



The Two Teachers Who Guided Me on the Way



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HI EVERYONE, I am Mitsuyo Ikari from Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver in Canada. I am very honored to give my testimonial on this special occasion. I would like to talk about the highlights of my spiritual experiences, focusing on the earlier days of my life when I first met my Dharma parent, Rev. Kunio Sakaida, and then my mentor, Ms. Yuko Tanaka, who has been leading me since I was a student at Hoju Vocational College.

To start with, I will go back to the time when I had difficulties getting along with my parents, especially my mother. Around the time I entered high school, I started avoiding Rissho Kosei-kai even though I was a third-generation follower of the faith and my grandmother and mother were active members thanks to the support of my grandfather and father. Because of the loneliness caused by the lack of true communica-



Ms. Mitsuyo Ikari delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the U.S. Sangha 60th Anniversary Convention.

tion with my parents, I started smoking when I was sixteen years old and I drank a lot of coffee. It drove my mother crazy and she didn't know what to do. She went to Rev. Sakaida—who was then the minister of the Suibara Dharma Center in Niigata, Japan—for help, and he made time to see me in his office. It was then that I met the man who would later become my Dharma parent.

Looking back, I realize that Rev. Sakaida gave me deep compassion and love, and he also believed in the buddha-nature within me and connected me to the Buddha Way hoping that he would liberate me from suffering.

Rev. Sakaida also loved smoking, and he used to work as a reporter at Kosei Publishing Company. When I told him my dream of becoming a translator, he told me that I had good writing skills. I remember he gave me assignments—documents on Buddhism—to translate from English to Japanese to keep me connected to the Buddha Way. He sparked my interest by using his skillful means. Because he trusted me first, I was able to trust him, even though I hadn't yet regained trust in my parents.

He honored and respected everyone with any nature or desire, but I know he tried to keep me walking the Way even when I had a hard time doing so. He suggested that I go to Hoju Vocational College, so I made up mind and was able to pass the examination.

With profound compassion of the Buddha, Founder Niwano, and President Niwano, and thanks to an encounter with a roommate at the college, I was able to realize the emotions I had toward my mother. It took me some time to overcome the fear of facing

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those emotions and acknowledge them within myself. When I was growing up, my mother had a hard time getting along with my grandparents, especially my grandmother. As I saw my mother getting emotional, I began to feel disgusted with her because she was not able to control her emotions. At the same time, unconsciously, I felt lonely because I was not able to depend on her.

I used smoking as a way to calm my mind and avoid admitting my ill feelings toward my mother, and I thought that was the way of living that suited me most. But by the time I graduated from Hoju Vocational College, I came to realize that it was a garment that concealed the buddha-nature within me.

When I talked with Rev. Sakaida, I thought I was always wearing a mask to keep up with him, but later I realized that Rev. Sakaida had already drawn out the buddha-nature hiding in me. I was looking at myself in a totally wrong way. This was the biggest change in my life, and a realization I had never had before in my spiritual journey.

The image of myself that I'd always had in my mind was driven away, and I was able to find my buddha-nature, which was a new image of myself that came to the surface.

When I was a second-year student at Hoju, I visited the Nerima Dharma Center in Tokyo for Dharma dissemination practice. This was when I met Ms. Tanaka, who is still my mentor today. Ms. Tanaka helps me see the Buddha's compassion in any situation. She shows me how to apply the teachings in daily life and shares her joyful and grateful spiritual experiences to help deepen my faith.

When I started studying and practicing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in English at the headquarters with fellow members of the sangha, I felt a joy I had never experienced before and I realized that my mission was to disseminate the teachings, in English, to the world. Ms. Tanaka told me that this must be the path the Buddha wanted me to walk, and that she honored my wish to spread the Dharma in English.

As I kept walking the path with her, my heart and

mind were gradually cleansed. I no longer needed to rely on smoking and drinking coffee, and I stopped both completely. Some people spend money and time at hospitals or workshops trying to find solutions to their problems with interpersonal relationships and addictions. Others are not aware of the cause of their problems and they continue to suffer. Thanks to the practice of self-reflection and the help of the sangha members, I was able to change myself by making a conscious effort to fix my relationship with my parents and overcome my addictions to cigarettes and coffee. It truly moves me to learn how the Dharma changes our lives.

A few years ago, on the back of the cover of my copy of the *Kyoten* (sutra readings), I found Rev. Sakaida's handwritten message, which he likely left for me to find and read later in my life. It says, "Guide living beings and bring the benefits of the teachings to them."

Even now I cannot help but feel a sense of wonder that I happened to find Rev. Sakaida's words when I needed them the most.

Following his advice, and based on some of the teachings from the National Leaders' Training last year, I made a twenty-year action plan of my own. My wish is to open a Dharma center in a public building in Vancouver. This is the first year of my plan. I hope that the Buddha will guide me to make my wish come true.

I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity to share my experiences and aspiration with you all today.

Thank you so much.