

開祖随聞記

笑顔のうしろ姿

根津益朗



Reminiscences of  
Founder Nikkyo Niwano

Reminiscences of Founder Nikkyo Niwano  
by Masuo Nezu

*These are personal reminiscences about the late founder Rev. Nikkyo Niwano from his former chief secretary, Masuo Nezu, now in retirement. During his years of service, the writer accompanied Rev. Niwano on dissemination tours, interreligious cooperation activities, and peace promotion work, both in Japan and overseas. This series recalls not only heartwarming episodes from the founder's everyday life, but also the spiritual insights derived from his words and deeds.*

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# Chapter 1

## Smile

### A Smiling Face

In March of 1988, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. Former United States President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalyn visited Founder Niwano at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo at that time. After enjoying a chat, they went into the main hall where a photographic exhibition of the organization's past 50 years was on display. Mr. Carter said to Rev. Niwano, "From the photographs of the founding period, I can see that you have always had a smile on your face, even in your younger days."

When people who met Founder Niwano anywhere in the world spoke about his personal magnetism, they always referred to his smile, saying such things as: "He has a smiling face to which people are drawn unconsciously" and "His radiant smile communicates warmth instantly." They often spoke highly about his smile. A frequent reaction was that it seemed to call forth a response beyond words from the hearts of others.

There are people who yearn to have such a smile themselves. "The Niwano smile" was a term often used by Japan's mass media. Rev. Niwano exemplified a life filled with joy, shown by his own smile. This series of reminiscence begins with episodes involving his smiling face.

### Shakyamuni Wore the Broadest Possible Smile

"When I am teaching the Dharma, I would be happy to continue all day long or even overnight," Founder Niwano often said. Teaching the Dharma to members, Rev. Niwano was always happy and deeply absorbed in the task. The more attentive the audience was, the wider his smile became.

It is said that Shakyamuni Buddha smiled radiantly when his disciples asked him good questions. "You have raised a very good question! I was just going to talk about that!" Saying this, he then smiled. "In the Lotus Sutra," Rev. Niwano pointed out, "Shakyamuni Buddha himself answered the question with great joy. He praised the question not only once, but twice saying, 'Excellent! Excellent!' Then Shakyamuni Buddha broke out in the broadest possible smile. His face beamed with joy." When Rev. Niwano said this kind of thing, he himself broke out in a gleeful smile.

Rev. Niwano was often visited by people from the mass media to obtain interviews. One day, the editor of a Japanese quality monthly magazine visited him at the Great Sacred Hall at the headquarters complex in Tokyo, accompanied by an interviewer. The editor was impressed by Rev. Niwano's open-minded frankness and endearing manner. He seemed to feel the warmth of the founder's personality. "Facing Founder Niwano is just like sitting in front of a mirror," he said. After the interview, he revealed that through listening to Rev. Niwano's talk about faith, he felt as if his imperfections and bad attitude were being reflected in a mirror. Before leaving, he expressed interest in Rissho Kosei-kai by visiting the Great Sacred Hall and the Horin-kaku Guest Hall.

At about this time that same editor was invited by an American university as a visiting lecturer. He felt some anxiety about going and about taking his family. Later, it was said that he had been able to decide to do so with confidence after having the opportunity to meet with Rev. Niwano. A few years later, he happily related to a Rissho Kosei-kai staff member, "My son said to me not long ago 'It's good to see you smiling so much these days, Dad.'"

## With an Innately Pure Heart

One day a young girl came to the Great Sacred Hall as part of a group pilgrimage of parents and children and had the opportunity to meet Rev. Niwano. She asked him, "How can I achieve such a radiant face as yours?" The founder responded, "Since all human beings are children of the Buddha, if one grows up with an innately pure heart, one can always have a smiling face like the Buddha. On the other hand, if one behaves selfishly, that will also show up on one's face." Speaking to the girl, Rev. Niwano emphasized the need for being honest.

"The first of the so-called 'Ten Suchnesses,'" he explained, "is 'such characteristics.' Characteristics appear in outer features, so that if you keep your innate honesty, you will always have a smiling face."

"Needless to say," he said, "personal honesty requires complete truthfulness and trustworthiness. However, as Shakyamuni Buddha says in chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, 'Skillful Means,' 'In the midst of the bodhisattvas, frankly putting aside skillful means, I teach only the supreme way.' These are words having the very deep meaning of 'going straight to the ultimate truth.'"

Rev. Niwano also often quoted from the same chapter, saying, "Your hearts should be filled with great joy, for you know that you too will become buddhas." "Great joy," he would say, "is a sign of an inner thankfulness and the smiling face is its outward expression."

Founder Niwano also taught that even after entering the religious life, one's facial expression would not be transformed immediately. But, he said, "if you are determined to set your mind on doing good for others, then without making any specific effort your expression will gradually become soft and gentle. Since your face is fully exposed and seen by others, it can be said to be very useful. It may be better to show your face as it is, rather than hiding it from others. Even when you are straining or struggling to be patient, if you always practice maintaining a gentle and smiling face, that will gradually lead to a more pleasing facial appearance. That is a kind of religious practice, isn't it?" This also applies to smiling.

## The Power of Laughter

Medical experts say that if one laughs, the blood vessels relax and one's blood pressure goes down. The muscles of the chest and heart also relax and in effect become younger. An old German proverb says, "Laughing once is more beneficial than taking medicine three times."

In Rev. Niwano's words: "This is because our inner joy and gratitude can be expressed in our smiles. We feel more refreshed than after drinking medicine three times, and thus we can become healthier." He also pointed out: "The first of the six bodhisattva practices is 'giving.' Among giving practices is what we call *wagen-se* in Japanese, having a smiling face. Together with *aigo-se*, being generous with kind words, it softens the attitudes of people around one and brightens all of society."

Founder Niwano's good friend, the late Most Venerable Etai Yamada, the 253d head priest of the Tendai Buddhist Denomination who lived for a century, often said that the virtues of laughing and smiling offer benefits not only to oneself, but also to many others. "By laughing once, one can become a year younger. Becoming angry once makes one a year older."

When arriving at the Great Sacred Hall each morning, Rev. Niwano would pat the heads of the babies and small children waiting with their mothers while smiling expansively. The mothers, who had been anticipating his arrival, were greatly pleased. This kind of warmth always widened the circle of the Sangha, or community of believers. There are members of Rissho Kosei-kai who say, "I joined the organization because I was moved by the founder's pleasantly smiling face." "From now on," he would say, "let us live with smiling faces as well."

## Chapter 2

# Thoughtfulness

During the coffee break at a study seminar of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP/Japan), a senior leader of our organization came up to me and said with feeling: "I was watching Founder Niwano from the back of the room. He was sitting in the first row, listening very attentively to the lecturer and taking notes from time to time. When the lecturer came down from the stage, Rev. Niwano went up to him and politely bowed to him. He seemed to be thanking him, and talking about his impressions of the presentation. Rev. Niwano was one of the founding figures of the WCRP movement and was of a great age, as well as being the most senior of those present, but he looked very modest. His attitude is always the same. It never changes."

This man served for many years as a Japanese parliamentarian. Wishing to devote himself to bodhisattva practice, he changed the course of his life to a religious one and would visit a Rissho Kosei-kai church every day, eventually becoming a leader of the church to which he belonged. He was also an associate member of WCRP/Japan and made every effort to travel each year from some distance by bullet train to its New Year's gathering held in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters complex in Tokyo. He said that his reason for doing this was that "I always look forward with joy to listening to what the founder has to say as he greets the beginning of the new year."

### May I Have Another Cup of Tea?

Whenever a ceremony or event was held in the Great Sacred Hall also located at the organization's headquarters, Rev. Niwano would wait in a back room connecting to the sacred platform in the hall before delivering his sermon. One day he was there as usual, talking with some people. A woman served him a cup of tea. On that day, also as usual, he held the cup by clasping it in both hands. Bringing it up to his lips, he drank from it. Then he kindly said to the woman, "This is very delicious tea. Could I have another cup, please?" Everyone smiled. The woman put his cup on a tray and withdrew to the pantry. Removing the cover of the Japanese-style cup to pour in some more tea, she was surprised to see the inside of the cup. It was clean and dry, indicating that perhaps there had been no tea in it from the beginning. Astonished, she touched the cup. It had no trace of warmth. She realized that she had served Rev. Niwano an empty teacup, perhaps due to nervousness or to being in a hurry. She was embarrassed and now doubly tense. Contrite, she poured another cup of tea and served it to the founder. He very happily enjoyed the "second" cup and continued talking with other people as though nothing unusual had happened.

Moved by the thoughtfulness of Rev. Niwano in doing this so that no one would be aware of her mistake and to make it possible for her to return home with a sense of satisfaction that she had done what she wanted to do well, this woman must have related this incident herself with a feeling of self-reproach for her carelessness. No one else could have known of the incident, yet it was widely circulated.

## **The Curry and Rice in Our Home Is the Best in Japan!**

"Ten years ago or so, I was working as home help at the founder's house," a young woman who is now married and an active member of Rissho Kosei-kai told me. "One day, the rice that I had cooked was much too hard. In response to my apology, Rev. Niwano smiled pleasantly and said, 'Hard rice is good for the teeth because we have to chew it well.' The next time, I tried to make the rice softer. But since I used too much water, the result was that the rice became too soft. Again I apologized. This time, too, the founder didn't scold me or complain. On the contrary, maintaining his smile he said, 'Soft rice is good for the stomach.' His generosity and warmth allowed me to feel very relaxed. Reflecting on my own normal attitude toward others, which was far different from his, I realized that an attitude which can bring a sense of relief to others is very important."

She also told me another story. "In the family there was one member who was very good at cooking curry and rice. While enjoying it with the others, Founder Niwano praised the cook wholeheartedly, saying, 'Your curry is number one in Japan, and that means it is number one in the world.' He always brightened his surroundings. He would never refuse whatever was being served, always taking at least a hearty taste. Making others happy was his natural behavior."

## **Can We Lift That Car?**

This is a story told by Rev. Niwano's driver a few decades ago. "Founder Niwano is a man who cannot ignore the situation when others are in trouble. One day when I was driving him somewhere, we passed a man in trouble because one wheel of his car was stuck in a ditch. Rev. Niwano suddenly asked me, 'Can we lift that car out of the ditch if we try together?' Lightheartedly I answered yes. 'Then stop the car,' he said, 'and let's go back and do it.' I was surprised and disconcerted, while he promptly walked toward the other car. Working together, Rev. Niwano, his secretary, and I were able to lift the car safely out of the ditch." After brushing away the dirt by rubbing his hands together, Rev. Niwano then went off in his own car as if nothing unusual had happened. The owner of the other car certainly must have been startled, however.



## Chapter 3

### Helping Others

#### You Must Be Cold

Among the many stories told about Founder Niwano are some touching ones that demonstrate his warm feelings for children. The following was related by a senior staff member at a monthly morning meeting of the Rissho Kosei-kai staff at its headquarters in Tokyo.

"It is snowing this morning and when it snows, I always remember what happened when Founder Niwano visited the city of Morioka in northern Japan for a dissemination tour in the 1960s. There was no air-conditioning or heating in the city gymnasium where the event was held, so on that day it was very cold there. On behalf of the church members attending the event, a small girl wearing a sleeveless one-piece dress, Koko Shirafuji, presented a bouquet to Rev. Niwano. After the program, he asked the people near him where the little girl was--'Would someone bring her here, please?' Though they searched for her, they could not find her for a while. Finally she was found near the rear entrance of the huge hall. She was with her parents. When Rev. Niwano saw her for the second time, he took her up in his arms and rubbed her hands, saying tenderly, 'You must be cold, it is chilly in here.'

"The girl's parents were living separately at that time for some reason. 'Since our daughter is to play an important role today, please come with us,' the wife said to her husband. Thus the father and mother attended the rally together. After observing Rev. Niwano warmly comfort his daughter, the father later apologized to his wife and admitted that he had been the cause of their domestic trouble. The couple's relationship returned to normal and they resumed an ordinary family life with their daughter. Whenever it snows, I remember this incident just as if it happened yesterday."

This occurred in 1965. There is a sequel to it.

The little girl, who had been seven years old when she presented the bouquet, grew up, graduated from a university, became a teacher in an elementary school, and married. Her husband's mother was the head of a Rissho Kosei-kai chapter. Some years later, the grown-up girl quit her teaching job and became seriously devoted to various religious duties in Rissho Kosei-kai.

"When I was a child," she said, "I didn't realize how important Rev. Niwano's comforting of me was, and how the role of presenting a bouquet to him was connected to the happiness of my parents being reunited. Instead, I even complained to my mother about her going to the church so often and leaving me at home alone. However, every day now I feel that I want to practice the teaching."

Now she has been given the position of chapter head and goes to her local church every day, leaving home early in the morning. Her own two children are already older than she was when she presented the bouquet to Founder Niwano.

## **It's a Good Thing Someone Was Helped**

When Rev. Niwano addressed the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in New York in 1978, an airline strike made it impossible for him to fly back to Japan right away. He thought this was a good opportunity presented by the Buddha to visit Rissho Kosei-kai churches on the U.S. Pacific coast, and so he flew to San Francisco, and then to Los Angeles. It was a great joy for the members there to welcome their revered teacher so unexpectedly.

On his last evening before returning to Japan, Rev. Niwano took the minister of the Los Angeles church to a Japanese restaurant for dinner and conversation. The young waitress who served their food came into the private dining room from time to time. She took a good look at the face of Rev. Niwano and asked, "Aren't you the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai?" She was so happy to meet him so unexpectedly that she could not keep silent. She told Rev. Niwano that she was a member of the organization who was originally from the island of Kyushu in southern Japan but now lived in the United States, that previously she had been in the training program in Ome organized by the headquarters Youth Division, and now she was working in the restaurant, and so on and so on.

Rev. Niwano listened with a warm smile and gave her appropriate advice about various things, and then said, pointing to the minister sitting beside him, "When you have a day off, come to the church nearest here. This is the minister." With bright eyes, the young woman said, "Yes, I will and I'll call my mother in Japan tonight. I'm sure she will be overjoyed to hear of our meeting!"

In the car on the way back to his hotel, Rev. Niwano said, "It's a good thing that this evening, too, someone was helped."

## **Beads of Perspiration**

In 1983, on a trip to Chicago, Rev. Niwano was asked by Rissho Kosei-kai local leaders to give a lecture on Buddhism. It was delivered in a hotel ballroom, which was full of people interested in Buddhism as such, as well as of members of Rissho Kosei-kai and other Buddhist groups. Among the members were many who had flown for hours to reach Chicago and meet their revered teacher.

After the lecture, members formed a long line to talk personally with Rev. Niwano. They wanted him to know they had become happier by receiving guidance on the Lotus Sutra and to hear from him directly even a word or two. Listening attentively to them, Founder Niwano gave each person warm encouragement and guidance. Though the large hall was well air-conditioned, beads of perspiration could be seen on the back of his neck.

## **Medical Treatment on the Plane**

In 1991, when the fourth assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP IV) was held in Nepal, where Shakyamuni Buddha was born, Rev. Niwano flew first from Japan's New Tokyo International Airport at Narita to Bangkok. When he was waiting to change planes to fly on to Katmandu, many local members were present in the airport lobby. While the luggage was being transferred, he spoke enthusiastically to those members, as they seldom had any such opportunity to meet with the founder.

The week-long visit in Katmandu was filled with the conference program, private meetings with the king (who was an ardent Buddhist), and with the prime minister, interviews by the mass media, and other activities. The visit took place from late October into early November, so the weather in Japan may well have been that of a cool autumn,

but in Katmandu it was scorching hot every day. Rev. Niwano was to be 85 years old in about a week, but he stuck vigorously to such a hard schedule, even while suffering from the stomach trouble common to travelers in that part of the world.

After his stay in Katmandu, when Rev. Niwano was on the way back to Japan, at the Katmandu airport, just as in Bangkok, many local members of Rissho Kosei-kai and Japanese members who had attended the assembly came up to him one after another. Nevertheless, he smiled and tried to talk with all of them, even if only saying a word or two. In the plane his personal physician, who was accompanying him from Japan, quietly gave him some medication that greatly helped his condition. It happened that the secretary general of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, a Shinto priest, was sitting in a nearby seat, saw this, and was surprised, as he had no idea that Rev. Niwano was feeling unwell. He apologized to Founder Niwano for the hard schedule, and at the same time admired him for his untiring enthusiasm and devotion.

## Chapter 4

### Prayer

#### A New Sash

On November 15, 1991, the 85th birthday of Founder Niwano, an Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma ceremony was held for the first time in Rissho Kosei-kai when the founder passed on his duties as president to his son Nichiko. In the early morning, a reporter and a photographer from a Rissho Kosei-kai periodical visited Rev. Niwano and Nichiko at their residence in Tokyo. Thanks to those two, we have this story.

Trying not to be too early or too late, the reporter and photographer had arrived at just the appropriate time. Dressed in a traditional kimono, Founder Niwano greeted them by saying, "It is good of you to come." At six a.m., the daily home sutra recitation began as usual. The founder led the chanting and Nichiko assisted with the gong. The rest of the family sat behind them.

Placed on the family Buddhist altar were two brand-new sashes. When the recitation was over, Founder Niwano held up one of the sashes and handed it ceremoniously to Nichiko. Applause spread through the room.

The founder himself had inscribed the wording on the sash, "*Namu Myoho Renge-kyo*" (I take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma). He presented it to his son as his successor as president saying, "I wish to make a gift of this new sash to you." They then all went to the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai Tokyo headquarters. When the ceremony in the hall began some time later, Rev. Nichiko Niwano was wearing that sash and Founder Niwano was wearing the other of the new sashes.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, a lay Buddhist organization, the sash is equivalent to the robes of a Buddhist monk. It represents not only the purification of one's body and mind, but also devotion to the Lotus Sutra and one's pledge to follow its teachings. With the new sash the founder was expressing his deepest emotions.

Since then, President Nichiko Niwano has always taken this sash with him wherever he goes, whether in Japan or overseas, putting it on when he delivers a sermon.

"Bearing the founder's spirit with him, the president is always one with his father," someone who has accompanied the president on his tours said, after observing him treating the sash as his most precious possession.

In chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha says, "I am always here teaching the Dharma." Wherever President Niwano goes, the spirit of the founder is always there too, present before the members. After Founder Niwano passed away in 1999, President Niwano inscribed a new sash for his late father.

"As I was given a sash by the founder personally inscribed by him at the time of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma ceremony, at this time I wish to return the honor and offer one to him," he said. That sash now lies on the founder's breast forever.

## This Tastes Good!

The following story comes from a woman in Japan who for many years has been active as both an educator and as a *shiatsu* (finger-pressure massage) therapist.

The woman would visit the home of the Niwano family from time to time and use her relaxing massage technique on the founder and some other members of the family. One day the procedure took a little longer than usual, so she was invited to join the family at dinner and to stay overnight. One of the dishes served at dinner was abalone. Rev. Niwano said to the massage therapist, "This tastes good. You should try some." He then added, "People often comment that a typical home-cooked dish is nothing special, but I don't agree. Instead I recommend the dish, saying 'How delicious this is.' Since the food was carefully prepared and tastes good, I want others to try it."

Days later, when the therapist went to the church to which she belonged, she related this to the chapter heads. They thanked her politely, bringing their hands together in prayer.

They all looked pleased by what they seemed to consider a wonderful story. The therapist wondered why, although anecdotes concerning Rev. Niwano were usually well received, the chapter heads seemed to think so highly of this one, so she asked them about it.

One of the chapter heads replied, "When we talk about the Dharma to people, we should say, 'This tastes good,' just as Founder Niwano did about the food. The teachings of the Buddha are very valuable. We must tell that to people directly. This should renew our enthusiasm for dissemination from now on." When she heard this, the therapist said she was ashamed of her own shallow understanding of Founder Niwano's words.

"The next time, I visited Rev. Niwano to give him a massage," she commented, "I reported this incident to him. Then he said to me, 'You engaged in guidance work.' 'Oh no, sir,' I responded. 'They are chapter heads. I have done nothing like guidance.' But Rev. Niwano responded, 'Not at all. Chapter heads will have what they heard from you in mind when they guide others. You helped them in this, so it is equivalent to your doing guidance.'"

Some years later Founder Niwano hurt his back and was confined to bed. With age, it had become difficult for him to get around by himself in that condition.

The *shiatsu* therapist asked him on one of her visits: "Are you happy every day?" "Yes, I am," he replied. Then she asked, "You are not able to move about freely, yet still you are happy?"

His answer was: "Although I am unable to move about, I can still pray for others. Therefore I am still happy." He always thought of others. Realizing this, the therapist was deeply moved.

## Chapter 5

### Reading and Recommending

#### **'Read These Parts for Hoza Participants'**

In the summer of 1969 Founder Niwano visited the United States and Europe on a "peace pilgrimage" in support of the first assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace to be held the following year in Kyoto, Japan's ancient capital. In America, his health turned bad due to the tiring schedule and travel became difficult for him, but he continued the trip as originally planned.

When he was traveling, he almost always used to read Rissho Kosei-kai periodicals and newly published books. On this trip, as he rested on his hotel bed, he read in tears a report in the Japanese-language monthly magazine *Yakushin* by a young man who was leading a pious religious life while fighting a mortal disease.

In Geneva, he met with the Japanese ambassador to Switzerland at that time. During their talk, he handed the magazine to the ambassador saying, "This is a periodical of ours. I hope you will read some of it when you have the time." The cover looked a little soiled since the magazine had been taken out of his bag and put back in repeatedly during the trip. However, Rev. Niwano politely presented it to the ambassador saying, "There are some articles here I think may interest you," as he thought the contents were of value. The ambassador gladly accepted it

In June 1978, Rev. Niwano addressed the first Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament (SSD I) on behalf of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. When he was leaving New York after completing his schedule, the local leader of Rissho Kosei-kai was in the car with him on the way to the airport. Rev. Niwano held up a book and said, "Here in this volume the essence of Buddhism is clearly and concisely explained. After I awoke early this morning, I underlined some of the important parts in red. Next time you hold a hoza counseling session, I suggest that you read those parts for the participants." Thus even in the midst of his busy schedule of meetings with important figures at UN headquarters in New York and elsewhere, he found time to read a book newly published by Kosei Publishing Company, an affiliate of Rissho Kosei-kai, and sought to convey its main points to local members of the organization.

Taking every available opportunity, he would read a great variety of things, and even recommend what he thought would be useful to others. This is one of the impressions I often received when I accompanied him on a trip--his eagerness to disseminate the teachings of the Buddha through Rissho Kosei-kai publications.

## Chapter 6

### Teachings

#### See the Good Side of Others

It was in the early 1950s, shortly after the establishment of the Youth Division, that members of the division asked Founder Niwano for guidance in the form of a big hoza counseling session. They had detected what they thought was some discord between words and deeds among the organization's leaders and wanted to know how they ought to deal with it.

Rev. Niwano first illustrated his point with a Buddhist parable: "A man once tried to show the moon to another man who had asked him to do so by pointing to it with his finger. The second man, however, failed to see the moon, only looking at the pointing finger. The first man said to the second, "I tried to show the moon to you, but all you did was stare at what was right in front of you, my finger."

Thus Rev. Niwano persuaded the young people to change their attitude, saying, "Since I was a boy, I have always tried to see the good aspects and virtuous side of others, and to appropriate those qualities for my own benefit. When I was an elementary school pupil, others at the school sometimes criticized one of our teachers, claiming that his attitude was not good or that he was known to drink too much, and so on. But I did not care at all about such things. I concentrated only on seeing his good qualities, and learning from them. Thanks to that effort, I have become what I am today. You young people had better not concentrate on the shortcomings of senior leaders, but try to look beyond them and improve your own character by overlooking minor faults in others. If you do that, I think you will not be so bothered by the appearance of things from now on."

#### Guide Others by Your Appearance from the Back

One day Rev. Niwano was talking with Kosan Yanagiya, the best known traditional Japanese-style comic storyteller at the time, who had been declared a living national treasure by the government. During their chat, Rev. Niwano asked, "In training young people, it is very important to praise and compliment them, isn't it?"

Kosan responded, "Sometimes when I am listening to beginners in my field practice, among the many styles of storytelling to be heard there occasionally is one that cannot be praised at all. Still, I want to say something to encourage the novice. So I say, 'At least, that was good and lively,' although I personally don't always know what was so lively about his storytelling."

Then Rev. Niwano said, "I often advise leaders: 'Guide others by your appearance from the back,' meaning how they themselves look from the rear." If you sincerely practice and walk the Way, younger junior members will follow you, realizing that they want to do likewise." Kosan replied, "What a wonderful phrase: 'Guide others by your appearance from the back.'"

## **Make Your Point Concisely**

Founder Niwano instructed the ministers of Rissho Kosei-kai churches that in such a lay Buddhist movement it is important to see how much time members can devote to volunteer service each day.

At various times he taught: "Both when visiting the homes of others and when convening members at the church, consider their convenience. It is not good to fill up their time with long talks by yourself. Make your points concisely and then let them go, saying, 'Go and take care of your personal affairs, or 'if you have the time, visit as many as possible of the members of your church who need guidance or care.' That kind of personal consideration is important." It was a lesson for a time when everyone seemed to be always busy. There are many people who have been able to change their lives through Rev. Niwano's example of guiding people without doing a lot of talking sometimes even by using only a few words.



## Chapter 7

# Teaching the Dharma

### Unable to Refrain from Teaching

It is said that in the course of his occasional encounters with various religions, Founder Niwano did not respond very positively to the words addressed to him by the heads of religious groups: "You have the talent; why don't you become an expert?" However, his attitude changed markedly after he encountered the Lotus Sutra as a young man. He later said regarding this time, "Filled with joyous gratitude at learning the Lotus Sutra, I could not refrain from teaching about the Dharma."

### Happy Learning from Joyful Teaching

Rev. Niwano once said, "Human beings suffer in various ways. One of their sufferings is having no one and nothing to look up to. In fact, lacking anything to respect from the bottom of one's heart may be the greatest agony of all. However, we Buddhists have both the Buddha Shakyamuni and his Dharma to revere. Encountering our objects to venerate and show devotion to in this life, we are in the state of ultimate happiness, that is, we are fully appreciating what he conveyed to us through his teachings."

Rev. Niwano demonstrated to us the mental attitude for how to teach the Dharma to others. Two of his comments follow: "I advise others and try myself to teach the Dharma so clearly that anyone can thoroughly understand it." "I gaze at the faces in my audience and speak directly in response to their reactions."

Founder Niwano put his whole heart into teaching the Dharma so sincerely that this attitude showed in both his behavior and demeanor. The following comments by him are typical.

"It is often said among Japanese traditional comic storytellers, 'Making people cry is easy; it is making them laugh from their bellies that is hard.' Some say, 'Even if you are speaking ill of someone, try to express yourself so that the subject of your comments can hear you with a smile.' Thus, while teaching the Dharma, if you speak to your listeners so that they really understand, then they will go home happy. It is the duty of a leader to teach the Dharma so that the hearers cannot only understand it, but also realize its truth in their own hearts. Then they leave with smiles on their faces."

"When the teacher feels joy, then the listeners will do so also. If they leave filled with gratitude--even humming a song--then they can perform their Dharma duties without upsetting those who are always around them, like family members," the founder said.

"There are those who say, 'I don't have enough religious experience myself to be telling others what the Dharma means for their lives.' Or others say, 'I am lucky to be free of my own suffering. However, I'm sure I can't teach the Dharma with any confidence to anyone else from my own experience of salvation.' These are gross mistakes. It is like saying, 'I can't teach the Dharma because I didn't learn it directly from the Buddha Shakyamuni.' If that were the case, then no one could teach the Dharma. If you study Shakyamuni's teachings earnestly, then any of you can indeed teach his Dharma," he once said to a group of members of Rissho Kosei-kai.

"If you preach the truth and the laws of Buddhism correctly, then no one would be reluctant to hear you," he continued. "What makes people feel uneasy isn't the teaching, but the teacher. In the end, what matters is the personality of the one preaching the Dharma."

"The religious testimonies of Rissho Kosei-kai members come from their earnest practice; that is why they bring their message home to their listeners. If it were only theory, it could never capture people's hearts the way it does," Rev. Niwano concluded.

## **Better to Say It Explicitly**

When asked to give guidance to a person who had delivered religious testimony, Rev. Niwano would say, "It was a pleasure for us all to hear your testimony"--thus affirming its value. "For good testimony, speak simply and clearly of what you have learned from your own experience in following the Lotus Sutra's teachings. Speak with enthusiasm and confidence. That is best and makes the strongest appeal."

The founder was a careful observer. From time to time, he emphasized not only teaching the Dharma, but also listening to what the other person has to say.

"Unless you listen sincerely to the testimony of others, you cannot deliver your own testimony satisfactorily as well as feel a sense of relief. Listening earnestly to the testimony of others will help them to relieve their own pain so they can then better help other members. You should try to convey your testimony so as to save yourself. Even more important, you should try to hear the testimony of others for your own salvation," he once said.

Each time he listened to members' testimonies, as they finished he would fold his hands and pray. That was his way of admiring what the person had said and of hoping that those words would positively motivate others.

"Be an even better listener than you are a speaker," he advised. This is vital for leadership. People like it when others listen to them. Don't force others to obey your guidance; listen, and listen well. Those who do not listen carefully to other members' testimony cannot effectively disseminate the Dharma. Good teaching relies on good listening."

## Chapter 8

### Sutra Recitation

#### Grateful for Time to Chant the Sutra

"During the early period after the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, since I was running a business it was difficult to find sufficient time to talk with believers and keep them satisfied. Being suddenly asked to come to a home where a family member had become ill was another urgent demand on my time. In those circumstances, there was not enough time to recite the Lotus Sutra," Founder Niwano once recalled.

"That is why I have been always eager to have sufficient time for sutra recitation," he said. "Now, both at home and abroad, many members are earnestly spreading the teachings. It is not necessary that I alone make the desperate effort. Thanks to the endeavors of so many members, I have enough time for recitation. I am very grateful for this. I recite the sutra with joy and gratitude."

The time he could devote to dissemination work in a single day was sixteen hours. During the remaining eight hours, Rev. Niwano had to eat and sleep and run his business. He continued in this way for a long time, and it would be many years before he was able to have enough time to recite the sutra as he wished. Thus he expressed his gratitude for being given such valuable time.

Members who were running a service trade or business in the early years sometimes did not finish their work until after midnight, then gathered for a religious meeting. The founder then taught them the Dharma. And he awoke very early each morning to conduct his own business of delivering milk. It was not an easy life.

He also once said this: "From time to time, I was overcome with drowsiness while chanting, fell backward and dropped off into a doze. When I came to myself, I was lying flat on my back, still holding the sutra!"

Regarding the daily devotional services in the morning and evening, Rev. Niwano said: "Performing sutra recitation every day at a fixed time might seem like a trifling matter to others. Such a daily practice is spread by word of mouth among one's neighbors, however. They hear the voices in recitation and say, 'At that house, every morning they chant a sutra at such and such hour. In the evening, they do it at such and such hour.' In this way, the number of people who believe in the Dharma gradually increases."

In Rev. Niwano's own home, family members gathered at six in the morning before the Buddhist home altar and recited the sutra readings, excerpts from the Threefold Lotus Sutra, together. Each day, one full chapter of the Lotus Sutra corresponding to that day's date would be added to the regular sutra chanting, instead of the usual excerpts from that chapter. The selection of chapters started from the beginning of each month. For example, on the first day of the month, chapter 1, "Introduction," was recited and on the sixteenth day of the month.

On February 29 of a certain leap year, on the way back to his home, I said to Founder Niwano, without having anything special in mind, "Today is the end of February." He responded, "Today, we recite the Repentance Sutra at home."

"It could be possible for even a frog to recite the sutra if only the sound is needed. When reciting the Threefold Lotus Sutra, it is important to try seriously to appreciate the meaning of the words and to understand the teachings," he said.

"Buddhism is a teaching which covers three temporal worlds-the past, the present, and the future," he said on another occasion. "Transferring merit to the spirits of the dead by performing devotional services for one's ancestors and elevating oneself in the present world by following the bodhisattva practice is connected to bringing up children and grandchildren so they can live well in the future. No child who grows up seeing his or her parents sincerely reciting the sutra every day will ever get into trouble through family violence or juvenile delinquency. Such children will naturally develop a spirit of reverence toward their ancestors and want to follow the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*."

"If one thinks that he or she is doing what one naturally ought to do, sutra recitation will not become nervous or strained. On the other hand, if one thinks it is only a duty, it may become a strain," was another of his comments.

Rev. Niwano was born into a pious family and when he was given the moral instruction by his elementary school principal to pay homage to the gods and the buddhas, he immediately put it into practice on that very day. Reflecting on his own experience, he taught the members how to develop an appropriate mental attitude for sutra recitation in various ways.

## Chapter 9

### Episodes Involving the Lotus Sutra

#### The Community Church in New York

In the summer of 1979, Founder Niwano attended the Third Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP III), held in Princeton, N.J. At that time he was invited to speak at a Sunday service at the Unitarian Universalist New York Community Church.

During breakfast on the day, I asked him casually what he was going to talk about, and he said, "Today, I will talk about *kaiji-gonyu*."

This is taught in chapter 2, "Skillful Means," of the Lotus Sutra. It means "to open the door to Buddha-wisdom, to reveal it, and to enable all beings to know it and enter into it."

Regardless of where he was, Rev. Niwano used to chant one chapter or another of the Threefold Lotus Sutra every day, in addition to his usual daily recitation of an excerpt from the sutra.

That particular day was the second day of the month, and just by chance we had chanted chapter two and read about *kaiji-gonyu* in Rev. Niwano's hotel room. I thought he felt that it was appropriate to tell American Unitarian Universalist church members about the essence of *kaiji-gonyu*.

A couple of speakers were scheduled before Rev. Niwano. Not only church members, but also all the members of the Japanese delegation to WCRP III, Buddhists, Shintoists, Christians, and others were present.

From the platform as the service progressed, Rev. Niwano observed the audience. His sermon turned out not to be about *kaiji-gonyu*, as I had expected, but about the *sampoin*, the "three marks" of the Dharma.

After the entire service was over, on our way back to the hotel, I asked him why he had changed his topic. He answered that when he saw the audience, he thought it might be better to do so.

Though it is just my guess, he may have thought that the subject of *kaiji-gonyu* would be a little too complicated for the audience members who were not so familiar with Buddhism, as well as being time-consuming.

The *sampoin* is more central, understandable to everyone, and can be explained in less time. The service was running a little late and there were people who had schedules to keep. Rev. Niwano was probably concerned about them.

## **"The Taste Gets Better Each Time"**

The Rev. Dr. George A. Mullins, an Anglican clergyman in Australia who is now retired, first visited Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo in 1968. Since that time he has become deeply interested in both Rissho Kosei-kai activities and the Lotus Sutra.

He has visited Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan more than a dozen times during the past thirty-odd years to do extensive research and to study. He obtained his Ph.D. degree from the University of Melbourne with a dissertation on "The Nature of New Religions," focusing mainly on the Lotus Sutra and Rissho Kosei-kai.

In November 1991, Rev. Mullins delivered a speech as one of the guests at the consultative meetings about the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Law held at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo.

Rev. Mullins said that he had learned Rev. Niwano had never failed to chant the Lotus Sutra for even a single day over decades, and that the text had lost none of its subtlety for him and continued to exert a profound influence on him.

In his speech, Rev. Mullins recalled his vivid memory of a friendly chat with Founder Niwano in a Chinese restaurant on the occasion of his visit to Tokyo some twenty or more years earlier. At that time, Rev. Mullins asked Rev. Niwano about how many times he had chanted the sutra throughout his lifetime.

"If you have read the Lotus Sutra, as you say you have, twice a day for some forty years," Rev. Mullins said, "then you have read the essential Lotus Sutra more than 25,000 times!" "Yes," was the quick reply, "and the taste gets better each time."

Dr. Mullins told me the following on another occasion as he recalled the above conversation: "As Founder Niwano read the Lotus Sutra for at least another twenty years after that, the total number exceeded 47,000 times, and no doubt the taste kept improving for him, and for those who had the privilege to meet him and hear him."

(The founder's first contact with the Lotus Sutra came through the lay Buddhist organization Reiyukai, in which he was a member for a brief time from the summer of 1934. Since Rev. Niwano passed away in October 1999, he would have read the Lotus Sutra  $65 \times 365 \times 2 = 47,450$  times. In addition to his daily devotions, he chanted the sutra as the leader at memorial day services at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai four times a month and at other ceremonies and on many other occasions for years. One can imagine that his total number of readings actually must have exceeded 50,000.)

## **The Wife of the Chief Priest of a Zen Temple**

These days, particularly in urban areas, many babies are raised on powdered milk formula instead of being breast-fed. But years ago, when Rev. Niwano visited a Zen temple in Niigata Prefecture, he heard that the wife of the chief priest was distressed at being unable to breast-feed her infant properly.

Learning this, Rev. Niwano asked her whether she was honoring the spirits of the ancestors of the parishioners.

She indicated that she had not been offering such things as water, boiled rice, incense, or flowers at the temple altars, or reciting sutras.

Rev. Niwano suggested that she should begin to care for the spirits of the ancestors of the parishioners. Not honoring them properly is just like not offering food to those in the afterworld following their deaths. They are

spiritually starved. Particularly during the time of her husband's absence from the temple, it was the duty of the wife to read the sutra and make offerings, he told her.

Following Rev. Niwano's advice, the chief priest's wife began chanting sutras and honoring those spirits sincerely. Soon after, it is said, she was able to feed her baby sufficiently with her own milk.

She understood through her own experience the importance of ancestor veneration through sutra recitation. She became diligent in doing so.

It is said that even in a Zen temple, the priests are accustomed to recite some chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

## Lectures to Hoju Students

In November 1995, Rev. Niwano addressed the students of Hoju Vocational College for Women in Tokyo, which is affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai. Before all the students gathered in Serenity Hall, neighboring the college, he first opened the *Kyoden: Sutra Readings* (extracts of essential parts of the Threefold Lotus Sutra used by Rissho Kosei-kai members for daily recitation) and quoted from chapter 3, "Ten Merits," of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings.

His sermon about the "Ten Merits" was very comprehensible and concrete. In it, he enthusiastically taught the students the state of mind that people ought to have. The students were deeply impressed, and many of them said later that they had reported to their parents what they had learned.

Incidentally, around that time, Dr. Gene Reeves, former dean of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago and recently retired from teaching at Japan's University of Tsukuba, who was doing research, teaching, and writing on the Lotus Sutra, also lectured to the Hoju students in the same hall. He said in part, "Rissho Kosei-kai teaches the Lotus Sutra. And the Lotus Sutra is a message for the whole world--a message of harmony through respect and generosity which is needed by the entire world.

"For me, Rev. Niwano is one of the great discoverers of the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra," Dr. Reeves added. "In Rev. Niwano we have received a very special gift, very rarely seen." The students were thrilled to hear such words from a scholar born in the United States.

## Making the Sutra Understandable

The late Most Venerable Etai Yamada, the 253rd head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, was on very close terms with Founder Niwano. When, at the invitation of Pope John Paul II, more than 150 religious leaders from around the world gathered at Assisi, Italy, to take part in a World Day of Prayer for Peace in October 1986, each religious group prayed according to its own rites. Rev. Yamada observed the Rissho Kosei-kai members' prayer and sutra recitation led by Rev. Nichiko Niwano, then president-designate, who was attending on behalf of Founder Niwano and was much impressed. He said, "Their feelings of reverence and devotion are expressed naturally in the form of their prayer."

About the sutra recitation in the Japanese reading of Chinese characters conducted by Rissho Kosei-kai members, he continued: "What to do in order to make everybody understand and how to implement what one can understand are what Founder Niwano always emphasized. This is apparent even in sutra recitation."

Recently, on occasions such as memorial services for parishioners in traditional Buddhist denominations, the sutras written in the Japanese reading of Chinese characters are used to achieve better understanding. Dr. Reeves' translation of the Lotus Sutra into English is another attempt to increase understanding.

# Chapter 10

## Words of the Lotus Sutra

### Frequently Quoted by Founder Niwano

#### Great Joy

While disseminating the Lotus Sutra and working for peace in the world through interreligious cooperation, Founder Niwano often quoted the sutra in his sermons and addresses. I once made a list of the passages that he frequently quoted. There were many--both those directed at members of Rissho Kosei-kai and those primarily intended for other listeners--that he hoped would help them understand the idea expressed in the sutra for interreligious cooperation and efforts toward world peace.

The one which he used most frequently in teaching members included the closing words of chapter 2, "Skillful Means."

What Rev. Niwano said was, of course, in Japanese. In the English translation by Dr. Gene Reeves, former dean of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago and recently retired from teaching at Japan's University of Tsukuba, the text reads,

"Your hearts should be filled with great joy,  
For you know that you too will become Buddhas."

Dr. Reeves also has been doing research, teaching, and writing on the Lotus Sutra.

What Rev. Niwano emphasized to members was *daikangi*, meaning "great joy," in practicing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. He often said, "Those who always think and say happily, *arigatai, arigatai*, meaning 'I want to show gratitude,' will become happier and happier."

#### A Foundation for Interreligious Cooperation

Rev. Niwano taught that the reason why Rissho Kosei-kai supports interreligious cooperation is found in two teachings of the Lotus Sutra: *kaisan ken'itsu*--"opening up the three vehicles and revealing the one," from chapter 2, and *shiho joju*, "four conditions for having a world in which [the] Buddha will want to appear," or "the four steps for enabling people to live in peace," found in chapter 28, "Encouragement of Universal Sage Bodhisattva."

It may be more appropriate to speak here, however, about what Rev. Niwano taught us was the fundamental idea behind Rissho Kosei-kai's interest in religious cooperation.

He said, "For us whose religious faith is rooted in the Lotus Sutra, the Truth of the universe is one. Various religions are only diverse manifestations of that Truth. Therefore, our conviction should be that all religions stem from one root, and we should take it for granted that religious cooperation is necessary."

The term *bankyo dokon*, "all religions have the same root" or "all religions spring from the same source," was often used by Founder Niwano when he spoke of religious cooperation.



## The Peace Teachings of the Lotus Sutra

Rev. Niwano once said, "Shakyamuni Buddha is a true exemplar of peace. In Buddhism generally, and in the Lotus Sutra in particular, there are profound teachings of peace."

Let me quote his comments on two chapters of the Lotus Sutra from his book *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*:

"Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra tells the story of Devadatta. In one place it says:

'The attainment of Perfect Enlightenment, and the widespread saving of the living--all this is due to the good friendship of Devadatta.'

"The Buddha further said:

'In the future, Devadatta will surely become a buddha.' We should especially remember that although he was the object of Devadatta's wrath, the Buddha never bore a grudge toward Devadatta, nor did he feel the need to fight with Devadatta. From this we can see the true path to absolute peace.'"

Also, "One of the unexpected lessons I learned when I was introduced to the Lotus Sutra was in chapter 20, 'Never-Disrespectful Bodhisattva.'

To recognize the buddha-nature that every living being shares equally and to make an effort to cultivate that buddha-nature are basic and essential aspects of Buddhism that must be fully understood before one can invite all humankind to share in the Buddha's total teaching and before any kind of universally serene or peaceful existence can be established on this earth."

When Rev. Niwano was visiting Beijing in 1981, he was invited to address Chinese religious people there. He spoke about Bodhisattva Never-Disrespectful and said,

"The spirit of the World Conference on Religion and Peace is clearly shown in the practice of worshipping the buddha-nature in the story of Never-Disrespectful Bodhisattva."

The late Rev. Zao Puchu, then president of the Buddhist Association of China, responded, "If religious people of the world make their best effort in this spirit, world peace will surely be achieved."

(The incident concerning Mr. Zhao will be introduced later in more detail.)

# Chapter 11

## Diligence

### Great Joy

As cited in one of the ancient sutras, Shakyamuni Buddha taught the following about diligence:

"If you make the effort wholeheartedly, there isn't anything you cannot achieve. Therefore, diligence is important. Even a small stream, if it flows continuously, will someday wear a hole in a solid stone.

"Buddhist practice is the same. If you only practice once in a while, even if you do it until you are tired out, you will not achieve much. It is also like starting a fire by rubbing two sticks together. If you stop before they get hot enough, it will be impossible to start a fire. Continuously practicing wholeheartedly, without any negligence, is called 'diligence.'"

Founder Niwano had many things to say about diligence. After referring to the parable of the rich father and poor son in chapter 4, "Faith and Understanding," of the Lotus Sutra, he said, "If we diligently practice the teachings and follow the tenor of the Buddha's thought, he will give us, his children, every treasure he has." (At the ceremony for the 22nd anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai in 1960)

"The diligence taught as one of the Six Perfections is not to back down. Always step forward. This is most important." (At a meeting of staff members of Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo in 1961)

"The *saha* world is the land where suffering has to be patiently endured. Patiently do good deeds and accumulate their virtues, then, even if only little by little, try to keep on doing good deeds. Never give up. (In a sermon on the anniversary of Shakyamuni's Entrance into Nirvana in 1975)

"Being diligent until yesterday but not being so today is not good. If you did good deeds yesterday, today you would be more diligent in doing so. Continuously doing good deeds, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow too, is proper diligence." (To the members of a group pilgrimage to Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo in 1977)

He taught and exemplified the mental attitude for religious faith through his own deeds: "Do not let your faith be like a fire that burns rapidly and soon cools down. Always be like water that flows evenly. Practice steadily and assiduously. That is diligence."

### Guiding Others Requires Patience

When people become diligent in practicing the Dharma, they soon tend to expect the same diligence from others. Rev. Niwano taught, however, "When guiding others, you also need patience. Depending on their capacity to understand Buddhist teachings, there are people who can understand quickly and those who cannot. Unless one comes to such an understanding by oneself, it is difficult to make those who are slow to understand diligent in practicing the Dharma, even by logical persuasion."

"The Lotus Sutra tells us to know 'who is mature and who is immature' (chapter 4, "Faith and Understanding"). To do this, first you need to discern whether the person has a mature or immature capacity, and only then should you teach the Dharma. Even strawberries before becoming red are not tasty. Well ripened, they are delicious. It is the same kind of thing."

In the course of delivering a sermon including the above-mentioned topics, Rev. Niwano would refer to "committing the offense of pressing oil" (chapter 26, "Incantations or *Dharanis*"), of the Lotus Sutra. "Long ago, when people in India wanted to make oil, they would gather seeds, like those of the sesame and flax plants which can produce oil, and then press them lightly, patiently squeezing the seeds carefully so as to produce oil drop by drop. Though it may be easier and faster to obtain oil by pressing the seeds with great force, worms and pieces of the seeds' husks are also squeezed out in the process so the oil is not pure. In order to produce quality oil, you have to be patient. When developing human talents, do not be in a hurry for the fruit."

After the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma ceremony in 1991, the duties of president were transferred to the founder's son Nichiko. When dealing with his very busy schedule, the new President Nichiko Niwano experienced the solitude required in making major decisions. He sought to bear the solitude together with the heavy weight of his responsibilities. One day he said, "Though he did not express it in so many words, the founder was watching me with warmth in his heart. Patience is the deep affection of a father. Without using any words, he was abiding patiently. These days, I truly feel his deep affection."

For many parents who want their children to inherit the faith, and to those leaders who earnestly want to guide those below them and children in the faith, this lesson of patience, "wait with trust," is valuable and profound.

## Chapter 12

### Gratitude

#### Be a Guest That Is Welcomed Back

The following is a recollection of the founder by a staff member at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo, after he had driven Rev. Niwano to and from the headquarters every day as well as having accompanied him on domestic dissemination tours in 1990 and thereafter.

"When I accompanied Founder Niwano on a tour for the first time, everything I saw and heard was quite new to me. I was a little nervous, as I was not aware of what my role was supposed to be. Of course, I had heard from senior staff members before our departure what I should do, but that really was not satisfactory. Unconsciously I may have been determined not to make any mistakes and to try to make myself look good. With the passing of the days, I gradually changed my mind. Founder Niwano can see everything in my heart, I thought. So long as I make the utmost effort at doing things sincerely, it cannot be helped if I make a mistake. Thinking in this way, I decided to be my natural self. Then I relaxed, and I was able to fully tackle my work.

"Rev. Niwano took good care of those of us who were around him. When we ate in a restaurant, I understand that he reminded our colleagues that some of us would be late because we were parking the cars. It seems he told them with a laugh, 'Don't forget that others will be coming soon. You'd better save some of these delicious things for them.' After the waitresses had brought the ordered dishes and seemed to have nothing else to do, he took care of us as well, ordering additional things to eat and drink.

"Since he accepted everything as it came, he recognized everything that happened as good. One day when we were staying at a hotel, going from his room to the dining room required our changing elevators twice. An ordinary person like myself might feel the distance was too great. But what Rev. Niwano said was, 'In this way we can get a good idea of the hotel facilities, and such a long walk will improve our appetites.' In the morning, we were told that the milk we were served was the local milk. Though I felt it was just ordinary packaged milk, he said, 'This is very good, isn't it?' I learned that even though the milk is the same as I could get anywhere, it may taste better if I drink it with gratitude.

"When he purchased souvenirs for his grandchildren, he didn't want to trouble the clerks to show him this and that or to bring items from elsewhere in the shop. He bought things displayed in the showcase, as they were easy to remove. On such an occasion I felt that he showed consideration for anyone that he met. "When we stay in a hotel, we are apt to think, 'We are guests.' However, Rev. Niwano taught us, 'We had better behave so that the hotel staff is happy to have us stay with them and will want us to come back.' Throughout that trip, I became determined to accept every chance to meet others as a good opportunity and to make my best efforts to likewise be a good opportunity for others.

"When I was close to Rev. Niwano, the atmosphere always seemed bright and heart-warming. Never, not even once, did the people around him feel unpleasant. Even when one of us made a mistake, he didn't blame us, but brightly cheered up the person who had made the mistake. I felt that though he may not preach the Lotus Sutra in so words, he made us understand the meaning contained in the sutra by his deeds and behavior.

"During the two years from 1990, I accompanied him five times on domestic tours. My mother was very happy and thankful that her son could have such opportunities, something she had not expected. So far I have been doing my duty while thinking that this may be my very last such opportunity. By thinking in this way, I can devote myself fully

to my assigned tasks, intending not to have any regrets later. If I think there will be 'a next time,' my sense of gratitude may be weakened."

Later this man became Rev. Niwano's last chauffeur and drove for him for some years.

## Chapter 13

### Founding Period

#### A Great Revered Teacher

How did Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, first encounter the Lotus Sutra? Why did he become so interested in religion? Most fortunate was his encounter with Sukenobu Arai, a chapter leader in the lay Buddhist organization Reiyukai, whom he greatly revered.

In August 1934, Rev. Niwano's nine-month-old second daughter suddenly became ill with a very high fever and fell unconscious. A pediatrician who lived nearby said that the infant's condition could become grave unless she was hospitalized at once. Since his only work at the time was making and selling Japanese pickles, Rev. Niwano could not afford to put the child in a hospital. After exhausting all other possibilities, one week later, on the recommendation of a member of Reiyukai he called on Mr. Arai one rainy day and joined his group that very day. He began offering reverence to the spirits of his ancestors by chanting the Lotus Sutra. In a week's time, the baby's condition had improved.

What surprised and touched Rev. Niwano the most--even more than the miraculous recovery of his daughter--was the wonderful power he sensed in the Lotus Sutra, and the joy which it suddenly called forth in him upon his discovering it. So he started attending Mr. Arai's lectures on the Lotus Sutra and continued doing so every day for three years. Rev. Niwano later wrote in his autobiography, *"Lifetime Beginner,"*

"Listening to lectures on the Lotus Sutra, I realized that I had found what I had been looking for. The Lotus Sutra was the perfect net in which to save everyone in the world. Physically and spiritually it could help both the individual and all of society. I was profoundly shaken by what I had learned. The impression made on me was of astonishing, vibrant freshness."

He also said,

"The more I read the sutra, the more impressive and profound it seems. Is there another teaching with this power? Is there another book that can be read with amazement and growing emotional impact every day for forty years?"

#### First Sutra Copies Were Mimeographed

On March 5, 1938, Rissho Kosei-kai was founded. The headquarters was on the second floor of Rev. Niwano's home in Shinmei-cho, Nakano Ward, in Tokyo, where he was then running a milk shop.

The founding ceremony was held on the same day, blessed with fine weather, at the house of the cofounder, Mrs. Myoko Naganuma, in Hatagaya-Honcho in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward. Some thirty members gathered there. Starting at six in the evening, recitation of the Lotus Sutra was conducted in a small tatami-matted room.

Rev. Niwano later reflected, "The sutra for the recitation had not yet been printed. We hurried to make temporary copies by mimeograph and somehow managed to hold the founding ceremony."

At that time, Mrs. Naganuma's house contained only two small Japanese-style rooms. The rest of the available space was devoted to a shop selling ice in the summer and baked sweet potatoes in the winter. The late Rissho

Kosei-kai Special Advisor Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma, who was a young boy helping out in his aunt's shop at the time, later remembered:

"The small house soon became full of members. The large oven-like metal drum in which sweet potatoes had been baked during the day was still warm at night. Some members leaned against it while listening to Rev. Niwano's sermon, a sermon that was very easy to understand."

A small, young religious organization cannot preach mere ideals. What it must do first is help people to overcome their various sufferings through the use of *hoben*, skillful means. Then people can gradually be led to the true Way of Buddhism, which involves helping others.

In many cases Rev. Niwano's guidance began with name interpretation as a skillful means. Together with Mrs. Naganuma, he did *michibiki*, guidance work, for many personal acquaintances, as well as for others. One of Rev. Niwano's regular milk customers suffered from a long-standing health problem which necessitated occasional hospital treatment. The man joined Rissho Kosei-kai with his younger brother, and gradually it became unnecessary for him to undergo hospital stays. One day, a police officer whose duty area included Mrs. Naganuma's house, came by on an off-duty day with his mother and joined the new organization.

It is said that in those days, Rev. Niwano and Mrs. Naganuma led almost everyone they encountered into the faith, beginning with their neighbors. In the midst of a busy dissemination campaign, while also conducting their regular business, it certainly must have been difficult to guide the members. Later, Mrs. Naganuma was known to almost everyone as "Myoko-sensei" (*sensei* meaning teacher).

For instance, the last day of the year was also Rev. Niwano's busiest. He had to collect the payments owed to him for that month and deliver two days' supply of milk, including an extra bottle for New Year's Day. Once, on the very last day of the year, a member passed away and it was necessary to hold the funeral on that same day. Rev. Niwano, immediately after hearing of the death, rushed to the man's house and conducted the funeral--leading the sutra recitation and doing all else that was necessary. He had no time to dress formally, so he just put his sash, Buddhist prayer beads, and copy of the Lotus Sutra into the drawer of his milk cart, and after the funeral resumed the day's milk deliveries.

## "The Gods Were in High Spirits"

From time to time during his overseas "peace pilgrimage" trips, Rev. Niwano looked back on the founding days and shared the following memorable stories with me.

"During the founding days, miraculous things occurred one after another. Good results and evidence of divine activity appeared frequently so that members grew happier and happier. As they were grateful for this, they made more of an effort to practice the Way. Myoko-sensei and I tried as hard as we could. Members who themselves had been helped also tried as hard as they could to help others. Chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra, 'The Sight of the Treasure Stupa,' reads, 'This Sutra is so difficult to grasp that if anyone embraces it even for a short time, I will be pleased, and so will all the Buddhas.' It was just like these words of the sutra in those days. We could really feel that the Buddha was pleased and that 'all the Buddhas' were protecting us, day after day. It was as though the heavenly deities were in high spirits.

"As it was difficult for us to use automobiles then, I used a bicycle, taking Myoko-sensei on the back of the bicycle to visit various places. On cold winter days, her legs became so chilled that after getting off she was unable to walk for several minutes.

"In the midst of such busy days, we unexpectedly had a couple of free hours. 'We haven't seen either a movie or a play for years; let's go to a movie,' I said. But this time was quite different from all those when we went by bicycle

together to do dissemination or enshrinement of the focus of devotion at a member's house. On this day we were caught by a police officer and scolded, since two people riding on one bicycle was against the rules. We apologized profusely, and went home without going to the movie."



## Chapter 14

### Founding Period II

#### The Dharma Is of Supreme Importance

This is the story of Rissho Kosei-kai's first independent structure. On November 5, 1941, it was proposed to the members of the organization that a training hall be built. This was shortly before the outbreak of the Pacific War. A divine revelation had come to Founder Niwano: "Make haste to prepare construction materials. Otherwise, it will be impossible to build." All the members therefore hastened to the task.

Only three days later, on November 8, the foundation work and land purification rite took place. Volunteer efforts got the ground-breaking under way, but collecting the construction cost was another matter. Though there were a few large donations, many members could only make offerings of five or ten yen--and that by extraordinary effort, managing to save out of their meager incomes.

On December 8, carpenters and other building workers began their task. Some of the items needed for construction, such as cement, were already being rationed by the national government. Rev. Niwano later recalled the difficulties involved. Hurrying to collect the needed cement, he would borrow from others who had already received their supply--promising to replace their cement when he received his own share. That took longer than anticipated, however, and he found himself repeatedly having to apologize for the delays in making the replacements.

On December 20, a ceremony was held to mark the completion of the structure's framework. By the time the very first Rissho Kosei-kai facility was completed, it was already well into the next year--May 7, 1942.

"During the founding period, we refrained from having even a cup of tea when we visited homes for dissemination work or for members' guidance," Rev. Niwano later remembered. In those days of strict discipline, the very first 'training hall'--only 25 *tsubo* (less than 100 square yards) in size--was finished with member donations of merely 16,000 yen. I then decided to concentrate all of my energies only for disseminating the Dharma, and thus I quit my regular work."

On another occasion the founder told the following story: "In my sermon at the completion ceremony, I said, 'I am not satisfied with such a small facility as this.' The members gathered there complained of my ambition, saying, 'We have already given all we can; we just can't do any more.' I was even urged to apologize for asking so much of them. But I did not. I was of the belief that the Dharma is of supreme importance, and I was therefore determined that we would not remain in a headquarters facility of only 25 *tsubo*." War had just begun, and Japan's future was quite uncertain.

Members then could never have imagined the present Rissho Kosei-kai that developed decades later. Yet even then Rev. Niwano was unswervingly confident about the future--when the Dharma would surely shine in every direction.

Even so, he nonetheless added, reflecting on the experience of constructing the organization's headquarters past and present, "Our organization was not large at the beginning. Starting with only a small house, it has been able to grow bigger year by year."

The very first headquarters was removed and reconstructed as the chapel for Kosei Cemetery in 1952. Even after construction of the new chapel, decades later, the original one still stands in the cemetery yard.

## Chapter 15

### Mrs. Naganuma, the Cofounder

#### Thinking of Nothing but the Dharma

The cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Mrs. Myoko Naganuma, was introduced to the Lotus Sutra by Founder Niwano. However, once Rissho-Kosei-kai was underway she put all of her energy into disseminating the Dharma.

Mrs. Naganuma was known to everyone as "Myoko-sensei" (*sensei* meaning "teacher"). Rev. Niwano once reminisced about her this way: "Myoko-sensei was always thinking of others and devoted herself fully to the faith. She thought of nothing but the Dharma."

Even though she gave guidance to many people, it is said that Rev. Niwano still was the one who always needed to show new members how to arrange for the enshrinement of the *sokaimyo*, the symbol of faith, in their homes, which was the practice at that time.

When Rev. Niwano was traveling in many countries for activities related to the World Conference on Religion and Peace, from time to time he would reflect on and talk about the cofounder. One such recollection was about a divine revelation which had come to her, that "The truth and spirit of the Lotus Sutra will spread over all the world through Rissho Kosei-kai's efforts."

The episodes made known to me included the divine revelations through her and the dissemination work that the two of them conducted during Rissho Kosei-kai's founding period.

Rev. Niwano and the cofounder frequently took their meals together during World War II. That was because the other members of the Niwano family returned to Niigata Prefecture to live since Tokyo was being regularly bombed. Rev. Niwano remembered, "Once wartime conditions became severe, food shortages were common in Japan. Even so, Myoko-sensei would often manage to find some sake (Japanese rice wine) for dinner. I don't know where she got it. Nibbling on dried sardines and sipping sake, I would talk with her about the members we were guiding each day, and then together we planned on whom we were going to visit the following day. Chatting this way, we became increasingly enthusiastic about our mission and the Dharma flower bloomed in our hearts."

The fact that the cofounder unstintingly gave her possessions to others was recounted as an aspect of her compassionate character by people who knew her. "Throughout her whole life, Myoko Sensei was a woman of great compassion. Those who knew her had direct experience of her compassionate thought and action and the strengthening effect they had on religious faith. She frequently gave things away . . . She was very frugal in her own way of life . . . She wore her wooden geta clogs till they were level with the ground then made a reverent gesture and said a word of thanks as she burned them for firewood. It was her joy to see happiness on the faces of people to whom she unstintingly gave her own possessions." This is a passage which President Nichiko Niwano included in his book *My Father, My Teacher* (1982).

Myoko-sensei used to say, "Use harsh words when you must, but then buy the person a cup of sake." What she meant was, "Encourage people even when you're criticizing them." In her own life she was forever considerate, even when her words had to be severe.

Many times she admonished leaders of the organization for their poor attitudes. Because of her gentle and generous manner, however, they responded by pledging their greater determination and diligence to the Dharma.

Rev. Niwano said, "There aren't many like Myoko-sensei - who else can teach so much good by scolding?" Her generosity was not always accompanied by strong words. Early on, when she was working as a vendor of roasted sweet potatoes, she would sometimes delight a young laborer who would regularly come into her shop by saying, "After sweating so much you need a glass of water." Then he would be more delighted still when he put the glass to his lips; it would be sake! She loved to bring a smile to the face of others. It was an expression of her appreciation.

At the same time, she taught with wonderfully apt similes. She used to say, "When you give an offering (of money), send it off happily, with a little pat. It will come back to you and bring a friend along with it."

Rev. Niwano once said, "After she entered the religious life, needless to say such perceptiveness found its true fulfillment."

## **Literally "a Life of Compassion"**

On December 24, 1989, a ceremony was held to unveil a monument to the cofounder. Founder Niwano and then-Chief Director Motoyuki Naganuma left early that morning for the Saitama Church, the location of the monument.

In the car on the way, Rev. Niwano asked Rev. Naganuma, "How many Rissho Kosei-kai churches are there now in Saitama Prefecture?" "There are fifteen," was the reply.

Rev. Niwano was filled with deep emotion, remembering when he and Myoko-sensei had worked so hard disseminating the Dharma during the founding period, and he was pleased at how the Dharma had spread in the cofounder's home prefecture. He recalled how she had devoted her life to the Dharma.

Nearing the church, Rev. Naganuma pointed out various places to Rev. Niwano, explaining how they were associated with the cofounder.

"In those days all the roads were gravel," Rev. Naganuma said. In response, Rev. Niwano commented, "Yes, and the roads weren't as wide as they are now." Rev. Naganuma pointed out, "You'll find the old road beyond that one." And so the conversation between them continued.

"Last night I was looking over the family memorial book kept at my family altar," the founder said. (In the memorial books enshrined at members' home altars, the Buddhist posthumous names of their ancestors and close relatives are registered.) "I noticed that this is the memorial day for Mrs. Kuni Furusawa."

Kuni Furusawa was the eldest sister of Myoko-sensei. Rev. Niwano remembered even her sisters.

Myoko-sensei was the sixth daughter of Asajiro Naganuma, who came from an old family in Saitama Prefecture. Her childhood had been difficult, particularly when her father suffered financial reverses and lost their large home and most of his other property. The whole family had to move into a nearby temple for some time. The chief priest of the temple always taught her as a child to respect her ancestors. The message sank in--deeply.

Rev. Naganuma said, "Myoko-sensei later guided that chief priest to the Lotus Sutra and brought him into Rissho Kosei-kai."

Among her older sisters was one who followed the Tenrikyo faith for many years. Yet when she was about to die, it is said that she asked Myoko-sensei, "Please recite the Lotus Sutra. Soothe my soul with the Lotus Sutra."

They even talked in the car about the sashes that Rev. Niwano and Myoko-sensei presented to members of Rissho Kosei-kai going to the front during the war.

"Some 450 men were listed and had their names posted on the wall at our first headquarters," Rev. Niwano recalled. "It took four columns to include all the names."

"I wore one of those, too, around my belly going into battle," Rev. Naganuma said. "Just like the mandala banner, the words 'Namu Myoho Renge-kyo' (I take refuge in the sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma), 'Infinite as heaven and earth' and 'Many in body but one in spirit' were written on each one in brush calligraphy. At first I tied my sash around my belly; but after the war, so as not to get it dirty I put it inside my helmet and wore it on my head."

Rev. Niwano inscribed the sacred words on the sashes and Myoko-sensei blessed each one. It is said that among those 450 soldiers, not one of them died in battle.

On arriving at the Saitama Church, Rev. Niwano was greeted by many members. Paying homage to the *gohonzon*, the focus of devotion enshrined at the church, he then went into the drawing room. There, in his sermon during the ceremony unveiling the monument, he said with deep feeling, "When I think of the life Myoko-sensei lived, I feel it was truly 'a life of compassion.'"

On her monument is an inscription that Rev. Niwano wrote from his heart on her memorial day. After the ceremony, he gazed at the monument and said, "The color of the stone is very pleasing."

## **Chapter 16**

### **Encounters I (Pope Paul VI)**

#### **Interreligious Cooperation Is Possible— Meetings with Pope Paul VI**

During the first half of his life, Founder Niwano devoted himself wholeheartedly to spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In the second half of his life, his activities in the civic sphere, with the emphasis on religious cooperation, both deepened and widened to become international in scope. There were a number of important "encounters" with prominent world figures.

Among Rev. Niwano's many encounters, the one with His Holiness Pope Paul VI was especially important because of the opportunity to meet with the pope in a private audience at the time of the Second Vatican Council. Rev. Niwano became convinced that world peace was not only a possibility but a necessity for which religious people should make their best effort.

The founder had four opportunities to meet and talk with Pope Paul VI. The first was on September 16, 1963 at the Vatican during a tour of the Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons, consisting of sixteen delegates from Japan.

The second was at the time of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which Rev. Niwano later saw as the encounter that determined the second half of his life. On September 14, 1965, the session of the Vatican Council which Rev. Niwano attended started with an opening Mass. It was reported that the pope told the participating bishops from around the world that throughout history the popes had been guilty of causing schisms in the Christian faith. It was no time for divisions in Christianity or disagreements among world religions, he told them. Now was their chance to join hands and walk together in the direction of peace.

After being greatly moved and excited by these words, Rev. Niwano had an opportunity to meet with Pope Paul VI privately on the following day. The founder later reflected, "The pope extended his hand and shook mine. We exchanged a firm handshake. He spoke with shining eyes about religious freedom and peace in the world. That firm handshake symbolized cooperation, friendship, and mutual understanding between Buddhists and Catholics, transcending differences of language. The pope said that for religious people, there is no better way to contribute to humanity than by walking hand in hand in the way of peace. I replied that I would make the utmost efforts for the sake of world peace. This firm conviction spread through Rev. Niwano's entire being and carried him into the activities to establish the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

Later, Rev. Niwano reminisced about the event and told me the following: "If it were not for that encounter with the pope and his words, my determined efforts on behalf of the WCRP might not have started so early. It can well be said that the pope's conviction was responded to by my conviction. I felt that the message of the Buddha and of God are substantially the same."

When it was decided to establish the WCRP, the first international preparatory committee meeting for that purpose was held in Dedham, Massachusetts, near Boston, in 1969. Following that meeting, the founder extended his "Peace Pilgrimage" to Europe. His third opportunity to meet with Pope Paul VI came on that trip, on July 30 at Castel Gandolfo, the summer residence of the pope in a Rome suburb.

Rev. Niwano earnestly explained to the pope the goal of the WCRP, and the leader of the Roman Catholic church replied, "Your contributions for peace and justice are greatly appreciated."

At the end of the meeting, the pope said to his aide, "I would like to thank him in Japanese." Upon learning that the appropriate word was *arigato*, Pope Paul VI spoke it sincerely to the founder and warmly shook his hand.

While attending two international conferences in the United States, Rev. Niwano's health had taken a turn for the worse and the strain of his extended visit to Europe caused those around him to worry. As if the pope understood this, his words of appreciation seemed to be directed to the founder's single-minded determination to devote his efforts to world peace.

The Second World Assembly of the WCRP was held in Leuven, Belgium in 1974. After the assembly had ended, the Japanese delegation visited the Vatican. This became the occasion for Rev. Niwano's fourth meeting with Pope Paul VI, on September 5, again at Castel Gandolfo. At the start of the meeting, Rev. Niwano expressed the deepest appreciation for the papal message to the WCRP Assembly and reported on the assembly's successful results.

After that, the pope took the initiative, saying, "Let us silently pray for peace together." He then led an interfaith prayer for peace with all who were gathered there. This precedent-setting joint prayer signified how strong was the desire for world peace and the hope for interreligious cooperation cherished by Pope Paul VI.

That pope, who will be remembered in the modern history of world religion for his many remarkable achievements, passed away in August 1978. Rev. Niwano, by chance, was in Rome at the time. When he received the first news of the death from a reporter for the *Kosei Shimbun* newspaper stationed in Rome, even though it was the middle of the night, the founder arose and immediately began chanting the Lotus Sutra and sincerely praying for the spirit of the pope.

A papal presence at a WCRP World Assembly was realized later, in Rome at the Sixth World Assembly, with the attendance of Pope John Paul II.

## **Chapter 17**

### **Encounters II (Pope John Paul II)**

#### **The Messages of the Buddha and God Are One— Meetings with Pope John Paul II**

In February 1979, Founder Niwano met His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the first time. After attending the International Executive Committee meeting of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) in Princeton, New Jersey, Rev. Niwano flew to Rome and visited the pope in the Vatican.

The temperature in Princeton was 20 degrees Celsius below zero (4 degrees Fahrenheit below zero). On the Hudson River, big blocks of floating ice could be seen. In Rome, by contrast, it was very warm. And the welcome of Pope John Paul II was even warmer than the temperature. Putting both of his hands into those of Rev. Niwano, the pope said, "I know that Buddhism is a religion of deep spirituality." Rev. Niwano responded with a smile, saying, "I think the messages of the Buddha and God are one."

When the conversation turned to the WCRP, the pope asked Rev. Niwano where and when the next World Assembly was to be held. When asked if he would attend, Pope John Paul II replied only, "I will see."

When the founder was leaving, he later recalled, the pope said with a warm look: "I live in Rome. Rome is my home. Whenever you come to Rome, please do visit me."

However, the second opportunity for a meeting was not in Rome. In 1981 the pope visited Japan for the first such papal visit in the history of the Roman Catholic church. On February 24, Rev. Niwano attended a meeting with representatives of non-Christian religions held at the Apostolic Nunciature in Tokyo.

Through an exchange of talks between the pope and Japanese religious leaders, the founder came to feel that ties of the Vatican with other faiths on interreligious cooperation were becoming stronger. At the time he said, "From the Vatican, a state which has no military forces, to Japan, which has a war-renouncing constitution and wishes to be a nation of peace, the pope came as an apostle of peace. The importance of this visit is very great. All religious people should strengthen their efforts at interreligious cooperation and make greater efforts for peace in the world."

The third encounter of Rev. Niwano with the present pope was on the day that something which has long been desired by the founder and many other religious leaders was realized. That was the presence of the pope at a WCRP Assembly. The day before the opening of the Sixth World Assembly of the WCRP in Rome, Rev. Niwano paid homage at the grave where Pope Paul VI rests in peace, thanking him for his positive regard for the WCRP and praying for the success of the assembly. Recalling the late pope, Rev. Niwano told the reporters accompanying him, "I still vividly remember the pope's warm hands and his saying that this was not the time for religious people to disagree among themselves, but to engage in dialogue and cooperate for peace."

"How important it was that I attended the Second Vatican Council and was able to meet and talk with the pope has become clearer as the religious leaders of the world have become more cooperative and are earnestly making efforts for peace through WCRP activities."

On November 3, 1994, the Opening Session of WCRP VI took place in the Synod Hall of the Vatican. Over seven hundred religious leaders of the various faiths of the world attended. Pope John Paul II and Founder Niwano were

seated side by side at the center of the platform. It had been twenty-nine years since Rev. Niwano attended the Second Vatican Council and twenty-four years since on behalf of the WCRP he invited Pope Paul VI to attend a WCRP World Assembly. Rev. Niwano began his opening address in this humble way, "To be able to stand here before you is an extremely moving experience."

After briefly introducing the process which had made the day possible, he said with deep emotion, "We who are here convening WCRP VI at the Vatican are deeply honored by the presence of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, whose message we shall soon receive."

Pope John Paul II spoke next: "The Holy See has participated in previous assemblies and continues to follow with interest your efforts to work together for peace in ways suited to men and women of deep religious conviction. I thank the Reverend Nikkyo Niwano for his kind remarks regarding the relationship between the Holy See and your organization from its beginnings." He continued, "It is our common task and duty to make better known the relation between religion and peace. This commitment is inscribed in your own identity as an association." He spoke clearly about continuing cooperation with the WCRP.

It was at this assembly that President Nichiko Niwano, following in the footsteps of the founder, became deeply committed to the WCRP and that the commitment of Rissho Kosei-kai to the WCRP became broader and stronger. The handshake between Pope John Paul II and Founder Niwano at this assembly signified "the promise of the future."



## **Chapter 18**

### **Encounters III (Dr. Dana M. Greeley, President of Unitarian Chapter Universalist Association of North America)**

#### **It's a Fine Day Today— Meetings with Dr. Dana M. Greeley**

The Second Vatican Council raised Founder Niwano's expectations for religious cooperation from a mere possibility to a firm conviction. Besides his private meeting with the late Pope Paul VI, one other encounter is worthy of special mention. That was his meeting with the Rev. Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, with whom he joined in a devotion to peace activities. They shared a strong sense of solidarity.

On January 22, 1968, the Japanese-American Inter-Religious Consultation on Peace (which later gave birth to the WCRP--the World Conference on Religion and Peace) was held in Kyoto. Following that consultation, the Rev. Dr. Shin'ichiro Imaoka (then head of the Japan Free Religious Association) brought Dr. Greeley, at that time president of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), to the Great Sacred Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo. There, both met with Rev. Niwano. Following up on their initial encounter in Kyoto, Rev. Niwano and Dr. Greeley talked for three hours, frankly and openly.

"Some people say that Unitarians are Christians, while others say they are not," the American religious leader remarked, reaching for a fact that might transcend individual faiths and sects.

"The goals of all religions are the same. All religious people should cooperate in their common tasks," responded Rev. Niwano.

Both discovered that, regarding their religious views, they had a great deal in common. With the joy which comes from finding someone of closely similar view, they shared the conviction that there was a bright future for religious cooperation. After seeing Dr. Greeley off, Rev. Niwano looked quite happy in the elevator on the way to his room. He said, "It's a fine day today."

"In one sense," Dr. Imaoka reminisced, "this encounter was very fortunate as well as dramatic." Having served as interpreter for both men, I have found that this day has remained unforgettable.

In July of 1969, the following year, Rev. Niwano attended an International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) Congress for the first time. It was the 20th World Congress, held in Boston. On that occasion, Rissho Kosei-kai formally became a member of the IARF. At this same congress, Dr. Greeley was elected president and Rev. Niwano was elected to be a trustee of the association, succeeding Dr. Imaoka as the representative from Japan.

Following that congress, the first Executive Committee meeting of the WCRP was held in Cambridge, Mass., near Boston. Both Rev. Niwano and Dr. Greeley attended. From then on, for two decades, they worked together, hand in hand, for religious cooperation and world peace, attending world assemblies and congresses of both the WCRP and the IARF, as well as U.S.-Japan bilateral conferences, United-Nations-related activities, and so on, and playing central roles in each of these gatherings.

The IARF historically has emphasized dialogue, whereas the WCRP has been more action-oriented. Each organization has its own characteristic features; however, both place great emphasis on religious cooperation as the axis around which their work revolves, and there are sundry other similarities as well.

## "He always thinks of others"

Among my many memories of Dr. Greeley and Rev. Niwano, working together in all the corners of the world, was how they talked repeatedly of what had taken place at the second bilateral conference, the Inter-Religious Consultation on Japanese-American Relations, in 1972.

The venue was Hawaii, a place of eternal summer. Dr. Greeley showed up wearing a Hawaiian aloha shirt. Rev. Niwano, like any Japanese gentleman, appeared in suit and tie. Exchanging greetings, both men noticed the disparity in their attire. After lunch, they returned from their rooms to the meeting, and this time Rev. Niwano was wearing an aloha shirt while Dr. Greeley was in the suit and tie! It produced a big laugh among their colleagues. However, the episode pointed up the attitude common to the two men--forever looking at things from the other's point of view, trying better to understand, and always making a sincere effort to promote religious cooperation by accommodating others.

In peace activities over many years, Rev. Niwano greatly respected Dr. Greeley's views. Dr. Greeley, too, listened carefully to whatever Rev. Niwano said, and the two often found themselves in agreement.

In his final years, Dr. Greeley suffered from cancer. He underwent major as well as minor operations on several occasions, and Rev. Niwano sent many letters of sympathy and encouragement, always including prayers that he would soon be well. Dr. Greeley was a strong-willed man, and demonstrated an almost miraculous recovery from his surgeries. Surprisingly, he attended the 25th IARF Triennial Congress convened at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo from July 23 to August 1, 1984, and in less than one month even extended his travels to Nairobi, Kenya, to attend the Fourth General Assembly of the WCRP. Throughout these two world congresses he continued his passionate, almost superhuman, efforts toward peace--showing no sign of weakness, and touching the hearts of all participants.

In the United States at that time, though not in Japan, it was already common practice for physicians to inform their patients when they had cancer, and Dr. Greeley had not kept his condition a secret. Thus peoples' eyes widened with astonishment at the behavior of this man with an incurable disease. A frequent comment was, "Even in such a condition, he always thinks of others instead of himself."

One day in Nairobi, too many participants had come to find seats at a particular workshop. Dr. Greeley brought in a chair from the next room, carrying it on his shoulder, and then gave it to someone who was standing. Since this was just a common courtesy, the person who received the seat may well not have known that it was Dr. Greeley who got it for him, nor certainly that Dr. Greeley was a man fighting cancer.

Over the next two years Dr. Greeley's condition had worsened. He was unable to attend the third assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace in Seoul in 1986. During that conference, the attendees learned that he had passed away.

Several days before his death, Dr. Greeley had recorded his very last words on tape. The Rev. Dr. Malcolm Sutherland, a former president/dean of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School affiliated with the University of Chicago and a close colleague, took the tape to the conference. International officers listened to it together, as Dr. Sutherland commented on it. The tape began with Dr. Greeley's voice saying "Rev. Niwano," and then in turn the names of other officers who had worked with Dr. Greeley from the very beginning of the movement. The tape continued with a farewell to his colleagues, a prayer for the success of the conference, and so on. He sounded hoarse and betrayed his difficulty in breathing and speaking. Every word came from the heart. All of those gathered were deeply moved and prayed that Dr. Greeley's spirit might rest in peace. Rev. Niwano, after returning to his room, recited from the Threefold Lotus Sutra as a further prayer for his good friend.

## The Spirit of Dr. Greeley Is Still with Us

In praise for his devotion to world peace, the Greeley Foundation was established, and Dr. Greeley's spirit continued to flourish through both the IARF and the WCRP. "His spirit surely is with us still, and will continue with us for years to come," Rev. Niwano thought. With that in mind during subsequent WCRP activities, the founder could sense Dr. Greeley's vision and wisdom with him, and it served as continuing inspiration to all the leaders of WCRP/USA.

"For a World Conference on Religion and Peace, it takes enthusiasm, wisdom--and money,"--so said Dr. Greeley at the very first Interim Advisory Committee meeting of the WCRP, held in 1969, in Istanbul, where East meets West.

When the Second World Assembly of the WCRP met in Leuven, Belgium, in 1974, the discussion lasted very late one day. Dr. Greeley smiled, shook hands with Rev. Niwano, and said, "Today, since it is already well after midnight, we should be saying 'yesterday.' Yesterday was a great day!"

While attending a photographic exhibition on the 50th anniversary of the founding of Risho Kosei-kai in March 1988, Rev. Niwano reflected on the days when he worked with Dr. Greeley. He looked as though his heart were very full.

"I will go to the UN with your passion"

In June 1988, staying in New York on the occasion of his addressing the third Special Session of the UN General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament, Rev. Niwano paid homage at Dr. Greeley's grave. The day following our arrival in New York, he made a one-day trip to Boston. It happened to be the Sunday closest to the second anniversary of Dr. Greeley's death. In the First Parish church at Concord, Mass., where he had served for many years as the senior minister, his widow, Mrs. Deborah Webster Greeley and many others who had loved and admired him deeply and worked with him, were awaiting Rev. Niwano's arrival.

At their request, Rev. Niwano spoke from the pulpit where Dr. Greeley used to deliver his sermons. "This week I am going to make an appeal for the third time at the UN's Special Session on Disarmament," he said. "I want to do it with the passion of the late Dr. Greeley. . . ." Then he visited the Greeley Foundation and the Lexington cemetery, where Dr. Greeley rests along with several prominent American writers. He offered flowers, lit incense which he had brought from Japan, and offered a heartfelt prayer.

At the Greeleys' home, some seventy well-known people who were close to Dr. Greeley gathered and shared memories with Rev. Niwano and Mrs. Greeley. There was an atmosphere of reminiscence, like that at the church, remembering the bygone days of Dr. Greeley and his personal magnetism.

Rev. Niwano concluded this busy one-day trip by visiting Dr. Edwin O. Reischauer, the former American ambassador to Japan whom he had visited with Dr. Greeley nearly two decades earlier.

"While in Concord, many people welcomed me warmly--almost as if Dr. Greeley was again with us. His spirit protected us all day. There are a great many people who admire him long after his death." Rev. Niwano spoke to me repeatedly of Dr. Greeley's greatness.

Mrs. Greeley had a herb garden in her home where she raised various aromatic plants. Taking some rosemary in her hand, she presented it to Rev. Niwano in memory of her late husband. The sentiment seemed to exude from the herb itself. After the founder returned to Japan, the rosemary was replanted in the garden of the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Risho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. Although the latitude of Boston is close to that of Hakodate in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost main island, where the temperature range and climate are altogether different from those of Tokyo, that rosemary thrived for years.

## Juzu

In June 1998, thirty full years after the first encounter between Rev. Niwano and Dr. Greeley, I contemplated a visit with those who had worked closely with us when I was assisting Rev. Niwano. (I also wanted to let my spouse see with her own eyes something of how I had spent my thirty years in international activities, for which she had provided loyal background support.)

The primary stop on our trip was, for a second time, to pay homage at the grave of Dr. Greeley. If she was in good health, we also wanted to see Mrs. Greeley.

The day we went to Concord was June 13--not only a time when the Greeley Foundation board would be meeting, but actually the precise anniversary of Dr. Greeley's passing away twelve years earlier. My wife and I were surprised at the coincidence, and felt it was a sort of divine arrangement.

At the meeting, in the center of a huge table around which some twenty people were seated, lay a string of *juzu*, Buddhist prayer beads, made from seeds of the *bodhi*-tree in Bodhgaya, India. They had been presented to Dr. Greeley by Rev. Niwano when the two were working together for peace. They tell me that since Dr. Greeley's death, the foundation has placed the *juzu* on the table at each board meeting as they open with prayer--to remind them during their deliberations of the spirit generated by both Dr. Greeley and Rev. Niwano. It serves as a kind of memorial. Dr. Greeley, a Unitarian, had accepted the *juzu* gift as embodying the spirit of Rev. Niwano, a Buddhist. The foundation board members, headed by his widow, were carrying on Dr. Greeley's work and treasured the inspiration they had received from Rev. Niwano. My wife and I were deeply moved.

Although it was a busy meeting, I was given a little time to speak. So I spoke briefly about the relationship between the two men as I had witnessed it.

Absenting themselves from the meeting for a while, two daughters of Dr. and Mrs. Greeley, Faith and Penelope, kindly guided us through the cemetery. We offered incense, flowers, and a prayer.

Then up in years, Mrs. Greeley herself passed away two months after our pleasant reunion. It is remarkable that, together with her four daughters, she carried on her beloved husband's great work to the very last days of her life.

It was along with other progressive religious leaders in the United States that Dr. Greeley endeavored from early on to establish the WCRP. Still earlier, he had been devoted to the IARF, which was one of the seeds from which the WCRP developed. Occasional contact between the general secretary of the IARF and the secretary general of the WCRP evidenced their need for cooperation.

For example, the Boat People Project of 1976--77 is characteristic of WCRP activities. With financial contributions from many individuals and religious groups, the project came to the aid of the Vietnamese "boat people" refugees and helped to focus international attention on their plight. Although the IARF generally puts more emphasis on dialogue, it, too, has expanded into a social services network since the 1980s. The Donate a Meal Campaign, which started in Japan, was taken up and put into practice at both these international bodies' world congresses. Likewise, the Niwano Peace Foundation in Japan seeks the healthy and stable development of a peace movement based on religious cooperation; in the U.S., the Greeley Foundation makes manifest the vision of the man for whom it was named. Born mainly out of dialogue among liberal Christians, the IARF only gradually advanced into full interfaith cooperation.

## **Chapter 19**

### **Encounters IV (Mrs. Chiara Lubich, Founder and President of Focolare Movement)**

#### **Interreligious Dialogue as the Will of God– Meetings with Ms. Chiara Lubich**

In many places in the world, the Focolare Movement based in Italy has very friendly relations with Rissho Kosei-kai. The official Italian name for this Roman Catholic lay movement is Opera di Maria. In Rome, in February 1979, Founder Niwano met for the first time with its founder and president, Ms. Chiara Lubich.

It was during the course of Rev. Niwano's "Peace Pilgrimage" in Rome, after he had attended the international executive committee meeting for the third assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) in Princeton, N.J., that month.

At that time, they talked for about an hour. Ms. Lubich later said: "Through talking with Rev. Niwano for the first time, I became convinced that it is the will of God that the Focolare Movement should work for interreligious dialogue." She also recalled, "We were invited to the WCRP by Rev. Niwano. The Focolare Movement has entered into a cooperative relationship with this large religious movement and ever since has been actively participating in some of its various activities."

Two months later, in April, Rev. Niwano went to London to attend the award ceremony at which he would receive the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion, which Ms. Lubich had received in 1977. After the ceremony at Windsor Castle, a public ceremony was held at the historic Guildhall. At that time, when Rev. Niwano arrived at the hall, many Focolare members greeted him with applause. At the reception held after the public ceremony, young members of the Focolare Movement surrounded Rev. Niwano to congratulate him and enjoy chatting with him in a friendly way.

Every month Ms. Lubich used to send a message from the headquarters in Italy to well over a hundred Focolare Centers around the world by radio. In this way, people in the Focolare Movement in the U.K. had received the news of Rev. Niwano's receiving the prize.

Even on first meetings, Focolare members are very friendly and outgoing and talk to the person they have met as if they were long-term acquaintances or even family members. A kind of communal feeling is experienced instantly with them.

Beginning from that encounter in London, whenever Rev. Niwano went to various places around the world, Focolare people always showed up and brought happy conversations with many smiles. In time, the daughters of President Nichiko Niwano would visit and stay for days at a time at the Focolare community at Loppiano, near Florence, where they experienced deep religious exchanges.

The participation of the members of the Focolare Movement in the WCRP was realized at the Third Assembly held in Princeton, N.J., in the same year that Rev. Niwano first met Ms. Lubich. Not only did their representatives attend, but some served on the staff of the secretariat and as volunteers in other capacities. Their contribution was remarkable and has become absolutely indispensable for world assemblies of the WCRP ever since.

The friendliness, jovial manner, and deep kindness of Focolare members toward others is commonly felt everywhere in the world. It almost gives others the impression that they are meeting with people who are "Focolareans," rather than Italians, Americans, or French people.

## **"Our meetings always have a surprise"**

In both 1981 and 1985, Ms. Lubich visited Risho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. At the Great Sacred Hall she addressed Risho Kosei-kai members, and at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall she spoke with Founder Niwano and President Niwano, with others in her party all around them.

During their friendly talks, what impressed us deeply was that what Ms. Lubich said was always precise and concrete, and deeply earnest. For example, "It was in such and such a month in such and such a year when I first met you, Founder Niwano. At that time, you said so and so. The second time was in such and such a year on such and such an occasion and I learned from you such and such and we implemented it. And then the next time was. . . ." She recollected such occasions accurately, and then said, "Now we are dealing with such and such a task. I want your advice on this matter." She always thought carefully, modestly asked for advice, and was serious about dealing with the tasks she was facing, and Rev. Niwano responded with sincerity and seriousness.

Ms. Lubich herself is a wonderful person, but it is also the case that those around her have always been thorough in assisting her. By considering her visits important, they showed their good preparation in many ways.

With Ms. Lubich at their center, Focolare members are well organized. They work as if they are inseparable from Ms. Lubich. For example, Ms. Natalia Dallapiccola, deputy for Dialogue with Other Religions, often represented Ms. Lubich in external, interreligious matters. She well understands the hopes and style of working of the Focolare Movement founder. She often says: "Chiara says," "Chiara tries," or "Chiara wants." She rarely uses the word "I."

One time, Ms. Dallapiccola visited Rev. Niwano at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall, substituting for Ms. Lubich. She began the conversation lightly with the following words and a smile: "Today, I came to you as a 'living letter' from Chiara."

Regarding the relationship between the Focolare Movement and Risho Kosei-kai, Ms. Lubich says, "Our meetings are always surprising as we discover new ways and stimuli for deepening and appreciating our religious experiences, which have many similarities and points of commonality." Focolare members are working with this idea of Ms. Lubich's as their inspiration.

## **"In their smile, an echo of your smile"**

In her message for the Risho Kosei-kai ceremony installing Rev. Nichiko Niwano as president in November 1991, Ms. Lubich wrote about the youth members' activities of both organizations, "Special mention should be made about how they worked side by side, with enthusiasm and dedication, for peace and understanding among people from the Philippines to South Korea, from Europe to Africa, and to Brazil. In the fresh and sincere faces of the young people of Risho Kosei-kai, we have always seen a reflection of the everlasting youthfulness of your (Founder Niwano's) heart, and in their smiles, an echo of your smile and confirmation that the new generations, under your guidance, have allowed themselves to be enlightened by a pure conscience and by a great love for humanity."

Exchanges between Risho Kosei-kai and Focolare members are continuing in various ways. After encounters with Focolare people, many Risho Kosei-kai members feel "excited" rather than "impressed." They experienced the impression of having been taught rather than of mutual learning.

The global viewpoint of the Focolare Movement can be seen in the frequent radio communications from their headquarters to their centers scattered around the world. It is reflected in the form of the hoza-like circles consisting of young people who come from many lands, with only one person representing his or her country in each circle so that every circle can have a broad international range.

## **Chapter 20**

### **Encounters V (Mr. Zhao Puchu, President of the Buddhist Association of China)**

#### **The Roots of a Long, Intimate Friendship— Meetings with Mr. Zhao Puchu**

Founder Niwano's first visit to China was in April 1974. Although normal diplomatic relations between Japan and China had been restored in 1972, there was as yet no agreement concerning direct airline flights. Therefore Rev. Niwano was unable to fly from Tokyo to Beijing. He flew first from Tokyo's Haneda Airport to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong took a train to Guangzhou. From there, he flew to Beijing. Thus he did not arrive in Beijing until the third day after he had left Tokyo. It was 9:30 p.m. when he landed at the airport in Beijing.

There, Mr. Zhao Puchu, then president of the Buddhist Association of China, was awaiting his arrival. Out of this meeting grew the two men's long and intimate friendship.

At that time, the second assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) was in its preparatory stage, so the founder's main purpose in visiting China was to recruit Chinese participation in it. On his shoulders, accordingly, rested the heavy burden of the expectation of his international WCRP colleagues that he could accomplish that end.

The first meeting with Chinese religious leaders was held at the Guang-ji monastery, headquarters of the Buddhist Association of China, and was attended by Mr. Zhao as well as representatives of Buddhism, Islam, and both Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations of Christianity. People were seated in a large hall, their backs to the wall, on all four sides of the room, leaving the center open. Such an arrangement was quite new to Japanese eyes.

Mr. Zhao opened the meeting with words of welcome. Rev. Niwano next introduced Rissho Kosei-kai and its major activities, explaining the purpose of his visit. Then representatives of each of the Chinese religions explained their religious activities in detail to him.

After the meeting, one of the participants said, "Only thanks to Rev. Niwano's visit have we Chinese religionists had the good opportunity to be able to come together and talk."

They said there never had been any such discussions before of transcending the differences in faith found among the people of China. For this unexpected by-product of the meeting, words of appreciation were expressed to Rev. Niwano by several of the Chinese participants. As for membership or participation in the WCRP, however, the domestic situation in China was not yet ripe for it, and no commitment could be obtained from the Chinese in that regard.

Five years later, however, a little before the Third Assembly of the WCRP convened at Princeton, N.J., Rev. Niwano again visited China. This was during the hot summer, but this time he was able to fly directly to Beijing. He focused his attention exclusively on one aim—full Chinese participation in the WCRP—and although he stayed in Beijing for only one day, his enthusiasm for making Chinese participation possible was clear, and was appreciated by the Chinese. The national sentiment about engaging in external affairs had changed in those five years, so Chinese participation was finally realized. With great appreciation for Rev. Niwano's endeavors, Mr. Zhao said, "This is the first time we have been able to attend this kind of world assembly. During the conference we shall need to rely on your kind advice and guidance."



Mass media throughout the world reported the Chinese involvement. One report noted, "Through the participation of China, home to one-fourth of the world's population, the WCRP has indeed become a world conference in reality as well as in name." Since then, religious people in China have earnestly undertaken the work of the WCRP.

Two years after China's first participation in the WCRP, Mr. Zhao again welcomed Rev. Niwano to China, saying, "When WCRP III was held at Princeton, we were indebted to you. Please now enjoy our spring here in Beijing."

At that time, Rev. Niwano was invited to address the audience gathered at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Hall. "The spirit of the WCRP," he said, "is shown clearly in the worship practices of the Bodhisattva Never-Disrespectful."

It is taught in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra that Bodhisattva Never-Disrespectful concentrated on just one practice--namely, worshiping the buddha-nature in others--and he thus attained the enlightenment of a buddha himself, as well as guiding many others to similar enlightenment.

Mr. Zhao recognized the profundity of this view, and saw it represented in Rev. Niwano's unshakable determination and patience, as well as in his positive stance--always seeing the better side of things--and always believing that the best is possible. Mr. Zhao concluded his lecture following Rev. Niwano's address with these words: "If religious people all over the world can put forth their best efforts in this spirit, then world peace will surely be achieved. Rev. Niwano, who taught us so, is my elder brother." Incidentally, Mr. Zhao was one year younger than Rev. Niwano.

Having observed the latter's devotion to the WCRP over the years, Mr. Zhao once said, "It is amazing to see Rev. Niwano's foresight and his remarkable power to implement what he envisions."

Year by year their friendship, based on trust, deepened as their mutual visits continued. In the summer of 1987, Rev. Niwano invited Mr. Zhao to tour Japan after attending the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei near Kyoto. It was an occasion for world religionists to pray for peace succeeding in the spirit of the Day of Prayer for World Peace advocated by Pope John Paul II in 1986 at Assisi, Italy.

At a Rissho Kosei-kai retreat facility in Hotaka, Nagano Prefecture, Rev. Niwano, Mr. Zhao, and Ven. Etai Yamada, 253d head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination (the host of the religious summit), engaged in a three-way dialogue. It covered varied topics, ranging from interreligious cooperation and the road to peace, to the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

During their dialogue, Mr. Zhao happened to notice the Rissho Kosei-kai's Member's Vow. He asked his interpreter to explain it. Given a quick oral translation, Mr. Zhao said to the interpreter, "What wonderful words those are! You had better copy the vow precisely and translate it correctly into Chinese. I want to bring it back to China with me." He was deeply impressed with the content of the vow since it shows clearly how to practice Buddhism.

Explaining his robust health, Mr. Zhao said that he practiced *taijiquan*--a traditional kind of Chinese "shadowboxing"--every morning with his wife. And he slowly demonstrated it. In response, Rev. Niwano showed Mr. Zhao his own way of exercising--sitting on the floor with his legs spread out in front of him, then bending his upper body forward until his chest touched the floor. As they watched the two men exercise, the people around them were surprised at the suppleness of their bodies.

Mr. Zhao was a noted calligrapher of his day. And it is said that he was the leading poet of *Hanpai* (Chinese haiku). During his stay in Japan he was continually brush-writing his daily reflections in verse. He later edited them and presented a small volume of poems to Rev. Niwano.

In China there is a saying: "When drinking water from a well, think about the labor of those who dug it." Mr. Zhao's sensitivity seems thus reflective of the Chinese national character. By the same token, Rev. Niwano reminisced,

"When I first met Mr. Zhao, I repented all that Japan had done during the Sino-Japanese war. He responded, 'Friendship between China and Japan has a history of 2,000 years. A single war is like a quarrel between a husband and wife.' I was quite impressed with the large-mindedness of that big country."

## **"Listening together to Shakyamuni Buddha's sermon on Vulture Peak"**

The following year, 1989, the Fifth World Assembly of the WCRP was held in Melbourne, Australia. The three religious leaders--two from Japan and one from China--attended together. In the busy conference schedule, a three-way talk again was planned.

This time Mr. Zhao said, "In our former lives, we would have been listening together to Shakyamuni Buddha's preaching of the Dharma on Vulture Peak in ancient India, wouldn't we?" Rev. Niwano responded, "It must have been so. And such a relationship continues into our present lives, doesn't it?"

In Chinese, *yi-yi dai shui* refers to "close neighbors separated only by a narrow strip of water," and *xin-xin xiang yin* means "kindred spirits with a mutual affinity." Years later, Mr. Zhao wrote an article in The People's Daily newspaper in China headlined "Buddhist Exchange between China and Japan: Prospect and Retrospect," which contained those two phrases. He mentioned both Rev. Nikkyo Niwano and Ven. Etai Yamada in it by name, and wrote, "Through the efforts of these friends, a 'big tree' of friendship between China and Japan has flourished and grown."

## Chapter 21

### Encounters VI (Ven. Etai Yamada, 253d Tendai Zasu)

#### **Any Good Thing Surely Is Protected by the Gods and the Buddha— Meetings with Ven. Etai Yamada**

"There are three elements to any achievement. First, you have to put forth the utmost effort. Second, you need the assistance and cooperation of others. Further, you must have the protection of the gods and the Buddha. Unless all three come together nothing can be achieved."

In the spring of 1984, the Most Venerable Etai Yamada, the 253d *Tendai Zasu*, head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, made the above affirmation at a meeting of the Japanese Committee of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), and then added by way of explication, "If people live with this belief in mind, that can be called 'the religious life.' And that is the 'truly human life.' The teaching of the unity of these three things is common to all religions."

That year Ven. Yamada reached ninety years of age--*sotsuju* or the age of auspiciousness according to the old Japanese way of naming the decades of our lives. Responding to the congratulations of everyone gathered there, he thus expressed at once the belief which had guided his own life, plus his sincere prayer for religious people to cooperate for world peace as well as for their efforts to obtain divine protection for that quest.

It was the beginning of 1975 when Founder Niwano met Ven. Yamada for the first time. He visited Ven. Yamada at the heavily snow-covered Mount Hiei near Kyoto for a face-to-face talk. At that time Ven. Yamada was said to have felt deeply the "implementation of the Lotus Sutra" in the presence of Rev. Niwano as he talked with him. He also thought highly of how Rev. Niwano rendered the difficult Buddhist teachings in a quite readily comprehensible way and excellently applied them to people's daily lives.

He once said, "Religion should not be mere 'doctrine'; it is to be practiced. Shakyamuni Buddha highly valued *gyochi*, 'wisdom acquired through practice.' 'Nothing other than this,' he even said, 'can be wisdom.' Wisdom obtained through practice is quite precious." Later, he added, "That is the essence of the *hoza* (counseling session)."

In the following year, 1976, the first assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP) was held in Singapore. The two men attended together and their close ties rapidly strengthened.

Ven. Yamada was a man who believed that "the gods and the Buddha surely exist." During the final phase of the Pacific War he was ordered to board a ship that was to send 1,500 junior-high school students from Okinawa to Kyushu for volunteer work in factories. He recollected his experience of that time in the following way.

American submarines were patrolling the sea lanes. So he earnestly prayed for the safety of those children from a possible submarine attack by reciting chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Universal Gate of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World."

"Unless I recited the sutra 75 times each day I was unable to fulfill the pledge that I had made at the beginning of the year to recite the sutra 3,300 times before the ship's departure. I did so wholeheartedly, using all my waking

hours and even some of my time for sleeping. One day while chanting, I noticed the passage in the sutra that says, 'If there are hundreds of thousands of billions of beings [who] go out to sea and a fierce wind blows their ships off course to the land of the ogre-demons, and if among them there is even a single person who calls on the name of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, all those people will be saved from difficulties. . . .' I was thrilled. Until then, though reciting the sutra, I hadn't noticed that the 'single person' of those words--'even a single person'--must mean me, myself! My whole body was shaken. From that day on, my recitation of the sutra became more fervent. All 1,500 students finally reached their destination safely, testimony of the truth of the sutra. Since then, I have believed the sutra with all my heart and without any reservation."

He said, as well, "To recite with deep belief is to invoke the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. Any good thing surely is protected by the gods and the Buddha. Thus does it persist. Bearing in mind what surely lasts, therefore, it is important to tackle things while thinking how they can become reality and what efforts one might make toward that end." Ven. Yamada's creed was this: "To make manifest what the sutra teaches us: that is our faith."

## "The Lotus Sutra which permeates through daily life"

The conversations I witnessed among three prominent religious figures--Ven. Yamada, Rev. Niwano, and Mr. Zhao Puchu, president of the Buddhist Association of China--remain for me a most fruitful memory. [See the 20th installment in this series, entitled "Encounters V: Meetings with Mr. Zhao Puchu.] Gems of thought stand out, as when Founder Niwano remarked once about his teaching style, "When I preach the teaching of Three Thousand Realms in One Mind, I paraphrase it in easily understandable ways, saying, 'If one's own mind changes, others' will change accordingly,' and I guide our members to use the teaching in daily life."

Year by year their friendship, based on trust, deepened as their mutual visits continued. In the summer of 1987, Rev. Niwano invited Mr. Zhao to tour Japan after attending the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei near Kyoto. It was an occasion for world religionists to pray for peace succeeding in the spirit of the Day of Prayer for World Peace advocated by Pope John Paul II in 1986 at Assisi, Italy.

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## **Chapter 22**

### **Encounters VII (Sir John Templeton, Founder of Templeton Prize)**

#### **Having a Long-range Vision– Meetings with Sir John Templeton**

In April 1979, Founder Niwano, with his wife, Naoko, flew to London to receive the 1979 Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion. At Heathrow Airport they were welcomed by the Rev. Dr. Wilbert Forker, executive vice president of the foundation and taken to Claridge's hotel in London's West End.

On the following day, Mr. John M. Templeton, the founder of the foundation, and his wife, Irene, who were staying at the same hotel visited Rev. and Mrs. Niwano's room to greet them. Although it was their first meeting, they enjoyed a friendly chat. Later, the Niwanos made a return visit to Mr. and Mrs. Templeton's room.

Seven days of official events began after this. Between the private award ceremony at Windsor Castle and the public ceremony in London's historic Guildhall, there was a press conference attended by journalists from many countries. Mr. Templeton was also present, and remained sitting quietly to the side throughout the event, listening attentively to the questions and answers.

Perhaps he had read a good deal about Rev. Niwano during the screening for the prize recipient, and after Founder Niwano's arrival he spoke several times with him, so he should have known quite a bit about him. Still, he was very eager to learn more about the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Mr. Templeton, who had achieved great success as an American investment counselor and financial analyst, had long pondered the role of religion in the twentieth century as a pious Christian. The more success he achieved in the financial field, the more he recognized the importance of developing the religious and spiritual element. He felt that while Nobel Prizes are awarded to people who have made remarkable contributions in fields such as physics, chemistry, economics, medical science, and literature, there was no prize for significant, lasting contributions in the field of religion. He wanted to honor such contributions and established the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion in 1972 for that purpose.

The award to Rev. Niwano honored his remarkable contribution to "the promotion of peace activities through interreligious cooperation." Rev. Niwano thus became the first Buddhist recipient of the prize.

Prior to the ceremony, the founder said, "This award, as I understand it, also includes my colleagues in the World Conference on Religion and Peace, who devote themselves to religious cooperation for peace, as well as to all of my fellow members of Rissho Kosei-kai who support my efforts from behind the scenes. I will receive the prize as the representative of all of them."

At the private ceremony in Windsor Castle, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, said, "I am very happy to be able to present the seventh Templeton Prize for the first time to a Buddhist." And he extended his hand to Rev. Niwano and congratulated him. Mr. Templeton, who was present, happily nodded in agreement.

Ten years passed, a decade during which Mr. Templeton was knighted by Queen Elizabeth and became "Sir John." In 1989, Rissho Kosei-kai was asked by the Templeton Foundation to host a public ceremony for the awarding of

the foundation prize in Fumon Hall at the organization's Tokyo headquarters. The foundation wished to hold the ceremony in a different country, alternating with England, every two years. There were two prize recipients that year, a German physicist, Dr. Carl von Weizsaecker, and a Scottish Protestant minister, the Very Rev. Lord MacLeod. The ceremony was held in June. Their acceptance addresses were delivered to very large audience from several nations, among whom were diplomats, religious leaders, scholars, and important figures from the business world. Sir John and Lady Templeton visited Risho Kosei-kai headquarters for the first time.

Among the various activities that took place at that time was a tour by the representatives of the Templeton Foundation of the main facilities of Risho Kosei-kai. In the corridor of the main hall of Horin-kaku guest hall is a painting of the modest, thatch-roofed farmhouse that was the birthplace of Rev. Niwano. In front of that picture, I explained to the visitors, "Founder Niwano was born in this house, and now, as you have seen, he is working globally." The members of the party seemed to better understand what Rev. Niwano had accomplished in his life through this than through any detailed description.

The guests continued their tour in a large bus, visiting the Great Sacred Hall, the Kosei-Gakuen Boys' Junior and Senior High Schools, the birthplace of Risho Kosei-kai, the Gyogaku-en (library and seminary), Kosei Publishing Company, Kosei Advanced Nursing School, Kosei General Hospital, and the Second Group Pilgrimage Hall. After viewing these facilities, Sir John expressed his impression with feeling: "For Rev. Niwano to have achieved so much in his lifetime is truly remarkable. He must be a man with a long-range vision." Sir John also achieved a great deal, in his case in business, and established the award that became popularly known as the "Nobel Prize in religion." According to an old Japanese proverb, one great man can understand another great man. Sir John's comment was impressive.

After the Templetons returned home, Sir John sent a cordial personal letter of thanks to Rev. Niwano.

## Chapter 23

### Encounters VIII (Mr. Jimmy Carter, President of the United States)

#### **A Lifetime Dedicated to Peace— Meetings with U.S. President Jimmy Carter**

It was on September 6, 1979 that Founder Niwano first met Jimmy Carter, then the president of the United States. The meeting was arranged just before the closing of the Third Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP III), which had been convened at Princeton, New Jersey.

"If we are serious about world peace, we should be appealing directly to the top," the founder said. "Since the WCRP conference is going to be held in the United States, let us try to schedule a meeting with President Carter."

Accordingly, Rev. Niwano set about it, with the cooperation of other WCRP officers. The plan came to fruition. During WCRP III, a so-called "Washington Day" was scheduled. It was arranged for all participants in the third assembly to visit the White House and meet with President Jimmy Carter, the leader of one of the two "superpowers" at that time. They wanted to discuss with him, in the name of the WCRP, what world religious leaders were striving to do, and what they hoped that he would do, for world peace.

On the morning of that day, a quite unexpected setback occurred. A major hurricane suddenly hit the U.S. East Coast. All the airports were closed. Many trees on both sides of the highway to Washington, D.C., were knocked down or damaged by the strong winds. Even veteran drivers hesitated to get behind the steering wheel. Under these circumstances, it took us many hours to travel just the few hundred kilometers to Washington in Rev. Niwano's car. Yet, as we arrived in the capital area, the storm passed and clear blue skies suddenly appeared.

The meeting with President Carter went very well. The WCRP officers asked him to think seriously about what the WCRP was trying to do for the cause of world peace. The president responded most positively. High hopes and broad smiles spread among everyone in the room. Rev. Niwano and Mr. Carter then shook hands warmly and the president placed his arm around Rev. Niwano's shoulders. Rosalynn Carter, the president's wife, also shook hands with each WCRP representative. Smiling, she spoke with Rev. Nichiko Niwano, then president-designate of Risho Kosei-kai, as well as with Yoshie Niwano, his wife. A White House reception then took place, followed by animated, happy conversation among those who were present.

The drive back to the hotel in New York also took a long time. While the people in the car were happy about the events of the day, and continued to smile about them, Rev. Niwano added a sobering comment. Apparently thinking of the storm that had struck earlier in the day, he said, "On the way to Washington, I was chanting *dharanis* silently in the car." (*Dharanis* are chanted by Lotus Sutra devotees when seeking protection from possible hazards.)

The encounter at the White House immediately produced lasting ties between the peace-loving president and Rev. Niwano. The twentieth anniversary of the founding of the WCRP was celebrated in October 1990 at the Kyoto International Conference Hall, which had also been the venue of the very first World Assembly of the WCRP. Despite an extremely busy schedule, Mr. Carter flew from Atlanta, Georgia, to Osaka and then was taken on the expressway to the conference hall. After hurriedly changing clothes, former President Carter delivered the commemorative address. After his speech, a joint statement from the Carter Center and the WCRP entitled "Peace



and Freedom of the World" was issued. Mr. Carter then autographed the joint statement, together with Rev. Niwano, representing their two organizations and both using the same pen. After their joint press conference, Mr. Carter was finally able to relax, and joined in conversation with the WCRP delegates.

Each time he visited Japan, not only when he came for official WCRP events, Mr. Carter made a point of meeting and talking with Rev. Niwano. In 1988, the year marking the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, Mrs. Carter came to the Great Sacred Hall in May, and then, in September, Mr. and Mrs. Carter together visited the Horin-kaku Guest Hall, both of which are located at the organization's headquarters in Tokyo. They came as representatives of the International Mediation Network for Conflict Resolution, based in Atlanta.

After having spoken about world peace with Founder Niwano and President Niwano, the Carters strolled with them to view the photographs and mementos on display as a part of the commemorative events for the anniversary celebration. Standing before a photograph from Rissho Kosei-kai's founding period, Mr. Carter smilingly said to Rev. Nichiko Niwano, "In those days, your father looked just like you do today."

This renewed contact deepened their intimacy and friendship, sharing as they did a common sense of mission for world peace.

On another occasion when Mr. Carter met Rev. Niwano, he skipped the usual formalities and asked directly, "So how is your son doing these days?"

A man with a strong bent toward peace, Mr. Carter is admired among many in the United States as the most distinguished former president, and internationally he is praised for his continuing efforts toward resolving regional conflicts throughout the world. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his outstanding dedication in this regard in 2002.

Nor has he failed to publicize the WCRP. One lecture he delivered on European television in which he made reference to the work of the WCRP has been shown in Japan.

## **Chapter 24**

### **Encounters IX (Mr. Varahagiri V. Giri, President of India)**

#### **Changing Pessimists into Optimists– Meeting with Mr. Varahagiri V. Giri**

In April 1971, one year after the First World Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) was convened in Kyoto, a meeting of its officers was held in the Indian capital of New Delhi. At that time, WCRP officers visited Mr. Varahagiri Venkata Giri, then president of India, at his official residence.

The president smiled warmly when he met the visitors. Mr. Giri was not only a devoted follower of the Hindu faith, but also a deeply sincere humanist. From that standpoint, he evaluated the first assembly of the WCRP held in Kyoto highly and expressed his appreciation for the contributions of the Japanese hosts of the assembly.

"It is no longer a time for religions to compete for superiority over one another," Mr. Giri said. "Instead, it is the time for religions as a whole, mobilizing spiritual energy, to tackle the real problems of the world. In that sense, what the WCRP is doing is really excellent."

During his talk with Rev. Niwano, Mr. Giri might have felt something in common with him. He said that he was an optimist: "I have hope in the future of humankind. When I talk with pessimists, I always persuade them to change and become optimists."

For the president of a nation like India, with a population of several hundreds of millions of people, many of them suffering from economic deprivation, he was a very jovial person. He seemed to be enjoying the conversation, smiling throughout the meeting with the WCRP officers. Sitting comfortably in his chair with his legs crossed, he looked quite at ease.

In their own work, religious people also need to be optimists. They need to deal positively with their tasks and to turn on a bright light in the minds of others. If the circle of such people widens, society in general becomes brighter and contributes to the achievement of a peaceful world. Being an optimist himself, and usually considering things in a similar way, Rev. Niwano heartily agreed with Mr. Giri's views and shook hands enthusiastically with him.

## **Chapter 25**

### **Encounters X (Dr. Gustav Heineman, President of West Germany)**

#### **I Admire the Efforts You All Are Making– Meeting with Dr. Gustav Heineman, then President of West Germany**

In the summer of 1972, the next important world figure whom Founder Niwano met was Dr. Gustav Heineman, then president of West Germany, at his official residence in Bonn.

As a possible venue for the Second World Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP II), the United States, Europe, and Africa had been proposed. Among them, Europe had a centuries-long history of Christianity divided into two streams, Catholicism and Protestantism, and also the long East-West confrontation between the socialist countries and democratic countries was still in effect at that time. The symbol of this was the divided city of Berlin.

The WCRP hoped to hold its Second World Assembly in Berlin. With that expectation in mind, Rev. Niwano, Dr. Greeley, and a few other WCRP officers visited President Heinemann.

Before his inauguration, the West German president had been a leader of a Protestant denomination and was very enthusiastic about movements for world peace. Turning his kind eyes to the top leaders of the WCRP, he listened attentively to their explanation about WCRP I in Kyoto in 1970 and their expectations for the Second Assembly.

"That really sounds like a historic conference that was held in Kyoto" Mr. Heinemann told them. "I admire the efforts you all have been making."

He then ventured as his personal opinion, "As the venue for WCRP II, where religious leaders from all over the world are to gather for peace, Berlin would be a most appropriate place."

The allotted time of 30 minutes for the meeting passed in what seemed like an instant and actually twice that much time was allowed. This was quite exceptional for such a meeting with the president.

This was long before the reunification of the two Germanys, of course, and the brutal act of terrorism that had unexpectedly occurred at the Munich Olympics threatened new dangers. As a result, WCRP II was not held in Berlin. However, the encounter with President Heinemann, a distinguished gentleman who had more the air of a man of religion than of a statesman, was one that greatly impressed Rev. Niwano.

## **Chapter 26**

### **(Dr. Richard von Weizsacker, President of Germany Founding Period II**

#### **If I Can Be of Help, Let Me Know— Meetings with Dr. Richard von Weizsacker**

A week after the meeting with President Heinemann in the summer of 1972, Founder Niwano met another distinguished German political leader.

This was Dr. Richard von Weizsacker, who later also became president of West Germany, and then after reunification, president of all Germany. This meeting was in Utrecht, Holland, where Dr. Weizsacker was attending a large convention of the World Council of Churches (WCC). It was the second time for Rev. Niwano to meet him.

The first time was in 1969 in Tokyo when Dr. von Weizsacker visited Rev. Niwano in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters.

Since he had been an enthusiastic participant in lay religious movements and in promoting cooperative activities between Catholics and Protestants, Dr. von Weizsacker felt he had much in common with what Rev. Niwano told him about the activities of Rissho Kosei-kai, as well as the idea of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) aiming at interreligious cooperation for peace. At that time, he was virtually the German representative of the WCC, and naturally showed strong interest in the WCRP.

On that occasion, he said, "I have read about the WCRP in the newspaper. Please tell me more about its World Assembly. And if there is anything I can do to be of help with it, please let me know."

Rev. Niwano responded, "Now is the time that religious people of the world can exert their cooperative strength for peace. When we reflect on the events of World War II, the mission of Japan and Germany is especially important, I think."

Rev. Niwano drew closer to Dr. von Weizsacker and spoke passionately as he handed printed materials about the WCRP to him. Their meeting in Utrecht for the second time took place three years after this. WCRP I had already borne historic fruit and there was strong participation in it by German religious leaders. As the meeting this time took place on the way to the Second World Assembly, it stands to reason that the conversation became very lively.

Twelve years later, in 1984, Dr. von Weizsacker became president. The following year was the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. On that occasion, the president addressed the Federal Parliament in Bonn. Referring to Germany's responsibility for World War II, he made the following moving statement that received wide attention around the world. "Those who close their eyes to the past are also blind to the present."

His term as president continued through 1994, during which time East Germany and West Germany ended their separation of nearly fifty years and achieved a peaceful, historic reunification. Not only among the German people, but also among world leaders in many fields, Dr. von Weizsacker is highly regarded as an excellent president whose name will go down in history.

When he visited Japan in 1995 on the occasion of events commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, "Learning from History: Toward a New Era," Dr. von Weizsacker spoke of the importance of the contribution to the world that nations without large armies could make.

In 1989, acceptance lectures for the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion were delivered by the two recipients of that year at a public ceremony convened in Fumon Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. That year, in order to make the prize and its purpose better known in Asia, the Foundation decided to hold the public ceremony in Japan, and requested Rissho Kosei-kai to host it. This was ten years after the award of the same prize to Founder Niwano.

One of the recipients in 1989 was the Very Rev. Lord MacLeod, a Scottish Christian minister. The other was Dr. Carl Friedrich von Weizsacker, the elder brother of President von Weizsacker and a world-renowned physicist and philosopher. The elder brother's major field was natural science, while that of the younger brother was politics. Their main lines of work were different but both were deeply committed to religion and very earnest in their peace activities, which were widely known not only in Germany, but also elsewhere in Europe.

It was on the occasion of a conversation for the September 1989 issue of the monthly Rissho Kosei-kai magazine *Kosei* that Rev. Niwano met for the first time with the elder brother before he delivered the acceptance speech of the prize. When the editor showed the latter a copy of the organization's newspaper from 1969 in which photograph of his younger brother appeared together with an accompanying article, Dr. Carl Friedrich pointed his finger at the photograph of Dr. Richard and said to Rev. Niwano impishly with a laugh, "I know this person very well."

Rev. Niwano responded, "Your younger brother is continuing his excellent work as president. You two are a remarkable pair of brothers."

Their talk began with humor and smiles, ranged over various topics such as the interreligious cooperation of the WCRP and WCC, as well as science and religion.

A large audience of people from many fields heard the acceptance speeches of the recipients delivered in Fumon Hall. At the reception which followed, held in the Second Group Pilgrimage Hall, Founder Niwano, President and Mrs. Nichiko Niwano and their eldest daughter, Kosho, all attended together. It became an occasion for happy conversation with Dr. von Weizsacker, Sir John and Lady Templeton, and many other dignitaries taking part.

## Chapter 27

### Dialogue I

In the Rissho Kosei-kai monthly periodical *Kosei*, Founder Niwano for several decades published a series of dialogues - one per issue, for a total of 343. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the publication, in June 1990, the 332d such dialogue appeared. Talks with numerous prominent individuals from various fields, both in Japan and abroad, were featured in many of the episodes.

#### **"I am enjoying this feast of conversation"**

The talk with Dr. Hideki Yukawa, a physicist and Japan's very first Nobel laureate, was held at a traditional Japanese restaurant in Kyoto on the theme of "Looking for a Key to Peace." Including the remarks of the moderator, Professor Takeshi Umehara, a philosopher, the dialogue was published in the September and October 1970 issues.

After the guests had been served some sake, the talk became happily animated. Rev. Niwano, wearing a Japanese kimono, spoke of the mission of religious people, and Dr. Yukawa addressed the point of contact between religion and science in the highly advanced society of the present day. Professor Umehara, who in a sense stands between religion and science, skillfully moderated the discussion.

As the three men were enjoying their conversation, a waitress noticed that only traces of food remained on a few of the dishes and courteously asked, "Shall we bring out some more dishes?"

"No, thank you," replied Dr. Yukawa, "I am fully enjoying this feast of conversation. It is filling enough, without anything more to eat." Dr. Yukawa then turned back to the dialogue participants and was soon again engrossed in conversation. The scene, as well as the content of their talk, was well remembered by the members of the editorial staff who were present.

In the May 1971 issue, a dialogue with Dr. Shigeru Sakakibara, a professor at Tokyo Women's Medical University, the leading cardiac surgeon in Japan at that time, appeared. It was his conviction that however medical science may advance, no genuine cures can be achieved unless the heart of the doctor is linked with that of the patient.

In their talk, Dr. Sakakibara found many points in common with the opinions of Rissho Kosei-kai's founder and quickly discovered a kindred spirit in him.

He suggested that they should play golf together. After they had played a few times, Dr. Sakakibara was even more impressed by Rev. Niwano's personality. He offered to lend his assistance to Kosei General Hospital, affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai.

By chance, the director of the hospital at that time was Dr. Toshio Onoda, who turned out to have been a fellow-student of Dr. Sakakibara's in the Faculty of Medicine at what was then Tokyo Imperial University, so things went quite smoothly when he visited the hospital.

The editor of *Kosei* from that time remembers those days: "Dr. Sakakibara was a humble, well-mannered gentleman. His everyday speech was exceptionally polite. We felt that his goodwill toward and respect for Founder Niwano were reflected even in the way he related to us."

Before long, a cardio surgery ward was established at Kosei General Hospital. In addition to bringing some surgeons who were his former students to the hospital, he even performed operations there himself and diligently made rounds, visiting the patients. It is said that before a surgical operation he would first worship at the hospital altar in front of the image of the Buddha.

## "The world is my home"

Rev. Niwano "encountered" Dr. Shin'ichiro Imaoka, president of the Free Religious Association of Japan, at a round-table discussion entitled "The Age of Inter-Religious Cooperation Has Come." (Their discussion was published in the December 1965 issue of *Kosei*.) "Encounter" (*deai* in Japanese) was a favorite term of Dr. Imaoka's.

Dr. Imaoka and Rev. Niwano had first met in the late 1950s. In those days, at meetings of the Japan Council for Inter-faith Cooperation, Dr. Imaoka noted Rev. Niwano's great passion for religious cooperation, as well as his remarkable efforts toward that end.

"The world is my home" was virtually Dr. Imaoka's slogan. He was fond of reading history, and was especially keen on Arnold Toynbee's belief that we need not distinguish between the ancient, medieval, and modern ages, since all ages are the present to the historian. Dr. Imaoka once referred to the pleasure of reading history and contemplating historical events and persons in his study: "When I look at history with my mind's eye, the actions of heroes, saints, wise men, and ordinary people from ancient times to modern times in the East and West are developed before me. It is my greatest happiness to come into contact with all of humankind."

Although he was a man of quite small stature, he had a broad vision which allowed him to see and understand Rev. Niwano's "bigness." Therefore Dr. Imaoka was keenly responsive to the founder's ideal of interreligious cooperation. It is well known that later, Dr. Imaoka introduced Dr. Dana MacLean Greeley, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, to Rev. Niwano, and that "encounter" helped lead to the establishment of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). (See the installment on Dr. Greeley, number 18).

Dr. Imaoka graduated from Tokyo Imperial University at the beginning of the twentieth century, and then from the Harvard Divinity School in the United States. He was a pioneer of religious liberalism in Japan. Several of his talks with Rev. Niwano were published in the *Kosei Shimbun* newspaper. On such occasions, Dr. Imaoka sometimes said that it had been his decades-long dream to hold the World Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in Japan. He always added that there was no one other than Rev. Niwano who could make it come true. That dream of his was realized by the 25th World Congress of the IARF, held in Tokyo in 1984. At that time, Rev. Niwano was the president of the international organization.

Dr. Imaoka addressed the opening ceremony of that Congress--held in the main auditorium of Fumon Hall and attended by some 5,000 people, including 800 delegates from 22 countries around the world. He began by reading a few lines from his prepared text written in Japanese, then suddenly stopped. The audience held its collective breath. After a momentary pause, he resumed his speech extemporaneously in excellent, fluent English. Dr. Imaoka had been born in Japan in 1881. By this time, he was already well over one hundred years old. His English, which he had studied since the nineteenth century, was vivid and clear--to the wonderment of the entire audience. It was admired not only by native English speakers from Great Britain, the United States, and Canada, but of course by everyone else as well. When he finished his speech, resounding applause echoed throughout the huge hall.

Rev. Niwano's talk with Dr. Soshitsu Sen 15th Grand Tea Master of the Urasenke School in northern Kyoto, was titled "Utilizing Tradition in the Present Day." (It was published in the November 1970 issue.)

Dr. Sen wore kimono, and he elegantly served ceremonial tea to Rev. Niwano, according to the *Otemae* ritual. His first words to Rev. Niwano were naturally a graceful introduction to his discussion of the "Way of Tea" and its history--beginning with the sentiments of *wabi* and *sabi* (peculiarly Japanese concepts of simplicity and elegance). Then they discussed the spirit of Buddhism. This was, by chance, the time of the First World Assembly of the WCRP, then being held in Kyoto. Rev. Niwano spoke a great deal about peace.

Dr. Sen said, "What are you doing is putting into practice the *wakei* (peace and respect) that is esteemed together with *seijaku* (purity and tranquillity) in the Way of Tea. Don't you think so?"

And he referred to the following words of Dogen, the Japanese Zen master: "To learn the Buddha Way is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget oneself."

Rev. Niwano responded, "Well, Shakyamuni Buddha, who himself taught us all of the teachings, says, 'I preach not even a single word.'"

So the conversation of these two men of one mind continued without pause--such that the moderator sitting beside them could not get in a single word.

There is one contrary example, however. With Rev. Mumon Yamada, president of Hanazono University, the title was, "World Peace Is to Be Built with the Spirit of Buddhism." (This was published in the December 1970 issue.) Yet, although each had read several books by the other before their talk, the moderator was unable to pull Rev. Yamada into the topic from the beginning. Finally, after they had digressed for awhile, the tense atmosphere was eased as both Rev. Yamada and Rev. Niwano spoke of their recollections, and of their excitement upon visiting various sacred Buddhist sites in India. That led in time to their referring to the very points at issue--which people face today. So by the end of their talk they found they were mutually congenial spirits and concluded together that those who hold the key to peace are people of religion and that they should strive further toward that end.

Twenty years after that dialogue, a sequel to the story arose from Kyushu in southern Japan. Both the minister and the men's division head of Risho Kosei-kai's Nakatsu Church wanted to form a council of local religious leaders to help the WCRP movement, which their revered teacher, Founder Niwano, had been actively promoting.

They visited several Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and Christian churches in the area. At first their appeals on behalf of interreligious cooperation were not well received and they obtained no positive response whatever. They felt discouraged.

Yet, just at this time they visited Rev. Zuisho Sasaki, a senior priest of the Myoshinji branch of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. Rev. Sasaki told them, "When Rev. Niwano talked with Rev. Yamada, I was accompanying my teacher (Rev. Yamada) as his aide, and I listened to their dialogue from behind the sliding door of the next room while awaiting him. Hearing to Rev. Niwano's words, I felt intuitively that there was no one else who could make world religions cooperate with one spirit as he could. So I will go along with whatever you are planning to do."

At this, the two (the minister and the head of the men's division) were greatly encouraged. Next, they visited Rev. Kinshiro Kawabe, principal of the Roman Catholic Don Bosco Junior High School. They learned that Rev. Kawabe had served the Holy See during the Second Vatican Council, and that when he had heard that a Japanese Buddhist had been invited to the council for the first time, he had happily welcomed Rev. Niwano there.

They then visited Chief Priest Katsuhiko Akinaga of the Kumo-hachiman Shinto shrine. He had attended the third world assembly of the WCRP as a representative of the Association of Shinto Shrines. Thus continued their encounters. It was as if everyone was welcoming the two Risho Kosei-kai church leaders with the feeling that their visits had been awaited.

The Council of Niho Religious People was established in the autumn of 1991 in the spirit of "transcending sect-mindedness" and talking about religion to one another. The inaugural meeting was attended by many people from



the Shinto, Buddhist, Christian, and other faiths. The Council engaged frequently in volunteer activities and mutual visitations among member groups. In the following year, 1992, the sixteen principal member groups all visited Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo, headed by Rev. Sasaki as the president of the Council, and met with Rev. Niwano. For several of the visitors, it was the occasion for a happy reunion with the founder.

## Chapter 28

### Dialogue II

#### "The Lotus Sutra is needed by the entire world"

In June 1983, Founder Niwano visited the Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago, which had awarded him an honorary doctor of laws degree some years earlier. At the school, he met and talked with the then dean, Dr. Gene Reeves.

He spent a long time with Dr. Reeves, talking with him extensively about the Lotus Sutra. Dr. Reeves had studied Buddhism in his younger days as a university student. Before Rev. Niwano's visit, he had read the autobiography and other writings by Founder Niwano. As well as being impressed by the founder himself through their conversation, Dr. Reeves seemed to become more deeply interested in the Lotus Sutra. He then read Rev. Niwano's *Buddhism for Today*, his one-volume commentary on the Lotus Sutra, and began studying the sutra in depth.

In the autumn of the same year, Dr. Reeves was invited to come to Japan to speak at a ceremony in the Great Sacred Hall celebrating Founder Niwano's 77th birthday on November 15. During that visit, he met with Rev. Niwano and during their conversation expressed the hope that some expert might be able to lecture on the Lotus Sutra at Meadville/Lombard and the University of Chicago. Sometime later he was introduced to Professor Yoshiro Tamura, formerly of the University of Tokyo, who was a leading scholar of Tendai Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra. Before long, Professor Tamura went to Chicago to give a brief series of lectures at Meadville/Lombard. Those lectures impressed faculty members as well as students so much that he was invited to return the next year to teach for a term at the university. During these and subsequent meetings between Professor Tamura and Dr. Reeves, a mutual friendship developed in which Dr. Reeves' knowledge of and appreciation for the Lotus Sutra were greatly enhanced.

In subsequent years Dr. Reeves' enthusiasm for the Lotus Sutra continued to deepen, and he devoted more and more time to studying it. One day, on hearing Dr. Reeves' interpretation of a main point of the Lotus Sutra, Rev. Niwano, much impressed, said, "He has quite an excellent and deep understanding."

Several years later, Dr. Reeves moved from Chicago to Tokyo to continue his studies, and to learn Japanese and Chinese. Soon, he was writing and lecturing about the Lotus Sutra on various occasions to English-speaking audiences of many nationalities. To Asian young people, he taught how the Lotus Sutra "teaches the unity of wisdom, compassion, and implementation." For speeches and lectures at various academic and religious conferences, he always chose some aspect of the Lotus Sutra as his theme, often referring to the practice of Buddhism in Rissho Kosei-kai.

In 1992, when President Nichiko Niwano was awarded an honorary doctor of theology degree by Meadville/Lombard, the presentation ceremony was held in Fumon Hall in Tokyo. Speaking in Japanese about the Lotus Sutra and Founder Niwano, Dr. Reeves said that Rissho Kosei-kai is the very place to practice the Bodhisattva Way and to learn living wisdom. Leaders of Rissho Kosei-kai who had gathered from all over the country listened very attentively and were deeply moved.

In 1994, the year when the Hoju Vocational College for Women in Tokyo was opened, Dr. Reeves delivered a special lecture to the students, together with Dr. Malcolm Sutherland, a former president and dean of Meadville/Lombard who held those positions when Founder Niwano was awarded his honorary degree from the

school. At that time Dr. Reeves said, "The Lotus Sutra is a message for the whole world--a message of harmony through respect and generosity which is needed by the entire world."

"Founder Niwano is one of the great rediscoverers of the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra," he said, "a person of our time comparable to great discoverers of the meaning of the Lotus Sutra of other times and places, especially, perhaps, Vasubandhu of India; Kumarajiva from Central Asia; Zhiyi of Tiantai Buddhism in China; Saicho, the founder of Tendai Buddhism; and Nichiren Shonin in Japan. . . . For Rissho Kosei-kai, part of what it means to be an organization of laypeople is that ordinary people can share the profound meaning of the Dharma through their own devotion. . . . The Lotus Sutra has come from the Buddha, through others, to (Founder) Niwano, to Rissho Kosei-kai, to you for sharing with others throughout the world. . . . So I salute you this morning--as vehicles of the Wonderful Dharma, the Buddha's children, as young bodhisattvas, even as buddhas!"

After the lecture, the Hoju students were quite excited about hearing this testimonial from a distinguished scholar from overseas. Their teachers were surprised at the degree of the students' enthusiasm.

Dr. Reeves' lecturing on the Lotus Sutra has extended from Asia to America and Europe. Sometimes papers by him have been presented at the series of meetings of the International Conference on the Lotus Sutra in Japan for scholars of Buddhism and other religions hosted by Rissho Kosei-kai.

In Japan, in addition to serving as a professor at the University of Tsukuba for several years, Dr. Reeves has held a regular lecture series called the "Dharma Seminar" at Rissho Kosei-kai facilities, which non-Japanese residents as well as Japanese, having seen announcements in the daily newspapers, attended to learn about the Lotus Sutra. He is often invited to speak on the sutra to groups not connected with Rissho Kosei-kai, most recently holding a brief series at St. Alban's Anglican Church in Tokyo. A group of Rissho Kosei-kai volunteers called "LS" (for "Language Service"), who provide assistance in English to participants in various international conferences and to foreign visitors to Rissho Kosei-kai, are also learning from Dr. Reeves at lecture classes. At Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary, Japanese students preparing to be leaders of the organization study the Lotus Sutra in English with Dr. Reeves. Most recently, Dr. Reeves has been giving Dharma talks in English on Sundays at the newly formed International Buddhist Congregation of Rissho Kosei-kai.

The number of such lectures by Dr. Reeves now totals over 400, given in Japan and several other countries. Many have now been published in journals and books. His articles on the stories in the Lotus Sutra are now appearing in each issue of Rissho Kosei-kai's English-language magazine *Dharma World*. He has also recently completed a new translation from Chinese into English of the entire Threefold Lotus Sutra, a translation which is certain to have a strong impact on English-speaking followers of the Lotus Sutra, as well as on quite a few Japanese. It all began with his encounter with Rev. Niwano.

## Chapter 29

### Meals

#### **"I'm proud of the family who invited you"**

First, I would like to tell you an episode that occurred when he was abroad, in the early 1970s in New York, while attending an international meeting of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). Founder Niwano, along with two of us, his aides, was invited to a Thanksgiving Day feast by a religious American family. The time at which we were scheduled to arrive at their home was a little too late for lunch and a little too early for dinner. We wondered what we should do about lunch. If we had lunch as usual before going, we might not be able to enjoy the feast properly, which would be impolite to the host family, we felt. If we didn't eat then, however, we might be very hungry by the time the meal was served. "How about ordering one sandwich and sharing it among the three of us," someone suggested. Portions in America are much larger than is usual in Japan. So it was agreed to share a sandwich.

We went down to the coffee shop in the hotel where we were staying. I explained frankly to the middle-aged waitress what we were thinking--three adult men ordering one item for all of them together. We wondered what her response would be. Somewhat curious, we looked at her expression. With her hands on her hips she nodded, and then with a smile said, "As an American, I am proud of the family who invited you Japanese gentlemen to dinner." And she went on, "OK, one sandwich! Enjoy it, and take your time!" She said this in a cheerful voice.

Our host family for Thanksgiving was most hospitable. Still, the words and the smile of the coffee shop waitress also were one memorable aspect of our visit to the United States.

#### **Enjoying Good Local Foods**

Because of his busy travel schedule, Rev. Niwano sometimes ordered breakfast from room service in the hotels where we were staying. We ordered it for a proper time following the regular morning sutra recitation. This meant avoiding a waste of time, and also a waste of food as we ordered slightly fewer portions than the number of people who would be eating, because the amount of food served in the U.S. seemed a little too much. Sometimes we even skipped a meal. On the other hand, this kind of breakfast gave us time before the day's activities to go out for a walk in a nearby park, bringing a few small pieces of bread to feed the squirrels or pigeons. Some of the pictures taken by the photographer who accompanied us later appeared in Risho Kosei-kai publications.

When he invited guests to lunch or dinner, Rev. Niwano took sufficient time to enjoy the meal and the conversation that also often was substantial. This deepened mutual understanding and friendship, and helped to promote joint activities.

From time to time he was asked what he liked to eat. To that question, Rev. Niwano used to respond, "I enjoy eating anything that is a local specialty, whatever it may be." He did not talk about his own likes and dislikes. Rather he was always considerate of others and asked them to choose what they liked.

When traveling overseas, if he thought that other Japanese religious leaders in the party would be longing for Japanese food, he made arrangements for them to eat at a Japanese restaurant. Drinking sake together, they enjoyed talking about religion, peace, and related topics. Similarly, on domestic tours when young staff-members were accompanying him, he ordered meat dishes that he knew they would like. He sometimes told them with a smile, "When I was a boy, from time to time I took part in contests to see who could eat the most rice cakes

stuffed with bean jam. And I never lost!" Thus Founder Niwano created a relaxed atmosphere in which they did not have to feel uneasy but could enjoy their meal.

In the postwar reconstruction period of the late 1940s, special meals were provided after important events at Rissho Kosei-kai to show appreciation to those who had worked on the event. On the tatami straw mats of the Second Training Hall's main floor were many rows of long boards serving as makeshift tables, on which many plates were placed. Those plates held a variety of foods, including steamed sweet potatoes, Japanese *oden*, and other simple home-cooked dishes, to be enjoyed along with sake. All the meals were prepared by Cofounder Myoko Naganuma and women leaders of the organization with heartfelt gratitude.

At a still vigorous age, Rev. Niwano would sometimes become engrossed in conversation during such meals and after a while refer to his dreams for Rissho Kosei-kai. He even sometimes stood up and with enthusiastic gestures made a fervent speech.

Every year in October, Rissho Kosei-kai holds the Oeshiki Festival to mark the anniversary of the death of Nichiren, the eminent 12th-century Buddhist priest who fervently advocated the Lotus Sutra despite severe persecution. The festival is now held on the Sunday closest to the actual anniversary, October 12. On one such occasion, young people as well as older men who had carried the *matoi* (traditional Japanese firemen's standards) and *mando* (portable pagodas) in the day's Oeshiki parade gave voice to exuberant shouts of joy. The general atmosphere became lively, and all those gathered pledged further diligence in the days to come.

In the late 1950s, a leader of a large religious organization visited Rissho Kosei-kai. After he had talked with Founder Niwano, it was time for lunch. Various dishes were brought in. It was just after the visitor's recovery from a stomach operation, so the amount he could eat was limited. Rev. Niwano later murmured, "He has good manners. He tried a little from each dish." Apparently Rev. Niwano had recognized the courtesy of the guest toward his host and his consideration for the cook who had prepared the good dishes.

"Let me tell you how to prepare noodles"

One day during a dissemination tour in a rural area of Japan, Rev. Niwano was going from one city to another when it came time for lunch, and he went into a *soba* noodle shop. A local reporter for the *Kosei Shimbun* newspaper was among those accompanying him. While waiting for the noodles to be served, Rev. Niwano said that *soba* was especially tasty if prepared in a certain way. He explained the correct procedure for preparing *soba*, using a lot of gestures.

The reporter was surprised at hearing this. He was a man from an area famous for its *soba* and was rather knowledgeable about how to prepare it. He found that Rev. Niwano was quite an expert on *soba*. "I knew before that Rev. Niwano was originally from Niigata Prefecture and is fond of *soba*," the reporter said, "but I didn't know that he knew so much! He really knows so many things!"

Incidentally, this reporter later changed his field of work to engage in dissemination activities and worked for many years as a Rissho Kosei-kai minister.

## **“Why don’t you come to my house from now?”**

One day in the latter half of the 1960s, a scholar who was planning to write a character sketch of Rev. Niwano visited him at the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai Tokyo headquarters for an interview. He had lots of questions and earnestly asked them of the founder. Rev. Niwano, at his ease, frankly answered each of them. Time passed. Then the scholar asked, "May I learn the daily routine at your home?" It was almost sundown. "I am going back home soon," Rev. Niwano said. "If it is convenient for you, why don't you come with me?"

At home, he began the evening's sutra recitation with his family in the living room as usual. The scholar sat behind them, watching and listening to the recitation. After this, the interview resumed in a different room and soon it was time for the evening meal. "Let's dine together," Rev. Niwano said, and the guest was invited to join the family's evening meal. Among the dishes served were boiled potatoes and other vegetables with soy sauce, roast fish, *miso* soup, and rice. It was just an ordinary home meal. As the scholar was an unexpected guest, they neither prepared a special menu for him nor expressed false modesty about the simple food. It was a typical meal such as they usually had.

Enjoying the meal, Rev. Niwano continued to respond to the scholar's questions with a smile. It was a scene which recalled his boyhood days in his hometown of Tokamachi in Niigata Prefecture, where his parents and grandfather used to extend courtesy to sudden visitors who stayed at their home. With everyone seated around a traditional Japanese sunken hearth in the center of the room, his family treated the visitor to the same kind of evening meal that they usually had. As he left Rev. Niwano's home, the scholar gazed back from the car window at the receding image of the house and seemed to reflect on his impressions of the day.

## Chapter 30

### Diary

#### "Once I begin, I never quit"

Founder Niwano had been keeping a diary for decades. "I have been blessed with good health all my life," he said. "So my diary consists simply of such things as what I did each day, whom I met with, and so on, after I got up in the morning."

Wherever he went in Japan or abroad, Rev. Niwano would quietly write in his diary in his hotel room each morning before the regular sutra recitation. Always, each night, or the first thing the following morning, he would reflect on the day and jot down his impressions, no matter how busy his schedule.

"Just as with sutra recitation, I make sure to write down something every single day. Once I begin something, I never quit. It is not my way to write only when there is something special to write about. And I am not afraid to be repetitious when similar things happen again and again."

They say that keeping a diary is a way of polishing oneself--rather like a gem. Founder Niwano seems to have considered keeping a diary like practicing the Way. He never forgot to make an entry. No "three-day-bonze" (early quitter) was he.

For a while during World War II he used a simple memorandum notebook. After the war, he was able to buy regular yearly diaries prepared for daily entries. Sometimes he was able to write quite extensively, but on other days only briefly when his time was limited.

"Eiji Yoshikawa [a famous novelist of the time] used to say, 'Except for myself, everyone is my teacher.' It is nice to meet all kinds of people and to learn from them all--new things and useful stories," Rev. Niwano said. "I feel that wherever I go there is something to learn."

Often taking notes about what he heard or saw, Founder Niwano would later transfer them to his diary--sometimes adding a personal comment or impression. For instance, he wrote, "Once I was traveling with Mr. Sohachi Yamaoka [another noted author of the day]. We stopped at a Japanese inn and talked all through the night, sipping sake. We had a lot in common--we were of the same generation and both of us had come to Tokyo from the same part of Japan--so we chatted freely. One thing I remember talking about was his habitual attitude toward paying taxes. When the tax bill comes, he said, he always put it in a small wooden box and placed it before the family shrine--as an object of worship--because he was thankful to be able to pay so much tax! Surely it was that different way of seeing things which made him such a fine novelist, read by so many people."

Because the incident involving Mr. Yamaoka impressed him so much, Rev. Niwano mentioned it in his diary and concluded the entry with the word *arigatai* (meaning "gratefulness"), which he often used to show his appreciation for a particularly pleasant or meaningful day.

After he became on intimate terms with Ven. Etai Yamada, the head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, Rev. Niwano said, "I have developed a greater respect for diary-keeping."

Through Ven. Yamada's writings, he came to feel more in touch with life and with the words of Dengyo Daishi Saicho, founder of Japanese Tendai Buddhism, than ever before.

"Saicho once said, 'Sustenance is to be found in the will to follow the Way; the will to follow the Way is not to be found in pursuit of the means of sustenance.' I became aware that I savored the deep meaning of those words more than ever. It was then I also realized, despite its few words, that the deeper truth was included in the expression, 'To forget oneself in giving service to another is the ultimate in compassion.'"

On the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), March 1, 1990, Rev. Kosho Otani, head priest of the Honganji School of Jodo-Shin Buddhism, had a discussion with Founder Niwano and began his part by saying, "Last night I looked back to the pages of twenty years ago in my diary and reread what I had written about the very first assembly of the WCRP." It had lingered in Rev. Niwano's thoughts, also.

A diary has the wonderful power to draw a reader across time, through the years, into the era when it was written. Each person's diary--always--is the record of "now" as it was then. Besides keeping his own diary, Rev. Niwano seems to have appreciated reading those of others. "It is helpful," he said, "to read the diaries of others that have been published." It is said that "the real value of keeping a diary is that you never do anything you would be ashamed to confide to it."

Rev. Niwano walked his way honestly and straightforwardly--living in the way of "each and every day is a good day" - for more than ninety years. His diary accurately records his footsteps along the way.



## Chapter 31

### Staying Healthy

#### "Do what is natural—naturally"

Having been blessed with excellent health, as well as longevity, Founder Niwano was often asked how he managed to maintain his good condition. One reason appears to have been the fact that he did morning exercises every day for decades. On one occasion he had received instruction from a yoga teacher, and adding to that whatever seemed helpful, he then exercised without fail every single day.

When he was past eighty, the topic of exercise came up one day while Rev. Niwano was talking with some visitors. Getting up from his chair, he sat right down on the carpet and demonstrated his daily routine. Bringing the soles of his feet together, he spread his knees wide apart, and with his back straight, bent forward from the waist until his head touched the floor.

"This isn't hard," he told them. "You just sit naturally like this. Some people say that Shakyamuni Buddha's position of sitting with folded legs crossed is difficult. For me, it is easy."

The visitors were amazed at how supple his body still was after more than eight decades. "I practice this exercise every morning and then recite the sutra," he said. He began playing golf at the age of sixty. That strengthened his legs and lower back and had the additional virtue of improving his eyesight--from aiming his ball at the course's distant putting green.

His "salt-water regimen" was a holdover from earlier days. When he awoke each morning, he inhaled a small amount from a glass of salt water warmed to body temperature up each nostril in turn, down into the back of his throat and then spat it out.

"That is taught in *Yojokun* (Precepts for Health, a manual on healthy living written by the Neo-Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekiken in 1713, at the age of 83, reflecting his belief that cultivation of body and spirit go together). It sounded so good that I started to practice it. It is refreshing and, above all, prevents one from catching colds. Since I practice it daily, the inside of my nose stays clean and clear, and I breathe more easily," Rev. Niwano said.

He continued, "It is not enough only to nod in agreement or be amazed at what you have heard. Unless you put it into practice, what you learn is useless. Since I heard that the 'salt-water regimen' is also good for empyema, or pus in the lungs, I recommend it to anyone suffering from that. But there aren't many people who will practice it every day. I say to them, 'Why can't you do such a simple thing?'"

Rev. Niwano kept a little bottle of salt in his bag, to use when traveling. He rinsed his eyes with salt water, too--water only slightly salty, like tears--some thirty times every morning. "Whenever I hear about a good health practice, I try it and then follow it every day," he concluded. "Practice makes perfect." His visitors were thoroughly impressed.

Rev. Niwano sought the natural way in everything he did. He was not only concerned about physical health; he stressed mental health, too. At the core of his thinking, of course, was his faith. When asked by a Japanese politician for the secret of his good health, he replied, "Never being untruthful."

He did not mean to be facetious, but only to show the politician how he maintained his healthy condition.

"Be honest--do things simply, naturally. Do everything straightforwardly," he said. When instructing those appointed to new positions in Rissho Kosei-kai, he always emphasized, "Be honest."

"The best way to stay healthy," he stressed, "is to find a rhythm natural to one's physique and mind in everyday life, and then to patiently put exercises to maintain one's health into practice according to that rhythm." Thinking that way--plus getting up by five in the morning and going to bed around ten each night--he regularly sustained just such a daily rhythm himself. It seemed to him to be only a natural way of life.

"Do what is natural--naturally," was his motto. It reflected the way that Rev. Niwano maintained his good health.

## Chapter 32

### Visiting the Sick

During the founding period of Rissho Kosei-kai in the 1930s, the health of many members was improved by improving their own state of mind. One after another, miraculous results and events not conceivable to common sense took place.

Founder Niwano later said, "It was a time when the gods were in the best of spirits." At the same time, he said, "The main purpose of religion is to deal with the minds of people, not with curing physical illnesses."

It is said that Shakyamuni Buddha said to Jivaka, a very skillful physician, "I will cure the inner diseases, the mental and emotional diseases, of people. You should cure their external diseases."

The Kosei General Hospital was established in 1952. Leaders who practiced religious training from the early days of the organization felt a need to repent when they became sick or had to be hospitalized there. They regretted being unable to fulfill their duties in the churches to which they belonged because of their illness.

When visiting such patients in the hospital, Rev. Niwano used to speak warmly to them, completely understanding what they were feeling. "Becoming sick is a vacation presented by the gods so that one can take a good rest. Do not worry about your duties, just relax and rest." His words indicated special caring and understanding of those who had devoted themselves to the religious activities of Rissho Kosei-kai for decades.

When visiting a male patient who had undergone a stomach operation, Founder Niwano said, "Buddhism offers salvation from the suffering inherent in birth, old age, illness, and death. Having been born, human beings sometimes fall sick. If it were not for birth, there would be no disease, old age, and death. You had better become determined to rely fully on the Buddha if you become ill again."

Until then, the patient had thought of soon going back to resume his duties. Hearing these words from the founder, however, he was able to discard any attachment to a self-centered way of thinking. He then quickly regained his physical strength, and was able to return to his workplace. "Unless we believe that we are protected by the Buddha, we cannot receive the bestowal of the Buddha's protection," Rev. Niwano told another patient. "Just as when a baby is lying still in the arms of a young mother and feels safe and comfortable, if the baby suddenly moves fretfully the infant could fall out of the mother's arms." For many years, that patient remembered deeply the words that Rev. Niwano had spoken at that moment.

As a youth, Founder Niwano traveled to Tokyo from his native Niigata Prefecture to look for work. Before long, he was serving as an assistant to the proprietor of a small family-owned shop. Many years later, the proprietor's wife, who by then was nearly ninety years old, had to be hospitalized for an illness. After learning of her hospitalization, Rev. Niwano was able to take the time to visit her, despite his busy schedule. One of the patient's relatives was sitting beside her bed, reading a Rissho Kosei-kai periodical. At the time of the organization's founding the proprietor became a leading member. The relative was startled and touched by Rev. Niwano's sudden appearance. The patient was sleeping, so Rev. Niwano left the room briefly to ask the nursing staff about her condition. After he returned, the old woman opened her eyes slightly. Rev. Niwano held her hand tenderly for several minutes, until she again fell into a peaceful sleep. He then went back to his work.

## Chapter 33

### The Great Sacred Hall

After being under construction for eight years, Rissho Kosei-kai's Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo was finally completed in 1964. In his first sermon at the start of that year, Founder Niwano reminded members gathered in what is now known as the Former Main Worship Hall that the event which all had so eagerly awaited would soon take place. He proclaimed to the members, "This is the year in which Rissho Kosei-kai of Japan establishes the foundation of itself as a world organization."

On March 4, 1964, the enshrinement ceremony for the image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as Rissho Kosei-kai's focus of devotion was held on the fourth floor of the new hall. After the ceremony, as he stood in a quiet corner of the new building, the founder was heard to say, "As I look out over this magnificent edifice, my heart is full."

On May 15 of that year he shared his joy with all the members at a ceremony to commemorate the completion of the hall, saying to them, "What a tremendous effort from all of you it has taken to make this day possible." Some members who were housewives on limited budgets, for example, had managed to save a few Japanese yen a day out of their household expenses as an offering, and newspaper delivery boys had contributed a hundred yen each month from their small incomes toward the construction costs. Finally having attained this great goal through the wholehearted efforts of the membership gave all the assurance that each and every one had played an important role.

Twenty years after the hall's completion, the 25th Triennial Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) was held there, as well as at other facilities of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo. That congress in July 1984 was the very first ever held in Asia. Its theme was "The Religious Path to Peace: Eastern Initiative and Western Response." This was a precedent-setting theme in the history of the IARF, where the trend had long been toward "Western initiative and Eastern response."

Many innovative programs were initiated by Rissho Kosei-kai for the congress, such as *hoza* group counseling sessions, short visits to the homes of members of Rissho Kosei-kai and other Japanese religious organizations, "Experience Japan" programs for participants from overseas, and study seminars to promote mutual understanding.

One highlight of the congress was the worship service called "the Congress Service" held at the Great Sacred Hall, in which some 800 participants from various faiths gathered to pray and rededicate themselves to their common purpose--world peace. According to Rissho Kosei-kai ritual, a passage from the Lotus Sutra was chanted as a "Prayer to the Eternal," by the attending Buddhists who were led by Rev. Nichiko Niwano as officiator. In addition, hymns and choral interludes were sung and devotions were offered by Hindu, Christian, Shinto, Islamic, and Sikh representatives, all in their respective languages. Rev. Nikkyo Niwano delivered an address entitled "Today's Perspective on Our Religious Mission."

For this large gathering, 7,000 leaders representing Rissho Kosei-kai churches throughout Japan filled the fifth, sixth, and seventh floors of the Great Sacred Hall and observed the entire service. Afterward, several commented on how deeply touched they were by it. "Those world religious leaders entering the hall appeared to be the manifestation of the true spirit of the Lotus Sutra's teaching," one member observed. Another member noted, "The group photograph of all the participants reminded me of the *kokue*, one of the great assemblies described in the sutra. The foreign representatives seemed to be 'buddhas emanating from all directions.' I genuinely felt that people from all over the world were appreciating and sharing the true Dharma."

One leader recognized the congress as testimony to a divine revelation. "I joined Rissho Kosei-kai in 1945," she commented. "When I first came to the headquarters, Cofounder Myoko Naganuma said, 'In the future, the truth and spirit of the Lotus Sutra will spread over all the world through Rissho Kosei-kai's efforts. Bearing that in mind, practice the sutra's teachings and devote yourself to helping others.' That was soon after Japan's defeat in World War II, and much of Tokyo was still in ruins. Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters was then just one very small house. That the Lotus Sutra would spread throughout the world because of this small Japanese religious group was unbelievable. I even thought I might not have understood what she meant. However, seeing this congress with my own eyes, I am thrilled to think that her words have come true and that I was able to see it in my own lifetime. It is beyond description."

Many years have now passed. The range of visitors to the Great Sacred Hall has become truly international. In addition to the visits by Japanese members, many foreign residents of Japan come to the building to take part in various events, such as the Buddhist Flower Festival on April 8, celebrating Shakyamuni's birth. Those seats in the main hall once occupied by the overseas delegates to that IARF congress are now filled by Rissho Kosei-kai members not only from Japan, but also from Asia, North and South America, Europe, and Oceania, either as individuals or as part of group pilgrimages.

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai on March 5, 1998, many guests from overseas took part in a ritual offering of lighted candles on a special platform in the Great Sacred Hall. They included the members of the Governing Board of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, as well as the four senior leaders of the Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Jewish communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, demonstrating solidarity after the long years of civil war in the former Yugoslavia.

It deserves pointing out here that in an interview conducted by a major Japanese newspaper with Rev. Nichiko Niwano on November 15, 1991, when he succeeded to the presidency of Rissho Kosei-kai in the ceremony of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Law in the Great Sacred Hall, he cited the motto "Think Globally, Act Locally." These are words he has held in high esteem since he first heard them while participating in a conference at the United Nations headquarters in New York on January 9, 1991. Rev. Niwano had spoken as a representative of a nongovernmental organization at the Amendment Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere, Outer Space and Under Water.

## Chapter 34

### Horin-kaku Guest Hall

#### "A taste of the natural beauty of Japan"

The Horin-kaku Guest Hall was completed in 1978, for the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai. The building stands adjacent to the Great Sacred Hall in the headquarters complex in Tokyo. Since then, members both at home and from abroad have come to the building on occasions such as group pilgrimages to the headquarters, and there have been visitors from all over the world. The interior of the hall expresses the "World of Buddhism" theme so cherished by Founder Niwano, who put his heart and spirit into its construction and decoration.

The building is designed to express the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha as made manifest in the Lotus Sutra, and to reflect the fundamentals of Buddhism. Rev. Niwano's hope that it might be a place where visitors from all countries could comprehend "the spirit of Buddhism" and "what the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai is" is obvious to anyone who enters the hall.

Carved on four tall black marble pillars in the lobby--fully 5.2 meters high--are Shakyamuni Buddha's first teachings, the Four Noble Truths. Eight *kanji* characters representing the "Truths" appear there: *kutai*, the Truth of Suffering, stating that we humans have to recognize how life is filled with suffering; *jittai*, the Truth of Cause, teaching us to grasp where suffering comes from; *dotai*, the Truth of the Path, showing us that there is a way to end suffering; and *mettai*, the Truth of Extinction, pointing out the state where suffering is overcome. In short, according to this doctrine, we must face sufferings and understand their true cause so that we can attain a peaceful state of mind through our daily religious practice. All of the characters are based on the founder's own calligraphy, a very vigorous brush style, two characters engraved on each of the four columns. His autograph is also inscribed, commemorating the completion of the building--"Nikkyo Niwano, on an auspicious day of November in 1978."

"Buddhism begins and ends with the Four Noble Truths," it is often said. With this in mind, Rev. Niwano wrote those characters many times in a style full of life and energy and chose what he felt were the best examples for use on the columns.

On both the eastern and western walls of the lobby of the Horin-kaku Guest Hall, tapestries based on paintings by Rev. Niwano can be seen. One is titled "Shakyamuni's Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree" and the other, "The First Rolling of the Dharma Wheel at Deer Park." The pictures were painted on large sheets of paper which were then sent to Kyoto to serve as guides for the tapestry weavers. The work took about a year and a half to complete.

Rev. Niwano painted the pictures as a prayer for the everlasting life of Buddhism. The lobby leading to the main hall thus exhibits the roots of Buddhism through the "Truths" on the pillars and the great tapestries. Surely they give it the appearance of "entering the Dharma." One key attraction of the main hall is the statue of Juichimen Senju-Kannon, or the Eleven-headed Thousand-armed Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. Another is the ceramic wall tiles based on pictures that the founder painted in the hope that foreign religious leaders and scholars visiting the hall from overseas would thus get a sense of the natural beauty of Japan.

"I am going to paint pictures that can survive for many generations. . .," he said, putting his heart and spirit into the task. Consulting several books about sacred painting, he gave a great deal of thought to composition, even referring to them when he drew the first rough sketches. At home and away, he studied carefully the shape of Japanese plum and pine trees and photographed examples of each for use in his paintings. Viewing Mount Fuji

from the window of an inn, he conceived of it surrounded by plum trees. While at a study seminar of the World Conference on Religion and Peace held in a nearby town, he saw a Japanese bush warbler on a plum branch at the hotel where he was staying. He asked a photographer for Rissho Kosei-kai publications who accompanied him to take picture of it for him.

In a room at the Great Sacred Hall, he painted frequently, despite his busy religious affairs schedule, putting all his energy into every detail of even the branches and twigs of plum and pine. Just after the event, it was said that the founder recalled the past and said, "It has been a long time since I have concentrated on any one thing as much as this."

He often guided distinguished visitors, both Japanese and foreign, through the completed Horin-kaku Guest Hall himself. When Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Carter visited the hall, the former U.S. president had read the pamphlet about it beforehand. Admiring Founder Niwano's calligraphy concerning the precepts contained in the Verse of the Seven Buddhas of the Past which appeared on his painting, Mr. Carter said, "Rev. Niwano, your calligraphy is very impressive--and so is your painting. After reading the pamphlet, I was looking forward to seeing your actual paintings today." Rev. Niwano explained the essence of Buddhism and then, pointing to his calligraphy of *Ichinen-sanzen* (Three Thousand Realms in One Mind), interpreted its meaning for the Carters. These are instances of that "introduction to the spirit of Buddhism" which Rev. Niwano strove to present to his foreign visitors.

On another occasion, Prof. George Williams, an American religious scholar from California, visited the organization's headquarters and shot a film at Horin-kaku Guest Hall. His movie about the activities of Rissho Kosei-kai incorporated an interview he conducted with Rev. Niwano in front of the tapestry of "Shakyamuni's Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree." The film has been shown at many universities in the U.S. The famous American futurologist Dr. Alvin Toffler featured the garden at Horin-kaku Guest Hall in a television program called "The Third Wave" that was broadcast in many countries around the world.

## Chapter 35

### In the Second Group Pilgrimage Hall

#### **"Since they are going to be seen in the 21st century. . . ."**

When members and visitors enter the lobby of the Second Group Pilgrimage Hall, one of the first things they see is the three ceramic photographic murals of three sacred mountains of Buddhism—Mount Gridhrakuta (Sacred Eagle Peak) in India, Mount Tiantai in China, and Mount Hiei in Japan. These photographic plates are an impressive 3 meters high and 27 meters wide and hang on the upper part of the right wall.

Founder Niwano said he originally had them in mind as a concrete image when he visited the Ise Grand Shrine in Mie Prefecture in January of 1987. In the evening he was thinking about how to express the flow of Buddhism, particularly of the Lotus Sutra tradition, as it moved from India, through China, and to Japan. The following morning, he described his idea to his aides.

After returning to Tokyo he examined about forty books of photographs and other materials. He studied the angles and compositions of photographs and drew numerous rough sketches. The founder concentrated on this project, devoting much time to it, until he was satisfied with the plan.

When the design had been finalized, photographers from Kosei Publishing Company, affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai, were dispatched to India and China to photograph the two mountains in those countries, and in the case of Mount Hiei, an aerial photo was taken after a long time had been spent observing the mists around the mountain.

The photographers later said that since the composition of the images had clearly been grasped in advance, it was as if Founder Niwano himself had taken the pictures and they had only pushed the shutters of their cameras on his behalf.

Rev. Niwano spent a long time considering what words or captions to put with the photographs. It is said he thought about this for days and days—while traveling to and leaving Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo in his automobile, while bathing, and even in bed at night. One day, at last, he said, "I have now decided." In order to write in the shortest possible way, he wrote only in Chinese characters. For Sacred Eagle Peak he wrote, "The sacred place where the Lotus Sutra originated"; for Mount Tiantai, "Where Buddhism was transmitted and the theoretical study of its teachings established"; and for Mount Hiei, "The site appropriate for the teaching of the One Vehicle to spread through the world. The teaching is based on the universal and great wisdom of the Sutra of the Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, by which bodhisattvas are instructed and which the buddhas guard and keep in mind." Above his signature, he wrote "Mountains, rivers, plants, and trees are all becoming Buddhas." These expressions convey his deeply felt conviction that "On the way to the 21st century, indispensable ideas for the whole of humankind are in these characters."

In the process of making the photographs into ceramic plates some alterations to the photographs were made with paint, as he wanted them to be bright and magnificent. He traveled to Kyoto twice, where the ceramic plates were to be made, to see how the process worked. By using the latest techniques at that time it was said that the ceramic plates would not fade for 2,000 years and would not be damaged by an earthquake even of the magnitude of 7.

"Anyhow," the founder said, "since they will be around for 2,000 years, I have to write the inscriptions very carefully." He concentrated especially on inscribing the characters. Through studying professional books on



calligraphy and pondering over them, the style of the characters was studied, devised, and then changed to a certain extent.

As he wrote relatively huge characters on many sheets of paper with a brush, the quantity of ink needed became so great that for days staff in his office prepared liquid ink from ink sticks all day long. The manner of rubbing the sticks required careful pressure, neither too strong nor too soft, to avoid the excessive adhesion that might result from applying all one's might. The water used was always the same natural water. He wrote the phrases many times, until he was satisfied. One evening, finally, he placed them on the wide floor of the Great Sacred Hall. He had chosen the best by gazing at and pondering over them.

"These words are to live through the 21st century." "They must survive for 2,000 years." The people around him in those days heard him utter these words many times.

## Chapter 36

### Youthful Days

#### "Thinking just of yourself is no different from what an insect does"

During Founder Niwano's childhood, there were few inns or hotels in his small native village in Niigata Prefecture on the northwestern coast of Japan's main island, so traveling strangers sometimes came to the Niwano home asking if they could spend the night. They say that travelers came to know that the "Juzaemons' (i.e., the Niwano family's) house is a good place to stay." Founder Niwano's parents greeted such unfamiliar people warmly, saying, "Welcome. Come spend the night. We'll be happy to share *zosui* (rice and vegetable porridge) with you, and tomorrow morning we'll even pack you a lunch."

At their hearth they invited the traveler to sit around the wood fire like part of the family circle and then served them *zosui* from the caldron over the flames. The following morning they cooked rice and made a box lunch for the traveler. In those days most village-travelers carried their own (meal) box; but if they did not, the Niwanos gave them one--Rev. Niwano's mother filling it with *onigiri* (rice balls) plus, to keep the rice from going bad quickly, some *umeboshi* (pickled ume) and *miso-zuke* (miso pickles). In such a family atmosphere, the travelers must surely have been doubly warmed--both in body and in mind.

Typhoid fever had once been common where the Niwanos lived. Since in the center of rice field there stood a hut used for setting off fireworks in the summer, typhoid patients were sometimes temporarily quarantined in the hut. In addition, the doctors needed help from willing volunteer villagers. The patients' soiled clothing needed to be washed, of course, and whenever a doctor had to move a patient, he needed strong men to help. Rev. Niwano's grandfather, Jutaro, was a ready volunteer. Seeing his tireless devotion to such work from which others shrank, fearful of contagion and feeling repulsed, the physician would say, "Any man with such a benevolent nature as yours ought to go into medicine." So the doctor taught Jutaro various medical skills and even called him "Nantei," a familiar, affectionate nickname for a medical man. After that, whenever a sick person in the village needed urgent care, Jutaro would hurry to help. If a villager experienced any swelling, for example, Jutaro treated it. His skills and his devotion were appreciated even by the people of the neighboring village.

One day Founder Niwano was reflecting on his boyhood during a dissemination tour: "Just taking care of yourself is no different from what an insect does. Even though one is born as a human, one doesn't deserve to be called a 'lord of creation' without working for others' sake as well as one's own. My grandfather taught me that when I was a little boy. 'Grow up to be a man,' he'd say, 'who does good for others and for society, too.'"

"God (kami-sama) kindly wakes me up each morning"

Founder Niwano was the second of four brothers. He had a sister, too. His older brother was very skillful at doing just about anything; the only thing he couldn't do was to get up early in the morning when he had gone to bed very late. His inability to be roused without a parental call was the only thing about him that disappointed their father. Seeing that, Rev. Niwano resolved in his boyhood never to put his father to the trouble of waking him up. It is said that he never once had to be called. "Even when I stayed up till one or two a.m.," Rev. Niwano recalled, "I always awoke when I was supposed to." Once he remembered with a laugh, "God kindly awakened me; I didn't need an alarm."

Even after coming to Tokyo to work, and after entering upon the religious life, this fortuitous habit of his never changed.

While Rev. Niwano was first employed as a wood and charcoal dealer--in 1924, the year after the Great Kanto Earthquake--Mr. Ishihara, the master of the charcoal shop, built three rental houses. He paid off his mortgage with the monthly rent he received from tenants, as well as with any extra profits from the shop. Thus Rev. Niwano worked as hard as he could, thinking, "Let's get the shop out of debt as soon as possible; let's make this a first-class shop."

He didn't have any sense of "being employed." In the winter, the outdoor work was bone-chilling. Employees' hands would be stained with blood from chopping and carrying wood.

"Shika-san! [Rev. Niwano's first name then was Shikazo], let's finish up for today," Mr. Ishihara would say. He was a hard worker, and few employees lasted long under his stern management.

"Yes, sir," Rev. Niwano would respond. However, he would already be bringing back another load of wood from the warehouse and would add, "Let's bring in one more load and then quit."

He was forever thinking about business the following day. Another load helped to start the day better tomorrow.

"He was no ordinary man--from the beginning"

After Mr. Ishihara passed away, for many years Rev. Niwano continued to pray for him, that his spirit might rest in peace. One morning, the founder paid a visit to the Ishihara family.

After wishing them a good morning and exchanging greetings, he prayed before the family's home altar. He made an offering there of a large carton of fruit.

Mrs. Ishihara said, "I know you keep a busy schedule. But if you are not in a big hurry, how about having a cup of tea with us?"

"Well, I am going to Niigata at the end of the month, and next month I am supposed to go to Europe," replied the founder. He spoke of activities related to the World Conference on Religion and Peace and other international activities, and then introduced various other topics.

Listening appreciatively, old Mrs. Ishihara turned to me (as I was accompanying Rev. Niwano then as his secretary) and said in an aside, "Founder Niwano is such a good man. And it is because of his virtue, I suspect, that foreign religious leaders think so highly of him. When he was working in our shop in the early days, I recall that he was quite different from all the other employees. When I was pregnant with my second child, he would always get up early, go out to the well in the yard to wash his face, and then bring me back a wooden bucket of water to use. He worked very hard, all day long, every day. I thought then that he was no ordinary man--from the very beginning."

In the car on the way back, the founder reflected on the old days, and he said to me, "In any event, Mr. Ishihara was certainly a very hard-working man. So I wanted to learn that from him. Mr. Ishihara trusted me and treated me a little differently from the others. Those who came to work in his shop later sometimes thought that I was Mr. Ishihara's younger brother."

## Chapter 37

### Mother

Now, here is the story of Founder Niwano's mother. Rev. Niwano's mother's name was Mii. She was born into a farming family that lived in a village located in the same district as the village in which Rev. Niwano was born.

"A tender, hard-working, ordinary Japanese farm wife, she was for me something entirely absolute," Rev. Niwano wrote in his autobiography, *Lifetime Beginner*. She not only had to do the usual farm work, every spring she also joined the local farmers in transplanting rice seedlings from seedbeds to the flooded paddies. This took place at the same time that raising silkworms required most of her time. At all hours of the day and night, she had to feed those voracious creatures the mulberry leaves they needed to grow, leaving her almost no time for rest.

Snow began falling in November. From that time through the middle of spring, she worked at weaving. At night, she was always patching the family's clothes, especially those of the children. In the morning she woke up earlier than anyone else and at night she went to bed later than anyone else. This was her daily life. "When I happened to awake at night, I saw my mother in front of the fireplace, still plying a needle. Looking at her face, I became relaxed and fell asleep again."

One day when Rev. Niwano was still a youth he made an unannounced visit to his mother's parents' home. "In my mother's village, my uncle and aunt were weaving from five in the morning until ten at night. They had to stand up to do this work, so there was almost no time for sitting. Their legs were swollen, but with practice through the years, it was all right. My aunt, who became very good at weaving, lived to be over ninety. My mother seemed to learn from her dedication." Rev. Niwano recalled those days and told this story to his secretaries and those close to him, using an affectionate tone when he said "mother," "uncle," and "aunt."

"In the old days in Japanese farming villages, the only times of the year when children wore kimono made of only one piece of cloth from top to bottom were New Year's, the Bon festival in summer, and a very few other occasions. When the area around the knees wore thin, a sleeve from another old garment--the sleeves seemed to wear out less easily--would be used to cover the hole or tear. We usually wore such kimonos," Founder Niwano once recalled. "As my mother was very deft of hand, one winter she managed to make time to weave about thirty-six yards of cloth, enough to make kimonos for three adults. With the money she made from this she bought a sash for each of us six children. On the day of the village festival, we wore them around our waists and ran down the sloping road to the shrine shouting with joy. The beat of the festival drums could be heard. We were very excited. Our mother watched us from behind. Her tender look is still vivid in my memory."

During dissemination tours to rural towns, Rev. Niwano sometimes told these stories at the end of a busy day, when he was drinking a little sake with the evening meal. In today's Japan, clothes full of patches, other than those designed that way, can rarely be seen and there must be almost no homes where children awake at night to see their mother patching clothes. Yet Rev. Niwano's deep feeling for these patched kimonos was sensed by those who heard these stories, a feeling that such kimonos expressed the affection and whole-hearted sentiment of his mother in every single stitch and that this kind of wordless teaching of gratitude for material things and of the importance of using such things well had permeated the minds of her children.

In short, Rev. Niwano's mother was a woman of deeds, not of words. He added, "Being thankful for the blessings of nature, revering the gods, the Buddha, and her ancestors, and not asserting herself, she worked tirelessly." Physically, however, she was not very well, often suffering from stomach trouble. It is said that Rev. Niwano's father cared deeply and worried about her condition, and always did the heavy work before she could do it. "I

think my parents, in their ordinary daily lives, guided us in the meaning of 'work' by the way they looked to us from behind--always busy at some task. This is something for which we children were very grateful."

When reflecting on his parents, Rev. Niwano also talked about the importance of education at home. He emphasized, "It is said, 'One good mother is equivalent to one hundred teachers.' Surely the best educator is the mother."

## Chapter 38

### Affection for His Wife

#### "I will take my wife with me"

In the closing years of her life, Founder Niwano's wife, Naoko used to say, "Having a copy of the Threefold Lotus Sutra is enough for me. I need nothing else."

For ten years, during World War II and through the early postwar period, she was away from Tokyo with her six children in Suganuma, her husband's hometown in Niigata Prefecture. "Seeing the sun during the day and looking at the moon at night, our mother didn't have anyone with whom she could confer. The sutra was all she could rely on." This expresses how her children in later years remembered their mother in those days.

Until very late at night, she stayed up to patch the children's clothes. Still, she got up at three in the morning, lit the candles at the Buddhist home altar and chanted the sutra. At sunrise every day, she went out to the field and worked until after dark. When any of her children became sick, she practiced a cold-water ritual beside the well and wholeheartedly chanted the sutra.

President Nichiko Niwano wrote in his book, *My Father, My Teacher*, "I have learned much of great value from father. Mother has taught me much too, and among her lessons the most important is to cling to the Lotus Sutra, no matter what happens."

Founder Niwano received the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1979. In March of that year, the Rev. Dr. Wilbert Forker, the executive vice president of the Templeton Foundation, visited Rev. Niwano in Tokyo, informing him officially of the award and explaining various necessary procedures. After offering some general information about the award ceremony and related events, he asked Rev. Niwano. "Sir, will Mrs. Niwano be coming with you to the award ceremony?" For a moment, Rev. Niwano looked a little bashful, like a young man. But in the next instant, he straightened himself up and said clearly, "Yes, she will come with me."

When he was married to Naoko in 1930, the wedding ceremony was very modest. Only a brother from each of the two families and a cousin came from the hometown. The couple started their new life in a small rented room without furniture. Both of them worked for a pickle shop. Through the period of his religious search, when Rev. Niwano encountered the Lotus Sutra, he was devoted to it every day without paying attention to his family. And for the family, that was followed by ten years of living away from him in Suganuma.

Rev. Niwano felt that the honor of the Templeton Prize should be shared by all the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, that he was receiving it as their representative. At the same time, it was an occasion on which his deep affection for his wife, who had shared hardships with him for so many years, was strongly felt.

The Award Ceremony was held on April 9 at Windsor Castle outside of London, where generations of kings and queens of England had lived for 800 years. Rev. Niwano was presented a certificate, a medal, and a check for 80,000 pounds sterling by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. From the large windows of the room the view outside was of lovely greenery as far as one could see.

Following the ceremony, a luncheon party was held in a lodge in the huge garden, where Founder Niwano enjoyed talking with many prominent persons. During this time of chatting in a relaxed atmosphere, Mrs. Niwano presented her own set of prayer beads to Mrs. Templeton. Mrs. Templeton looked very touched by such a heartwarming spiritual gesture, and the two women became quite close.

It seemed to be especially memorable for Mrs. Niwano to experience the culture of another tradition-steeped country like England, becoming acquainted with many well-known people in various fields, and visiting the places in London where events related to the award were held.

For the next ten years or so, she spent her days peacefully, deep in her faith. Surrounded by her grandchildren, she felt every day was happy and bright. Toward the end of her life, she became ill and had to be hospitalized. Rev. Niwano, despite his busy work schedule, visited her at the Kosei General Hospital near Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters every day. Taking care of her warmly at her sickbed, he massaged her legs tenderly.

It was a peaceful time for the couple. To Mrs. Niwano, Rev. Niwano was of course her husband, but at the same time she might have felt that he also was her Dharma teacher. It is said that she often said to him, "I certainly owe you many apologies and thanks."

On April 13, 1994, Mrs. Niwano's final day arrived. After showing his concern for her until the last moment, Rev. Niwano left the hospital for home just a little ahead of the car bearing her body. He dressed in Japanese formal garb and waited at the entrance of their house for his wife's return.

## Chapter 39

### Father and Son

#### A Daily Example, For Which We Are Always Grateful

There is a clear personal memory which both Founder Nikkyo Niwano and his son, Nichiko, write about in their respective autobiographies. The incident occurred in the early 1940s.

"I remember a field day at the school of his (Nichiko's) older sisters," wrote Rev. Niwano. "I participated in a parents' obstacle race consisting of running a little way from the starting line, picking up and putting on a mask, and then raising a sandbag to the shoulders, before running on to the finish line. I have strong legs; and at that time my work made me accustomed to lifting and carrying. When I won the race, Koichi (Nichiko's name in his youth) was so delighted that he called out, 'My father came in first! My father came in first!' It made me happy to see how proud he was." (*Lifetime Beginner*: Kosei Publishing Co., 1978)

Here is how the son described that same incident. "I recall very clearly seeing my father dash ahead of all competitors in a bale-toting race to win first prize. I do not remember what my sisters did that day, but father's taking the prize is deeply emblazoned on my memory." (*My Father, My Teacher*: Kosei Publishing Co., 1982) In the founding days of Risho Kosei-kai, Rev. Niwano was so devoted to his dissemination work, day in and day out, that this may have been the only chance the two ever had for a "father-and-son day." Soon after, the "ten years in Suganuma" period (1944--54) began and the Niwano family, except for the founder, had to live in a remote village in Niigata Prefecture because of the founder's religious practice. The opportunities to be together for Rev. Niwano and Koichi were few because of this physical separation.

Actually, it was in the autumn of 1960, after several years had passed following their return from living separately in the countryside, before the whole Niwano family were again able to live together in the same house, in Tokyo. One day the editorial staff members of the Risho Kosei-kai periodical *Kosei* visited Nichiko for an interview. Besides studying at a university, Nichiko was then practicing kendo (Japanese swordsmanship) and had attained the third level. His father, Rev. Niwano, was himself accomplished in judo and had experienced some exciting episodes during his naval service before World War II. And, most likely because it was his son's first interview, Rev. Niwano also was present. In the yard, the photographer asked Nichiko to assume various kendo poses, saying, "Would you please thrust your chest out a little more and stand up very straight?"

Kendo begins and ends with a salute. Accordingly, Nichiko's fine posture, known to everyone these days, was already rather good, and no one remembers why the photographer would have made such a request. But just at that moment Founder Niwano was standing a little behind the photographer, watching his son. When the cameraman asked Nichiko to stand up straight, the one who reacted promptly to the request was the father rather than the son. Founder Niwano thrust out his chest out and threw his shoulders back, straightening his posture as if he had been called to attention. It is well known that during World War II, when he had been drafted into military service, Rev. Niwano always kept a photo of his son, Nichiko, in his breast pocket. Such a display of affection as this caused everybody to smile at the father so identifying with his son.

A year after the Ceremony of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma in 1991, Nichiko succeeded to the presidency of Risho Kosei-kai from his father and he made a series of dissemination tours called "*shinseki-mawari*" (visiting relatives). Following his year-long schedule of tours, covering 130 sites in the entire nation, he finally returned home one evening. At the front door, just as he was about to enter, a voice from inside called out to him, "Please wait a moment."



Curious as to what was up, he waited outside, wondering. Then the voice inside said, "Please come in."

"When I stepped inside, I found Founder Niwano, my mother, my wife and daughters, all sitting side-by-side in the entrance hall, welcoming me with clapping hands and saying, 'Congratulations.' I had not even expected that the founder was with them to greet me. All through my dissemination tours, no idea that my family might be missing me, or that they might be concerned about me, had entered my mind. But seeing this welcome, I felt just how much they had been concerned for me in their hearts, and I was touched."

This story was recounted by President Niwano in response to an interviewer's question some days later.

The wooden buildings of Japan's 2,000-year-old Grand Shrine of Ise in Mie Prefecture are reconstructed every twenty years. In October 1993, Founder Niwano attended for the second time the ceremony for the transference of the symbol of the deity Amaterasu Omikami housed there to its new home. President Niwano also attended. Of course, it was the first time that he was invited, since he had succeeded to the presidency only two years earlier in the ceremony marking the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma.

After the symbol of the deity had been solemnly carried from the former main sanctuary to the newly constructed one, all the participating religionists moved there as well. On the previous occasion two decades earlier, Founder Niwano had walked vigorously, with a quicker step than most of the others. This time, however, he was nearly ninety years of age, so he walked up and down the steps less easily and was just a little unsteady. Suddenly someone quietly approached from behind to offer a helping hand. Founder Niwano looked up at the face and saw it was his son, Nichiko. (They were of just the same height, but the founder was bent as he walked the stairs.)

Later, in saying, "I was guided by my son's hand," Rev. Niwano expressed his joy to those around him, so that what had been a private experience between the two men was made known to others as well.

When President Niwano spoke at the morning gathering of staff members of Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall in June 1996, his remarks included the following comments:

"This year Founder Niwano is going to be ninety years old. He is still quite healthy, and he still assumes the role of leader in our daily sutra chanting at home, morning and evening. Blessed as he is with longevity, we are always grateful to see him as a daily model for our lives. My eldest daughter, Kosho, recently had her first child, a daughter, so that now at home we are again able to hear a baby's cry. My youngest daughter is now twenty-three years old, which means that it has been more than two decades since we have heard a baby cry in our house. A ninety-year-old and a newborn--four generations are now living under one roof. We are blessed this circumstance and the great variety of experiences we enjoy through their presence."

## Chapter 40

### Brides

#### **"Be sure to honor and respect the ancestors of the Niwano family"**

Hoju Vocational College for women, which is affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai, conducts a series of training programs in Sukanuma, Niigata Prefecture. At the program held in 1996, Tomoko Niwano, the eldest daughter of Founder Nikkyo Niwano, spoke about Sukanuma, his birthplace. In speaking to the students, she also told the story of her own marriage, which took place in January of 1947. It was at the time when her mother and the six Niwano children were still living far away from Tokyo, staying at Rev. Niwano's parents' house, where they had been safe from the wartime bombing in the capital. The man that Tomoko married was Kenzo Niwano, a son of another prominent Niwano family--the patrilineal "head" Niwano family in the village of Sukanuma (as opposed to the branch from which Rev. Niwano's family stemmed). She was then only 16 years old.

"It seemed better for me to get married," Tomoko said modestly, "instead of staying on at my grandparents' house, crowded with so many of my family members." She recalled, "There was a distance of some 200 or 300 meters from where I was living to my future husband's home, and since there was no form of transportation available, I had to trudge through the snow in full traditional bride's kimono."

Rev. Niwano, who was living all alone in Tokyo, where he was totally immersed in religious studies and the early activities of Rissho Kosei-kai, was thus unable to attend her wedding--the first of one of his daughters. The other Niwano family was a very large farming family. Concerned about Tomoko's possible unease in her new family, Rev. Niwano wrote to his beloved daughter, saying in his letter, "Please be sure to honor and respect the ancestors of the Niwano family." (He meant, of course, those of the Niwano family into which she was marrying.)

Later, when she came to Tokyo along with her relatives, Tomoko used to stay at her parents' home for longer periods than any of her siblings. When guests stayed over, and the rooms were all full, it was even the case that Tomoko slept in the same room with her parents. "I called their home 'my family inn,' I remember, and always stayed there," she later said. "Sometimes, half joking, people would say that because of this I seemed to be loved more than my sisters and brothers."

Soon after World War II, when daily necessities were scarce, every time Mrs. Niwano, Tomoko's mother, sewed any new kimono, she also made one for Tomoko. Of course, that may have been because she felt unable to take care of her properly in other ways. Tomoko's youngest sister Yoshiko (Izumida) used to say that because Tomoko married at the age of 16 and had less time with her family than the other children, both parents did their best to spend time with her whenever she came to Tokyo as an adult.

Takao Izumida and Yoshiko were married in the autumn of 1962. "Since I lived with my parents after returning to Tokyo from the wartime evacuation," Yoshiko said, "I was blessed with their special affection, inasmuch as it was then possible for them to do for me what they were unable to do for my elder sister when she was married. When it came time to choose my reception kimono (to change into after the actual wedding ceremony) my father even went to the bridal shop with me to pick out an especially beautiful one, saying, 'This one looks nice.'"

Since the Great Sacred Hall was then almost completed, some of the money Founder Niwano might have spent on her wedding, he instead donated toward its construction expenses.

Yoshiko once recalled, "During the evacuation period I was afraid we might never return to Tokyo, and I longed for my father to direct more of his attention to us, his family. I even began to doubt his affection for us. I remember

writing to him, saying, 'I want to go to a university to become a teacher and then I want to devote myself to caring for my mother. He replied, 'On your way back from your next school field trip, visit me here at headquarters in Tokyo.'"

At the Risho Kosei-kai headquarters, Mrs. Myoko Naganuma, cofounder of Risho Kosei-kai, welcomed Yoshiko, serving her a festive meal, as well as offering some gifts for her to take back to her family.

On the morning of her wedding, Yoshiko saluted her father very formally in her bridal attire, saying, "You have taken good care of me all these years. I will always be grateful." This is traditional Japanese etiquette from the daughter who is getting married to her father on her wedding day. Rev. Niwano was barely able to hold back his tears. In his autobiography, he wrote of his sentiments on that occasion.

"I still recall the deep emotional feeling I experienced on hearing those words."

The Izumida home was in Zushi, a Tokyo suburb near shore. Guessing the state of mind of Founder Niwano, both of joy in the marriage of his beloved daughter and loneliness at her leaving, someone close to him seems to have recommended that Rev. Niwano and his wife go to a movie one night--something they seldom did. They saw the famous director Yasujiro Ozu's "Autumn Afternoon," a popular movie that year in which a father experienced his daughter marrying and leaving home. The actor playing the father gave an especially masterful portrayal of his complex emotions. Yoshiko heard about this only later, of course.

"Parental affection, transcending time and place, is equally shared among all their children"--that is how Tomoko and Yoshiko feel about it today.

## **"Do everything honestly, with your whole heart"**

Special advisor and former Chief Director Motoyuki Naganuma, who acted as go-between for both President Niwano's daughters Kosho and Ryoko (now Yukako), later reminisced, saying to those around him in Risho Kosei-kai with a bright smile, "The girls seemed quite pleased, as if to say, 'Look at the man I have chosen.'"

Not just the present President Niwano and his wife, but Founder Niwano, too, was happy saying, "Bridegrooms become sons in deeply religious families." The daughters' new lives were launched with that powerful benediction.

The wedding of Kosho was held on June 22, 1995. By chance, that was the memorial day for the passing of Founder Niwano's mother. The wedding ceremony was performed in the Eijuden Hall on the seventh floor of the Great Sacred Hall, where many years earlier Kosho's parents, Nichiko and Yoshie, had also been wed. On this day--which marks the start of the new history of Risho Kosei-kai--Kosho, with her husband, Munehiro, said from the platform in the main hall of the Great Sacred Hall to all the members gathered there, "Together the two of us pledge to serve others." She went on to say that their determination was derived from Founder Niwano's words: "All will be well if you seek to do everything honestly, and with your whole heart."

That sentiment had been expressed to them in recognition of the monumental future task of Kosho's becoming the third president of Risho Kosei-kai.

The present President Niwano also said, on behalf of the two families, "Please lend your support and give encouragement to these two who are now about to take their first step together as one."

The wedding reception was held the next day in the main hall of Horin-kaku Guest Hall, in a relaxed atmosphere. Kosho said to the guests, "Though it might have been better to prepare a message, I simply asked Founder Niwano, 'What shall I say tomorrow?' He said to me, 'Don't worry about it; they're all your relatives.'"

Shortly before the reception ended, President Niwano stood up and said with a broad smile. "I have been giving a lot of thought to being sure that I said the right thing to the newlyweds today."

In his message of congratulations to the new couple that followed, he said, "So far, my immediate family has consisted of my wife and four daughters--five women and only one man! Now, with a strong new ally, my son-in-law, it's five against two. Together, we can stand up to these women." (Laughter)

"This will be great. When the groom returns home, I'll be able to enjoy drinking sake with him."

Later, the president's remarks took a more serious turn. He concluded, "They are walking the difficult path of inheriting the lamp of the Dharma. Both are still immature. Please give them your guidance--warmly, but firmly."

President Nichiko Niwano's second daughter, Ryoko, married Noriyuki Tanaka in October of 1996. She then became Yukako Tanaka. (That is, Yukako is her new Buddhist name.) When the parents of the two families met for the first time, something like the following occurred. After exchanging salutations, both sets of parents sat Japanese-style on the tatami mats. President Niwano said, "I like this way of sitting best; it is the most relaxing." So saying, he folded the seat cushion in two and sat on it with his legs crossed.

Both parents of the groom had been ardent members of Rissho Kosei-kai from their youth. Later, Noriyuki explained me what had happened in the day when the parents of both the bride and groom met. "My father is a man who never skips sutra chanting, even if it means doing so after he comes home late at night." Reflecting on events connected with their meeting with President Niwano, he said, "He and my mother were very ill-at-ease at that first meeting." With just a few thoughtful words from President Niwano the atmosphere became relaxed. Sake was served and the conversation drifted to the childhoods of the two young people.

The wedding took place on October 10. A book newly published that month, from Kosei Publishing Company, had arrived at the president's room in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall just a couple of days earlier. Rev. Niwano took it home and inscribed it with his writing-brush: "Congratulations to Yukako! October 10, 1996--Father Nichiko" and he presented it to Yukako.

In that book, commenting on a passage of the eminent 13th-century Buddhist priest Shinran, the author writes about the warm ties between parent and child and their deep sense of unity.

In the evening before the wedding day, Yukako saluted her parents. She later said, "My father bowed his head slightly and said nothing. Maybe he wasn't able to say anything. My mother said, 'Be good to your Tanaka parents and make yourself loved by them.'"

The bride and groom both wore Japanese attire throughout the wedding ceremony. However, for the reception that followed the bride wore a Western-style wedding dress. President Niwano took her arm and led her to the main table--escorting her as the father of the bride--and at the table, passed her on to the bridegroom. Founder Niwano looked on with warm emotion.

## Chapter 41

### Sacred Places of Shakyamuni Buddha

#### **"Let's hold a hoza for the Rissho Kosei-kai family"**

In the autumn of 1964, Founder and Mrs. Niwano visited India with their son Nichiko to pay their respects at the great sacred places associated with Shakyamuni Buddha. In that year, the Great Sacred Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo was completed and an image of Shakyamuni Buddha was enshrined there as the central focus of worship.

The delegation that went to India with the Niwanos consisted of thirty people, from both traditional Buddhist sects and new Buddhist organizations in Japan.

"While making a pilgrimage to the sacred places associated with Shakyamuni Buddha, I will talk with members of the group about the future of religion in Japan." With such an aspiration, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano added the following at the airport before embarking on the flight to India: "I will walk the difficult path of a true pilgrim, with a pilgrim's simple straw sandals and stick."

On the afternoon of November 21, the delegation left Gorakhpur for Lumbini, the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha in what is now Nepal. It was a 200-kilometer bus drive one way. Either because of the age of the bus or the bad road, or both, the whole bus shook and clouds of dust rose from the road. When the group arrived at Lumbini Garden, the sun had already reached the horizon and dusk was closing in.

Lumbini Garden is said in Buddhist texts to have been a picturesque park with many-colored flowers in bloom, pure streams in a beautiful forest, and scattered ponds. But in 1964 no trace of a beautiful forest or ponds remained. According to legend, while Queen Maya was strolling in the garden, she suddenly felt labor pains, and when the queen reached out to pluck a flowering branch from an *ashoka* tree, a perfect child, Siddhartha, was born. (This was the personal name of the historical Buddha before his renunciation of the world.)

Members of the party hurried to worship at the main temple and saw the Ashoka pillar and the well where the baby prince was bathed for the first time. Then they drove back to Gorakhpur, where it was almost midnight when they arrived. With the dust blown up from the road, everyone was covered in gray. They couldn't recognize each other's faces and burst out laughing as they tried to do so. There was neither bathtub nor shower at the rest house where they stayed, so it was even difficult to wash one's face.

Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha became enlightened, was a quiet woods. Huge trees grew here and there. We members of the group looked up at the great stupa with the autumn sunlight behind it. People prayed at the Diamond Seat, the place of the Buddha's awakening. Founder Niwano said, "One can surely believe that Lord Shakyamuni became enlightened in this place." Transcending a lapse of two thousand and several hundred years, the noble figure of Shakyamuni at the moment of enlightenment seemed to have come to Rev. Niwano's eyes. Touching the trunk of the huge bodhi tree near the Diamond Seat, he submitted for a while to the deep emotion.

Nine people from Rissho Kosei-kai were on this trip. At Gaya near Bodh Gaya all of the delegation took breakfast and dinner at a rest house and stayed at night in a train sleeping car parked in the station. After the evening meal and their return to the station, the Rissho Kosei-kai members entered Rev. Niwano's compartment. "Now, let's hold a hoza session for the Rissho Kosei-kai family," he said. Following the bright voice of Rev. Niwano, an instant hoza counseling session was formed and for some time there was joyous conversation in the family-like atmosphere. Rev. Niwano spoke in the small box-like compartment, filled with the nine people sitting knee to

knee, about his impressions of the sacred places, his sentiments after many years of practice of the Lotus Sutra, and his dreams and hopes for the future.

On Sacred Eagle Peak, where Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra, Rev. Niwano lit incense he had brought from Japan and offered it at the "seat of preaching." Without stirring an inch, and with his palms joined, he prayed for a time. Then he chanted the sutra with all of the nine members. "We were able to see with our own eyes and walk with our own feet in the footsteps of Shakyamuni Buddha. It was really good to come to India," he said.

"We heard that, counting from the Edo period, some 300 Japanese had made pilgrimages to the sacred places of the Buddha. With this tour, we have made the total 330," Founder Niwano said. "When I stood in front of the place on Eagle Peak where Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra, I was moved beyond words."

On the one hand, Rev. Niwano was excited about the pilgrimage and his impressions of India; at the same time, he gradually deepened friendships with members of the traditional Buddhist sects in the party. At the beginning of the tour, they were like strangers to each other. As the tour progressed, however, this changed day by day. By the end of the pilgrimage, they actually felt close to each other. Some continued the friendly contact through correspondence, mutual visits, and exchanges of periodicals of their respective organizations for many years.

Rev. Niwano, who asserted that "the Lotus Sutra is the supreme way to peace" and that "the Buddha is an exemplar of peace," visited Nepal, the country where Shakyamuni Buddha was born, for the second time in 1991, to attend the fourth assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace in Kathmandu. Soon after he returned from that trip, the Ceremony of the Inheritance of the Lamp of the Dharma, celebrating the transmission of the Dharma from Founder Niwano to the second president, his son Nichiko, was held for the first time by Rissho Kosei-kai.

## Chapter 42

### Peace Pilgrimage

#### "I could hardly put on my shoes"

The first international preparatory meeting was held in February of 1969 in Istanbul, Turkey for what was then known as the World Conference on Religion and Peace, now the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). The plane from Haneda airport in Tokyo to Istanbul took a southern route, requiring 24 hours to reach the destination since it stopped five times along the way. As we approached Istanbul, I said to Founder Nikkyo Niwano, "You must be very tired." "No," he responded. "When I flew to Brazil, the journey was much more difficult." He had visited Brazil in 1958 on his first trip overseas. From Haneda to Wake Island, Honolulu, San Francisco, New Orleans, Caracas, Belen, Rio de Janeiro, and then Sao Paulo, the trip took five consecutive days and changing from one propeller-driven plane to another. After so many hours seated on airplanes, he recalled, "When I tried to put my shoes on before disembarking, my feet were so swollen it was not easy."

In Istanbul, some twenty members of the preparatory committee from various countries had gathered to discuss concrete issues regarding the holding of a world conference on religion and peace. Their first meeting lasted from early in the morning until late at night and it can be said that the meeting itself manifested interreligious cooperation. In Istanbul, a historic point of contact between Eastern and Western cultures, representatives of religions from both joined hands and pledged to work together for world peace. After three days of enthusiastic discussions, it was decided to hold the first World Assembly of the WCRP (WCRP I) in Kyoto the following year, 1970.

Even in February, Istanbul was quite warm, making the representatives feel that spring was coming. But when Rev. Niwano flew back to Japan and landed at Haneda, it was snowing heavily. Perhaps the weather indicated the hard future ahead for the beginning of the WCRP, since no discussion at all had been held with Japanese religionists about hosting such a big assembly.

In 1969, Rev. Niwano had served as chairman of the Japan Religions League (now the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations), a position that rotates each year among the five members of the association--Buddhism, Shrine Shinto, Sectarian Shinto, Christianity, and new religions. Rev. Niwano was then chairman of the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan. He visited the head temples of traditional Buddhist denominations and the headquarters of various other religious organizations to enthusiastically explain to the top leaders the concept and ideals of the WCRP and the plans for its first world assembly.

This was the beginning of his "peace pilgrimage" in Japan. "It accords with the spirit of the Buddha that the major goal of Buddhism, Christianity, and other world religions is principally the same," Rev. Niwano said. One of the other Japanese religious leaders said, "In the precinct of our head temple on the mountain here, we have large facilities. We would be happy if they could be put to use for such a good cause as interreligious cooperation and world peace."

Some became committed to the WCRP immediately, while others expressed interest in cooperating for the assembly, and others not yet ready to join at the initial stage voiced their support. Reactions varied, but the process of making possible the first assembly, the so-called Kyoto Conference, was an opportunity to increase cooperation in the religious peace movement and strengthen it among Japanese religionists year by year.

"This is an example," Rev. Niwano said, "of *ichinen-sanzen* (three thousand realms in one thought, a concept derived from Chinese T'ien-t'ai Buddhism that says all phenomena are contained and interpenetrated in a moment

of thought within the mind). If our will and determination are not strong enough, others may not respond sufficiently. If we are truly serious, they will also become serious."

When the first WCRP assembly was held it drew international attention and bore much fruit. Sometime later, on the way to WCRP II in Leuven, Belgium in 1974, Rev. Niwano began to extend his "peace pilgrimage" overseas. One cannot know a country by looking at a map. Visiting there, observing its natural surroundings, and meeting and talking with people and trying to understand how they think is entirely different. Rev. Niwano met top religious leaders and people from other fields of various countries and enthusiastically talked with them and also earnestly listened to what they had to say, even the ordinary citizens he encountered.

In Belgium, responding to the enthusiasm of Rev. Niwano, a man who had been hired as his driver for that country became eloquent and talked a lot as he drove. "In this country," he said, "we begin teaching two foreign languages from the fourth grade of elementary school. Without international awareness, it is difficult to live in Europe. What Nazi Germany did during World War II, people of the countries that suffered can forgive but not forget. Fully curing the wounds of the war may take several more decades, until all the people who experienced them have passed away."

In Germany, another driver (who sped on the autobahn to reach neighboring countries) was impressed by Rev. Niwano's personality. "I want to read the Lotus Sutra in German," he later said to Dr. Maria Lucker, who had been a member of the executive committee of the WCRP, and who sent a letter noting his interest to Rev. Niwano in Japan.

Prof. Rolf Italiaander, a German scholar and writer, first visited Rev. Niwano at his hotel in Bonn and learned about Risho Kosei-kai and the WCRP. He realized the importance of their missions. He wrote and published books about Rev. Niwano and Risho Kosei-kai and delivered a series of lectures about them in Europe and in Japan.

One woman who interviewed Rev. Niwano for the first time at WCRP II, when she was a university student, then began studying the Lotus Sutra and Risho Kosei-kai. She interviewed Rev. Niwano several times at consecutive world assemblies of the WCRP for her dissertation, as well as serving the movements of interreligious cooperation of the WCRP and the IARF as a volunteer. Her wedding took place at the time of WCRP II and sometime later she had her first child, a daughter. When the girl had grown up, she visited Risho Kosei-kai Tokyo headquarters and local churches in Japan carrying a letter from her mother, who continued her scholarly work for some twenty years.

"The firing I heard last night seemed to be rounds of a very large size"

Though the WCRP is a movement for "peace," there sometimes have been dangers. At WCRP I in Kyoto in 1970, delegates from Vietnam participated while the war there was still going on. In December of that year, soon after the assembly had ended, Rev. Niwano, heading a small group of the Japanese Committee of the WCRP, flew to Vietnam, bringing with him relief goods for the suffering people. In the battle between North Vietnam and South Vietnam, artillery and rockets flew between both sides. The group heard that a Japanese newspaper reporter, while asleep in his hotel in Saigon, experienced a direct hit on his room and died. The small group headed by Rev. Niwano flew to Hue, only miles from the front, and there distributed food and other relief supplies directly to people in need. The family that provided rooms for the group members were lay Buddhist followers. At night, the sound of artillery rounds being fired was incessant. "The firing I heard last night seemed to be rounds of a very large size," Rev. Niwano said in the morning. "Having served in the navy in my young days, I can just about guess the size of the shells when I hear artillery firing." We later learned that the fighting had been very near.

International relations were under considerable strain in 1980 after Iranian students took as hostages a large group of staff members from the American Embassy in Tehran. At the first Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament (SSD I) in New York in 1978, Rev. Niwano had appealed to the leaders of the world, especially of the then two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union: "Instead of taking risks with arms, please take major risks for peace and disarmament."



"Since we are all religious people," Founder Niwano said with regard to the hostage problem in Iran, "we can work together for a peaceful solution, can't we?" At the invitation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Rev. Niwano as an honorary president of the WCRP flew to Iran to take part in the International Conference on U.S. Interventions in Iran held June 2 - 5, 1980, to learn about the situation from the standpoint of the Iranian people. About 400 religious representatives from 54 countries attended the conference. It began with opening remarks by Abolhassan Banisadr, then president of Iran, and a message from the senior religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. The venue for the conference, as well as the residence for the participants, was the Independence Hotel, the largest in Tehran. In the windows we could see bullet holes, probably from the time of the revolution in 1979. The hotel was guarded 24 hours a day by soldiers armed with automatic rifles.

On the third day of the conference, Ayatollah Khomeini delivered an address. In a calm voice he expressed appreciation to the participants for attending and said that the people of Iran would not compromise in any way with the American superpower. After the various events of the conference, Rev. Niwano wrote a final appeal and gave it to Foreign Minister, Sadequ Qotbzadeh. "Please release the American hostages as quickly as possible and put the issue up for discussion at the United Nations," his message read. "If you feel any anxiety about releasing the hostages, we will be happy to serve as substitutes for them together with volunteers from among Risho Koseikai youth members." These words came as quite a surprise to the Iranian leaders and created a considerable impression among them. It turned out that about half a year later, all of the hostages were released. In the following month, the Iranian government sent a special envoy, Mr. Abdol Karim Hashemi Nejad, the highest leader of the country's Shi'ia Islam, to Tokyo. He visited Rev. Niwano at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall and expressed sincere gratitude to him, saying, "Even though Japan was in a very delicate position in relation to the U.S., you understood well the standpoint of Iran and bravely gave us assistance. We want to express our sincere gratitude.

"Just by meeting, cooperation has already begun"

Dr. Helmut Jarosch, a German university professor teaching in Japan, visited Rev. Niwano at the Great Sacred Hall in 1985. He was teaching German as well as trying to heighten students' consciousness of "peace" and "nonviolence" through his seminar. An ardent Christian and extremely fond of Japan, he had lived in the country for several decades. His command of the Japanese language was excellent. For some time prior to the meeting he had observed Rev. Niwano's activities for peace and interreligious cooperation, and admired him. "My favorite Japanese word," he said, "is *kyo-ryoku* (cooperation). In kanji characters, *kyo* is made up of *ju*, the numeral 'ten,' which looks like the plus sign, and *chikara* (power), repeated three times. Thus with the *ryoku* (another Japanese pronunciation of *chikara*), there are four *chikaras*. Four 'powers' and a 'plus' mean cooperation is 'full of power.' Cooperation among great powers, I think, is most important and necessary. There is also the word *kyoson* (coexistence). However, just being together can be done by everyone. What is difficult is to cooperate to do something together. Without a rich mind, interreligious cooperation cannot be promoted." This may have been the very first time that Rev. Niwano heard an interpretation of kanji characters from a German scholar. He responded, "Just by meeting in this way today, cooperation has already begun." Though it was their first meeting, the two enjoyed their conversation very much and it lasted for a long time.

## **"Only by chanting the formula of 'Namu Myoho Renge-kyo,' we cannot fully express the spirit of the truth that the one heaven and the four seas are all attributed to the Wonderful Dharma"**

On both sides of the altar in the main hall of the Horin-kaku Guest Hall hang special permanent examples of Founder Niwano's calligraphy. The one on the right side reads *itten-shikai kaiki-myoho* (the one heaven and the four seas are all attributed to the Wonderful Dharma). The one on the other side reads *tenjo-mukyu itaidoshin* (infinite in heaven and earth, many in body but one in spirit).

When Rev. Niwano wrote with brush in black ink the saying that appears on the right plaque, he said, "Only by chanting the formula of 'Namu Myoho Renge-kyo' (I take refuge in the Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus

Flower), we cannot fully express the spirit of the truth that the one heaven and the four seas are all attributed to the Wonderful Dharma. Everything in this world is sustained by the truth of the Wonderful Dharma, and what is needed is for everyone to waken to the truth and base their everyday behavior on it. It is the meaning of the truth that all people will practice the spirit of the Wonderful Dharma."

"All religions stem fundamentally from the same root. Making the truth their base, all religions also have the same ultimate goal." So believing, Rev. Niwano promoted interreligious cooperation.

The Horin-kaku Guest Hall was completed in 1978, the 40th year since the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai. In his first sermon of the year, indicating the sayings mentioned above that he had inscribed in traditional Japanese calligraphy on the two special hangings, he offered guidance to the members gathered in the Great Sacred Hall by saying, "I have put these words here as the theme for the organization this year, as well as having resolved myself to promote interreligious cooperation based on these thoughts. Please make them the goal of your efforts." He used the same words in his customary New Year's calligraphy that year.

On the one hand, he strove ceaselessly to disseminate the Lotus Sutra, but at the same time he put much energy into promoting interreligious cooperation. The goal of the two was same, namely the realization of "the land of serene light, a truly peaceful world" in our present age. In his mind, his dedication to world peace and his warm concern and high regard for individual members were two facets of the same thing, reflecting a longing for the happiness of all humankind. For more than 30 years after beginning international peace activities based on interreligious cooperation, he always exemplified what he taught.

How should the next generation assume this sacred task? One day Rev. Niwano spoke of his own expectations to young members of Rissho Kosei-kai. "Inheriting the spirit of the founder is most important in any organization. So far, we have been opening a path of religious cooperation where there was no such path. This has continued for 30 years. With that understanding in mind, I expect the younger generation to make a great effort to carry forward what I have been trying to achieve. Those who strive to succeed in this in the twenty-first century are bodhisattvas who spring up from the earth as described in the Lotus Sutra."

In both the WCRP and the IARF, Rissho Kosei-kai member who are now helping to achieve those goals of Rev. Niwano is growing gradually, as is the number of those who attend the world assemblies of the WCRP as well as those who contribute in their local communities.

"From tomorrow on, let's make a fresh start!" The years 1984 and 1999 are notable for the fact that in both a world assembly of the WCRP and a world congress of the IARF took place in the same year. In the summer of 1984, the 25th World Congress of the IARF, the first ever to be held in Asia, was held in Tokyo using Rissho Kosei-kai facilities. Less than two weeks later, WCRP IV was held in Nairobi, Kenya. Holding a conference on such a world scale requires tremendous energy even when there is only one. That year there were two. When they ended, bearing much fruit, the honest feeling of Rissho Kosei-kai staff members who had taken part was one of relief along with great joy. Following an interview session with the general media, Rev. Niwano participated in another interview with Rissho Kosei-kai periodicals. At the end of that one, he said, "From tomorrow on, let's make a fresh start!" He added, "Although I am nearly eighty years old, I still have a dream."

In those days, flying to Nairobi required flying from Tokyo to London by taking the northern route and passing over Alaska. After staying in London overnight, we then boarded a different plane to fly to Africa. The entire journey took three days. During the stay in Nairobi there were many inconveniences. Despite the hardships, Rev. Niwano's words "From tomorrow on, let's make a fresh start" made a deep impression on us and left a lasting memory. These words are valuable not only with respect to peace activities, but also for Buddhist practice in general. They can be remembered even now as a lesson we should always keep in mind.

The "fresh start" bore much fruit at WCRP VI, held in Italy in 1994. The presence of Pope John Paul II, which Rev. Niwano and many other world religious leaders had long hope to see since the pope has such great influence among the world's religious leaders, was realized. For this purpose, President Nichiko Niwano visited the Vatican

during the preparatory stage and wholeheartedly conveyed once again Founder Niwano's hope of many years. There were many other remarkable results from this world assembly.

In the summer of 1999 the first IARF Centenary World Congress was held in Vancouver, Canada. From Japan, the U.S., Canada, and South Korea, more Rissho Kosei-kai members attended than had been at the previous three. "We felt all the more keenly the greatness of Founder Niwano and appreciated it greatly" was a widely shared sentiment. Their comments often served as reminders to the non-Japanese participants who had attended the IARF Japan Congress 15 years earlier. One after another, such people described to Rissho Kosei-kai participants their pleasant memories and expressed their gratitude.

Some of the foreign participants in the Japan Congress witnessed a hoza counseling session for the first time. At each subsequent congress, "circle groups" similar to hoza sessions were a part of the activities. At this congress in Canada, too, many circles were formed each day where the participants talked and listened to each other.

This is where Rissho Kosei-kai's Donate a Meal Campaign took root. It was not only implemented at the IARF congress, there was even a report of the campaign being taken up by the local IARF chapter in England.

There was also a report about home visits. "We first learned about home visits at the Japan Congress," some participants from India said, "and followed the same program at the congress held in our country." Listening to such reports, Rissho Kosei-kai participants at Vancouver learned that the "Eastern Initiative," one of the themes of the Japan Congress, had been implemented in other countries afterward. They were also impressed with the role that Rissho Kosei-kai had played at the Japan Congress. After these participants returned to Japan, Rev. Niwano listened attentively to their reports of their various activities and their awareness of their role. Although physically weakened, he showed his pleasure.

In the autumn of that year, 1999, the first world assembly of the WCRP (WCRP VII) in the Middle East took place in Amman, Jordan, the first to be held after the passing of Founder Niwano. On the day following the Buddhist 49th-day memorial service for him, President Niwano left for the assembly, which welcomed some 1,400 participants from 60 countries. At the first plenary session, which immediately followed the opening ceremony, President Niwano gave the keynote speech on the conference theme of "Action for Common Living." He closed his talk with the following words: "The mission of the WCRP is to be the handmaid of multireligious action for common living."

This assembly was the very first at which Founder Niwano was not present. However, President Niwano played as an active role as an international president.

## **"I'm happy to play the role of messenger"**

During the founding period of the WCRP, Founder Niwano served as chairman of the Japan Religions League and visited many religious leaders in the country, saying, "I am happy to play the role of messenger for the purpose of developing peace activities based on interreligious cooperation." In addition, at the same time he extended his "peace pilgrimage" widely overseas. He was often the leader of activities in which he sought to work behind the scenes. This was true of the urgent relief goods which he brought to Vietnam during the war there immediately after WCRP I in Kyoto, of the Indo-Chinese Boat People Project which began at the first assembly of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace in Singapore in 1976, of his efforts for the peaceful resolution of the American hostage crisis in Iran, and of the WCRP initiative to create a worldwide project to rescue Indo-Chinese boat people. This was highly praised by the top United Nations officials.

Founder Niwano's decades-long efforts were appreciated and honored by many representatives from around the world who attended the Amman Conference. President Niwano's keynote speech conveyed his firm determination to follow in the footsteps of his father. Among participants from Rissho Kosei-kai, similar voices of determination were heard, voicing such sentiments as: "The founder is with us here at this assembly," "He must be pleased with

this assembly," "It is as if we can hear him saying, 'Fellow members, continue your efforts,'" and "The seed sown by Founder Niwano has grown greatly in 30 years and now huge flowers bloom from it. We must continue to strive so that it bears good fruit."

## Chapter 43

### To Young People

#### **"Step forward with high hopes"**

Rissho Kosei-kai's Youth Division was born on August 28, 1949. In the subsequent two years, the organization's daily report for January 3 noted that the New Year Gathering of the Youth Division was held at the Kosei Nursery School (now known as Ikuseikan). Both Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Cofounder Myoko Naganuma were present and delivered New Year messages to the young members attending.

On the last day of 1950, after taking part in the general year-end cleaning of Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters facilities, I went to a friend's home. Since I had guided him to join the organization, I visited his parents' house to attend the installation ceremony of the focus of devotion for ancestor veneration in their home Buddhist altar. On January 3 of the new year I rushed to his home again, early in the morning, and shoved him out of bed to wake him from a deep sleep. We hurried together to the headquarters. At least that is how I remember my first attendance at a New Year Youth Gathering. That morning, sermons were delivered by Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma, and in the afternoon impromptu entertainment was offered by Youth Division members.

In 1952, because of the growth in membership, the venue of the New Year Gathering was changed to the main worship hall in the headquarters at that time. Although it rained that day, luck was with us. "The rain is a special arrangement by the Buddha to allow us to spend the whole day with the Youth Division," Founder Niwano told us. Then he and Mrs. Naganuma changed their schedules for the day so that instead of visiting branch churches in the afternoon, they stayed with us at the New Year Gathering until late in the day.

"You young people," the founder urged, "should step forward with high hopes--with a mind actively seeking the Dharma." He continued, "Believe in the absolute, supreme Dharma and practice it earnestly."

For almost an hour Rev. Niwano instructed the youths and expressed his great expectations in them--all the while praising and encouraging them. Mrs. Naganuma offered guidance as well, saying that from that year she planned to have classes for the girls in sewing, conducting the tea ceremony, and Japanese flower arranging, all of which at that time were abilities that young Japanese girls of good families were expected to have. She also announced plans to set up a baseball team for the boys.

As more than a decade had passed since the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, this was a time when the organization was mainly concerned with religious practice, so these prospects of special youth activities were both surprising and regarded as a welcome New Year's gift.

The founder and cofounder had stayed up late the previous night to create amusing lottery games for the hundreds of young people to play. With funny trinkets as prizes, each with a message attached making a significant connection between the Dharma and the novelty, the result was that some participants were delighted, while others were less elated. There was plenty of happy laughter among them all that afternoon, however.

The baseball team was started in the spring of 1952, and in a friendship tournament featuring the member groups of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations in Japan) the Rissho Kosei-kai team took second place for the year. One after the other, classes were started in the tea ceremony, flower arranging, and sewing. In 1953 the New Year Gathering of the Youth Division took place in a much larger facility--the Second Training Hall. More than a thousand members attended, including many from local churches in various parts of Japan.

In the early 1950s, shortly after the founding of the Youth Division, Rissho Kosei-kai members had sought the Dharma without a halt from the beginning to the end of the year. New Year's Day thus marked the "first worship" of the year at the organization's headquarters. On January 2 a New Year Ceremony took place in which the founder and cofounder delivered their first sermons of the year.

On the third, the New Year Gathering took place, and then from the fourth on, the first hoza counseling sessions were held and continued throughout the rest of the year. In later years the New Year Ceremony that had been held on January 2 was included in the first memorial service on January 5, so the New Year Gathering of the Youth Division on January 3 became the first official Rissho Kosei-kai event of each year. In it, representatives from both the Men's and Women's Groups of the Youth Division delivered religious testimony at that time.

During those annual New Year Gatherings Rev. Niwano not only delivered a sermon, but also held a question-and-answer session in which he instructed the young people about various topics and issues. Hoping to receive more direct instruction, some of the young members asked him to conduct seminars on doctrine. So it was the Youth Division that first received that opportunity, with the beginning of Rissho Kosei-kai's Age of the Manifestation of the Truth (1958--77). On April 9, 1958 the first doctrinal lecture meeting was held for Youth Division leaders. In March of that year the Youth Members' Vow was adopted, and within a few years it became the Members' Vow and from then on was chanted by everyone belonging to Rissho Kosei-kai.

"He twirled the *matoi* so vigorously!" The following is a story from soon after the Youth Division was established. In those days not long after the end of the Pacific War many young people still suffered from tuberculosis and other health problems. One youth with tuberculosis who had been bedridden for years gradually recovered after he joined Rissho Kosei-kai. He is said to have considered this as proof of the merit of his practice and to have come to the organization's headquarters every day for worship and religious practice.

Every year in October Rissho Kosei-kai holds the Oeshiki Festival to mark the anniversary of the death of Nichiren, the eminent 12th-century Buddhist priest who fervently advocated the Lotus Sutra despite being severely persecuted for it. The ceremony is now held on the Sunday closest to the actual anniversary, October 12. One year when the event was drawing near, the recovered youth joined in training to twirl a traditional *matoi* fireman's standard, used to make a showy display in the festival parade.

Although he was diligent in practicing, he still had not fully recovered his strength and so lacked confidence. On the day of the festival, however, he exerted himself to the utmost, especially when passing before Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma, who were reviewing the parade from the balcony of the headquarters building.

The following day he chanced to meet Rev. Niwano in one of the headquarters facilities. The founder recognized him and said, "You did a fine job yesterday, but you must be tired. How are you feeling today?" Thousands of people took part even in the early Oeshiki parades. They were divided into groups, each with a *matoi* standard that was twirled by several different people so that no one was worn out from the task. The young man accordingly was grateful that Founder Niwano had noticed his efforts. "He remembered me and really seemed to care about my health," he said later, and seemed quite touched. Though more than half a century has since passed, that member has said to me that he still remembers that day vividly. A few years after this incident he began working at the Kosei General Hospital and spent his entire career caring for the health of others. He has now passed on his faith to his children and grandchildren.

By the time of the completion of the Second Training Hall in the summer of 1951 Rissho Kosei-kai had witnessed rapid growth in its membership and welcomed a great many visitors, who came to see Rev. Niwano and Mrs. Naganuma. Many of the young women members of the Youth Division were pleased to assist by serving the guests meals or refreshments.

One day one of these young women was quietly told she would no longer be needed for such assistance. Although she nodded her acceptance, inwardly she was deeply hurt. She puzzled over the matter for days, wondering what she had done wrong. Finally she became aware that when she was carrying a tray for guests her arms

unconsciously sagged from the weight, so that without realizing it she breathed directly on the dishes she was carrying, which of course was considered discourteous to the guests. A little later, after she had realized her error, Mrs. Naganuma was glad to suggest that she again join in helping with visitors.

This woman has another unforgettable memory, probably from around the same time, which was not so many years after the end of the war, when civilian goods were still in short supply. Sometimes Cofounder Naganuma gave the Youth Division members items to reward them for their volunteer service to the organization. One day, Mrs. Naganuma had planned to present a sweater to each of the girls who assisted in serving guests at the headquarters. She took great pains to select the color that she felt best suited each girl. There was only one red sweater and Mrs. Naganuma decided there was only one girl that the color suited best. This was the youngest girl in the group, who was overwhelmed with gratitude.

Whenever members of the Youth Division received something in the presence of both Rev. Niwano and Mrs. Naganuma, the latter always made a point of telling them that they should not express thanks only to her, but should also thank Founder Niwano.

## **"This is the way to use a hoe"**

From the late 1940s until the early 1950s, Rissho Kosei-kai had crop fields around what is now known as the former headquarters. Vegetables were planted in the fields and sowing the seeds, weeding, applying compost, and removing pests, along with harvesting the crops, were activities to which Youth Division members devoted themselves. In the early years after the war, food was in short supply. The young people, not accustomed to farming, worked at growing whatever they could--cucumbers, eggplants, beans, and chard.

From time to time Rev. Niwano would show up while the youths were at work. Recognizing that they were unfamiliar with the tasks at hand, he demonstrated by personal example. He would sometimes say with a smile, "This is the way to use a hoe." His crop rows were always straight and attracted much attention. The young members then tried it themselves, but it wasn't an easy skill to master.

Mrs. Naganuma often brought refreshments for them while they worked, sometimes slices of watermelon. On one occasion senior Rissho Kosei-kai leaders together with the cofounder brought a large basket of baked sweet potatoes. She also often brought words of encouragement. When they later recalled the experience as adults, these members remembered appreciating her words as much as her refreshments.

In those days of rapid membership growth the facilities had to be expanded as well. Construction of the headquarters complex continued apace. The Second Training Hall, which I have already noted was completed in 1951, was soon filled with members every day. "Outdoor hoza" sessions even were convened in the garden of the hall, on straw mats spread out by young men of the Youth Division.

Construction began with ground leveling and laying of the foundation. Young members joined the adults in assisting in the work on a volunteer basis, digging with simple shovels and using straw baskets to carry the dirt. Rev. Niwano often was out in front of the group. Wearing fingerless gloves he showed them how to carry the baskets by his own example.

In early autumn of 1951 a gathering was held in the Second Training Hall to mark the second anniversary of the establishment of the Youth Division. "Two years have already passed since the division started," the founder said. "Let's continue to encourage its young members." He and Mrs. Naganuma took part in the gathering with glad hearts. Many youths who had been seated in those places assigned to branch churches for hoza sessions greeted them at the entrance.

As at the New Year Gathering, Rev. Niwano, delivered a sermon and then allowed time for a question-and-answer session, emphasizing two-way communication, not just one-way instruction. There was a warm, family-like feeling to the session, with much relaxed laughter ringing out from time to time.

"Founder Niwano and Cofounder Naganuma always displayed special warmth in their attention to us," one member recalls. "Their eyes reflected their genuine interest and the hope they felt for the young members"-- in those days Rissho Kosei-kai was not nearly as large as it is now and its activities were not as diverse, and that is the way Youth Division members felt who spent time close to the two revered teachers. To practice the bodhisattva way gradually spread among them as a chief ambition and aim.

## **"Build up yourselves with the Lotus Sutra as your foundation"**

Soon after the division's start, on its membership application form a young man wrote in the column for the applicant's future hope or ambition the words "chapter head." That position then was equivalent to the present post of branch church head or minister, the organization's preeminent position for religious activities. In those days, modesty was regarded as a high virtue in religious practice, and arrogance was looked down on severely. That a prospective member of the Youth Division had such a high aspiration demonstrated courage. Rev. Niwano was pleased when he saw the response on the application form. "This is very good," he said.

The founder praised this positive attitude toward seeking the Dharma and practicing the bodhisattva way, and he encouraged it. He referred to the young man's ambition before many members of the Youth Division and used it as a stimulus for the others. Rev. Niwano wanted to put young members on their mettle to practice and disseminate the Lotus Sutra. In fact, the young man became a chapter head at a very youthful age and continued to take far greater responsibilities than his peers for many years.

When the idea to build a training hall with their own hands in Ome city, in the suburbs of Tokyo, was proposed by Youth Division members, Rev. Niwano was greatly pleased and actively supported it. The organization's directors and heads of the branch churches followed his lead. Upon its completion in 1966, the first use of the Ome Seminar House was for special training for the heads of all the local Youth Groups. At the time Rev. Niwano addressed the young leaders in the following words: "I feel a sense of great trust when I see your bright, energetic faces. I have been silently anticipating how your enthusiasm will be reflected in the construction of this building. I fervently hope that from this day forward you will build up yourselves as well, with the Lotus Sutra as your foundation. I hope that many of you, on whose shoulders the future of Japan rests, will develop through the religious training that will be held in this seminar house."

When we review the chronology of Rissho Kosei-kai, we can see how diligently Rev. Niwano devoted himself to the education of young members, especially at times like the building and completion of the Ome facility. The Youth Division celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1999. During that half century it helped to train numerous young men and women as human resources for the further development of Rissho Kosei-kai.

## **"Be the support and driving force of our one-hundred-year grand plan"**

Gakurin, the Rissho Kosei-kai seminary, was established in 1964. In the early years Founder Niwano often told the seminarians of his hopes and dreams for the organization. "I hope that you will be the support and driving force of our one-hundred-year grand plan," he said to them. At the entrance ceremony for the eighth enrollment of students in the seminary's graduate course, Rev. Niwano drew a parallel between them and Rennyo (1415--99), the eighth-generation chief abbot of the Honganji temple of Jodo Shin Buddhism. Under Rennyo's leadership, he pointed out, Honganji grew to become the unchallenged center of the sect and the largest religious group in feudal Japan. The comparison greatly encouraged the new seminarians.



Dr. Felix D. Lion, an American academic who taught English at the seminary in 1970, decades later recalled Founder Niwano's warmth toward and expectations of the students. When I visited him in the summer of 1998 in Canada, where he had retired, he showed me his diary entry for March 1, 1970, where he had written: "New students enter Rissho Kosei-kai seminary." Following that, he had written what he described as a very poor attempt at a haiku:

Beaming Niwano,  
Feast for ten. Last supper? No.  
Radiance, melting snow.

A light snow had fallen during the night, Dr. Lion recalled, but near noon it was melting, which he attributed--with poetic license - to Rev. Niwano.

In a recent letter to me, Dr. Lion wrote the following remembrance: "The dean of the seminary and his assistant had met Rev. Niwano at the seminary entrance and escorted him upstairs to a large room with Western-style cushioned chairs surrounding a low table. Tea was brought in. The two seminary officials and Rev. Niwano's driver or secretary left the room. Remaining were Rev. Niwano, ten students (I think all were new first-year students), including two women, and myself. I remained completely silent, but the students, encouraged by Rev. Niwano, were soon asking questions. He spoke and listened in turn, as if among equals.

"I particularly remember one student asking which among all the world's religions was the true one. Rev. Niwano answered along these lines (although of course I did not catch every word in Japanese, nor can I remember exactly at this late date): 'The major religions of the world developed out of various civilizations and various human experiences. It is as if a number of people from widely scattered villages started to climb a sacred mountain like Fuji, The higher they climbed, the closer their paths approached each other.

"The sages and prophets of each faith, as they ascended the heights and gained the larger truth, became very close, regardless of whether they started as Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, or members of some other faith.' That was my first close contact with Rev. Niwano, except for a formal handshake in Boston in July 1969. I came away profoundly impressed by his humanity and the depth of his concern."

## **"As I awoke at four this morning"**

The twenty-second World Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) was held in Montreal in 1975 under the theme "Our Unity in Diversity." It marked the first time that students from the Rissho Kosei-kai seminary had attended an IARF congress.

Ten of the students introduced the Japanese Buddhist organization under the title "Meet Rissho Kosei-kai." To introduce the function and history of the organization's hoza sessions in terms of their religious practice they used slides and role-playing demonstrations. This was followed by a question-and-answer session. Further, in another session they also demonstrated the chanting of the Lotus Sutra which members do in their daily devotionals.

Founder Niwano watched with rapt attention, noting that many attendees from Western countries expressed keen interest in the new religious movement from Japan. Despite his busy schedule at the congress the founder made time to invite the students to dinner at a local Japanese restaurant and offered personal guidance to each of them in a relaxed setting. The seminarians appreciated the consideration and warm encouragement from Rev. Niwano.

Among the students were two who were then studying at graduate schools in the United States. One day Rev. Niwano called them to his hotel room and presented them with some cordial handwritten instructions, saying to them, "As I awoke at four this morning I reflected on how well you students were able to explain the essence of the Lotus Sutra so that Westerners could genuinely understand its spirit. On this piece of paper I have set down for you what I consider some of the sutra's most important points."

One of those two students is now a director of Rissho Kosei-kai. Many of the other nine who participated in the congress now serve as ministers of local or overseas branch churches, or as heads of different departments or sections of the organization's headquarters in Tokyo.

In the summer of 1999 graduates of the Rissho Kosei-kai seminary and of the Hoju Vocational College for women, which it founded but is now an independent school, along with youth representatives from regions throughout Japan attended the Centenary World Congress of the IARF in Vancouver, Canada. The four courses at the seminary (the graduate course, the university student course, the vocational course for women, and the overseas students course) produced a steady stream of people to serve as future Rissho Kosei-kai leaders.

## **"It is important to live with honesty"**

In November of 1995 Founder Niwano visited Hoju Vocational College on the first day of the school's annual festival. The invitation came about through the persistence of the college's young women students. On this fine sunny day he arrived a little before nine in the morning. He walked onto the stage of a hall filled with students eagerly awaiting him. Before he addressed them, two students posed questions to him. Hearing the gist of questions, I thought, if I were in his shoes I could not reply in an appropriate manner so suddenly. In answering, Rev. Niwano said, "I don't know very much about women," drawing a laugh from the all-female group. "Would someone else kindly answer on my behalf?"

Speaking with a broad smile, he began his talk with tender words: "You are very blessed to encounter the Dharma at a young age." He opened a copy of the Sutra Readings for members' daily chanting, quoted from it, and then spoke of the mental attitude that students should have. "It is important to live with honesty," he said, speaking gently and without haste. "My wish is that as many people as possible will practice the way the Buddha taught us and spend each day joyfully in friendship with others."

Since the founder's birthday was that week, a student representative presented him a gift of a lap robe on which the girls had embroidered an expression of good wishes for his ninety years, together with the symbol of the college. "He seemed very grateful for our gift," one noted, "treating it as something of real importance."

Another student gave the closing remarks. Speaking earnestly, her voice choked with emotion, she said, "At the beginning of my time at the school, I felt tied down by the rules and grumbled about them every day. Having started in that way, I continued to do so, and I never did enjoy a really happy day. Before long, however, I began to realize how blessed I am to be sustained by the Buddha and my friends. Together with those friends I will do my best to reach the high goals of the college." As Rev. Niwano had taught, her words were honest and sincere--virtues shared with the other students, many of whom dabbed at their eyes with their handkerchiefs as she spoke.

After a rousing chorus of the college song, group photographs were taken, with Founder Niwano in the center. Then the ceremony was over and the students enthusiastically waved him off as he left.

At the start of the winter vacation season, students from all over Japan returned to their family homes. On the first day after returning to school, some reported to their classmates about their family's reaction to hearing about the occasion with Rev. Niwano. "Each time a student spoke," one said she told her parents, "the founder brought his hands together in the gassho prayer position. We were deeply moved. I want to do the same from now on, being respectful to everyone I meet." She said her mother, pleased to see the group photograph, agreed that they should begin to do so.

Another girl reported that her mother was envious of the visit from Founder Niwano and the chance to hear him speak, saying the experience made her feel a little closer to him herself. She reminded her daughter never to forget the visit from such a revered teacher.

Still another student said, "My father said Founder Niwano came to the college because he has high expectations of us as students and the spirit we have learned at Hoju, such as being grateful in our hearts and always ready to serve others and society as a whole. My grandmother added that I should be thankful for the opportunity we had and should treasure our group photograph. Until they said those things to me I had not really thought about what the founder expected from us. I was just happy at my good luck."

"My mother asked me my impression of the visit from Rev. Niwano," another girl said. "I told her that the most moving thing he said was 'You girls are all wonderful just as you are now.' I was so excited about seeing him so close, I can't remember anything except that he came to see us."

## **"They will preach the Dharma in hoza some day"**

Founder Niwano commuted to Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters from his residence in Tokyo every day for decades. When he arrived at the Great Sacred Hall each morning, many of the faithful greeted him at the entrance. Often, many children were among them, some still infants, others almost of school age.

Rev. Niwano approached the children, patting their heads or tweaking their cheeks. The children usually made the gassho gesture in return or reached up to shake his hand. Sometimes a small boy would even chant the Member's Vow in his piping voice, resulting in smiles and laughter from those around him. As the founder prepared to enter the building after an exchange of warm salutations, the children would wave and call "bye-bye" and Rev. Niwano would respond the same way.

One day, as he ascended to his office in the elevator, he said to me with a broad smile, "Some day those children will preach the Dharma in hoza sessions. Maybe not until twenty years or so, but some day."

## Chapter 44

### Entering Nirvana

#### **"Working for the happiness of all people"**

On October 4, 1999 all members of Rissho Kosei-kai were saddened by the news of the passing of Founder Nikkyo Niwano, who had died that morning at 10:34.

Some learned of it from the national news on television at 1 p.m., some were informed through their mobile phones. Others saw the news on the electronic bulletin board in the bullet trains on the their way to the Tokyo headquarters on group pilgrimages. Many members thus went directly to the Great Sacred Hall.

As they stood in front of the platform in the Great Sacred Hall, with its huge portrait of the late founder showing his usual smile enveloping all in his warm regard, many were overcome with grief. They offered their gratitude for his kindness in guiding them to the Dharma and pledged to reward him through their devotion to practicing the Way.

The news of his passing carried by the mass media was very quick and comprehensive. Reporters who were familiar with Founder Niwano's work for interreligious cooperation and world peace and senior executives and editors moved promptly. Not only national daily newspapers, but also local papers which carried the news report, contributed by the Kyodo News agency, immediately published obituary articles. Some carried detailed articles written by their own staff members. Special obituaries appeared in the evening edition of newspapers on the day he died. Morning editions the following day published extensive reports about Rev. Niwano's activities during the second half of his life, including his speeches to Special Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament, his address to the UN office in Geneva, and his efforts for interreligious dialogue and cooperation with the world's religious leaders.

As time passed, many newspapers published heartfelt messages of remembrance by people from various walks of life. Religious newspapers also reported the founder's passing and offered details about his accomplishments throughout his life.

TV stations, too, did not limit themselves to simple obituaries, but also showed some of his activities at home and abroad.

Regarding the quantity and depth of these reports, one journalist said, "Such extensive coverage of the passing of a lay religious figure has never happened before."

There was much activity behind the scenes. Distribution of its report by the Japanese news agency Kyodo to its subscribers was done as quickly as possible, resulting in the rapid dissemination of the news both in Japan and abroad.

In domestic TV news broadcasting, it seems to me that very prompt arrangements to report his demise were made because the fixed schedule of TV programs could have caused several hours of delay before showing the news.

Among the media people were those who had experienced fairly close contact with Rev. Niwano through their coverage of such activities as the world assemblies of the WCRP. They had not only become familiar with him, but had come to respect him highly.

One newspaper reporter sent the following note to the staff of the Public Relations Section at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters, attached to a copy of his article: "As I write this article with tears in my eyes, I cannot see my computer screen clearly."

It was said at the time that reporters who had never met Rev. Niwano were writing their articles saying to themselves, 'Am I writing this piece wholeheartedly and sincerely?'" Among media reports overseas, noteworthy was the dispatch sent around the world by the Holy See Press Office, which had been in close contact with Rissho Kosei-kai since the Second Vatican Council, and the Vatican Radio account with Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, who had worked in the WCRP and often visited Rissho Kosei-kai.

Some reporters offered such comments as, "The contributions of Nikkyo Niwano to interfaith dialogue will be genuinely appreciated even a hundred years from now" and "He was a leader who was able to exert himself even more on the international stage than in Japan."

Many eulogies were delivered at the funeral service, and letters and telegrams of condolence were received from within Japan and from abroad. Many were printed in the *Kosei Shimbun*, the newspaper of Rissho Kosei-kai, from October 15 through November 19. In that way the sense of loss was shared with many people.

Dr. Malcolm Sutherland, honorary president, WCRP, and former president, Meadville/Lombard Theological School, Chicago, and Mrs. Sutherland sent the following message to Rissho Kosei-kai:

"How fortunate we personally feel to have known him and to have had the privilege to work with him on behalf of international understanding and world peace."

The Rev. Dr. John A. Buehrens, president, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, also wrote that he had the honor and privilege of meeting Founder Niwano on three occasions, when he first visited Tokyo in 1993, in Rome at the time of the world assembly of the WCRP in 1994, and later on the 60th anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai in 1998. He continued that Rev. Niwano was a kind, gracious, and extraordinary man, whose compassion, commitment, and humility in the practice of religious living was, and would remain, an inspiration for everyone.

Reading these messages and translating them into Japanese for the *Kosei Shimbun*, the staff members of the External Relations Section learned once again how highly regarded their revered teacher had been.

On the day of the funeral tens of thousands of Rissho Kosei-kai members gathered at the Great Sacred Hall. Others assembled at local churches throughout Japan to observe the ceremony by satellite TV. The eulogies delivered by important guests were deeply moving.

Dr. William F. Vendley, secretary-general of the WCRP, after reporting on its recent activities, spoke to the spirit of the founder. "Now, dear founder, the WCRP-child that you so lovingly attended at birth and nurtured as a caring parent has begun to stand up."

The Ven. Eshin Watanabe, 255th head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, not only offered a heartfelt message of condolence, but also referred to a predecessor's words of gratitude: "The Ven. Etai Yamada, the 253d Tendai head priest, often said, 'Mount Hiei and the Tendai denomination were put on the world stage thanks to the sacred guidance of Rev. Niwano.'"

Even a lighthouse that flashes its beam over a wide expanse of sea is fairly dark at its base. Similarly, those who are closest to a great leader tend to be blind to the leader's greatness. In the days when Rev. Niwano was active in international interfaith activities, both in Japan and to a great extent overseas, members of Rissho Kosei-kai often heard in the congratulatory remarks of guests at major events of the organization such comments as "Please understand that Rev. Niwano is not only the president of your Rissho Kosei-kai but also someone who is needed all over the world." Followers are no longer able to hear lessons directly from Founder Niwano, but they can still learn much from many people of various backgrounds.

About one month after Rev. Niwano's death, at a seminar for leaders of Asian chapters of Rissho Kosei-kai, Dr. Gene Reeves, a former dean of Meadville/Lombard Theological School affiliated with the University of Chicago, reassured them: "Don't be discouraged by the passing of Founder Niwano. Many of his writings remain. I myself had my eyes opened to the Lotus Sutra from meeting him and started to study through reading his books. You can always learn from them."

Rev. Taido Matsubara, president of the well-known Buddhist association Namu-no-kai, in an interview with the *Kosei Shimbun* later that year said: "The words Rev. Niwano used in his life and in his books touch me after his passing more greatly than before. When you members of Rissho Kosei-kai recover from your grief, you should feel 'From now on we can truly meet our founder, and genuinely learn the teachings from him.'

President Nichiko Niwano, quoting Shakyamuni Buddha's words to his followers just before entering nirvana, 'Strive on untiringly,' said in his funeral oration: "In the same way, I believe that the founder, with his memorable smile, would have wanted us to follow our Great Benevolent Teacher Shakyamuni, disseminate the wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Sutra untiringly, and work for the happiness of all people."

Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma, special advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai and long-term close associate of Founder Niwano and chairman of the organization's board of directors, in his condolence message thanked the founder and expressed his determination to continue his work. "In your honesty and flexibility you were a living text of Buddhist practice. . . . you made Buddhism a living faith, able to bring all to liberation within their everyday lives. I am filled with gratitude. . . . We members of Rissho Kosei-kai here pledge that we will continue to be united forever under the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano to transmit your teachings to successive generations."

Among the thoughtful messages from many people were similar sentiments: "I strongly hope that all of you members of Rissho Kosei-kai will become 'numerous Nikkyo-sans'" (Dr. Kazuo Kasahara, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo). "We . . . understand that the only way to express our gratitude to our teacher is to strive to continue his teachings, even if our ability to do so is limited" (Shintaro Ishihara, governor of Metropolitan Tokyo and president of the National Council of the Brighter Society Movement). "I believe that the best and truest commemoration of his life is the dedication of all people to work together for the peace that Rev. Niwano held so dear" (Peter Cardinal Seiichi Shirayanagi, president of the Japanese Committee of the WCRP).

Founder Niwano's smiling face, enveloping all within his warm regard, seemed to appear before us with these words.

## Chapter 45

### Afterword

It has been several years since Founder Niwano entered nirvana. Yet his last months still come to mind from time to time.

The founder entered the hospital in September of 1998, when he was found to have contracted pneumonia. He was already over ninety years old. The members of Rissho Kosei-kai prayed for his recovery by chanting the Lotus Sutra in great earnest.

One day late that autumn I visited him in the hospital. His condition seemed to be good, and he even half raised himself up in the bed. I reported briefly to him how his colleagues in various international activities were faring, and about a few other things. He listened attentively, nodding. Then he conveyed to me his warm regards for each of those colleagues and for all his fellow Rissho Kosei-kai members. Although his voice was not very strong, his powerful spirit permeated my mind and heart.

I tried not to stay too long. As I was leaving, he said something quite unexpected: "Thank you very much for coming to see me even though I know you are busy." He spoke quite distinctly, and I was surprised because such formal politeness is usually reserved for persons who are not so close. He even said this putting his palms together in the *gassho* gesture. Tears suddenly filled my eyes.

*The following summer, I attended the Centenary World Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), held in Vancouver, Canada. After returning to Tokyo, I again visited Rev. Niwano--this time with Rissho Kosei-kai's then-chairman Rev. Norio Sakai--and together we reported about the congress. By then, his declining health already did not permit him to speak. But his eyes reflected his serious interest and he appeared attentive to our every word. We could sense his passionate wish for world peace.*

After our report, he shook hands with each of us in turn, conveying his feelings with a still powerful handshake.

Earlier that year he had appeared before the members in the Great Sacred Hall on three occasions--New Year's Day, the *Setsubun* Festival on February 3, the eve of the last day of winter according to the lunar calendar, and the anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's founding on March 5. Before each occasion, he would practice for days so that, for example, he would be able to toss the traditional demon-chasing beans on *Setsubun* and to hold up the ceremonial bouquet in both arms on the anniversary day. Even from his sickbed, he always thought of the members and tried to appear the best he could before them.

I hesitate to write about myself. Yet I dare to mention here his words to me on leaving the hospital room mentioned above simply because they so well illustrate his warm, thoughtful consideration for all the members in their everyday activities. His forceful handshake demonstrated his expectation that they would continue to strive to practice the Dharma in their daily lives.

Even after Founder Niwano had passed away, I have often met with him in my dreams. In those dreams he has been preaching the Dharma to our members and forever working actively with foreign colleagues on behalf of interreligious cooperation. Where is he? Awestruck, I find myself running to assist him.

When I awake from such a dream, I realize that at such times the founder always seems especially vigorous, and those of us around him are unaware of his passing. What occurs to me then is how the spirit of Founder Niwano is forever with all the members of Rissho Kosei-kai, and even with all of the world's people.

One hopes that many can share in such a dream.

*Gassho.*

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