



Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

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Happy New Year, everyone!

The New Year, 2022, has begun.

How did you welcome the New Year? What were your thoughts?

In Japan, there is a saying, “Plans for the whole year should be made on New Year’s Day.”

Perhaps you were making new resolutions such as, “This year, I will aim for ‘that’!” or “This will be the year to make ‘that’ my practice!”

Come to think about it, our life with corona will now be in its third year.

I recall that during the days when we didn’t understand at all, those days were filled with anxiety and fear, wondering what will happen in the future?

As time passed, it feels like the life of washing our hands without fail whenever we returned home after going out, always keeping our masks on and carefully avoiding crowds, had become our new normal way of life.

Before long, vaccines were developed, their inoculation had advanced, and already, there are many people who have received the third booster shots.

Recently, due to the efforts of such people, the situation had somewhat calmed down. People started gathering again to eat and drink at restaurants and see shows at theaters, such as Broadway, and walking outside without masks was even becoming a possibility, showing signs of recovery.

However, that only lasted a short time. Since the end of last year, a new and highly infectious variant, the Omicron, had emerged and is showing signs of spreading all over the world again. It seems like a vicious cycle of cat-and-mouse game between the humankind and the virus.

For RKNY, the facilities for our Centers in New York, Chicago and Ft. Myers continue to be officially closed. Therefore, we still cannot gather in large groups to hold services nor to visit and pay our respects at the Centers. We eagerly look forward to the day, as soon as possible, when we can meet and exchange words face to face, to visit and pay our respects.

Yet, such inconveniences were not the only experiences we had. Amidst such a difficult situation, we also realized something for which we can be “grateful.” That something is the program through Zoom which has become established and is achieving good results.

Until now, due to the wide range of coverage of RKNY (with many members in remote areas), it was difficult for everyone to meet in one place. The program through Zoom has made it possible to connect with everyone and a sense of unity of the Sangha has been cultivated.

At the beginning, there were the difficulties in operating the computer. When we finally connected, the conversations through the screen were somewhat awkward. The encounters started with greeting one another with “Nice to meet you,” and mutually confirming our faces, names and where we live.

As time passed and opportunities for study sessions and Hoza increased, mutual understandings and friendships were deepened, and a new style of Sangha, where people met with focus on the teachings, was formed.

Even virtual contacts such as Zoom, provide the importance and comfort for people to meet and interact with one another.

Professor Noriyuki Ueda, a cultural anthropologist, said in his book, “There are times when people suffer from their encounters with other people. However, it is precisely through encounters with other people that their hearts are truly healed.” He also said, “Depending on the type of relationship one has with people, it can mutually open the hearts of those involved, which will deepen their friendship and trust, and lead to true healing.”

As Buddhists, we are aspiring to develop ourselves through deepening our mutual relationships focused on the teachings expounded by the Buddha. Therefore, our relationships are by no means centered on our own interests and calculations.

That is the way we should aspire, as indicated in the name of our organization, “Rissho Kosei-kai.”

Thereupon, “Rissho (立正)” means based on the true words of the Dharma, “Kosei(佼成)” means perfecting ourselves through interacting with people, learning together and encouraging one another, and “kai (会)” means organization or society.

Let us consistently reflect on this basic spirit and cherish and deepen ever more our encounters with every person (relationships).

Every one of us has the desire to be understood and acknowledged. If that is the case, isn't it important for us to take the initiative to actively take interest in other people, to deepen our understanding, and to further deepen our relationships.

I think that is precisely the practice for the motto of the basic vision toward the 100th Anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai: “Getting connected with people without limit.”

This year, we will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's New York Center.

The commemorative event is scheduled for October 16th. As we look back on the 40 years, let us thank all the seniors for their valuable efforts, and as we explore how we can contribute to the coming era, let us also make the Sangha even more fulfilling this year.

Everyone, while we carefully pay attention to our health again, let us endeavor together to make this year a very fruitful year.



Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

Minister RKNY