



Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

320 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016 TEL: (212) 867-5677

E-mail address: koseiny@aol.com, Website : <http://rk-ny.org>



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Hello everyone! How are you doing?

The blazing sun of midsummer has passed, and the season is heading toward autumn with frequent arrival of hurricanes. We would like to express our deepest sympathies to the people who have been affected by the floods and gust of winds in various places, and we would like to continue to pay close attention for one another's safety. At the same time, the coronavirus infection has yet to be controlled, and we definitely cannot be lax.

Under these conditions, we would like to express our gratitude to those in the healthcare industries, governmental agencies, and essential workers who are working day and night, and sincerely pray for the spirits of so many people who have passed away due to the coronavirus infection that they may rest in peace. We also pray for the safe recovery of those who are presently receiving medical treatments and for those who are recuperating at their homes.

For this month, I thought about the object of our faith, "the Buddha."

Since my high school years, I participated in the activities of Rissho Kosei-kai and enjoyed spending my student years together with the youth members.

However, whenever my senior leaders occasionally said, "believe in what is beyond the visible (陰を信じて: *kage wo shinjite*)" and "with the Buddha in mind (仏様を念じて: *Hotoke-sama wo nenjite*)," I didn't understand what that meant and hearing those mysterious words triggered questions for me.

Wondering what on earth is it to believe in something we cannot see, I once lashed my question out at a leader, "You often say, 'beyond the visible (陰 *kage*), beyond the visible (陰 *kage*)' but what does that mean? I cannot understand that at all!" At the time, that leader just gently nodded her head and smiled.

When I became a college student, I read several books among the numerous books written by Founder Niwano stacked in the hall of my home. That was the first time I was impressed by the contents of his interpretation of "the Buddha."

Furthermore, I developed an interest in the story written in The Human Buddha by Professor Bunyu Masutani and have since read several books by him. I have been able to deepen the understanding in my own way of the life, hardships, and the supreme awakening of the Buddha as a human being, and I started to feel somewhat close to the Buddha.

One of my purposes for entering the Gakurin Seminary was to hear more about Professor Masutani. After entering the seminary and learning about The Lotus Sutra, there were times I could not clearly understand the relationship between the Buddha in The Human Buddha and "Shakyamuni Buddha" in The Lotus Sutra. There were also times when the mysterious stories of the Buddha sparked my curiosity and I could not help but wonder about them.

With such a questioning attitude, as I tried to organize my thoughts in my own way on how to understand the religion known as Buddhism, there were things that I started to detect.

First, to objectively learn the facts such as its history and culture. This might be in the realm of Buddhist studies in the academic world.

Second, to subjectively learn Buddhism as a faith, and from the viewpoint of how to perceive that for myself, I thought it was important to balance my understanding of both. I should not overly take a factual and academic point of view, and yet, to only believe would lack universality. But I did think the most basic for me was to be able to accept it as my own faith.

Professor Shoji Mori, an advisor to our organization's Research Institute, stated the following as a way of understanding the Buddha:

The historical Gautama Buddha (Shakyamuni Buddha) and the Shakyamuni Buddha of "The Lotus Sutra," and also the

Shakyamuni Buddha as the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni expounded in the “The Life Span of the Eternal Buddha”...all three buddhas should be understood as One.

Our aim should be for we ourselves to become a buddha; it is important for us to have the awareness as being bodhi-sattvas and to aspire to become aware that the buddha exists within us.

Historically, Gautama Buddha attained perfect enlightenment to the Truth of the Universe (Dharma). It has been said that as he was meditating while enjoying the joy of liberation under the Bodhi Tree, he, at first, thought: “People who are covered with worldly desires probably will not be able to understand the Dharma.” However, he was inspired by the thought that “some people may understand it.” Thereafter, he explained the contents of his awakening to his disciples, one after the other, in an easy-to-understand manner.

On one occasion, one of the disciples, who was very ill in bed, longed to see the Buddha just one more time and asked one of his fellow disciples to convey his wish. The Buddha said in reply: “To see me is to see the Dharma, to see the Dharma is to see me.” This signifies the importance of the Dharma to which the Buddha had been awakened and that the Dharma and the Buddha are One.

After the Buddha entered parinirvana, Early Buddhism cherished each and every word that the Buddha expounded. With Mahayana Buddhism that appeared later, various scriptures were compiled with the desire to place the importance on the true meaning of what the Buddha wanted to convey instead and, finally The Lotus Sutra was expounded. Therefore, the Buddha’s true intentions were included in The Lotus Sutra. Moreover, the importance of accepting and understanding through action rather than just understanding that true meaning in words was repeatedly expounded.

Therefore, through recitation of the sutra we encounter the Dharma, and that can be said to be the same as encountering the Buddha. Moreover, Nichiren Shonin describes the way such recitation should be, calling it “reciting through action: 色読 *shikidoku*”

“Not only to read with the eyes and the mind, but to ‘read’ by applying to one’s practice is ‘色読 *shikidoku*’ and to recite for transformation through action is important.”

He taught the attitude of complete devotion toward the teachings.

The Founder taught us that “the compassionate heart” is the starting point of the Buddha Way, that the grand wish of the Buddha’s great compassionate and merciful heart is to “help everyone find happiness,” and that it is important to greatly grow such a heart within ourselves.

The shortcut for that is to always devote ourselves to the spirit of Dengyo Daishi (Saicho)’s words: “Forgetting yourself and benefiting others.” This is the big goal for us as we put into practice the teachings of The Lotus Sutra in our daily lives.

This month again, let us be diligent in our efforts through our daily lives to move even slightly closer to the state of buddhahood, to become aware of the workings of the Truth (Dharma), with the wish to encounter the Buddha.



Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

Minister RKNY