

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



Founder's Essay

Recognizing Cries for Help

ANY parent would be totally shaken if their child said to them “Mom, I hope you drop dead!” However, this is really a distressed child’s cry for help from their parents. Our children’s words and hearts don’t always match.

When you blow up over words like “I didn’t ask to be born!” you are still a rookie parent. The love of a parent is about having the composure to consider what your child is feeling when they hurl such words at you. If you don’t have that leeway you will get stuck on the harshness of their words, end up losing your temper and throwing up your hands in despair. “Why did something like that come out of our child’s mouth?” you’ll ask yourself. The Bodhisattva

Regarder of the Sounds of the World’s power of “true regard” is what can see into the deepest depths of your child’s heart.

It’s common to catch sight of the figure of a salary-man, complaining about his company and belittling his superiors while having a drink on the way home from work. This may also be a cry for help. Regarder of the Sounds of the World can come to the aid of everyone because the Bodhisattva fully possesses the ability to discern the actual wishes of people like this from their cries for help. We too, should want to cultivate this ability.

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.



President's Message

Together With Others, Make a Lighthearted Effort

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Like a Tree Shedding Its Leaves in the Autumn

“E’en the cherry tree / sheds and scatters all its leaves / when they have turned red.” This is how the poet Yosa Buson (1716–84) described the flavor of this time of year when the season turns to autumn. In Buson’s poem, the description of the leaves of a cherry tree changing color and falling earlier than those of other varieties of trees is superimposed over the scattering of the splendid cherry blossoms of spring, and it is striking how the cherry tree earnestly fulfills the life it has received.

Incidentally, when we work even harder or exert ourselves at something, we use such phrases as “labor at” or “make an effort.” Maybe that is why, when we hear the phrases, “single-mindedly labor at” or “make an effort,” we feel as if they must describe something that is bone-breaking or painful. In practicing the faith as well, there are some people who, in spite of themselves, feel overwhelmed when they come in touch with the fervor of those who say, “Make an effort, make an effort, I will keep on making an effort until I die, and if I am reborn, I will make an effort again.”

However, I think that making an effort does not intrinsically mean that you should overexert yourself or to continue to work hard while enduring suffering.

The Japanese word for “effort,” *shojin*, is composed of two Chinese characters, the first of which, “*sho*,” originally meant polishing grains of rice to remove the outer layers of husk and bran. From this we can infer that “effort” indicates a “pure and unadulterated”—that is, an authentic, straightforward—way of life. Also, this same Chinese character, *sho*, has the nuance of “essence” or “fundamental energy,” so the phrase “let’s make our best effort,” which we often say to one another, can be understood as meaning, “let’s get right to developing our own pure, essential powers.”

Thinking in this way, the workings of nature, such as the cherry tree’s leaves turning red and falling as described in the poem cited earlier, are all examples showing us what effort means. Furthermore, as we, too, are part of the unceasingly creative, ever-changing effort of nature, we could say that our own effort means that we are striving “to live according to the laws of nature,” which is none other than “right effort,” which is itself one practice of the Eightfold Path.



Encountering Your Original Self

However, unlike trees, we human beings sometimes show our self-centered egos. We have our own measuring sticks for such things as our likes and dislikes, and good and bad, so that at times we become unable to honestly accept the phenomena occurring before our very eyes. At those times, finding ways to make your mind follow the truth is equal to “making an effort.” This kind of ingenuity, in other words, the way to make an effort appropriate to the circumstance, has been explained and revealed by Shakyamuni in various expressions.

For example, there are these lines of verse that were included in the Suttanipata and other scriptures:

Faith is the seed I sow,
Discipline is the rain.
Wisdom is my plow,
And modesty is the shafts.
The soul is the rope with which they are tied.
Introspection is the blade and pole of my plow.
I restrain my deeds and my words, am moderate
 in my meals, never partaking in excess.
I weed by preserving the truth.
Gentleness removes the oxen's yoke.

Through the attitudes of “modesty,” “introspection,” “restraining [your] deeds and [your] words,” “never partaking in excess,” “preserving the truth,” and “gentleness,” you reflect upon your own selfish mind, which occasionally shows itself, and while performing self-reflection and remorse, you return to your original self. However, none of these are supposed to become an overly zealous undertaking. Instead, why not try practicing things that, for yourself as well as for the people around you, make you feel lighthearted?

Being even a little more careful with your words creates harmony, and being gentle with others relaxes their minds. Eating in moderation is easier on the body, something that all of you know from experience.

I once saw, just as if traced from these lines of verse, vows by a member titled “Vows to Pass Each and Every Day with the Mind of Right Effort,” in a passage published in a *Rissho Kosei-kai* periodical. It read, “I will do things that bring people joy, . . . I will become someone who everyone can like, . . . I will conduct myself so that I am not ashamed of myself, . . . I will be gentle and kind to people, . . . I will become someone who never gets angry.” He spoke of the joy of walking the Buddha Way while saying these things to himself again and again, every day, and performing introspection from time to time. I think this is the joy of encountering your original self through effort. Then it goes without saying that your original self is none other than the buddha-nature.

From *Kosei*, October 2018



Practicing the Dharma Has Changed My Life



by Prakash Kumar
The Central Delhi Hoza

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the memorial day ceremony held at the Central Delhi Hoza on June 10, 2018.

GOOD morning, everyone. Thank you so much for giving me this significant opportunity to share my Dharma experience.

My name is Prakash Kumar. I was born as the second son in the Jha and Mishra family in Bhagalpur (Silk City), a small city in Bihar, India. I have two elder sisters and an elder brother. I was the youngest child, and my parents really loved me, and I also loved them a lot.

I am full of gratitude to all the people who poured out their love and affection to me throughout my life, and to those who shared their challenges and joys with me. I received plenty of love and affection from my parents and grandparents. My grandmother used to tell me stories at night during my childhood. But very soon I lost my grandmother and grandfather. I haven't been able to recover from the loss of my loved ones even now. I also lost one of my best friends. He was suffering from dengue fever. He had no father, and his family's financial condition wasn't good. As I was eight years old then, I could not under-



Mr. Kumar shares his Dharma Journey with members at the Central Delhi Hoza.

stand anything about what was going on. I was feeling very isolated and lots of questions were filling my mind: Why does death come? Why doesn't God help those who are in sorrow? What is the purpose of life? Why do people suffer? Why are people jealous of each other?

However, as I became busy with study and sports, day by day I began to forget these questions. I wasn't an extraordinary student but I was perfect in sports. I like playing cricket and swimming, and I was good at both.

My father was a very short-tempered person. I saw many times that my father shouted at others and quarreled with other people. I didn't like my father's short-temperedness. Whenever my mother heard my father's loud voice, she would become very upset. At such times I would say to my mother smilingly, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine someday."

Once, when my father was in a happy mood, I asked him, "Why do you get so angry? We like a peaceful atmosphere. Mom doesn't feel good when she looks at your angry face." Father said to me, "OK, from now onwards you won't see my angry face." However, when I returned from school one day, I found my father shouting at my mother for a minor mistake, and my mom was crying. I was in a panic that moment.

On the other hand, my father always encouraged me, saying that I could do things better. At times when I felt I couldn't do anything well, my father would tell me, "Look, everything is possible and you can do it. I know you can do it." There were times when I found it difficult, but I did it.

Since childhood I had been a selfish person. I was always thinking about my own success and had never thought of the feelings of my friends or relatives. I always tried to prove that I was right. I wasn't a good listener, and didn't have the patience to listen to others. I always tried to keep my own point of view first of all. I often interrupted another people during conversations. I was truly arrogant.

Later I completed my bachelor's degree. At that time, however, my father fell into debt, which was caused by the marriage of my elder sister. As there was not sufficient money, we took out a loan from the bank.

My family's financial condition was not good. So I decided to move out of the city to find a job. I was twenty-two years old then, and it was when the second phase of my life began. I came to Delhi and faced a lot of challenges in order to survive. As I didn't have any other options but to stay in Delhi, I never gave up. Very soon I found a job in a clothes production company. I was working there as a helper because I was a freshman and did not have any work experience. While working there, I came to understand how people work together as a team and learned the strength of team work.

A few months later, I switched my job and joined the Business Process Outsourcing sector, but the salary there wasn't good. I couldn't sleep well because my father's bank loan was always bothering my mind. So I decided to work two jobs, one part time and the other full time. I went for an interview and was selected. So now I was able to save some money for my family to help my father pay the bank loan. I was blessed, as I was able to help my parents.

When I was working two jobs at one time, however, I was experiencing the toughest time in my life. I

was not feeling happy and had many worries—Why should I work so hard for my family? Doesn't my father love my mother?—were running in my mind. My way of thinking had become selfish and arrogant and I didn't pay respect to my father. Later, when I thought about the same situation through the perspective of buddha-nature, I found that my father was a short-tempered person, but was still doing his very best for his family.

A year later, I changed my job again and joined the corporate sector as a customer support executive. One and a half years later, I was promoted to leader.

I joined Rissho Kosei-kai on June 12, 2013. I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Amit Kumar (former area leader) for guiding me to Rissho Kosei-kai. Later I met the present area leader and a sub-leader. Even though my mother lives fifteen hundred kilometers from here, I've never felt as though I live alone. The area leader always treats me like her own son, and I also respect her as my mother in the Dharma. I can't forget all the outstanding support from my friends in the Dharma. I owe them a great debt of gratitude for all that they have done for me. I am grateful for Rissho Kosei-kai, which has introduced me to such a wonderful family in the Dharma.

Through the practice of the Dharma, including reciting the sutra and attending *hoza* sessions, I've learned many good things. I began to greet every person with a smile, say thank you on daily basis, put my shoes and slippers in right order, and other basic practices. Our leader used to tell us that we should always try to do good things, never be the cause of anyone's tears, and never hurt anyone. We should do things to make people happy without any expectation of reward, so that everyone can achieve true happi-

Spiritual Journey

ness. I started to help my colleagues to complete their work in time, and I felt good when they thanked me for my help with a sweet smile. Our boss has praised me for my work on many occasions.

I have experienced a big change in my life by thoroughly following the three basic practices of the faith, namely: 1. Reciting the sutra; 2. Connecting people with the Dharma, enhancing people's connection with the Dharma, and attending *hoza* sessions; and 3. Studying and practicing the Dharma. I know that reciting the sutra is the key that unlocks all doors.

I would like to express a special thanks to Rev. Masatoshi Shimamura, the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia. His encouragement gave me confidence and enabled me to realize my potential and restore my confidence. Words are not enough to express the greatness of his guidance and support. Hearing his Dharma Journey talk, I learned how many struggles he had gone through when he was young and, by following the leaders' guidance and practicing Rissho Kosei-kai teachings, he had tackled the critical situation and brought happiness to his family. He inspired me to find my goal and made me capable of realizing it.

When I had an opportunity to participate in a Lotus Sutra seminar in Bangkok, Thailand, I was excited to learn many new things. I was also honored to be appointed as a master of ceremonies for the seminar. I was at first anxious, because it was the first experience for me to serve as a master of ceremonies. I can't forget the encouraging words of the minister of the Bangkok Dharma Center, who told me, "You are awesome, you are doing well. Keep it going." I would also like to express my appreciation for the ministers of the Dharma centers of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. They are great teachers. I'm grateful for their

thoughtfulness and generosity. I've learned a great deal about the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and about our mission. Their methods of making me understand the teachings were tremendous.

Every time when the session ended, I asked the interpreters for their feedback about the proceedings. They offered me concise, useful advice. I would like to express my gratitude to the interpreters, all the staff members from Bangkok and Japan, and to all the Dharma friends who participated in the seminar from many parts in Asia, with whom I shared a wonderful time throughout the seminar. Our collaboration made the seminar a great success.

When I was attending the session on buddha-nature, I felt a strong vibration connecting me to my father, and recalled all of my past events. Many images came and went in my mind's eye and I was feeling emotional.

When I returned to Delhi after having successfully finished Bangkok seminar, I got a phone call informing me that my father was not well. So I went to meet him. My father was delighted to see me and spoke to me about a lot of things. I listened very carefully to every single word without interrupting him. I told him that as I was here now he would get well soon, and unbelievably from that day he began to recover his health very quickly. I asked him to release his anger and be happy, since I would be always with him. I called a leader at the Delhi Dharma Center, telling him that I would not be able to participate in the next class to study the teachings, as I would like to be with my father for some time in my home town. The leader told me, "No problem. Taking care of your parents is also a bodhisattva practice. We'll also pray for your father." My father changed then, and has become a person who is very humble and calm.

I've also shared this wonderful teaching with my friends, and helped them to come out of life's troubles. I always keep the Founder's words and the President's guidance in my mind. I've connected many people with the Dharma, some of whom have become members of Rissho Kosei-kai. I would like to continue to share the teachings in the hope that Rissho Kosei-kai would develop further.

I am thankful to be a part of Rissho Kosei-kai as a contract staff member. After I joined the staff, I met Mr. Suman Barua. I admire him for his humility and diligence. I have always received valuable guidance and support from him. He always guides me toward the right path. I am very lucky to be able to work with someone who inspires me every day. I will be forever grateful for his guidance and kindness.

Our primary purpose in this life is to help others. We should be aware that true happiness is the liberation of both ourselves and others. Rissho Kosei-kai helps me to learn how to live life to become a buddha. I learned about buddha-nature in a seminar on the Lotus Sutra. Everyone in this world has buddha-nature. We need to recognize the buddha-nature in ourselves, and should also recognize and respect the buddha-nature in others.

I was fortunate enough that, when Rissho Kosei-kai commemorated the eightieth anniversary of its founding, I had a chance to attend the ceremony held at the Tokyo headquarters. I was blissfully happy to sit in the Great Sacred Hall and listen to President Niwano's speech on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary. It had long been my dream to visit the Founder's birthplace in Suganuma, but I didn't know that my dream would be realized so soon. Suganuma was one of the most peaceful places that I've ever visited. The director of the Founder's Birthplace

Center helped us visit the house (restored in 2005) where the Founder was born and the school where he received primary education. On the way to the school, there were a shrine the Founder used to put his palms together and pray for everyone's happiness, and a pond where the Founder used to swim when he was a child. The pond was totally covered with snow. I realized how great the Founder's efforts must have been before he discovered the wonderful teachings that will lead all people in the world to the true happiness.

I am so grateful that the sangha has always helped me through all the changes in my life. I hope that I will work with sangha members and achieve our goal for the next twenty years to commemorate the hundredth anniversary. I will do my very best to proactively disseminate the teachings in my area.

The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, President Niwano, thank you very much. Everyone, thank you very much.



Mr. Kumar (front, left) with other participants in the 2017 Youth Leaders Training Program, in Bangkok.



The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 2, Skillful Means

This chapter, together with chapter 16, “The Lifespan of the Eternal Tathagata” has long been regarded as the heart of the Lotus Sutra. It will be well to bear in mind the question of why this is so, but first we need to examine the plan of the chapter itself.

Near the beginning, Shakyamuni arises from samadhi, in which he has been engaged for a long time. Before anyone poses a question, he immediately begins to speak, addressing Shariputra. He explains that the wisdom of buddhas is most profound, an awakening to the basic truth of the universe. This basic truth is of such depth that ordinary people cannot understand it, and on this account, by using various ways of teaching within the capacity of their understanding, he has brought liberation to many. But the fact remains that they have not grasped the true meaning at the heart of the teaching.

The Ten Suchnesses and Three Thousand Worlds of Experience in a Single Thought

Having said this much, the Buddha suddenly stops, then resumes, again addressing Shariputra.

“That is enough, Shariputra! Even if I attempt to explain this, it would be impossible for you to understand. Why? This supreme truth that the Buddha has mastered is of such depth that only a buddha together with another buddha can fathom it.” The statement of this truth, known as the ten suchnesses, given in brief-

est form, is that everything in our world has such an appearance, such a nature, such an entity, such a potential, and such a function. The total of these elements becomes a cause for all phenomena, which, in contact with the prerequisite of a condition, brings about a myriad effects (immediate phenomenal results) and rewards (continuing effects). And their changes are based on a single truth, which seems to vary from one phenomenon to the other, but from the first to the last, it is always the same.

This is the teaching of the ten suchnesses called *ryaku hokke* (a Japanese composite term meaning the summary of the Lotus Sutra). It describes concisely the meaning of the “ultimate reality of all things.” Applying this teaching to our life, it can be explained as follows.

First of all, as human beings, we have our own individual characters. In other words, each of us has our own appearance, nature, and entity. And, we have a potential and function that are appropriate to our appearance, nature, and entity. However, they are never fixed nor unchangeable. We can make them change in any way we want.

We tend to be convinced that our individual character can never be changed. However, it’s not true. As long as we give a condition to a cause, the appropriate effect and reward come out. Therefore, the individual character is transmutable. This is what the doctrine of the ten suchnesses teaches us. Therefore, the possibility to reach the state of buddhahood resides in the minds of all human beings. At the same time, however, the possibility to fall into hell is inherent as well. The Great Master Tiantai (Zhiyi) analyzed this truth further and expounded it as the principle of three thousand worlds of experience in a single thought. It means if we change our mental attitude, then the three thousand worlds (all conceivable worlds) will change accordingly. Therefore, if we understand the teachings of the ten suchnesses and three thousand worlds of experience in a single thought, we can move away from the idea that we can do nothing about changing our character. Instead, we acknowledge that we can make any changes to our character, and it’s even possible to become a buddha. This is what we could be most thankful for. Our lives drastically change to

one filled with a bright future, which motivates us to make positive changes in ourselves. That is why the teaching of the ten suchnesses is called *ryaku hokke* and has been respected from ancient times.

However, at the time when the teaching of the ten suchnesses was suddenly expounded by Shakyamuni, no one could think about applying it to their own lives. The listeners were only puzzled at this new turn and did not know what to say.

Furthermore, Shakyamuni greatly emphasized the worth of skillful means, saying that the teaching of skillful means (appropriate teaching suitable to each occasion and each person to be reached) is nothing other than what emerged from the wisdom of the Buddha.

Still, the listeners are all the more perplexed. While expounding the supreme truth that the Buddha has seen, they are treated to words of praise for the everyday teaching of skillful means, and they are unable to see any connection.

The Three Requests and Three Refusals

Shariputra is not to be put off and is quite demanding as the Buddha three times declines to explain, on the grounds that what he has to say can only confuse and is thus better left unsaid.

Since, to begin with, the Buddha had of his own accord, with no prompting or waiting for any questions, begun to expound, we must suppose that this display of unwillingness had the purpose of creating in his hearers a suitable frame of mind to listen to what was to come. Then realizing, in response to Shariputra's pleading, that his hearers are ready, the Buddha is about to speak.

Departure of the Five Thousand

As soon as Shakyamuni began to speak, however, five thousand of the assembly, in a body, rose and departed. Shakyamuni simply watched, making no effort to stop them, and when all had left, he took up his exposition again.

One Great Cause for the Appearance of Buddhas in the World: Opening, Demonstrating, Realizing, and Embarking

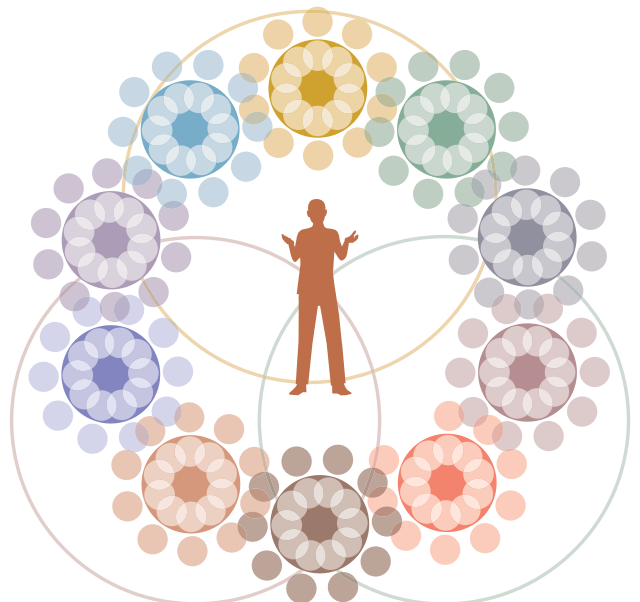
The following is an extract of the most essential part of his entire exposition.

“Buddhas appear in the world only because of the One Great Cause. Buddhas desire to cause living beings to open their eyes to the knowledge and insight of a buddha, which enables them to perceive the ultimate reality of all things and become pure. They desire to demonstrate the boundless knowledge and insight of a buddha to living beings. They desire to cause living beings to realize the knowledge and insight of a buddha through their own experience. They desire to enable living beings to embark upon the Way of the knowledge and insight of a buddha. This is the One Great Cause that causes buddhas to appear in the world.”

Thus, here, Shakyamuni has revealed for the first time the One Great Cause for the appearance of buddhas in the world.

Declaration of Clarifying the Three Vehicles and Revealing the One Vehicle

Subsequently, Shakyamuni declares that he clarifies the three vehicles (the shravaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle) and reveals the One Buddha Vehicle.



“All those whom the buddha-tathagatas teach and transform are bodhisattvas. The buddhas teach the Dharma by employing numerous skillful means, always for the sake of this sole cause, that is, to demonstrate buddha-insight to living beings and have them realize it. The tathagatas expound the Dharma only because they desire to enable all living beings equally to embark upon the Way of the buddha-insight. There is only one truth. In reality there are no divisions in the Dharma such as a second or a third.

“I have never said before that all of you would become buddhas because the time had not yet come. Now is the right time to definitely teach the Great Vehicle, which is the supreme teaching. I have expounded the various teachings of the skillful means (nine divisions of the teachings: teachings of lesser vehicles) appropriate to the capacity of the people. They form the basis of bringing people into the Great Vehicle. Now I recognize that there are many people whose minds are pure and flexible, and who practice the teaching of the Buddha in the right way. For the sake of them, I teach this Great Vehicle sutra.”

Things such as someone’s standing before a pagoda saying a little prayer, or a child’s drawing of a buddha’s image with sticks on the ground, are things with no bearing on this, but actually even these are related to this supreme Way, the Way to buddhahood. One must by no means make light of the possible range of skillful means. We should remember that skillful means as such is the truth.

This subject is developed at length, but in conclusion Shakyamuni states that whoever in simplicity and purity of heart gives attention to the nine divisions of the teachings he has expounded based on the supreme truth is a bodhisattva who is treading the Way to become a buddha. All who understand this truth and rejoice heartily will become buddhas.

This is an English translation of text originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 33–42).





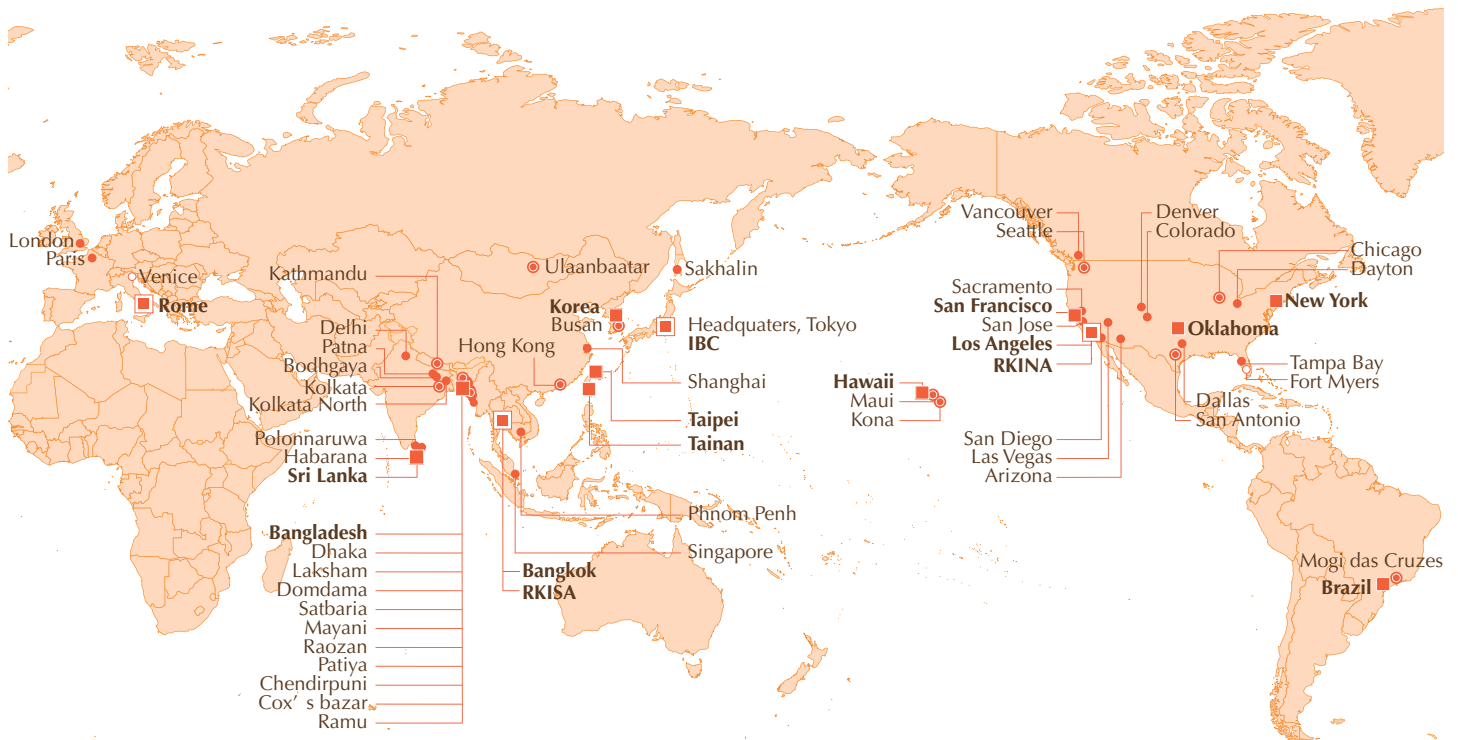
Being Diligent in Finding Your Original Self

WHEN we speak of October, what comes to mind are such phrases as “Fall is the best season for sports,” “Fall is the best season for reading,” as well as for various events including digging sweet potatoes, picking grapes, and Halloween. For many members of Rissho Kosei-kai, the first things that come to mind may be the Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival, and the annual Seitanchi Matsuri (Founder’s Birthplace Festival). Here I also want to add a new event for this year—a ceremony for the completion of the new building of San Antonio Chapter in the United States, and the installation of an image of the Buddha at the chapter’s altar. This will bring special joy to all of us.

However, what comes to mind first and foremost is the annual ceremony of observing Founder Niwano’s entrance into nirvana. In his funeral oration for the funeral service of Founder Niwano on October 10, 1999, President Niwano mentioned that the Founder had the same wish as the Buddha, and led his life the same way the Buddha did. This is expressed in the spirit of the foundation of Rissho Kosei-kai that reads, “I wish for many people as possible to know the way to live as human beings shown in the Lotus Sutra, and to make true happiness their own.”

This month, we would like to make Founder Niwano’s wish our own, while rededicating ourselves to be diligent in our practice with joy to find the original self (the buddha-nature).

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



🌸 RISSHO KOSEI-KAI INTERNATIONAL BRANCHES 🌸

✉ Welcome comments on our newsletter [Living the Lotus:living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp](mailto:living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp)

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