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December 2025 Newsletter

Theme: Returning the Year — Vow, Gratitude, and Quiet Strength

Hi Everyone:

I really hope that this sharing finds you well.

As we enter December, and colder times of the year, I pray that you and your loved ones are safe, warm, and holding close whatever has sustained you this year.

I really believe that December carries a quiet invitation to us, a soft culmination where the teachings of the past year gather like pages of a sutra scroll.

In November, we reflected on blessings not as personal rewards for ourselves alone, but as provisions; that is, what the Buddha and our Bodhisattva Vow place in our hands so we may carry forward with courage, in face often of tremendous challenges.

December asks a new question: where have those blessings and provisions been quietly leading us?

For so many of us this year has been powerful, tender, and for many, difficult. Think, some of us lost beloved family members and friends. Some carried illness, uncertainty, or burdens kept silently within. Others witnessed the world's struggles, violence, and felt the ache of concern.

And yet the Buddha is still here. Leading us through his teachings to our true selves and to our ultimate happiness. And so, here you are.....

Still practicing. Still chanting. Still offering kindness. Still doing your best to maintain your faith, even when your heart felt weary.

Your perseverance this year was not small. It was merit, a merit that extends to you and the entire world. It was vow remembering itself through you.

Since we are human beings and common mortals, when we look back, it is easy to see a series of just isolated events: moments of joy, loss, challenge, and blessing. But if we pause, a deeper truth appears:

This year was not a just a collection of random moments. It was a single teaching, a sutra written in the ink of lived experience.

For Your Life Matters! And your life, as a sutra, like all sutras, reveals itself slowly.

So let's use this December as President Niwano requests and use this time to re-read the year and ask:

- What was strengthened in me?
- What grief deepened my compassion?
- What blessing prepared me for someone else's suffering?

- What truth was I shown that I needed to see?

Chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra teaches us that the **Bodhisattvas of the Earth, whom you are**, rise from the ground of lived actual experience when the time requires it. So, to the degree you exerted yourself to be in harmony with your own vow to be of service to others this past year, then your year and compassion have been the ground from which you helped heal a world in need.

And as we enter the real Winter months, let us not forget that nature teaches us that winter is not stagnation. It is deep preparation. Roots grow strongest in the cold, beneath the stillness. Our practice moves the same way. Hence the real importance of our upcoming Winter Chanting Session

I know that even when you felt tired, grieving, or uncertain, your sincerity was rooting you more deeply in the Dharma. Founder Niwano often reminded us that awakening emerges through ordinary life. Winter teaches us that unseen effort is often the most transformative.

Maybe we can think of returning this past year and our merits and sharing them with the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni.

For while December is a month of giving, it is so very important that we not forget that the most sacred offering we make is this:

We return the year to the Buddha.

That is we decide to plant those things we can see and those things which are invisible back into our heart and the soil of our practice; in this way we can say we have returned our past actions back to the Buddha.

Not because our actions and heart were perfect. Not because we handled everything well. But because everything we lived this year, joys, mistakes, losses, and blessings, has become and is becoming a part of our awakening.

This is what it means to trust the Buddha's teachings, the Founder and the President, this unfolding and the replanting of the hopes hidden in our hearts. The Buddha and our Bodhisattva Vow know more than we do about why certain events appear in our lives.

So along with the questions I asked at the beginning let's try Three Gentle Practices for December to launch our New Year right!

1. Return the Year

Offer the entire year, our joys, sorrows, blessings, missteps, back to the Buddha. **For in RK practice ... Nothing is Ever Wasted.**

2. Recognize Your Quiet Strength

Never forget, upon reflection: **You survived what earlier versions of you could not have endured.**

3. Dedicate the Coming Year

Whisper gently: **"May the vow move through me with greater kindness next year."**

And as Final Encouragement:

When you chant before the Eternal Buddha this month, remember that you are not beginning again from nothing. You arrive with a year of lived wisdom, compassion, mistakes, learnings, and merits. The Eternal Buddha which is your True Self at your altar and Gohonzon, does not judge, it recognizes. And it recognizes you. And in that recognition is boundless Compassion and limitless Love.

So I say:

For every blessing received, shared, or carried — thank you.

For every hardship endured with kindness — thank you.

For every step you took to maintain your faith — thank you.

May you enter the new year with a heart made wiser by experience, softened by compassion, and strengthened by the vow that holds us all.

We Are One – Itai Doshin

Gassho,

Rev. James Hiroshi Lynch
Minister RKNY

