



Using My Life for the Happiness of Others



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CONGRATULATIONS, everyone! Today, we celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of New York. I'm glad to have the opportunity to share my Dharma Journey talk on this significant day. Today has become a meaningful day for me to stand at the starting line of my new life and celebrate taking the first step to move forward.

I was born in 1963 in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture. When I was three years old and my older sister was in the first grade, my family moved to Tokyo where my parents had no one to look to for help. My parents made every effort to find a nursery school to take care of me so my mother could work during the day to help support the family income, but they were refused by more than ten schools. Just when they were about to give up, they finally found a school that gladly accepted me.

At six o'clock the next morning, I was dropped off



Ms. Naito delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the New York Dharma Center.

at the nursery-school director's home; my mother came to pick me up at nine o'clock that night.

In the evenings, before my mother would pick me up, the director, whose name was Ms. Akiko Nakamura, would sit in front of the home altar and recite a sutra. She was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. I always sat behind her and listened to her recite.

Ms. Nakamura was like the Bodhisattva Kannon—the affectionate mother—to me. I vividly remember her always watching over me and affectionately taking care of me as if I were her own child. I have no recollection of experiencing loneliness as a young child. For me, my time with Ms. Nakamura is an unforgettable event for which I can never be grateful enough.

Meeting Ms. Nakamura also led my mother to Rissho Kosei-kai, who diligently went to the Dharma center for visits on the memorial days and participated in center duties and *hoza* sessions. Throughout her life, my mother relied on Ms. Nakamura as if she were her older sister, approaching her and asking her for advice whenever she was suffering.

Thanks to my father's job as a craftsman who paints designs on kimonos, by the time I was in second grade, my family was able to live in a single-family house. However, in less than two years, my father's business soured. Our happy life did not last long, and my mother started working again.

This was around the time that I started fifth grade and my elder sister moved away from home and into the high school dormitory. My mother stopped coming home, saying she was very busy at work. I would make dinner for my father and wait for mother, who did not come home. As the days passed, my father started acting strange and things became a mess in our house. I felt lonely every day.

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When I was sixteen years old, I wanted to get my license to drive a motorcycle. I got a copy of my family register, which designated the person I thought was my father as an “adoptive father.” To make things worse, I then found out that my mother had been living with someone other than my father.

My mother’s betrayal shocked me and deepened my sense of loneliness. I told myself, “I will try to regard my mother as simply a woman, and not my mom.” This was a way to avoid feeling sad, mortified, and lonely. Yet, in spite of everything, I loved my mother.

My mother divorced my father and married the person she was living with. Yet, when I turned twenty, my mother—who was having marital trouble with her new husband—suddenly came to me and said, “I want you to run a café to support me.” I thought it was an unreasonable request, but I wanted to live with my mother once again. I sacrificed everything and finally opened a café.

However, shortly after the shop’s opening, my mother decided to reconcile with her estranged husband and left me to run the business on my own. At that time, I truly felt like I was cursed to be lonely. Yet I received unexpected support from many people around me, and six months later, my café became the most prosperous shop in the town.

When I was twenty-two years old, I suddenly became ill and was diagnosed with pyelitis. The doctor told me that I was working too hard and needed complete bed rest. I was hospitalized for two months.

When I left the hospital, my mother and her husband took me on my first overseas trip. We went to Hawaii, and it sparked an instant liking for America. I wanted to be liberated from all the sorrow, anger, fear, and pain I’d experienced until then. My dream of living in open-minded America, with no constraints or limitations, began to grow.

At the age of twenty-five, I closed the café and, against everyone’s wishes, moved to New York. My chest was inflated with a false sense of confidence, however, and actual life in the city was not as easy as I’d thought. The savings I’d brought with me quickly ran out, so I had to work to live. After starting and leaving various jobs, I was able to get a job at a Japanese

trading company. There, I was able to receive the support I needed to obtain a green card.

When I was twenty-six, I married a man I met in New York. But my married life turned out to be a somewhat lonely and empty one. I’d been attracted to my husband, who often spoke about spirituality, but after getting married, I became overly attentive and concerned about him and I felt like I was putting forth a false “me” every day.

Knowing this, my mother in Japan was worried about me. Whenever I called her, she said, “There is a Dharma center of Rissho Kosei-kai in New York. Try to go there.” It was ten years after I got married when I finally visited the Dharma center. However, as I was thinking more about my road to future independence rather than normalizing the relationship with my husband, I was not receptive to the teaching.

In 2001, I made a career change to a moving company, where I was the president’s partner in opening up a Japanese market for the firm. Meanwhile, my relationship with my husband was deteriorating because of the differences in our ways of thinking. In 2005, my mother passed away from a stroke. In November of the same year, I decided to end my sixteen-year marriage and got divorced. I had lost the most important people in my life—I was lonely once again. I was becoming depressed and I condemned myself, thinking that I was worthless.

It was around this time that a member of the New York Dharma Center befriended me. At first, I was defiant against Rissho Kosei-kai’s teachings. “If you recite the sutra, do you really think the Buddha will do something for me?” I thought. The teachings did not resonate in my heart, and I didn’t listen to them. After a while, however, thanks to the perseverance of the member who kept drawing close to me, her warmth started to penetrate into my stubborn heart that was unwilling to be open to the consideration of others. I felt that my heart was gradually healing, and I found myself willing to listen to what people talked to me about with an open and flexible mind.

I had suffered from the false assumption that I was fated to be lonely, but through the warmth of the sangha, I learned that my life was supported by many people. It was an important thing for me to learn.

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Because Ms. Nakamura led my mother to the faith when I was a child, I'd actually been connected with Buddhism, Rissho Kosei-kai, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, and President Nichiko Niwano for a long time. I felt that over that length of time, the karmic ties with all of them had been firmly rooted in my soul.

In 2009, my doctor told me that my renal function had deteriorated and my kidneys were only working at 30 percent. In 2011, I suffered from high blood pressure caused by work stress and was told to receive treatment, but since I had no insurance, I didn't go to the hospital and instead left the disease untreated. This caused my kidney failure to progress, and in 2013, I was finally told that I need dialysis. I still continued to work without going to the hospital, turning my face away from the reality of the situation.

In 2014, I left the moving firm and started my own moving company as an independent proprietor, which imposed both mental and physical burdens on me. In the end, my kidneys were seriously damaged and lost most of their function. Finally, in August of that year, I went to the dialysis center. The doctor told me that I should continue to receive dialysis until I had the chance to have a kidney transplant. I was filled with numerous anxieties, but I began to live each day with a hope that I could have a kidney transplant someday.

When I talked to my sangha members about challenges in my work, they always listened to me attentively. One day, a member said to me, "Eiko-san, you can't change other people, so why don't you try changing your way of seeing things—even slightly?" I was strangely receptive and thought, "Okay!" I immediately put her advice into practice. Just by changing my way of seeing things, the feeling that I could accept the person who had made me suffer arose within me, and I had a mysterious experience in which things I couldn't stand before changed into things I was grateful for. I learned that practice sometimes brings fast results.

Although I had a major illness, I was very happy and cheerful because I felt that my mind was changing for the better. As I changed, people around me began to trust me and share their worries with me. I was pleased to know that people were opening their hearts to me. When I was convinced that anyone

would be liberated like me if they studied and practiced the teaching, my hope that all my friends would also be liberated began to grow.

Ms. A was a friend of mine for ten years, and I strongly wished for her to be liberated through the teaching. At first I was too pushy and intrusive, trying to give her advice and share my experiences. I ended up causing her to have a sense of rejection.

Around that time, I started to participate in evening Buddhist study-group sessions held at the New York Dharma Center. There I learned the Three Seals of the Dharma, the doctrine of Dependent Origination, and the Ten Suchnesses. While I was studying them, common phrases I'd been taught in the sangha, like "we can't change others" and "change your own viewpoint," began to make perfect sense to me. I found that these phrases were firmly grounded in Buddhist truth, which deeply moved and impressed me. It was then that I decided to invite Ms. A so we could learn the teachings together.

Soon after this, Ms. A gave me a call. She said, "I don't know what to do anymore. I want to die." I thought I'd fully understood her pain, but I hadn't. I apologized for not having been able to do anything for her. Then she said, "I would like to go to Rissho Kosei-kai." Exerting all her strength, she came to the Dharma center.

When she arrived, Ms. A looked totally worn out and was crying. When Ms. A started to talk about her suffering, the minister of the New York Dharma Center, Rev. Etsuko Fujita, listened to her attentively and drew close to her as if she were gently holding her. Rev. Fujita praised Ms. A, saying, "Your children have grown up to be honest and receptive. They are wonderful. You're the one who raised them, right? I know you've been doing your best." Then, as if a dark veil fell off, Ms. A's face, which had looked totally despondent until then, suddenly lightened.

"This is how people become liberated!" I thought. I was astonished and deeply impressed by what had happened before my eyes. Rev. Fujita must have struck a chord in the depth of Ms. A's heart, but at that moment it looked to me as though Rev. Fujita had performed magic.

Then I thought, from the bottom of my heart, "I

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want to be a person like Rev. Fujita who can liberate a person in such a way!” I was also filled with gratitude for Ms. A—she made me realize the joy of liberating people. Ms. A decided to join Rissho Kosei-kai of her own accord, and she and I started to practice the teaching that brings happiness to all people.

Through this opportunity of connecting Ms. A to the faith, my mind changed completely and I started to think seriously about using the life I’d been given for the sake of others.

When I began receiving dialysis in August 2014, I was told that I would likely need to wait eight or nine years for a donor kidney. I added my name to the waiting list, and the possibility of receiving a transplant gave me hope and lifted me up spiritually.

On July 12, 2017, I visited the New York Dharma Center to receive guidance from Rev. Fujita about my future. Rev. Fujita encouraged me, saying, “Now there is an Eiko-san who would like to be helpful to others. That’s wonderful! When that kind of decision is made, the Buddha will protect your work as well. As the proprietor of your company, this is the beginning of your practice to cultivate the mind and heart so you can garner complete trust from everyone.” She then told me with a clear voice, “From now on, you should leave everything up to the Buddha and devote yourself to becoming a person who can be of service to others.”

To tell the truth, I was filled with anxiety about the future direction of my company and how I could build a stable foundation for the rest of my life. Furthermore, I had a constant fear of the kidney transplant surgery I would need. It was as if thin clouds were constantly covering my mind and heart. But when Rev. Fujita told me clearly and strongly that I must leave everything up to the Buddha and be diligent, I was able to accept her guidance without hesitation, and I found that my anxiety instantly disappeared.

At that moment, I experienced a strange and powerful sensation, like something had started to move within me. It was as if gearwheels started to rotate, with their cogs biting into each other tightly. That day, I offered gratitude to the statue of the Eternal Buddha in the Dharma center and went home.

Early the following morning, I received a call from

the hospital telling me that they’d located a donor. They’d originally told me that I would need to wait eight or nine years for the transplant; it had only been three. Since this happened so soon after I made up my mind to dedicate myself to the practice of the faith, I felt that this was a blessing that the Buddha extended to me.

The next day, on July 14, I received the kidney transplant. The donor was a three-month-old baby. The doctor told me that although the small kidney would grow large in my body and eventually function properly, I would still need dialysis for the first three months after the transplant. But the kidney started to function properly very soon, and I didn’t need the planned dialysis.

I was given this life through many miraculous encounters. I’m hoping now, from the bottom of my heart, that I will use the rest of my life for the happiness of others by becoming a kindhearted person and improving myself spiritually as a human being.

Thank you, everyone, for your kind attention.



Ms. Naito (rear, fourth from left) with other sangha members at the New York Dharma Center.