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June 2023 Newsletter

Hello everyone! How are you doing?

It is June and, in the blink of an eye, half a year has already passed in the year 2023.

It seems like only yesterday that we held our NY Buddhist Center's 40th Anniversary Celebration Ceremony last October when we looked back to the origin of the Center.

Not long after that we celebrated the New Year, but six months have already passed since then, and "time flies like an arrow" indeed portrays the passage of time.

In our daily lives, we follow the guidance of Founder Nikkyo Niwano and President Nichiko Niwano, and we do not take detours, but I think it is important to stop, look back, and check our progress from time to time. This month, as we head into the second half of the year, let us once again reexamine how we can make our remaining days productive.

First, let us consider exactly what the "Buddhist practice" means to us.

In his past Dharma Talks, the Founder has said that the primary purpose of our practice is to "master the path of faith." In his talks, he also taught us that the purpose of Buddhism is "to attain buddhahood," and the word "attain buddhahood" means "to awaken to," in other words, "to awaken to the Truth of the Universe and Life and to attain freedom of mind."

At the beginning of "Ten Merits" from The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings in the Kyoten, as the important part of this teaching it states: "make an unawakened bodhisattva aspire to awakening." In other words, "Let those who have studied this teaching but have not yet attained the mind to seek the wisdom of the Buddha from the depths of their hearts (spiritual awakening), acquire the mind to earnestly seek to attain it (aspiration of buddhahood).

This sentence always causes me to pause.

Although I am a member of the Sangha, since I tend to just somehow go about my days, I feel this is an eye-opener for me,

Isn't it only when we indeed have a "spiritual awakening" and an "aspiration of buddhahood" that we can attain "awakening"?

To attain this "awakening," the Founder taught that there are five ways.

1. "Awakening through listening to the teachings of the Buddha."

By being in the Sangha, deepening our study and participating in the Hoza, we encounter the teachings.

It is through all the "Oh, yes!" "Of course!" the "A-ha!" moments that we understand.

2. "Just as we are caused to live, by living honestly to ourselves, we will gradually become awakened"

By learning the teachings and repeatedly putting them 'as is' into practice, and by embodying all that, we will gradually become spiritually awakened.

3. "Experiencing a sense of spiritual loss becomes the cause of awakening."

When we encounter unexpected events in our lives, it can snap us back to reality and seek what is important.

4. "Awakened by a reverse relationship"

The teachings we hear, even when we are repulsed by them, stay in our hearts, and one day, that single word will change our lives. It shows the importance of daily, tireless reaching-out activities, which also leads to the spiritual growth for those who are reaching-out.

5. "By learning the Buddha Way and teaching it to others we are awakened."

By sharing with others the teachings we have learned, our own understanding is deepened, which leads to our awakening.

Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect clearly states that "I attained Supreme Perfect Awakening because I taught this sutra for the benefit of other people."

There are various teachings about "awakening," but the one that comes to mind most often among what I have learned is that "awakening" is something that comes from outside at a certain moment and "awakens" us, rather than contemplating and devising on our own.

The late mathematician Professor Kiyoshi Oka said:

Once, he spent several days without solving a difficult math problem, but while he was chanting the Buddha's name in front of the altar at his home, he suddenly had a flash of inspiration and was able to solve the difficult problem. He said it was like the milk instantly turning into curdles when vinegar is poured into it.

To achieve that, it is important for us to make our own dedicated efforts to obtain such "workings of the Buddha." We must be careful not to overlook the small "realizations" that allow us to suddenly become aware in our daily lives. Let us cultivate ourselves to be able to feel the workings of the Truth and the blessings of the Buddha in those realizations.

It may sound like a lot of work to "aspire for buddhahood," but as the Zen teaching says, "One inch of sitting, One inch of Buddha." Let us remember that the accumulation of the small "realizations" is a process of perfecting ourselves.

Therefore, as we head into the second half of this year, let us reaffirm our goals for our efforts, and with all the members of the Sangha, walk the Way cheerfully and joyously together.



Gassho

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