

Living the Lotus

Buddhism in Everyday Life

New Year's Issue



New Year's Message

A Brand-New Year

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**Cultivating Human Beings
Is the Most Important Thing—
Make Serious Efforts as
We Approach Our Centennial**

I wish each one of you a Happy New Year.

The first day of the New Year is like the irreplaceable day we were born. No matter how old we are, in each of the days from that one onward our lives are brand new, experienced for the first time.

The Chinese Confucian classic *Daxue*, or The Great Learning, states, “If you can one day rectify yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily rectification.”

It is said that a famous ruler of ancient China carved that inscription into the wash basin he used every day, and he recited it every day to discipline himself.

For us as well, I would like this new year to be one in which we greet every day energetically, with refreshed minds and a renewed dedication.

At the Annual General Meeting for the Directors and Ministers of Rissho Kosei-kai held in November 2024, I offered my “Guidelines for Members’ Practice of the Faith for 2025” as follows.

“Instead of merely being content with the way things are, we human beings seek infinitely higher, more precious,



and greater things. This desire gives rise to a reverent mind. When this reverent mind develops, it inevitably leads us to reflect upon the comparatively inadequate state of our own lives, and to a growing feeling of humility. The most important things for the progress and improvement of humanity are to nurture the reverent mind, and as a result, to have a mind of humility.”

These words were well-expressed by those who came before us, describing the mindset that is important for human beings. In this spirit let us again commit ourselves together through our faith as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and as parents to somehow guide, on a humanitarian path, the young children and adolescents who will be bearing the next generation. With the aim of shaping their characters, we must put our family relationships in order. We must also move forward to achieve a splendid country by carrying on its best traditions. I hope that all of us will always strive energetically toward these goals.

Although this is quite similar to what I said last year, for our members it is extremely important.

Until now I have encouraged you to put all your efforts into our primary goal of “raising human beings.”

The ancient Chinese political and philosophical text *Guanzi* states, “Sowing grain is best for a one-year plan; planting trees is best for a ten-year plan; for a lifelong plan, nothing surpasses the raising of human beings.”

When we think about the future of our local communities, of our countries, and of the world, the most important thing is the cultivation of human beings.



The foundation for doing this, above all, is education in the home. This is because it is through managing the family (the wise management of family affairs) that proper human education is provided, which then makes the education in schools more fulfilling, and leads to “the raising of human beings” in the true sense.

Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), known as an authority on Eastern philosophy, wrote as follows in one of his books: “The father should be the role model for the child. The mother should be the seat of compassion for the child. That is because the family is like a seedbed for nurturing children.” If the seedbed for rice seedlings isn’t in good order, one can’t possibly hope for a good harvest in the fall.

These pivotal roles in this character building are carried out by our young husbands and wives (the young generation), our fathers and mothers (the middle-aged generation), and our parents (the elderly generation), who are the progenitors of human life. It is through them that the humanity of our children and young people is nurtured. I truly hope that, as we approach the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of our organization, we undertake this in earnest.

In the first article of his Seventeen-Article Constitution, Prince Shotoku (574–622) stated that “harmony is precious.” Also, the name for Japan in ancient times was Yamato (“Great Peace”) and embracing the spirit of “Great Peace” and “Great Harmony” was the national ideal. This tradition of Japan is also relevant to the world today, and it is our important role to strive to attain it.

The Essential Nature of Respect and Reverence Is Dignifying Ourselves by Having Respect for Ourselves

Having the “reverent mind” I mentioned in my New Year’s Guidelines means having a larger goal, a desire to progress and to improve. It is a mind that is not content with the uncompleted self. Instead, it attempts to approach a higher state, even if only slightly.

As such a reverent mind develops, it causes the self to feel unsatisfactory, and that gives rise to a mind of humility. Then, cautiously and with self-discipline, the self resumes with new effort and diligence.

But there is something even more important about this



reverent mind: the essence of respect and reverence lies in the self having respect for itself, and in us respecting ourselves.

Those who are unaware of their own value cannot in the truest sense respect others. It is only after a person knows their own dignity that they can see the dignity in others.

It is truly a miracle that we were originally given life in this world. The Japanese educator Yoshio Toi (1912–91) expressed this as follows.

There has not been a single person who has been born into this world under their own volition. People are born into this world through some unknown force. It is a gift—human life.

These are words that resonate deeply.

At the same time, our lives are sustained by the blessings of all things in the universe, including the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, the air, the water, the people around us, the plants, the animals, the insects, the microorganisms, and the bacteria.

The more we look at our lives, the more we feel humbled by its preciousness and wonder, and we feel gratitude.

We are taught, above all, that all humans are born with the ability to achieve the awakening of the Buddha and the ability to understand the Truth, and that we all have the seeds of buddhahood, in other words we all have buddha nature.

When we see a person who is troubled, we feel an urge to help them. This is proof that deep in our hearts we have the same wish as the Buddha.

Every day, we bow to the Buddha and place our hands together in prayer. When we do this we are given the same mind as the Buddha, which is why revering the Buddha is one and the same as revering the buddha nature in our own hearts.

We tend to look down on ourselves, thinking, “I’m not good enough.”

But the fact is we have all been given precious lives, lives that can be called “miraculous.” Our hearts cradle the same buddha nature as the Buddha. Each of us has the capacity to realize the Truth and the Dharma and we also have the power to solve problems by ourselves. Keeping this in mind and to practice diligently with confidence is the basis for a

way of life based on the teachings of the Buddha.

The Zen master Dogen (1200–1253), who founded the Soto sect of Japanese Buddhism, wrote, “The living body for this one day is a living body that deserves esteem, a ‘bag of bones’ that should be honored. We should love and respect our bodies and minds, which undertake this practice.”

This single day of your life is life that is to be valued. Your body must be valued. This means that you should love both your body and your mind as they walk the Buddha Way, and value yourselves.

We should be aware of the importance of valuing our own bodies and minds as we earnestly learn to put the Buddha Way into practice.

Anticipating My Eighty-Eighth Birthday— My Wish Is That We Enthusiastically Learn and Practice Together

On March 20th of this year, I will turn eighty-seven years old, or eighty-eight years old by the traditional Japanese age reckoning system, which means I shall be observing my special “beiju” birthday.

Truly, my life has been given by the gods and the buddhas and supported by all things in heaven and on earth, and I am truly thankful for this day.





A person has two parents, a mother and a father. However if we go back in time, through our grandparents and great-grandparents, for thirty generations, that number exceeds one billion. So I exist here and now, thanks to an unimaginable number of ancestors in an unbroken line.

It was in this eternal chain of life that our Founder Nikkyo Niwano lived his life as the Founder and passed away at the age of ninety-two. My mother also lived a full life of eighty-five years as my mother. I was given life by my parents, and I have lived my own life into my late eighties. In this sense, I cannot help but feel that we all pass the baton of life on to others.

What's more, each one of us has our own identity. It's like a medley relay in swimming. There are swimmers whose specialty is the breaststroke, and there are others who specialize in the butterfly. As members of a relay team, each one swims their leg of the race to the best of their ability. And finally we pass the baton to the next ones, in other words to our children or grandchildren.

As we grow old we are no longer able to do things the way younger people do. Our legs and backs become weaker. But it is said that the more we use our brains, their function improves.

The late Edo period Confucian scholar Sato Issai (1772–1859) wrote the following. “If you learn when you are young child, you will be able to do things when you achieve manhood. If you learn when you are fully a man, you will not decline when you are old. If you learn when you are old, what you have learned will live beyond you.”

It means that if we learn when we are youths, we can achieve something when we reach our prime. If we learn when we have reached our prime, even in old age what we have learned will not fade. If we continue learning in old age, then even after our lives end our reputations and spiritual legacies will not fade but will be passed on to the next generation.

The most important thing is that we keep learning, vowing to do good for others and making the world a peaceful place.

It has been said that when people learn, their hearts become bright and clear like shining stars.

It is my wish for this year that we all learn and practice with enthusiasm and walk the bodhisattva path (the path of humanity), as Shakyamuni showed us.

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