



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>



April 2023 Newsletter

Hello, everyone! Hope you are all doing well.

The arrival of spring is finally upon us, and we are somewhat starting to feel excited.

Many of you must be eagerly anticipating doing this or that once the weather warms up. President Zelensky has also stated that Ukraine, which has been struggling desperately against Russia's invasion, was greatly helped by the relatively mild winter this year.

This month, I would like to add to my last month's message since I did not have enough space to share at the time.

It was the second point the scholars made that interested me.

When the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect's life neared its end, he started to hear the Lotus Sutra from the sky, and upon hearing it, his six sense faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind) were completely purified, his lifetime was extended, and again he widely expounded the teachings.

So, my question was, what exactly does it mean that the Lotus Sutra was heard from the sky?

The book describes this as follows.

Firstly, he did not read the Lotus Sutra, but heard it with his ears, which implies that the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect was probably a nameless bodhisattva of low status who could not read or write.

As I mentioned last month, this indicates the universal law, meaning all people, no matter what their station (status, age, gender, etc.), can equally become a buddha.

It is also said in the sutra, "That monk did not apply himself to reading and reciting the sutras. Instead, he merely practiced bowing respectfully to people."

Secondly, it is said that the Lotus Sutra was expounded from the sky. This, however, does not mean the present Lotus Sutra was expounded as is. Rather, it means that through his past practices, the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect himself had deeply realized the spirit embedded in the Lotus Sutra, namely that, "any person can become a buddha by practicing the bodhisattva deeds."

There is an important message in this. It means: "Even if we are not fully engaged in the Buddhist practices such as the recitation of the sutras, if we carry through the practice respecting all people, we are practicing the Lotus Sutra".

Conversely, no matter how much Buddhist practice we may have mastered, if we disrespect or look

down on human beings, it can no longer be called Buddhism. This is a viewpoint that transcends sectarianism, ideology, and sectionalism, etc.

It also means that while it may of course be natural for us to seek the Supreme Perfect Awakening of the Buddha through our daily practices and strive for the perfection of our character, I think it also shows how important it is for us to continue to walk the bodhisattva way up to that point.

The other day, during a discussion with Ms. Hiroko Kojima, who was preparing her speech for “The Ceremony to Celebrate Shakyamuni Buddha’s Birth (Kotan-e),” she shared this realization with me. She said: “I used to think expressions such as ‘to attain Supreme Perfect Awakening’ and ‘to perfect ourselves’ were extremely serious words and that they were goals I would never be able to attain. But now I realize that rather than suddenly aiming for such lofty goals, it is important to make efforts, step by step, to get as close to the goals as possible, and those steps are the way we should practice.”

Our Sangha is a gathering of a diverse group of people, with many different viewpoints and opinions. Moreover, our Sangha is by no means perfect. However, it is also true that we are mutually endeavoring to improve ourselves and our relationships with one another. It is important to continuously make the effort to walk the bodhisattva way hand in hand with everyone, and furthermore, in this process, a greater harmony is created in a dynamic way.

We also should follow the example of the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.

No matter what difficulties we may encounter, let us continuously and warm-heartedly reach out to others with faith that we do possess buddha nature within ourselves.

The sutra expounds that Shakyamuni Buddha was this Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect in his previous lifetime.

I believe this means we are now doing the same practice as the Buddha, and we should look forward to engaging ourselves in this practice with gratitude and inspiration.

With this joy, let us deeply reflect on April 8, the Buddha’s date of birth, and the significance of the month of April.



Gassho

Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama

Minister RKNY