

Sangha in Motion

U.S. Dharma Centers - Staying Connected



SUMMER 2017

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Taste of Happiness

I have learned that the shortcut to happiness is to be in a group of good friends. The typical form of good friends is what we call *Sangha* in Buddhism. But, let me talk about *Sangha* later.

At this time I ask, “What kind of taste does supreme happiness have?” And, how can we actually taste that? Have you ever thought about this? It seems that the majority of people think that satisfaction of their five sensory organs is happiness, and they pursue it all the time. Satisfaction of the five senses is, however, momentary and transitory. It will be gone immediately once you experience it, even if you might have made efforts to obtain it for a long time.

A certain man explains supreme happiness for human beings as follows: everyone has a purpose in life... a unique gift or special talent to give to others.

When we blend this unique talent with service to others, we experience the ecstasy and exultation of our own spirit, which is the ultimate goal of all goals.

I like the words “we blend this unique talent with services to others” in this quote. People or friend(s) are indispensable for you to realize your unique talent because you can know it only through human relationships. If you do not use your unique talent for others to experience, then it is the same as not having it at all. That’s why a friend is indispensable.

A *Sangha* is what I call a group of people who believes that each of us inherently has unique talent. And also, they admire those who serve others by using their unique talent.

Through our encounters with good friends, we notice that we possess unique talents through activities with them. When we offer service to good friends with our unique talent, we are then able to hone our talents. I believe that the taste of the most precious happiness for human beings is to feel the joy and excitement obtained through the cycle of these activities.

Various events and activities are shared in this issue of *Sangha in Motion* from Dharma Centers in the United States. We can taste the happiness if we imagine the joy and gratitude springing from these events and activities. Joy comes from all participants finding their unique talents and serving other fellow members by using them.

Taste the Happiness.



Contributed by Rev. Kazuya Nagashima
Minister, Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America



National English Leader Training June 23-25, 2017 in Seattle

There were 35 total attendees, including the five U.S. Dharma Center ministers, RKINA staff, and two guests from Tokyo: Rev. Numata, Special Advisor of RK Headquarters, and staff aide Hidemitsu Matarai.

There were three main session topics:

1. Connecting People with the Dharma
2. Sustaining and Enhancing Members' Connection to Dharma
3. Application and Experience of Basic Practices of Faith

In his opening message, Rev. Numata encouraged the leaders to be the Buddha and Bodhisattvas now, at this moment during the training session. He said, "You are all chosen here to level up your practice so you have another layer of experience in 'Buddhism - Lotus Sutra way' when you return to your home Dharma Centers."

Sessions 1 and 2 were presented by four leaders from different Dharma Centers, along with Q&A and small group discussion following each session.

Session 3 was a lecture by our special guest advisor, Rev. Numata. He gave us a very heartwarming presentation of our attitudes and actions regarding the application of Dharma practice. He shared many of his experiences when he was a minister in Japan.

In the follow up *hoza*, Numata gave great guidance to many members who were having conflicts in their missionary and daily life situations.

Everyone was inspired and motivated greatly as they all headed back to their home Dharma Centers.



Contributed by Rev. Ken Nagata
Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America

RK Buddhist Church of Hawaii



Summer has been a busy time for the Hawaii Sangha.

We played host to three events that brought many visitors to our church. First of the events was hosting the Advanced Lotus Sutra Study group in May. We had a dozen students along with seven Hawaii members participate into the three-day study session at our Oahu church. We organized a barbeque on Saturday night with 30 of our Hawaii members joining the Lotus Sutra study group to mingle and get together. Entertainment was provided by a hula halau who performed for all. The evening was capped off with our out of town guests dressing up in sarongs and performing a hula with our entertainers.

With June came the first ever Matoi Camp where we invited RKK youth members to stay at our church to learn the history, care and movements of the matoi used in matsuri or parades. We had 22 students from Japan and across the US train and learn why the matoi was adopted by Rissho Kosei-kai to be used in parades. The group learned the basic movements used in hoisting the matoi and displaying it when marching in a parade.

The students were divided into two groups and traveled on several field trips to see the island and develop team camaraderie. The students got to show their skill and the team spirit they developed during the class at the Pan-Pacific Festival parade. The camp students all left with matoi parade skills and an appreciation for its

use in our church. Top students were recognized and all were very enthusiastic to continue practicing when they returned to their churches. We look forward to the next annual camp.

The Pan-Pacific Festival Parade ended our June activities. With the culmination of the Matoi Camp, we invited 44 Japan members to march with Hawaii members and students of the Matoi Camp in the parade down Waikiki. Over 80 Rissho Kosei-kai members from Japan, Hawaii and mainland US showed our skill at twirling the matoi, playing the drum, flute and bell as we marched the one mile stretch along the beach of Waikiki in front of 1000's of people who lined the streets. The parade has hundreds of participants from all over the world to create a global community by sharing and celebrating different cultures. No other group in the parade brings as much enthusiasm as our RKK group. The smiling faces drenched in sweat at the parade's end showed that all those in our group were drained of energy and voices hoarse because they gave their all during the event.



Contributed by Bradley Tom, Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York



Chapter 16 Lotus Sutra Leader Training

On June 30-July 2, leaders of RKNY Church, and from Chicago, Boston, Orlando, Fort Myers, and Oklahoma met for a Leader Training. The focus of the weekend was understanding and teaching about Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, *Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata*. For the Friday evening session we met in small groups to discuss "What is Hoza," and to prepare a group presentation on this topic. Saturday morning began with Ritual Practice, where we all fine-tuned this practice, especially working on coordinating our actions and moving slowly and mindfully. We then moved into the small group presentations on *Hoza*, as well as Q&A about each of them. Rev. Fujita then gave us a lecture on the Core Points of *Hoza*: that it is the lifeblood of RKK because it is a place to liberate others from suffering, and is a way for us to grasp the eternally abiding happiness from awakening to true faith. We then reviewed and practiced the three ways of listening in *Hoza*. Each small group was then given the task of making a presentation on Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, sharing all of our insights. Each group then gave their presentations, so we all had practice in learning and sharing this important teaching. Late Saturday afternoon Rev. Fujita gave the first of two lectures on Chapter 16, concluding after dinner. The Sunday session included a reflection from Rev. Fujita on Chapter 16. We closed the training with several *Hozas*, from three-person, to English, to Japanese.

This was an intense and powerful weekend. With so much work and emphasis on Chapter 16, we left feeling

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York (cont'd)

much stronger in our faith and our skill as leaders. We realized we need to worry about nothing, to be grateful for everything, and that the Buddha is always with us. We must learn to show our joy in feeling this, and trust in the Universe.

Thank you to Rev. Fujita and all of New York Church for planning such a superb weekend, and thanks to Kathy Spengler of RKOK, who came to share this experience with us. We are truly a Sangha in Motion!



Contributed by Mary Tracy Sigman
Rissho Kosei-kai of New York in Fort Myers

Dharma Center of Oklahoma



Wonderful Spring Into Summer Season

In Oklahoma, we have had a wonderful spring into summer season. We had our annual Founding Mothers Day for our Japanese members whom we appreciate very much.

Even though the number of our Japanese members continues to decline – they are our treasures.

Reverend Kris Ladusau spoke at several university religion classes. These continue to be annual visits and she enjoys providing the students with a view of Buddhism.

Randy Shumate got a chance to visit with Portland area members Karen Dunn and Ann Rinehard. Rev. Yasuko Hildebrand is working on her bucket list – she always wanted to ride a horse and Joan Ewer made that dream come true for her. Rev. Kris Ladusau gave the closing prayer at the Native American sovereignty symposium in Oklahoma City.

Special guest to Oklahoma, Yasuko Vendley from New York, enjoyed a week with the *sangha* experiencing all activities that we offer. Two special guests from Tokyo, Yurie and Hiro, came to visit after attending a class at Meadville Lombard in Chicago.



Contributed by Rev. Kris Ladusau
Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio



It's been an exciting few months at the Dharma Center in San Antonio. In April and May, we had a group hiking day in the hills around San Antonio. In May, The Women's Group of RK SA organized and performed a live Play, "*The Parable of the Herbs.*" That evening's event included a delicious meal prepared at the Dharma Center. The event was well attended and enjoyed by 60 people.

June was an eventful month: we sent three of our youth members to the Matoi Camp in Hawaii. They returned with sore bodies and many fond memories. Meanwhile, A group of RK SA leaders attended the Leader meeting in Seattle and were able to share ideas with leaders from Dharma Centers around the U.S. Finally, we bid farewell to Reverend and Mrs. Okada by holding a wonderful BBQ dinner in their honor.



Thus far in July, our *Sangha* attended a Buddhism exhibit at the San Antonio Museum of Art on a Tuesday evening. Thirty-five people enjoyed a wonderful tour and learned a great deal about the history of Buddhism in Japan.

We are looking forward to the next few months in which we will be busy planning activities around the expansion of our facility in San Antonio.



Contributed by Kevin Roche
Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio

A Brief History of Japanese Buddhism

PART ONE: *Buddhism Arrives to Japan*

Scholars today give the years 552 CE or 538 CE as the most likely dates for Buddhism's introduction to Japan. During this period King Seong Myong of Baekje (a kingdom located on the western Korean peninsula) sent a political mission to Japan that included Buddhist monks and nuns who brought with them sutras and Buddhist art.

They also brought with them a writing system; Japan did not have a writing system and as the sutras were written in classical Chinese, many of the court aristocrats had to learn to read Chinese to learn more about Buddhism. Eventually Chinese symbols were adopted by the Japanese and became the kanji that comprise much of Japan's writing system today.

Buddhism was met with mixed attitudes among the nobility, but with support from the powerful Soga clan, opposition to Buddhism by conservative forces was defeated. In 592 CE Japan's regent Prince Shotoku proclaimed Buddhism the official state religion and began the construction of Shitennō-ji (四天王寺) in 593. Shitennō-ji is often viewed as Japan's first Buddhist temple and it still stands today.

Prince Shotoku, often referred to as the 'father of Japanese Buddhism' worked to promote Buddhism and in 604 CE authored the 'Seventeen Article Constitution' that was both influenced by and promoted Confucian and Buddhist philosophy and ethics.

When the prince died in 622 CE Buddhism was flourishing among the nobility. Buddhism gave Japan a writing system and a sophisticated philosophy that would inspire new forms of art and culture and shape Japanese society in many positive ways.

Contributed by Robert C. Piemme, RK New York City Sangha



Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574 – 622)

Words from Founder Niwano

Meaning of a Positive Attitude

One of Japan's greatest professional baseball players, Shigeo Nagashima of the Yomiuri Giants, could always be counted on to come through when his team needed him.

Asked the secret of his batting, he replied, "When I know I've got to hit that ball or we're going to lose, I tell myself I can do it. I picture myself hitting a home run and I do not think of anything else. Not for an instant do I even consider the possibility that I might miss." He practiced so hard that there's no reason he should fail.

When we have this kind of confidence, we can get through the worst of times. Nagashima worked hard to perfect his batting technique. I know this because some of his former teammates often visited me and told stories of how hard he practiced.

Change moves in whatever direction we wish it to. The more we hope for the best, the more likely it is that things will go well. If we want good results, there is no point in fretting over what might go wrong. This is the meaning of a positive attitude.

Rissho Kosei-kai Founder Nikkyo Niwano



Closing Message

Obon: Expressing Gratitude to Our Ancestors

July is the month of *Obon*. Every *Obon* season I'm reminded of *Bon* dance and hot summer nights, as well as having the family get together. It is the time to think of our ancestors.

Once a year, Maudgalyayana's story comes up in the *Obon* ceremony. *Obon* means the state of being hung upside down. "*Urabon-e*" comes from the Sanskrit word of *Ullambana*. It became a prayer service to liberate people whose suffering is caused from seeing things from an upside down or deluded perspective.

The origin of *Ullambana* came from the story of Maudgalyayana, one of Buddha's disciples, who saved his mother from suffering. His mother loved her son deeply. So much so, that she seemed to ignore other people while she was alive. After she passed away, Maudgalyayana used his transcendent powers to find out how she was spending her time in the other realm. He found out that she had fallen into the realm of hungry spirits. To his surprise, he found that his mother was suffering from being hung upside down. So he asked for Shakyamuni Buddha's guidance to save his mother. Shakyamuni Buddha answered, "On July 15th after summer training, invite monks to hold a sincere prayer service with a lot of offerings, then your mother will be saved."

Maudgalyayana followed the Buddha's guidance, making offerings to others and sharing in the joy of others. His mother was immediately liberated from the realm of hungry spirits. Since then, July 15th became a very significant day for all of us Mahayana Buddhists as a day to hold a sincere prayer service offering to our parents and ancestors, and to express gratitude and appreciation.

Giving our gratitude to someone important to us makes us feel the universal power in ourselves. The life we live turns out to be the one we have been caused to live. By the power of invisible forces, when we can offer deep feelings of gratitude, then the invisible forces will return innumerable merit to us. Let us express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to our parents and ancestors.

Rev. Takashi Yoshizawa
Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America
Chief Operating Officer/Minister

Past issues of *Sangha in Motion* can be found here: <https://rkina.org/sanghainmotion/enewsletterarchive.html>