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## September 2021 Newsletter

Hello everyone! How are you doing? I hope all is well.

Although I thought we would finally be starting the preparations to reopen our Buddhist Center in September, because the situations have not yet turned-around, we now need to wait and see for a while. In the midst of this coronavirus crisis, the Tokyo Olympics were held last month. Every day I was impressed by the passion of the athletes. Eventually, the Olympics closed safely.

Suddenly, after that, the American armed forces withdrew from Afghanistan, closing the curtain on the 20 years of occupation, turning the world situation into turmoil.

The progress of vaccination made us feel we may be returning to normal, and yet there was an outbreak of a new type of coronavirus.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to all those who are in the healthcare industry, the various government agencies and services and the essential workers for their ceaseless extra work.

Furthermore, for the numerous people who have lost their lives to date, we pray that they may rest in peace and for those who are presently receiving medical treatment in the hospital or recuperating in their homes, we wholeheartedly pray for their speedy and safe recovery

By the way, the other day, while making soup for dinner at my home, I had a sudden realization. This month, I would like to share about that.

We put various ingredients in a soup, adding spices and seasonings. However, it is by including a secret ingredient not in the recipe that a richer taste is created. The taste of each ingredient is totally dissolved together, creating a great harmony (flavor).

My realization at the time was about the significance of the “Lotus Sutra.”

It is said that there are three distinctly important things taught in the Lotus Sutra.

1<sup>st</sup> is “Ultimate reality of all things (*shoho jisso*)” :

In Chapter 2, “Skillful Means,” the essence of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, the truth of the universe and how human beings should live, are indicated in the “Ten Suchnesses.”

2<sup>nd</sup> is “Eternal life span (*kuon jitsujyo*)” :

In Chapter 16, “The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata,” we are taught that the workings of the Buddha is eternal, beyond space and time.

3<sup>rd</sup> is “Children of the Buddha (*Hotoke no ko*)” :

Everyone is the child of the Buddha and can become a buddha. This teaches the importance of being aware of our own buddha nature.

These are all expounded from Chapter 1, “Introductory” to Chapter 22, “The Entrustment” and at the end, Shakyamuni Buddha asks all the bodhisattvas to disseminate this teaching, spreading far and wide, to as many people as possible. At this point, Shakyamuni Buddha completes the first stage of his expounding the Dharma. From Chapter 23 onward, the concrete practices of the teachings appear as the workings of various bodhisattvas and they are indicated as models for us.

At the beginning, I did not fully understand the importance of Chapter 23 and the subsequent chapters. However, because the Lotus Sutra was expounded to liberate all people, I was able to realize that in those chapters, various skillful means to liberate the people from their sufferings, worries and anxiety, by every means, are indicated through appearances of Bodhisattva Kannon (Regarder of the Sounds of the World) and the Dharani, etc.

Moreover, not only that, but I was also able to feel the depth of compassion of the wish to awaken the buddha nature within all people through numerous skillful means to reveal the Truth of the Lotus Sutra.

The importance of skillful means: After attaining enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha did not only expound the teachings to the monks and nuns. He walked through the villages, liberating the people from their sufferings, showing us humans how to walk the Way. Taking into account the person and the circumstances, he used the appropriate means to teach in an easy to understand way. Instead of expounding the difficult to explain awakening in a difficult way, he simply explained in a way anyone can understand.

In that sense, we can well understand that in accordance with people's interests and wishes, various bodhisattvas appear from Chapter 23 onward to teach multiple and diverse skillful means. Rather than arbitrary deciding that "this is important" or "this is not necessary," it is important to connect ourselves through those skillful means to the Way based on the Truth of the Lotus Sutra. Both "the skillful means and the Truth" have importance.

Returning to the story regarding the soup, it is not about taking each ingredient and spice, one by one, to discuss its taste and aroma, but it is important to connect all to the purpose of completing a delicious dish while mixing them. Moreover, that proportion should not be uneven. Instead, a moderate amount of each could maintain the balance so that the taste as a whole can be achieved. This time, through cooking an unfamiliar dish, I was able to learn about the world of harmony in which each contributor plays its role in aiming for a big purpose.

It is said that it is important to identify "the purpose and the method" when we look at things. If we misunderstand by not carefully looking at what is important, to what direction we should be going to now and what is the method for that, from time to time, we will end up not knowing what we are doing. If we do not, now and again, check what is the purpose as we proceed, how to proceed, and what is the method, there will be times when the "method" may have become the "purpose."

What is the significance of the lives we live every day? If we are busy every day, time will rapidly pass by. And if we do not think about it, we will not worry and the day will end.

In a book I read a while ago, a mathematician named Kiyoshi Oka wrote about "essential and trivial." Essential is something that is indispensable; trivial is something that is insignificant.

It is a comparative and contrasting way of thinking, but it can be a way to look at "the purpose and the method." People cannot help but spend their daily lives being captivated with trivial things. It is important to train ourselves to put our thoughts together so we can see what is truly important. To do that, he said, it is necessary to stop everything at once.

With the coronavirus crisis, we are forced daily to live a self-restraining life. But isn't such times, a great opportunity for us to calmly look at matters and think about the essential way of life? Without such an opportunity, we will feel overwhelmed and time-stressed every day.

This month as well, I hope you will spend meaningful and productive times through such activities as morning and evening recitations, participation in the Hoza with Zoom, and reading.



Gassho

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