, I can feel relaxed and have better relationships with others, which makes my everyday life happier and more enjoyable.

Mrs. A's mother, who is eighty-three years old, recently injured her arm and underwent surgery. Her children had always depended on her and didn't know what to do. They were complaining to each other about their mother's care. At that time, following the teaching I'd learned at Rissho Kosei-kai, I said to Mrs. A, "Now you have the chance to repay, even a little, the love you have received from your mother. Why don't you perform filial piety for your mother, leaving your siblings' attitudes aside?" Then Mrs. A said, "Yes, that's true. My mother has been striving for all of us, so I should be grateful to her." She regretted having taken her mother's affections for granted. Since then, she has been caring for her mother wholeheartedly.

My son and daughter became members of Rissho Kosei-kai, and they both had the comprehensive post-humous name for all their ancestors enshrined in their home altars. My son has been kind to his parents and, since he was little, has never caused trouble. It seems, however, that he had some emotional disagreement with his younger sister, and he stopped coming back home. The old me would have tried to bring him home by any means. But now I leave everything up to the Buddha and wait until the situation changes. Looking back on my own life, I have an older sister whom I stopped contacting due to some trivial matters. I also realize that I haven't contacted my husband's siblings since the divorce. If my parents were to know that I have become alienated from my siblings, they would feel sad in the same way that I am worried about my children's discord. So, I will get up the courage to contact my siblings.

Now, I can perceive that the encounter with the priest was necessary for me because it prevented me from deviating from the right way when I was unable to turn over a new leaf and move on after the divorce. I don't hold a grudge against her; instead, I accept the bitter experience at the temple with gratitude. I am grateful for the teaching that made all these changes possible. I would like to express my gratitude again to Mrs. Lee Young Soon, my Dharma parent. I also would like to thank Rev. Lee Hang Ja, who conveys to me the Buddha's teaching and Founder Niwano's guidance.

Thank you very much for listening.



*Mrs. Kim Yeon Suk with her husband Mr. Choi Dalju at the Busan Dharma Center.*

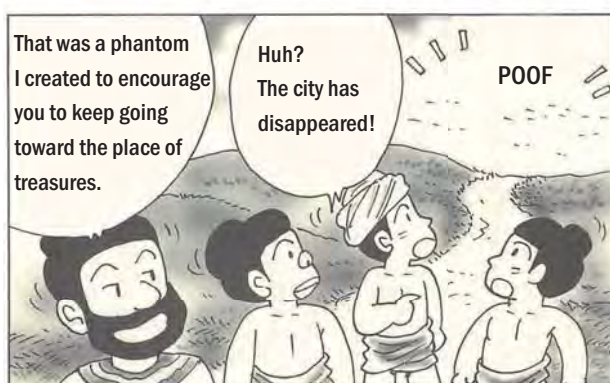
# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

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

### The Parable of the Conjured City

A group of people traveled along a perilously bad road that stretched far away to a place where there were great treasures. They became frightened and weary, and some of them were going to turn back. However, they had a guide who knew how to lead people. The guide used his skill and appropriate means to conjure up a great city. He let the group rest in the city until they were no longer afraid or weary, and he finally guided them to the place of treasures.

The long, perilous road symbolizes our lives. The guide represents the Buddha. This story tells us that the Buddha, using various skillful means, guides us to a way of living that accords with the teachings, whenever we are likely to be daunted by difficulties in life.



#### Did You Know?

This parable is expounded in chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Parable of the Conjured City." The Buddha compares the doctrine of the One Buddha Vehicle, which leads all living beings to becoming buddhas, to the treasures. Becoming a buddha means perfecting one's character and attaining a truly happy life.



## The Parable of the Gem in the Robe

A poor man was treated to a meal when he visited the home of his good friend, and afterwards he fell asleep there. While the poor man was sleeping, the host and good friend sewed a priceless jewel into the sleeping man's robe. However, the poor man didn't notice it and continued to lead his daily life with difficulty, earning just enough for food and clothing. A few years later, the poor man happened to meet the good friend again. The friend explained to the poor man about the jewel. The good friend symbolizes the Buddha; the jewel represents our vow to become buddhas; the friend's confession about the jewel signifies the Buddha's bestowal of an assurance of buddhahood on the poor man; and for the poor man, the confession symbolizes his acceptance of the assurance to become a buddha.

The parable teaches us that although it is not easy to become buddhas, as long as we don't forget our vow to become buddhas, we will receive the assurance of buddhahood from the Buddha.



### Did You Know?

This parable is expounded in chapter 8 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Assurance of Buddhahood Given to the Five Hundred Disciples." The good friend's sewing a jewel into the poor man's robe signifies that we can make a vow to become buddhas thanks to the Buddha's guidance. Receiving the assurance of buddhahood means that the Buddha bestows on us the assurance we will become buddhas.



## Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

### **The Reason You Are Here** **(2)**

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



#### **An Expanding Circle of Happiness**

When you set out to situate the existence of the person you call “I” in the here and now, you come to the realization that you are not living on your own.

Buddhism teaches something called “nonself,” meaning there is not a single thing in this world that exists in isolation. All things coexist interdependently through imperceptible ties.

We are all alive because of our interconnectedness with a myriad of other people. So,



if we do something to bring sadness to the person next to us, that will also make the person next to them sad. Conversely, if you can bring happiness to even a single person, a circle of happiness expands around them, and as it grows, you will invariably have exerted a positive influence on a great many people.

It's not only these "horizontal connections" with other people and things that are important; "vertical connections" are also crucial to our existence. The fact that you are here is thanks to the fact that your parents were here and their parents before them; your existence is owing to the existence of your ancestors over generations. When you think about this, it naturally makes you cherish your parents and appreciate your ancestors, and this imbues your morning and evening sutra recitations with heartfelt sincerity.

Additionally, as a practicing Buddhist, you must not forget the vertical connections that extend from your children in the faith, your Dharma children, to their Dharma children, who are your Dharma grandchildren, and continue down to your Dharma great-grandchildren. If your Dharma children nurture good Dharma grandchildren, and if they, in turn, also raise good Dharma great-grandchildren, then the Dharma will continue to live on, passed down through the generations.

"The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata" chapter of the Lotus Sutra teaches that the lifetime of the Buddha is infinite. Without question, the basic principle of this chapter is that the life span of the Eternal Original Buddha is endless, but we can think of this as also meaning that the Dharma, which teaches us the truth of the universe and of human life, is everlasting and immutable as well.

In the same chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says, "For I always abide here teaching the Dharma." The life of the Buddha is surely always alive within the people who practice the Buddha Way and teach the Buddha Dharma.

"Each person guiding another" is also about creating both the horizontal and vertical connections of the Buddha Dharma. If you can feel yourself at the center of these precious connections, there is no more noble way of being human. It's fair to say that this is the ultimate significance of knowing "I am here!"

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 37–39





## The Importance of Listening

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

**H**ELLO, everyone. In Japan, the lingering summer heat has finally subsided, and the leaves of the trees have begun to change color, signaling the deepening of autumn. I am in awe of the constant flow and change of the natural world these days.

This month, President Nichiko Niwano elucidates the last element of the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, all of which are the root cause of suffering. The Nirvana Sutra says, “Teach the truth of dependent origination to the disease of complaining.” It is unlikely, however, that a person whose mind is on the verge of bursting with self-centered desires and anger will easily accept the principle of dependent origination, even if it is explained in a logical manner. Therefore, the President teaches us the importance of lending an ear to others’ complaints.

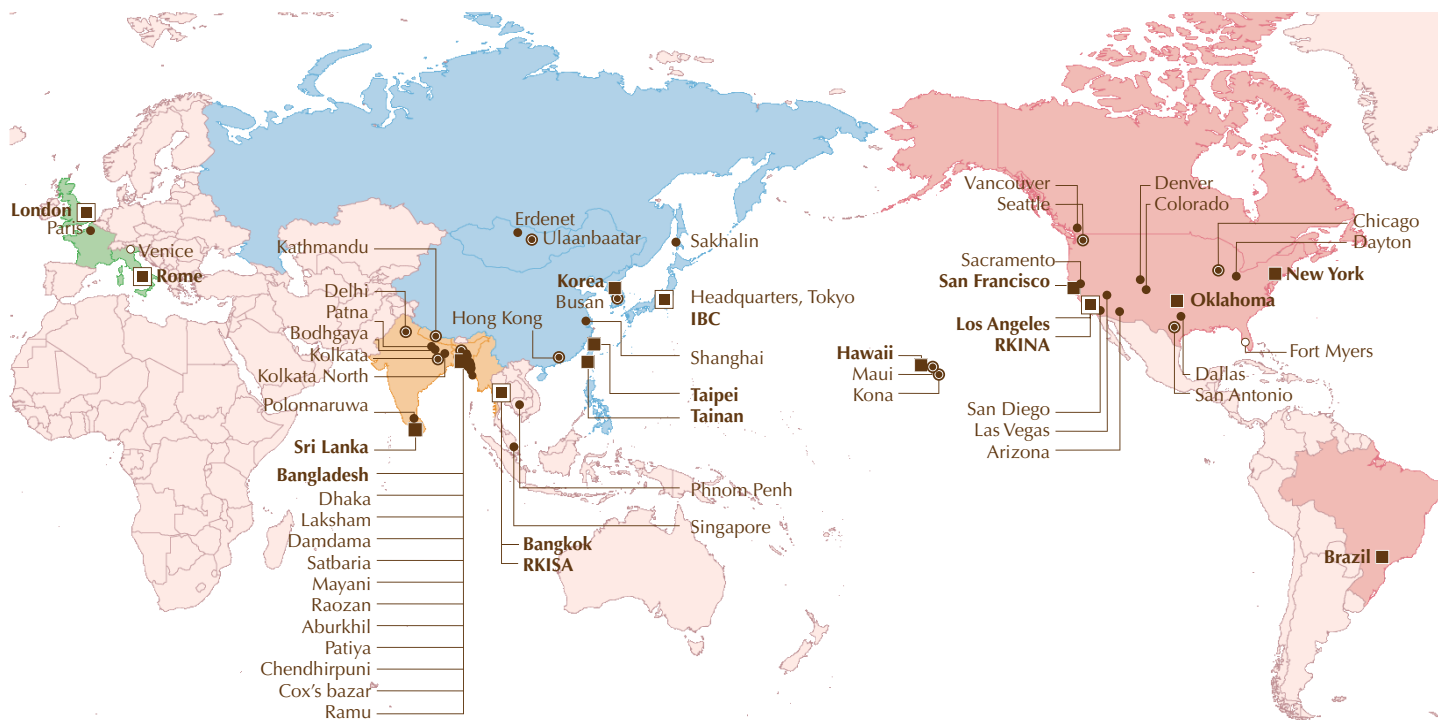
The Chinese character for “listening” also means “responding to another’s wishes.” If we listen to someone complaining or whining out of helplessness and respond by saying, “That must have been hard for you,” this genuine sympathy and compassion will surely bring a world of awareness to the heart of someone who has been corroded by “ignorance.”

The President’s message for this month reminds me of the importance of “listening” as part of the wisdom to conquer the three poisons. For me, who tends to push one-sided logic on others without regard for their feelings, the message is greatly important, and I have received it deep in my heart.





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