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January 2024 Newsletter

Happy New Year Everyone!

I truly hope that that you all welcomed the New Year feeling joyful and well.

I also pray that each of you has within you a strong sense of hope and sincere gratitude for all that is possible in 2024.

As I write this, I think we all wonder quietly to ourselves, what does the year 2024 have in store for each of us?

Before we each answer this question, I think that it might be helpful to take a quick look back, to the year that was 2023, since we all saw many challenges and surprises happen in this prior year.

From the top, thanks to Reverend Hatakeyama's guidance and wisdom we were able to face the COVID 19 pandemic's waning down after so many years and its undeniable global impact. Indeed, because of the change in COVID's infection status and rate we witnessed the gradual and prudent reopening of our centers from Chicago to Fort Myers and New York. This continuing amelioration of COVID conditions will afford us greater opportunities to meet in person during the coming New Year.

Also, we must be extremely and eternally thankful to Rev. Hatakeyama, that in 2023 we had him for his guidance, leadership and wisdom on behalf of our Sangha. Again, Reverend Hatakeyama handled riots in the streets, COVID, economic dislocation, to international conflicts, with humility, stability, and calm.

Still, the global environment has many concerns that remain extremely troubling.

For example, the situation in Europe surrounding Ukraine and Russia, with its ongoing war has led to the continuing loss of innocent life and regional European destabilization; and now with violent conflict flaring up in the Middle East, between Hamas and Israel, we have a conflict that has taken on global implications, and which has unquestionably resulted in social unrest across the United States.

Additionally, we cannot forget the scores of people migrating into the country, via the asylum seekers process, which has had a significant impact on many communities, such as in Chicago and New York respectively.

However, when looking back on all that occurred last year, we can, if we are not careful, lose sight of the many positive things, which helped bring us closer together as a sangha.

Again, for example, thanks again to Zoom, we were able to discuss worldwide and local concerns from a Buddhist perspective on our online Hoza gatherings and in our in-person meetings.

This was critical, because as a practical matter, we were able to hold space for those in our community who are suffering and being directly impacted by these serious challenges; and help us all to collectively confront the issues head on.

Indeed, Reverend Hatakeyama's monthly guidance, has been geared to make our Buddhist practice, both practical as well as impactful, and he is always in harmony with the guidance and direction of President Niwano. I also, believe that Reverend Hatakeyama provided us with powerful monthly guidance towards the end of his tenure as the Minister of New York that I believe will be invaluable to us and which we can draw upon as we go through 2024.

Finally, I want to share with you one of the essential messages that I received in my recent trip to Japan; and the critical attitude we should have as we move towards the One Hundredth Anniversary of Rissho Kosei Kai.

First, as a hint, in this year of 2024 we should dedicate ourselves once more to the proposition that we are determined to cherish each and every member, with an attitude of “getting connected to people without limit.”

In this way, by connecting with others without limit, we can do our very best to be one with people whom we interact daily.

This attitude accords perfectly with Founder’s guidance when he states: “Revering the buddha-nature of people is the foundation of Buddhist practice and should be given precedence over all else”. (Quoting from Nikkyo Niwano, in *The Buddha in Everyone’s Heart*, pg.93, by Kosho Niwano).

In this way, whether we meet at the Dharma Center, online via Zoom, over tea in person or even over the phone, we can have an attitude whereby we kindly cultivate the Buddha Nature in ourselves and others.

Based upon Founder’s direction, I truly believe that there is a deep “karmic connection” between each one of us, and that this karmic connection is a kind of “Mutual Karmic Entanglement” whereby our karmic relationships no matter how seemingly insignificant have been placed in our life through the workings of the Buddha to reveal our own and others’ happiness and essential nature.

In this way by seeing situations and others from this lens, we can get to connect with others without limit; and through this refreshing perspective, we can each change our life and how we see reality.

Hence, a good goal to include for this year might be to share Rissho Kosei kai’s teachings with each other from the depths of our hearts, with a mind determined to introduce these teachings to those who have yet to encounter them. In this way we further our understanding and compassion for ourselves and others.

I hope and pray that each of us takes on the challenge of connecting to others without limit with the mindset of President Niwano when he states:

When Disaster Strikes, Meet It Head On.... For if you acceptthe rules of this world and make them your good friends, instead of being overwhelmed by pain and suffering, you will awaken to the wisdom that moves you forward calmly and with strength. (President Niwano’s December 2023)

So, this time of year is a fantastic time to reflect on your life and to set goals, based upon the President’s suggestion, that will inspire you, come what may.

Now, we can look at the question posed at the beginning of “what does 2024 have in store for us?”... with a renewed sense of courage and wonder knowing that together we can do it...

Itai Doshin, many in body one in spirit.

Thank you so very much for your time!

Wishing you the very best always

Gassho

Rev. James (Hiroshi) Lynch
Minister RKNY

