

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life



Risho Kosei-kai of Seattle



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Risho 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, Risho 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.

Flexibility Leads to Mental Freedom

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Removing the Yoke from the Ox

Around this time every year, I am fondly reminded of the old days, when I would help with preparations for planting rice seedlings by doing things like plowing up the paddies, filling them with water, and smoothing them over. I have memories from around age 10 to 14 of leading, by the ring through its nose, the ox that cultivated the rice paddies. I felt afraid when sprayed by the ox's hard breath and when I heard its loud snorting, but for us, that ox was an important member of the family, living under our roof. Indeed, the first time I visited Founder Niwano's birthplace in Suganuma, Niigata Prefecture, I opened the front door and stepped into the dimly lit house to be greeted by the smell wafting in from the stables. That memory is still fresh in my mind.

To cite a passage from the Sutta Nipata, a collection of Shakyamuni's sayings, "Flexibility means removing the yoke from the ox." As someone who spent some years working and living with oxen and horses, this passage deeply impresses me, vividly reminding me of my close interaction with the oxen and horses that we kept and the mind of consideration born from keeping them. The yoke is an implement attached to the ox while it plows the fields. When the farm work is finished and the time comes to remove the yoke from the ox's shoulders, doing so must be like telling the ox "Thanks for working so hard again today," expressing gratitude and being kind to the ox. We can condense this into one word, "flexibility," which means "a kind and peaceful demeanor." And just as the farmer shows consideration for the ox, who he treats like a member of his family, I think this passage of the Sutta Nipata is similarly imbued with Shakyamuni's wish that all human beings be kind and peaceful.

Removing Attachments

Seen from a different angle, the phrase “removing the yoke” symbolically teaches us the importance of living our lives by removing the things that are tying us down.

We human beings have minds with many attachments, such as our opinions and desire for things, that prevent us from leading lives of complete mental freedom, without attachments, like animals and plants. Although we may not be able to attain a level of free and unhindered concentration like the buddhas and bodhisattvas do, these attachments produce sufferings, and therefore we should all try, as much as possible, to remove the attachments from our minds that cause irritation so that our daily lives are relaxed and calm.

The Edo period Zen master Shido Bunan (1603–76) said, “To practice being a buddha is to not think about anything,” and “it is fine to do everything with the mindset of not thinking about anything at all.” He was always careful to avoid having attachments to anything. Here is a story about him that illustrates this.

There was a wealthy man who respected Zen master Shido Bunan so much that he arranged for him to stay in a hermitage in the village where he lived. But one day, the man discovered that his daughter was pregnant. When he asked his daughter who the father was, she lied and said, “It’s the Zen master.” The man was so angry that he immediately went to Shido Bunan, hurled insults and rebukes at him, and chased him out of the village. After a while, though, his daughter confessed the truth, saying, “I was afraid of being punished, so I thought it would be better to say it was the Zen master, who is respected by everyone.”

The man immediately went to call upon Shido Bunan and tearfully apologized to him. According to written records, the Zen master replied with a pleasant smile and laughter, saying that no one is to blame, not in the least. Zen master Shido Bunan was certainly someone who was kind to everyone, full of compassion, and in command of a mind of flexibility and freedom from attachments.

In fact, “Shido Bunan” is a Zen phrase that means “There is nothing difficult about the Way leading to the Truth.” In other words, all you have to do is avoid forming attachments to liking one thing and disliking another, or to your own ideas about everything, and that is good enough; that is the Buddha Way.

Regarding flexibility, Founder Niwano said, “If, at first, you only superficially adopt the ‘keep on smiling’ philosophy, that’s all right. Just keep in mind that you are smiling to become more flexible, and it will naturally sink into your spirit.” Therefore, since we hope to become people with mental freedom and flexibility like the Buddha, let’s try, as best we can, to accept whatever happens with smiles on our faces.

From *Kosei*, May 2024



Interview

In the May and July issues of *Living the Lotus*, we will feature interviews with two young members who graduated from Gakurin Seminary in March 2024. Gakurin is Rissho Kosei-kai's global training center for engaged Buddhism and interfaith action. Through holistic education based on Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra, Gakurin trains future leaders of engaged Buddhism as well as leaders engaged in interreligious cooperation and peacebuilding both locally and internationally.

English website for
Gakurin Seminary



Wishing for a World Where Everyone Can Live Peacefully, Transcending National, Ethnic, and Religious Differences

Ms. Mukta Barua
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

Looking back on your two years at Gakurin Seminary, what is your most memorable experience?

Gakurin was my first experience living with other students in a dormitory. Because of the language and cultural barriers, I couldn't fully communicate my feelings to other students, especially at the beginning of my life in the dormitory, and I once had trouble getting along with one of my classmates. No matter how much I talked to her, she didn't respond to my greetings, let alone listen to what I had to say. I wondered why she constantly behaved like that and asked the then-deputy director of Gakurin, Ms. Otomo, for advice on the relationship. Ms. Otomo taught me the importance of changing myself first rather than trying to change others.

While wondering how I should change myself, I continued to try to speak to my classmate, no matter how she reacted, and I tried to listen to her by putting myself in her shoes. Then, gradually, her facial expressions became calmer, and our relationship changed to one in which we could tell each other



Ms. Barua (front row, right) with lecturers and fellow students of Gakurin in the assembly hall of the seminary.



Ms. Mukta Barua is interviewed by Living the Lotus

whatever was on our minds. Through this experience, I learned that if I change myself, my situation and my relationships with others will change accordingly.

What was the most significant thing you learned from your studies of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra at Gakurin Seminary?

The passage in chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra, "Devadatta," and the line "All of this is due to the good friendship of Devadatta," remains most strongly in my mind. The Buddha did not resent Devadatta for his repeated attempts on his life, but rather thanked

him for helping him to deepen his understanding of the Dharma. Therefore, I believe that if we too can perform the thorough practice of revering the buddha nature in others, just like the Buddha, who accepted the Devadatta as a good friend, we can change the way we view others and approach them with respect and esteem, rather than discrimination and prejudice.

In your graduate research presentation, you spoke on the theme of “Practicing the Spirit of the One Vehicle for Peaceful Coexistence between Local Citizens and Rohingya Refugees.” Why did you choose this theme?

I was born and raised in a Buddhist family in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. From the time I was nineteen years old, there were reports in the newspapers and on television about Rohingya refugees, a Muslim minority group who had fled Myanmar, and there were anxieties among my family and other people around me about accepting Rohingya refugees. At the time, I thought that as Myanmar was a Buddhist country, there was no way Myanmar could commit harmful acts, so the problem must lie with the Rohingya. At the same time, the critical attitude of those around me helped me to develop an exclusive attitude toward the Rohingya refugees.

However, when I entered Gakurin, I began questioning my way of thinking. In the course of learning about Devadatta and interreligious dialogue, I began to wonder whether I could really call myself a Bud-



Ms. Barua (front row, second from right) with her fellow students at Gakurin on the day she moved into the dormitory.

dhist if I only criticized the Rohingya refugees. This made me want to explore ways for the Rohingya refugees and citizens of Cox’s Bazar to live together in harmony. That was my reason for choosing this theme.

How do you plan to put this theme into action when you return home?

It has been more than six years since the Muslim Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh in the summer of 2017 after suffering severe armed repression and persecution in Myanmar, where 90 percent of the population is Buddhist. There are now about 970,000 refugees in Bangladesh and about 930,000 of them are living in camps in Cox’s Bazar, where I live. More than half of them are women and children. Currently, United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are continuing humanitarian aid for the Rohingya refugees. Because I can speak Japanese and want to take action based on what I can do, I would like to join a Japanese NGO and engage in support activities in refugee camps.

I would also like to volunteer with the youth of Rissho Kosei-kai’s Cox’s Bazar chapter to clean up areas around the refugee camps and create opportunities for dialogue and exchange between Buddhists and Muslims. This would deepen the local citizens’ interest in the Rohingya refugees and help the locals to overcome their religious prejudices.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that all people are just as



Ms. Barua is surrounded by members of the Fukui Dharma Center, where she had the Dharma dissemination training.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that all people are just as precious as the Buddha and that we should recognize and support each other in the “spirit of the One Vehicle.” To achieve this, we need continuous and persistent activities that promote dialogue and understanding between Rohingya refugees and the people of Cox’s Bazar, making it possible for them to open their hearts to one another. Through these activities, I hope we will overcome national, ethnic, and religious differences and aim for a world where everyone can live in peace.

Finally, what are your dreams for the future?

At Gakurin, I had yet to have a clear idea of what I wanted to do after graduation, such as working as a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai. However, when I visited the Fukui Dharma Center for Dharma dissemination training and saw the members participating in dissemination activities and performing their roles in the Dharma center, I started to think more deeply

about what I could do to repay my debt of gratitude to Founder Niwano and President Niwano. Once I return to Bangladesh, I can consider various options, such as putting into practice what I’ve learned at Gakurin through my work and activities at the local Dharma center or studying abroad to learn more about different cultures and religions.

However, to consider the question more deeply, my greatest desire is to pass N1 (the highest level) of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, which is extremely difficult. I know achieving it will be tough, but I will never give up. After I return to Bangladesh, I will continue studying diligently to improve my Japanese language skills and, if possible, I would like to work for Rissho Kosei-kai and study the teachings more deeply. As a staff member of the organization, I would dedicate myself to overseas dissemination and interreligious cooperation—that is my dream.



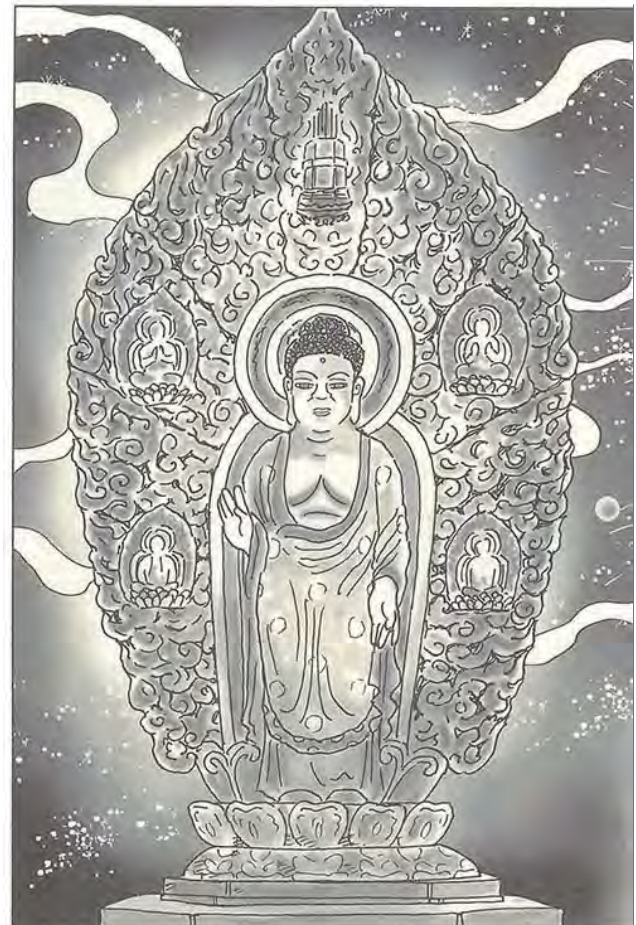
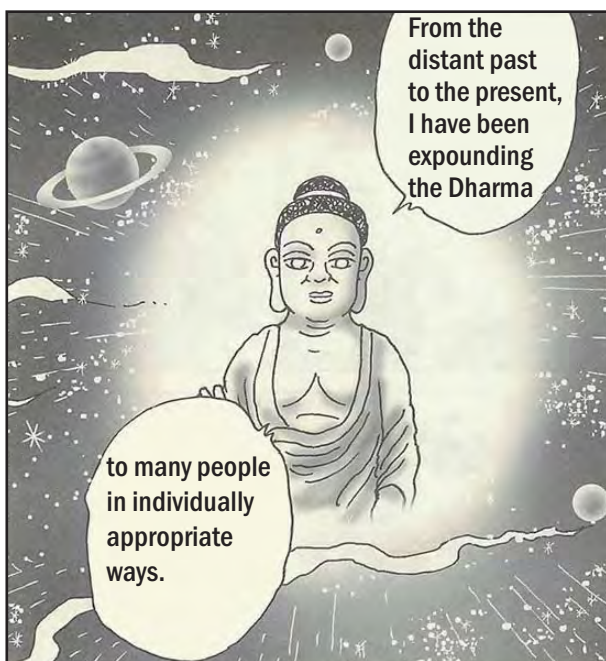
An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Becoming Members of Rissho Kosei-kai

The Focus of Devotion, or *Gohonzon*, of Rissho Kosei-kai

The Gohonzon is an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One. It is written in the Lotus Sutra that from the infinite past, the Eternal Buddha has been constantly here in this world, appropriately expounding various teachings to many people in order to liberate them. Based on this passage, Founder Niwano enshrined the Eternal Buddha as the focus of devotion for members of Rissho Kosei-kai. The Buddha's standing posture shows that he is always ready to go and liberate anyone who is suffering.

Installed inside the statue of the Gohonzon is the founder's handwritten Threefold Lotus Sutra, which he devoted his energy to copying.



Did You Know?

The Tathagata Abundant Treasures and the four great bodhisattvas are arranged in a halo around the Gohonzon: the Tathagata Abundant Treasures is on the top in the center, to the right are Superior Practice (upper right) and Boundless Practice (lower right), and to the left are Pure Practice (upper left) and Steadfast Practice (lower left).

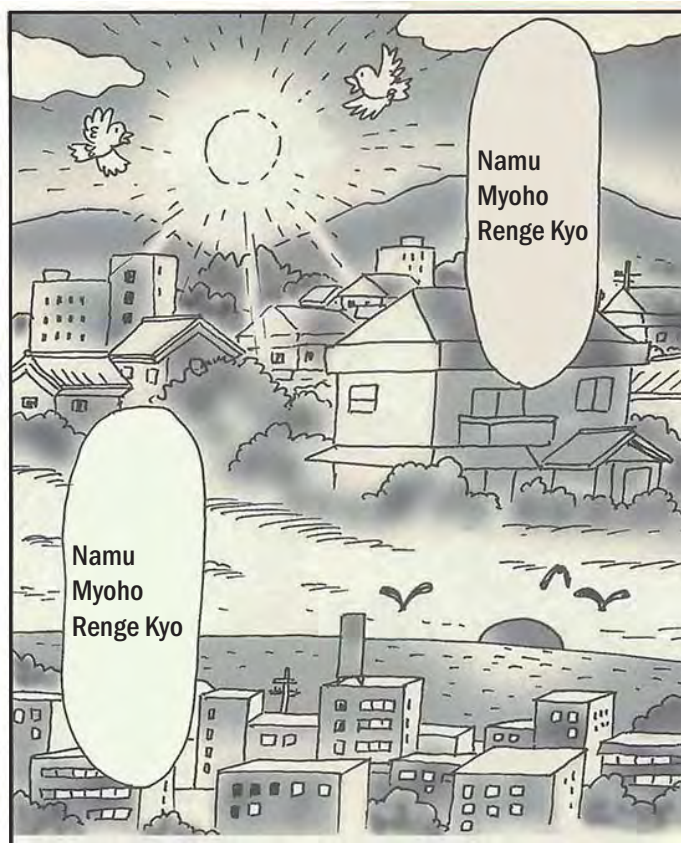


Regular Morning and Evening Sutra Recitation

Members recite the sutra every morning and evening. They wear the sash (a symbolic form of the monk's robe) and sit in front of the home altar with *kyoten*, or "sutra readings," and prayer beads. If we practice recitation every day, we feel very refreshed.

Before recitation, we offer water, tea, and cooked rice, and we change the water in the flower vase. We are careful when we use fire to light candles and offer incense.

Now we are ready to start sutra recitation. During the morning recitation, we make a personal vow to diligently practice that day, and later, during the evening recitation, we express gratitude for the events of the day.

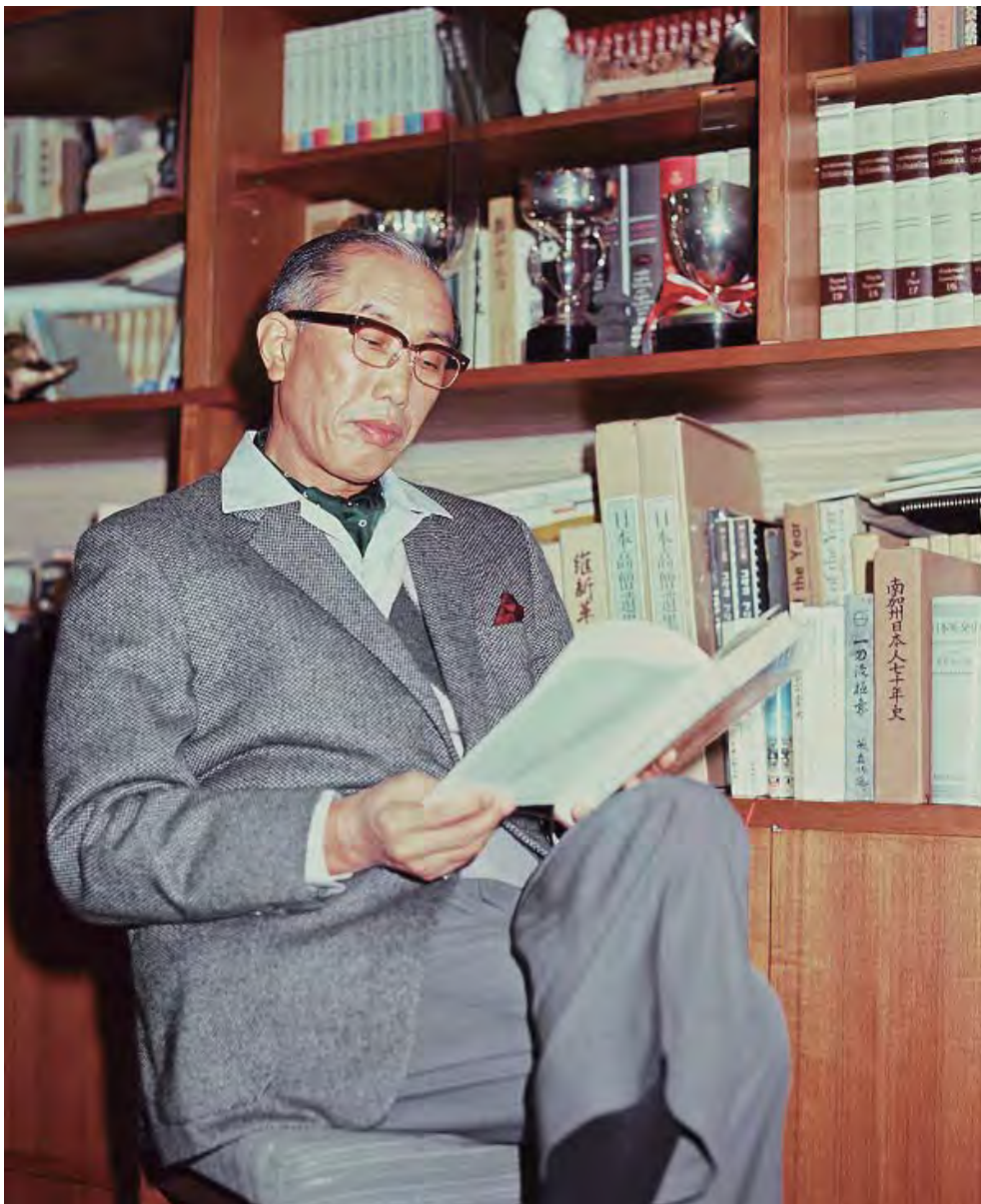




Chapter 1
Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

People Who Serve in Roles

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Bodhisattva Practice of Leading People to Embark on the Buddha Way

Essentially, “roles” are things that people have in ample measure, solely by virtue of their birth in this world as human beings, irrespective of their circumstances in life or the jobs they do. And it’s not just human beings; every living thing and every inanimate entity, such as air, water, and soil, has its own role.

For example, many people may think that earthworms are only useful as fishing bait, but that’s absurd. Earthworms continuously cultivate the soil by ingesting and expelling



it as they tunnel through the earth. Moreover, their tunnels aid in ventilation, and the soil they consume becomes fertilizer, benefiting plant growth.

Even smaller than worms, microorganisms also perform important functions. I've heard there are as many as several hundred million microorganisms in a teaspoon of soil. They decompose fallen leaves, plants, and the remains of animals, returning them to the soil. Without microorganisms to perform these functions, it is said that the earth would be covered with the bodies of animals and plants, leaving no place for us to live.

So, even microorganisms invisible to the naked eye splendidly serve other living beings in this way. Wouldn't it be a shame if, especially since we've been born as human beings, we didn't strive to fulfill our roles for the sake of the world and other people?

Humans have one outstanding quality that sets us apart from other living things: our ability to consciously choose to devote ourselves to others. While other living things naturally benefit others through the functions they instinctively perform, only human beings can consciously choose to work for the sake of others. This ability is not limited to natural roles such as working hard at one's job; it also includes the capacity to go out of our way to work for the benefit of others.

Volunteer activities are one example of this. And it goes without saying that the most valuable activity is the bodhisattva practice of guiding others to embark on the Buddha Way. That is, as I mentioned earlier, the work of devoutly dedicating oneself to the One Great Cause for which the buddhas appear in the world.

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 50–51



Director's Column

Flexibility Learned from “Peaceful and Agreeable Practices”

Rev. Keichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

Hello, everyone. It is May, a season of fresh greenery. In Japan, there is a long holiday at the beginning of the month, and it is a time when many people's hearts are excited; yet it is not uncommon to encounter unexpected chaos as tourist spots and expressways become crowded.

Perhaps President Niwano anticipated this situation, and in this month's message, “Flexibility Leads to Mental Freedom,” he guides us about the kind of mind and actions we should keep in our thoughts.

The first thing that came to my mind when I heard the word “flexibility” was a passage from chapter 14, “Peaceful and Agreeable Practices,” in the Three-fold Lotus Sutra: “Bodhisattva-mahasattvas should abide in the state of forbearance. They should be flexible, gentle, compliant, and never rash or aggressive.” Chapter 14 is so profoundly educational that President Niwano chose it as the theme for his master's thesis. It is like a practical book, full of wisdom that can be applied in daily life. You can almost hear the gentle voice of the Buddha saying, “Be patient and be kind.”

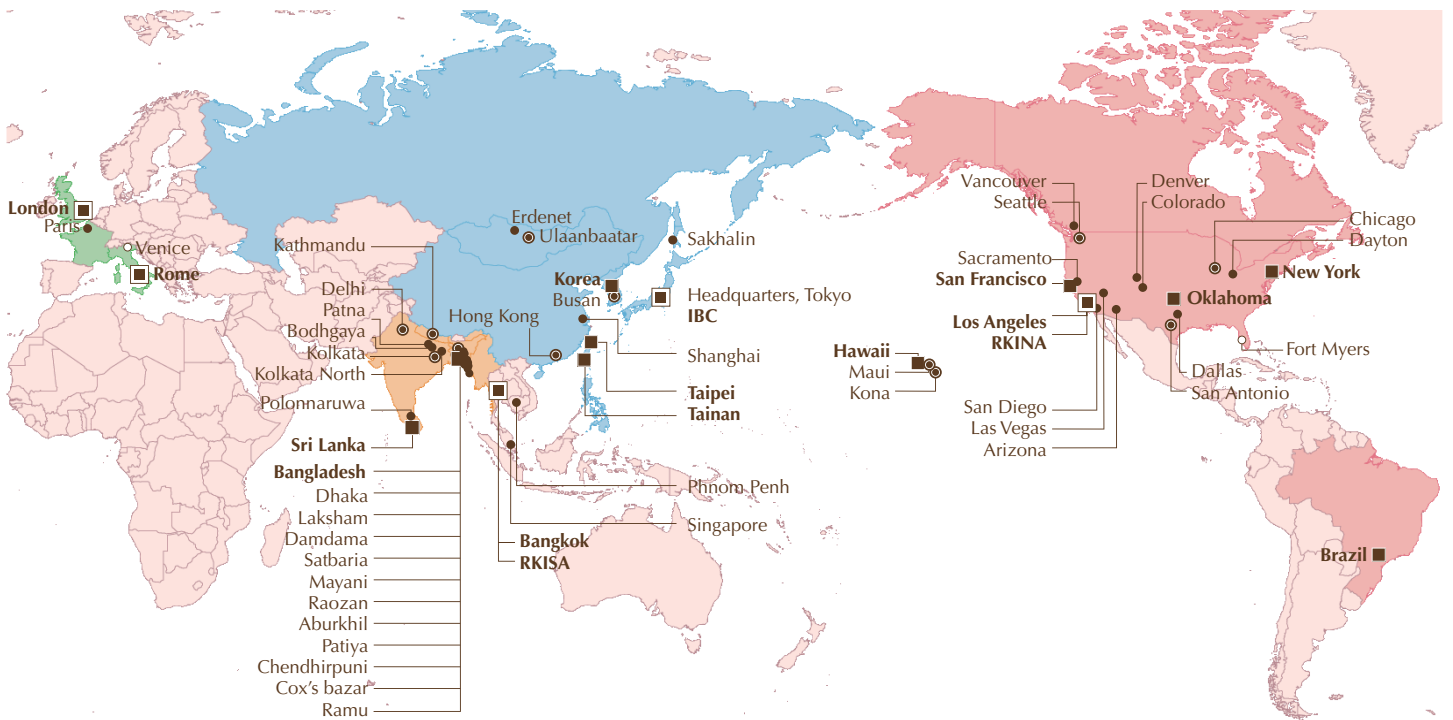
During this year's holidays, I would like to be diligent in my practice by keeping this passage in mind so that I can enjoy a feeling of freedom and flexibility.



Director Akagawa (front row, center) participates in a meeting of ministers and chairs of the boards of Dharma centers affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America, held at the Dharma Center of Los Angeles, March 22–23, 2024.



🌸 *A Global Buddhist Movement* 🌸



Information about
local Dharma centers

