



Sangha in Motion

Los Angeles and Tampa Bay in Action

Celebration of Buddha's Birthday in
Los Angeles



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Rev. H. Hosoyama



“ The most important thing is for each one of us to receive Shakyamuni’s great heart of compassion, becoming a person who integrates the Dharma into ones being.”

Spring has come. A plenty of plants have young sprouts and buds to open. In Japan, the most popular flower of this season is cherry blossoms. Many people are unanimously going to see the cherry blossoms in full bloom. On the other hand, these scenery **remind us of the Buddha’s birth-** day, because we have a certain image that under the cherry blossoms scattering petals over the people, a statue of the baby Buddha will be shining brightly to be poured on the sweet tee.

More than two thousand five hundred years ago, the Buddha was born in northern part of India as a prince Siddhartha into the royal family of Shakya Clan. It is the well-known episode, in an oral literature, that the young prince immediately took seven steps in the four directions and declared “In the Heavens and on the Earth, I am only the **Venerable One**”. **From the historical point of view**, this episode might be a mere parable which the people in ancient era wanted to show how much Shakyamuni Buddha has a great and distinguished virtue.

Actually however, we can have a more appropriate and profound understanding through this amazing episode. According to the Lotus Sutra, though the ultimate existence of ordinary person is also the same as that of the Buddha, though the ordinary persons appear in this world with entirely different appearance. Thus, we should firmly keep ultimate equality and apparent differences in our minds as an important knowledge. It is very precious for us that Shakyamuni Buddha has appeared in this world and has practical discipline for very long time with extremely sincere attitude. He has shown a precious example that an ordinary person can attain the dignity of Buddha-hood with the perfect character. We are able to have contact with the ultimate existence of the Buddha by revering the perceivable appearance of Buddha

April Message

and by accepting the teaching of Buddha with great joy in our mind.

Our President show us as follows: As you know, the true wish of the Shakyamuni explained in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, that the Eternal Life of the Tathagata mentioned **“How can I make living beings obtain entry into the unsurpassable way and quickly accomplish embodiment as Buddha?”** **In addition that** the most important thing is for each one of us to receive Shakyamuni’s great heart of compassion, becoming a person who integrates the Dharma into ones being. True compassion for us is to share the wisdom of Shakyamuni with each other. A human being cannot be truly satisfied if only they themselves are happy, as you may have an experience to feel supreme joy when you see others being liberated from their suffering.

On the Buddha’s birthday, I believe that we have not only to celebrate it but also to seek wholeheartedly on what Buddha wished to let us know through the message from the Lotus Sutra. I would like to keep doing practice together with all members, just from when I really did step on the start line of LA.

Mahalo,

Rev. H. Hosoyama, Minister of LA

Richard Kano

Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, Please guide me. President Nichiko Niwano, please guide me. Everyone, please guide me.



Hello members of the Sangha. I'm honored to be able to speak to you all today. Being able to share my experience with you all has given me another chance to look back at my life and examine my successes and challenges. For those of you who might not know me that well my name is Richard Kano and I came to the church October 2013.

I was a very lost and had no spiritual or moral direction in life and a week earlier I was released from a hospital where I stayed for 5 days due to alcoholism. I had drunk for 8 days and was on the brink of insanity and very depressed. This was a very difficult time in my life and I felt such shame for what I had ended up becoming. I used alcohol to escape from reality and often abused drinking because I felt I had no purpose. There was nothing going on in my life at the time. I had no job and wasn't in school anymore. I spent my days in self-pity and often turned to alcohol to fill a void I felt. I thought a relationship was going to make me **have purpose but I couldn't love someone else** because I didn't know how to love myself.

Having gone to school for audio engineering and realizing this field was not going to bring in sufficient income, I felt so let down and saw that my dreams of music production were really just going to be an expensive hobby. I felt crushed by this realization and left school feeling defeated, and so my depression began to worsen in my drinking habits. I came from a catholic background, mostly due to the influence of my devout grandmother. She had always taught me to pray. In my weakest time I drank so excessively that I ended up in the hospital and on my third day inside I prayed with all my heart and asked for guidance. I didn't even know whom I was really praying to at the time, I just felt like maybe someone would hear me.

My first huge spiritual experience was in that

LA Testimonial

hospital room when I was praying and suddenly I felt a hand on my head and a voice saying to me **“ I will give you all the tools you need, don't go back”**. I felt relieved and cried, as I suddenly knew that all things would be OK. The next day a woman in the hospital had given me two books from alcoholics anonymous. I began to read them and realize there was help out there for those who sought it. When I was released from the hospital, I left with a plan and had the deepest of conviction to recover from my addiction. I began learning about my alcoholism and also began to visit the church and learn Buddhism. I realized Buddhism was my ultimate answer, which would lead me to find my true purpose in life and I fell in love with the teachings and their practical use. This enticed me to absorb as much as possible and begin to practice. Not too long after I started to visit the church each Sunday I became an official member, thanks to the practice of guiding others to the teachings.

Seeing this example of leading others to the teachings I lead various others to the church which made me want to strengthen my commitment and become a stronger example.

I was always searching for acceptance when I was growing up and fell into the wrong crowd. I had come from a broken home and grew up with various aunts and uncles and even at times people I didn't even know, but they sheltered us as their own. All I knew was instability and had a mother who also suffered from alcoholism. Going to church each Sunday actually began to give me some stable routine and discipline, I even attended night classes taught by Reverend Nick on Thursdays and began to grow in my love for Buddhism. I began to practice the teachings and study the Lotus Sutra with all my heart. Every Sunday someone would read the presidents monthly guidance and for the rest of the week I would try to put the message into practice. I would love to share in Hoza how things were improving because of what I learned the week before.

“I began seeing how the teachings were suddenly giving me purpose and helping me see with better clarity. “

I began seeing how the teachings were suddenly giving me purpose and helping me see with better clarity. My relationships began to improve as I made better interactions with others and attempted to treat others with more respect and humility. I was very arrogant and proud before, which made it exceedingly difficult for anyone to want to mentor me, as I always thought I knew better. It was this arrogance and prideful thinking that would get me into trouble as my experience was limited and very diluted. This was a difficult aspect of myself to change. I thought **to myself “why must I ignore my own reason and listen to someone else’s whom I hardly know”, “what makes him or her so qualified to tell me what to do”. This was my huge ego talking** and it had a loud voice.

One of the teachings Founder Niwano was passionate about sharing was “being a lifetime beginner,” so I want to share with everyone how this has been such a useful part of my practice. In 2015 I accomplished many things and after thinking back I could see I have much to be thankful for. One of my proudest moments was applying for Gakurin seminary. When asked by Reverend Nick back in 2014, I was reluctant to consider such a huge commitment but after circumstances changed I reconsidered. I was told when I applied that there was no guarantee that I would be accepted, but that I should try my hardest to practice diligently. The thought of being accepted into seminary made me want to learn more of what our practices in Rissho Kosei-kai consisted of. I could only successfully learn if I had the humility to listen with an open heart. This was the founder’s teaching of “being a lifetime beginner” starting to make an impact on me. I thought to myself even before I had the chance to get accepted I would **want to cultivate my own leadership skills and even if I weren’t** accepted I could be a useful member of the sangha. I began to participate more in ritual training of Taiko, wood block, bell and even chanting leader. I was always nervous when we would begin learning and I always wanted be perfect right away. I was always hard on myself when learning, but I would have encouragement from leaders to be patient. Learning these rituals has taught me to have a beginners mind and to always see each time I practice as the first time. This practice has helped me cultivate the mind of seeing all things in the present moment and with humility.

I began learning from Yoshi how much care goes into being a leader. Last year for Nisei week, I observed how much coordination it takes to get members in one place and to be sensitive to their needs and concerns. I saw how much planning goes into events like these and realize how strong it must make the individual mentally. I was also asked to be Taiko leader for this

event. This really made me appreciate how church members coordinate events together and how much care goes into each task and how it may be difficult at times. I learned to take direction better and have become more trusting in myself because of the trust in me bestowed by others in this church. I believe in myself even more than I ever did because I was given many tasks and was able to challenge myself to complete them. These habits transferred into other areas of my life and I began to improve my relationships even further.

I was accepted into seminary November 11, 2015 and on this day I had vowed to keep the mentality of having a beginners mind. I want to do whatever it takes to have humility with every task I take on and to be grateful during hardship. I know I can make my experience in Japan fruitful with this mentality. My hope when I come back from Japan is to become a leader in the Sangha and to develop more skillful means to be able to spread the Dharma with care and love. I hope to grow spiritually in my devotion to the Sutra and to become an effective example of the Dharma like the Founder had hoped for us all. When I began my journey within this church I never thought my life would be so enriched by such **wonderful teachers and great examples of leaders. I’d like to** thank everyone for encouraging me so much and being there for support. I vow to study hard and develop myself and not to be a giver of truth but a useful guide. I vow to return to Los Angeles with a deeper sense of servitude to others and to develop a strong heart and mind in which to share these amazing teachings which can lead us to enlightenment.

The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, thank you very much. President Niwano, thank you very much. Everyone, thank you very much. I sincerely appreciate you all.



Contributions for this issue
from Rev. Nick Ozuna

Celebration of Buddha's Birthday

Los
Angeles



Interfaith Crop Hunger Walk



Founder's Birthday Celebration

Los
Angeles



Nisei Parade



Camping at Joshua Tree National Park



New Year's Party



Los Angeles



Youth Exchange with Tenrikyo Church



RK 101 Study

Los Angeles



Special Lecture by Dr. Lori Meeks

Tampa Bay's Story

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay, located in Clearwater, Florida held its Grand Opening on December 13, 2009. How this event came to be is an unusual story in that prior to the opening of the center there was only one member, Rev. Nick Ozuna. Rev. Ozuna was appointed to the Tampa Bay area after graduating from Gakurin Seminary, however, his original mission was not simply limited to developing a new sangha in the area, but also simultaneously working with the Unitarian Universalists, serving as intern minister under Rev. Abhi Janamanchi. The UU church allowed Rissho Kosei-kai to rent space at their facility for what would become the Buddhist Center of Tampa Bay.

The Grand Opening welcomed over 70 participants, which featured Dr. Reeves' Keynote Address.

Many of the early members of the Tampa Bay sangha were Unitarian Universalist members as well, however, there were also Rissho Kosei-kai members who were scattered throughout Florida, in Orlando and Fort Myers, who committed themselves to the Tampa Bay Buddhist Center, even if just once a month. The sangha grew steadily over the next couple of years and had developed leaders and other committed members, all taking on different service roles and contributing as a warm and welcoming community.

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay has aimed to be an active sangha, engaged in weekly services, study groups, and outings/activities. The biggest and most ambitious event held by the sangha was the Japanese Cultural Festival in 2011. This outdoor event, which featured Japanese live music, food, dancing, and games, brought nearly 300 visitors to the Buddhist Center. The event was held again in 2013 and it was even bigger and better, bringing in almost 500 people!

Rev. Ozuna served as Intern Minister for the Unitarian Universalists until the end of 2010 and devoted his attention solely to the Tampa Bay sangha for the next 4 years. In 2014, Rev. Ozuna was reassigned to RKINA in Los Angeles, although he still serves at minister of the sangha. Since that time, lay leaders have organized and facilitated all activities within the sangha. The future vision of the Tampa Bay sangha is to continue to grow in both number and experience and offer more activities and learning opportunities for the local community.

Tampa
Bay

Community Garden

Tampa Bay



Higan Ceremony



Pot Luck Dinner

Tampa Bay



Meditation Session



Tampa Bay Vesak Ceremony at Unity Church



Tampa Bay Baby Blessing



Dear Abdhi-Dharma

by Rev. Kris Ladusau



Dear Abhi-dharma

I am a hoza leader in my RK Dharma Center. I need to know your advice on something. Should the only comments given to the person speaking (person suffering) come from the hoza leader/sub-leader? I may have been at fault for some time for allowing others to comment with compassion to support the suffering person, always reminding the group that we cannot give advice or try to solve any problems. The focus is on listening closely, responding with compassion. But if only these one or two leaders are able to respond verbally, I have been in error. Please let me know what is appropriate.

Gassho,

Vacillating in Vermont

Dear Vermont —

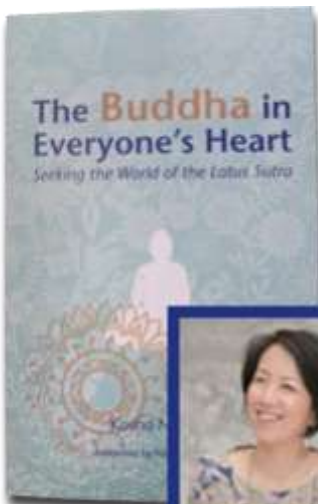
This has been a common issue here in the U.S. It may be linked to the fact that we are a culture of interaction - a horizontal structure, where Japan is more a land of vertical structure (for the most part). That is why hoza guidance in Japan is usually given by one person.

All U.S. groups have struggled with this issue... What I have chosen to do, is allow supportive comments (when they are on track) but if the circle shifts into a serious concern by one person - I will simply announce that "at this point", we are going to shift into a "traditional style" hoza. The conversation will continue between the leader and the member, but everyone else in the circle contributes only by deep listening and feeling compassion.

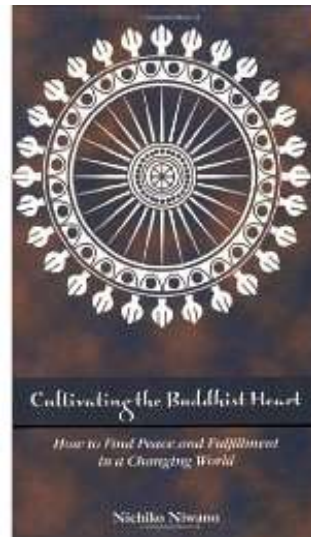
Sometimes, I will announce before the hoza that it will be traditional style and I share the guidelines verbally before we start. This is necessary for newcomers and a good reminder for other members. You may still have to remind people not to interject, but you can do that kindly and smoothly and redirect... I have seen great benefit from the Japanese style. Leaders also need to listen deeply for comprehension, and not for the intent of replying.

Gassho

"The conversation will continue between the leader and the member, but everyone else in the circle contributes only by deep listening and feeling compassion."



Rev Koshi
Niwano's new book
is now available
for purchase. To
obtain your copy
contact your
minister or RKINA



Cultivating the
Buddhist Heart
is now available
as a
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