Volume 4, Issue 4

December 2015



Sangha in Motion

President's Annual New Year's Guidance

Passing Along the Important Things

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Nichiko Niwano President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Create a Theme and Use Your Ingenuity to Focus on What Is Important

I wish you all a very happy New Year.

Last year marked the 70th year since the end of the Second World War. I wrote last year for one of my two New Year's calligraphy scrolls the characters for *fukyō* (never despise). These words expressed my wish that we treasure the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Despise by not looking down on or belittling each other and that we walk the path of peace and harmony. There is a valuable cultural practice in Japan that is expressed with the words "begin and end with courtesy." The role and mission of our members is to fully comprehend that sort of essential thing, and to fully apply ourselves to making the country of each of us a peace-loving nation. From a global perspective, large-scale terrorist acts and conflicts seem to be cascading. I would like for us to continue our steadfast work for peace and make good use of Japan's traditions and special qualities while watching the situation closely.

As you all know, since 1998 the General Goal of Rissho Kosei-kai has been "Cultivating the fields in the heart and mind of each and every person." Since 2008 the organization has been promoting the enshrinement of an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as a focus of devotion at the home altars of all members. By doing this we have accomplished the basis of taking refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha).

Then in 2014 we marked the 50th anniversary of the building of the Great Sacred Hall. Along with reflecting upon the wishes of

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Founder Nikkyo Niwano embodied in the Great Sacred Hall, we vowed then that we would make a fresh start in the spirit of "starting out anew in the 51st year."

In keeping with this history and the course we are taking, it is clear that it was Founder Niwano's foremost desire that each and every one of us has an aspiration for buddhahood (a mind that seeks spiritual enlightenment and walks the Buddha Way) and a mind open to delight, and that we walk the Buddha Way and pass the Buddha's teaching along to all those who come after us.

Rissho Kosei-kai's significant restructuring this year has focused on these wishes of the Founder.

I am presenting the following as the Guidelines for Members' Practice of the Faith in 2016.

This year, too, without becoming overwhelmed by the complicated realities of our daily lives, we will find appropriate ways to focus constantly on the things that are important. With this in mind, we will begin our dissemination efforts under the themes we have each created for ourselves.

Let us clearly understand what Shakyamuni Buddha wished and then share it with others.

Let us walk the bodhisattva way (the right path for humanity) with the compassion and consideration for others shown by the Buddha, our Founder and Cofounder, and by showing our basic human qualities of cheerfulness, kindness, and warm-heartedness.

For the past four years, since 2012, my New Year's guidelines have included "additional remarks" but I am omitting them this year. I did so because I believe that you fellow believers have well understood the meaning of "letting us always remember to pray for those who perished in the great earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan as well as many other disasters," "the cultivation of human resources," and "letting us choose to do these things at the levels of the individual, the chapter, the Dharma center, and the entire organization, and by so doing contribute to our communities, our country, and the world." It is also because these are things we should continue to do over the coming months and years.

For this year's guidelines, I have primarily adopted three subjects—"themes," "Shakyamuni Buddha's wishes," and "the bodhisattva path."

As for "theme," broadly speaking there are short-term, mid-term, and long-term themes. Short-term themes are for the issues right in front of us that we have to deal with. Then there is a weighty theme, how we are to live our lives. Furthermore, as in the words "endeavor, endeavor, endeavor until you die, and then when you are reborn, endeavor," there is the theme of transcending this world and purifying our souls—we say that there is this sort of long-term theme, an eternal theme. (When I think along these lines, I can say that the question of how to live one's life is a midterm theme.)

Depending on the person, there are probably some who prepare for the long-term themes first, working backwards from there to select mid-term and short-term themes. Some people might adopt short-term, mid-term, and long-term themes for a single objective. Even when contemplating themes, we should be flexible and innovative in focusing on the important things.

Always Focus on and Devote Yourselves to What Shakyamuni Wishes for Us

For this year I have also stated, "Let us

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clearly understand what Shakyamuni Buddha wished and then share it with others."

Just before he entered nirvana, Shakyamuni's last words to his disciples were, "Make yourself your light; make the Dharma your light." He wished for each and every person to live a purposeful life as an independent believer, and he wished us to be aware of the truth of the Dharma and to attain true liberation—these were the wishes of Shakyamuni.

As a matter of fact, however, one aspect of our faith is reliance on the Buddha to grant us our wishes and make our dreams come true. But Buddhism has always taught that the stronger your desires, the stronger your suffering, and let us rid ourselves of our attachments. It is important to grasp Shakyamuni's teaching directly without misinterpreting it.

Furthermore, suffering according to Shakyamuni meant things not going as we wish, referring to the eight sufferings: birth, aging, sickness, death, separation from what one likes, union with what one dislikes, not getting what one wants, and the suffering of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental constituents, and consciousness). However, when the Chinese character for "suffering" (ku) became used in writing the Japanese word kurushimi, meaning pain, it took on additional shadings to mean a variety of things, such as personal inconvenience, or distress as the result of a disaster or other troubles, and it has become difficult to convey the essence of the original Chinese word.

Of course, at the outset anyone can wish for worldly benefits. The things that happen around us can make us happy or sad. But when a wish comes true, when suffering goes away, that should not be the end of the story. Rather, it is crucial that we then focus on what Shakyamuni wished for us, and strive to get closer to the essence of Buddhism. We as members of the sangha should eventually play the most important role of guiding people we come into contact with to "make yourself your light; make the Dharma your light."

The core of Shakyamuni's teaching is that all things are impermanent, and all things are devoid of a separate self.

There is a well-known verse from the Dhammapada, "Difficult is it to be born as a human being; difficult is the existence of mortals, knowing they must eventually die; difficult is the hearing of the Dharma; rare is the appearance of the enlightened ones (buddhas)." It expresses the importance of becoming aware and awakening, through the Dharma of impermanence, to the miracle, preciousness, and blessing that is our own life and the lives of others.

Furthermore, as the doctrine of "all things are devoid of a separate self" teaches us, we are allowed to live thanks to the light of the sun, the water, the air, the animals and plants, the minerals—all the things in the universe. Our hands move, we can walk, we can eat, we can breathe, speak, and sleep. There are indeed so many things we are already blessed with.

Many believers, however difficult their situation, accept and reflect upon the fact that "it is all in the Buddha's teachings," and they find happiness and feel gratitude.

It is said that humans are the only creatures capable of gratitude, so being able to say thank you is the happiest thing for humans and gives us a purpose in life.

The Essence of Buddhist Giving Results from a Sense of Human Unity

After all, we walk the bodhisattva path by wishing for not just our own liberation but for everyone's. The foremost practice for a bodhi-

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sattva is donation, which is first of Six Perfections.

Donation also embraces compassion, consideration for others, gifting, and joyful giving, among other things. In the spirit of all the senses of the word, we practice daily sharing the Dharma with others, donating our selves, and giving material goods or money.

When we hear the word "donation," generally it is taken to mean giving material goods or money. But in the original sense, any act of kindness is a donation, be it in the workplace, community, or home; simply living earnestly in these places is a donation all by itself. Someone who delivers merchandise does it not only for a living but brings joy to the recipients. It would be no exaggeration to say that daily life is totally tied to donation.

Therefore donation can be a way of seeing oneself as not separate from others but as one with them. Shakyamuni taught that the things that exist in this world are here due to causes and conditions of endless interdependence, that everything is interrelated and that it all exists together as one life.

The Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) expressed this as *jiko* (oneself) and *tako* (the self in others). He admonishes that, rather than thinking of oneself and the self in others as separate, we should see both as one and the same at their root.

Another person's joy is our joy, their sorrow is our sorrow. The essence of Buddhist donation is the natural action resulting from this sense of oneness with others.

To begin with, donation must be practiced. Sharing the Dharma is one form of donation. But if we wait to impart the Dharma to someone after we think we have mastered the whole of it, we will never begin. What is important is to impart with devotion just what we have learned and what has moved us. If this gladdens someone, we will be twice as glad.

Something must always come out before something goes in. In Japanese the word for a door of a public facility is written with three characters meaning "exit-entrance-opening," and people who want to use public transport must wait for others to alight. The Japanese word for "breathing" is written with two characters meaning "exhale-inhale," and the one for "exhale" is first. Likewise, donation means giving before receiving.

Briefly speaking, religion clarifies how we should live. And as in the expression "Each day is a life in miniature," our lives hinge after all on how fully we live the one day that is today. This year as well I would like all of us to devote ourselves to passing along these important things.

SFRK Celebrates Buddha's Birthday



Rev. Takyuki Nagashima





Guidance from the Founder

"This life that we call the great life force, the great radiance, the great adornment, in other words, the Buddha, fills every corner of the universe. Doesn't this indisputably mean therefore that human beings, who are one part of this great life force, are fundamentally buddhas? What we know as the buddhanature is not something with which only human beings are endowed. Grasses and trees and the very earth itself, together with water and air, all possess the buddha-nature, and this the possibility of attainment of buddhahood. In other words, we are all inhabitants of the Buddha's world, all are the Buddha's children who strive together to achieve the realm of happiness and joy. Thus we should think of the buddha-nature as our own true form, existing within the stream of life that flows through the three periods of past, and future."

Commentary

From "A View of Eternal Life," essay in 2008 Dharma World



Isn't it curious how certain writings will make an impression on one? This essay has stuck in my mind since I read it in 2008, and I particularly like the above excerpt. No matter how much we believe in and think we understand buddha-nature, the Founder's words continue to remind me of not only the reality, but the true essence, of buddha-nature. I like to imagine it as an invisible energy that permeates everything, including, inanimate things like rocks, as well. The mere act of existing endows that thing with buddha-nature. It is something given freely, and does not need to be asked or prayed for. The humbling fact that all beings share this buddhanature equally can often be overlooked or forgotten. How often in our history has mankind felt superior to the animal world. or superior over one another. Do we sometimes fall into that perception even now? Is one human being more worthy of respect than another, or is man's comfort more necessary than the survival of other living creatures?

As I ponder all of this the Global Climate Summit is taking place. The Founder's words seem even more important now as we see our climate and the world environment deteriorating everywhere. The buddha-nature in "every corner of the universe "is being affected. I imagine that not just our earth, but the entire universe is cringing in pain as we continue upon the present path of destruction. Instead of a "realm of happiness and joy," we are creating just the opposite. As the Founder told us of the buddha-nature that exists everywhere, so is every place, every home, every person, every country, every blade of grass,

by Mary Tracy Sigman

drop of water, molecule of air, affected. The old ways of the Native Americans, the Aborigines and such saw the interconnectedness of living beings and adopted lifestyles that were compatible with that way of thinking. Most of our present world is still caught in the Eminent Domain mentality, feeling it is man's right to dominate and subjugate the world for his pleasure and existence. Truly seeing buddha-nature changes this mentality, as we must acknowledge the inherent worth of every grain of sand, every pebble, every human being.

The other important point from the Founder is his statement that the buddha-nature is our "true form," and that it has always existed in the past, present, and future periods of time. This was not a notion that Shakyamuni Buddha created, but something to which he awakened. It was part of his important enlightenment. As we are presently either preparing for or have just celebrated Bodhi Day, the day of the Buddha's enlightenment, let us feel deep gratitude to the Buddha for realizing buddha-nature and sharing this with all of us. Without the Buddha's teachings we would not be aware of our "true form," which is sharing in the same buddha-nature as Shakyamuni Buddha, and as he realized his buddha-nature was one with the Eternal Buddha, so likewise is our "true form" one with the Eternal Buddha. Knowing that each of us shares this "true form," the next question may be, how can we condemn, kill, mistreat others? In doing so to them we are truly hurting ourselves. Only by living in harmony with all living beings can world peace be possible. As we begin a new year, let us strive to create harmony in our lives and the lives of others. We are all one.

SF Minister's Guidance

Founder Niwano's Words (3)

Takayuki Nagashima, Minister Rissho Kosei-[°]kai of San Francisco

"It is important to realize that you know nothing and understand nothing"

There is a Japanese phrase, "Mi kara deta sabi." "Sabi" is the Japanese word for rust. This phrase refers to a sword and the rust that comes out of it will eventually destroy the sword itself. Therefore, this phrase suggests that we must suffer the consequences of our actions or "reap what we sow." So these words are not usually used to describe pleasant things.

It might sound a bit cold that I believe this phrase is telling some kind of truth because I have witnessed cases of people receiving appropriate results for what they have done in the past. Of course there are positive results, too. We see some people who have done good deeds and are living happily later in life and being admired by many people. In this case, we can say that they are enjoying the great fruits of what they have sown. The result is not "rust" but "gold." When I look at the Buddha in my home altar with this in mind, I understood why He shines like gold.

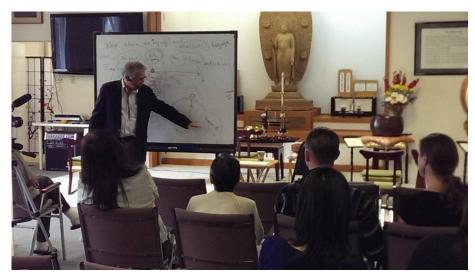
Founder Niwano's words for the 22nd day of the month in *"Nikkyo Niwano's Daily Meditations"* is *"It is important to realize* that you know nothing and understand nothing."

There are people who are upset with others because they think others don't know anything and are always wrong or useless. Some people are even mad with anger towards others. Actually, I was once one of them.

In retrospect, I realize that I was deciding whether something was "good" or "bad" with every person and circumstance I encountered using a so-called measuring stick that was built into myself at that time. Since I believed that I was right and knowledgeable, I looked down on people around me. To me, my standard was just my yardstick. But my mind was always filled with complaints, anger and an inferiority complex although I was supposed to be right.

My interpretation of Founder's "know nothing and understand nothing" is "we don't know the Law and the Truth of universe." Simply put, we don't know what is important.

Most of us who don't know anything and understand nothing decide things with ourselves in mind; therefore, things naturally don't work out. Once we realize that we don't know



anything nor understand anything, the next steps we need to take are to throw out our unreliable measuring stick and try to obtain Buddha's measuring stick.

Rev. Takyuki Nagashima

Do you know the saying that we cannot tell a fool that he is fool because he will get upset and start a fight? So a person who replies "Yes, I am a fool" might be very wise. The same can be said about a drunk who is really drunk but insists he is not drunk. If he says, "I may be drunk," he is still clear headed.

So, if we were told "you reap what you sow," what would you reply? I believe if we humbly admit and say, "Yes, my suffering is caused by me," we can instantly transform from a fool to a wise person.

For us, Buddhists, who follow the teachings of Buddha, our consequences are nothing but good. If we accept everything we get, we will shine like the Buddha. Founder Nikkyo Niwano wished for us to become Buddha. He sent us this message of "It is important to realize that you know nothing and understand nothing."

Let us shine together!

Monthly Dharma Talks-

Reverend Nagashima has been regularly giving his Dharma Talks every 4th Sunday of the month. The subject matter always reminds us of the shortcut to happiness.



San Francisco News

August- Rummage Sale-

We held our annual Rummage Sale on August 23. Many members helped by donating items and helping to organize and price before the sale. Because this is one of our bigger events, we make sure to apply the teachings of the bodhisattva way to show everyone involved that there is always a lesson to learn through everything we do.

by Stephanie Myers

Working together with others is the ideal place to practice our core teachings of compassion and kindness. And when things don't go our way, or there is some disharmony, how we react and recover can show us where we are on our spiritual path.









Major Buddhist Events-

Bingo is one of the signature parts of entertaining fellow members and guest. There are always fun prizes and everyone has a lot of fun plopping the ink markers on their cards. Sometimes the prizes are gift cards and other times there may be orchids, wine or sake. Many members look forward to playing bingo and spending time mingling with each other after a tasty lunch.











San Francisco News

Pacifica Poetry Festival-

For the first time in many years, we hosted the Pacifica birthday and poetry festival. Local poets and musicians gathered to share their experiences in a celebration of poetry and establishment

by Stephanie Myers

of Pacifica as a city on November 22, 1957. It was a festive afternoon that included hosted refreshments afterward where participants were able to mingle with RK members and learn about our Dharma Center.



Vehicle blessing service-

Every year we hand make vehicle blessing charms for members and their automobiles/motorcycles. The ceremony blesses the charms, but it is members who need to work on their attitudes and mindsets to remain safe when driving. Through the prayer service we remind ourselves to be grateful for what we have and how precious life is and how quickly things can change if we lose sight of these things. 2016 Blessings bestowed on this vehicle

Toyota Camry 5LZZ280 Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Francisco http://www.rksf.org





by Stephanie Myers

Pacifica Fog Festival-

We participated with a booth for the 3rd time this year at the annual Fog Festival. The Reverend and members take turns throughout the two day event and answer questions about our Dharma Center and any other related questions. We allow visitors to leave us their contact information if interested. We set up the statue of the baby Buddha so they can pour sweet tea over him and put their hands together in reverence. It is most popular with the children, they love it and seem so fascinated by it!















by Stephanie Myers

Sacramento visits-

Reverend Nagashima and other leaders visit the Sacramento area regularly. Almost all of the Sacramento members have been with RK for many decades and even though it has been more and more difficult to come to the Dharma Center in Pacifica, their hearts are with the teachings of Founder Niwano and the Lotus Sutra. We appreciate their support and are always happy to see them when they come for events.







Ryuichi Kubota -Cherry Blossom Festival





"It is possible to work on self-realization and to also help others-we are capable of doing both each day."

Dear Abhi-Dharma -Recently, I have noticed that I no longer spend time with some people who used to be regulars in my life. This is not a judgment of them, but I am puzzled... I know that in Buddhism we are reminded to look within - What have I been doing differently? Should I practice more for self-realization or practice more to help others?

Perplexed in Punxsutawney

Dear Curious -

This is a good question and I can tell it comes from a practice of self-reflection. As with all human thought (dualistic), it is so easy for us to seek a definitive answer to questions - "Well.. is it this? or that? (thinking we need to make a choice from

Dear Abdhi-dharma by Rev. Kris Ladusau

two possible options) In the teachings of Buddhism, we learn about the Ten Suchnesses, which explain not only our ability to see "distinctions" (this or that) but to also recognize the "oneness" of it all.

So, to answer your question let's transcend "either/or" and recognize that we don't have to pick "one or the other." It is possible to work on self-realization AND to also help others - we are capable of doing both each day. Once we take that "thought into action," we then suddenly realize that the Bodhisattva Path is certainly as much for "us" as it is for "others"

- Enlightenment for ALL.

Gassho

Senior Living by Anne Rinehard

Looking forward to 2016 and beyond

At the end of 2015, it seems that the world is upside down. We have been exposed to the actions of terrorists – if not directly, then by the ongoing media coverage. It seems that ISIS or ISIL could now be our next door neighbors. On the other side, "Never gonna give up" is one of many slogans symbolizing the spirit of those who refuse to be afraid.

Just after the first attack in Paris (Charlie) last year, I attended a class in terrorism at the local community college. It was a course for 'mature learners', meaning 55 years and older. It was heartwarming to meet the diverse group of seniors who very actively participated in the class. The recurring question was, "What can <u>we</u> do to stop this?"

This question stayed with me after the course was finished. And when I visited Oklahoma City, I asked my home sangha. Using the information from the class to establish some history and background, I asked them what we can do in our daily lives, following the teachings but remaining realistic regarding our time, energy and what's possible in our world.

There were so many thoughtful and profound responses. At the end of the day, they all came down to the cellular level of practice. Each of us can be an example of compassion, generosity and love. Each of us can pass that forward to others through our words and actions. Each of us can chant and that energy can go out into the universe.

We're reminded that retiring from practice doesn't happen when we reach a certain age. It's still our job to support as well as set an example. We can still be peace in the midst of chaos. We can still dream of possibilities for the future for our grandchildren. We can still follow our path.



"Each of us can be an example of compassion, generosity and love. Each of us can pass that forward to others through our words and actions."



Art from the Sangha by Rose Cirigliano Artist

Mrs. Shigeko Miles

Art-

Mrs. Shigeko Miles is one of the most prolific artists in our RKSF sangha. She has been a long time member who lived in Monterey up until about a year ago. She now resides in San Francisco, closer to her immediate family. She paints mostly oils and acrylics but also does watercolor as well. These are two paintings that are hanging in the homes of two members.



Artist Mrs. Shigeko Miles







Art from the Sangha by Rose Cirigliano Artist Sayoko Lesure

1. RC: Did you go to art school to learn graphic design?

SL: I wanted to get a broader college experience than art school so I went to a state college and majored in Fine Arts. It was an exciting time meeting others interested in learning and exploring the world. It was only a couple years later that I took a graphics class at night and ended up working with the instructor on assignments which gave me some real life experience in the field.

2. RC: What is the most intriguing aspect of this medium?

SL: Now with powerful computers and programs, we can do so much. When working in graphics, I really see it as a marriage of creative vision and logical thinking. Once I have an idea of what I want, I have to figure out how to create it on the computer and that's when knowledge of the medium comes into play. To work in the profession, knowledge of marketing and communication is also important. Especially important today is user experience, understanding human interaction. Whether it is trends, aesthetics, computer capabilities, skills – it is always changing.

3. RC: I know that you're designing postcards for RK public relations. Would you mind telling us how you got started with this?



SL: It started while we had our satellite storefront location in San Mateo during Reverend Nagamoto's time with us. We called ourselves "Lotus Buddhist Circle" or LBC and our outreach was to English speakers. We really needed a handout to advertise our existence as the landlord did not allow any of the businesses in the space to have outside signage. We did a three-fold brochure but when we closed that location after two years, we simplified it and made it into a postcard which is easier to handle and more cost effective. Whenever we can, we use it as a give-away. I even carry some in my purse. I never know when the opportunity may come my way.

Artist Sayoko Lesure





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Published by

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America, Los Angeles CA Chief Editor—Rev. Takashi Yoshizawa Editor—Jane Perri

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