Coming to terms with Buddhism

When We Are Called, Let’s Clearly Reply “Yes!”
~Creating Happy Days by Responding to Others Cheerfully~

How do you lead your life each day? Don’t we all want to have lives full of happy, pleasant days, rather than dull, dark ones? Then what should we try to keep in mind in order to make this happen? You may have several different answers to this question, but I’m sure you’ll agree that what is most important is developing good habits in everyday life.

There are several positive habits, such as “practicing sutra recitation every morning and evening” or “offering warm greetings to others in the morning”; we have discussed these habits before in this column. Among these practices, we would like you to keep one foremost in your mind, because it is of vital importance; responding “Yes!” clearly and cheerfully when you are called by others. You may think putting this into practice would be a simple and natural matter, but actually learning to respond this way each day without fail is very important.

Can you clearly respond “Yes!” for sure, whenever you are called? This may seem very easy and simple, but in reality, it is considerably difficult for a person to practice “without fail.” There are some people we can gently and easily respond to, but on the other hand, there are those who we can not respond to so willingly. Maybe that’s maybe because we have unfavorable feelings toward them, or we have extreme difficulty in getting along with them. I understand very well how you may hesitate in your response to such people with even a simple “Yes”. But let’s be patient with ourselves. Trying to say a positive, nice word to those we don’t like is clearly part of the process of ridding ourselves of our selfish minds. And responding with just one simple word--“Yes”-- is connected with the attitude of seeing others as valuable.

Strive to respond “Yes” clearly without fail to everyone, no matter who they are. It will be even more beautiful if you respond with a smile, rather than do it in sulking manner. Again, it’s never easy to truly put this into practice. However, there is no question that you’ll be able to lead a happy life with a pleasant and refreshed attitude, if you repeat this good habit over and over. Eventually, you will attain the benefits of this practice by simply responding to everyone in a warm and cheerful manner.

On July 31st and August 1st, the “Rissho Kosei-kai Convention Celebrating 50 years in the United States” was held in Las Vegas, with President Niwano in attendance. A total of 630 members from each Dharma center and branch, mainly from Hawaii, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Oklahoma, Seattle, Chicago and San Antonio, participated in the convention. At the convention, we saw a video which looked back on the history of 50 years of missionary work in the US, and we heard the personal religious experience of Mr. John Michael Schuh from New York Dharma Center, Chicago branch. Also, each branch featured performances including singing, dancing, music, drama, and comedy. Each branch brought its own flavor and character to its performance. So, the convention was full of deep emotion and smiles.

If you’d like to know the details of the convention, please access the Web site of Rissho Kosei-kai of North America (RKINA)!!

http://www.buddhistcenter-rkina.org/
Like the Lotus Blossom

President of Rissho Kosei-kai  Nichiko Niwano

What the Symbol of the Lotus Teaches

The Japanese poet Saigyo (1118–90), known for such works as his Sankashu (Mountain Cottage Collection), left us this verse:

The lotus blooming,
The waves beating
On the shore—
My mind hears them
As the preaching of the Dharma.

The poem means that from the sound of waves and the lotus, which pushes up its stem from within muddy water and puts forth with a slight popping sound a beautiful blossom unsullied by the mud, we can learn the Buddha’s teaching.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law (the Lotus Sutra) is one of the sutras that preaches the Dharma through the symbol of the lotus blossom. As representative of such sutras it has given people encouragement and joy in life since ancient times by a verse that cites the lotus as an example of being untainted by worldly things.

Chapter 12 of the sutra (“Devadatta”) contains the profound verse, “If they are born into the presence of bodhisattvas, they will be born from lotus flowers,” which teaches us that even bad people who have the opportunity to hear the Buddha’s teaching can reach a state of purity untainted, like the lotus blossom.

From this, we can also receive a powerful message from the Buddha, teaching us that, even if we are experiencing severe circumstances in which many things seem almost unbearable, once we believe in and accept the Dharma, the negative aspects of our lives will be transformed into positive ones.

The life of the lotus blossom lasts a mere four days. It opens with an audible sound in the early morning and between late morning to midafternoon it closes (depending on the day’s temperature). It repeats this for three days, and on the fourth day its petals drop off.
I am struck by the purity of the lotus blossom, and its being unsoiled by the mud in which it grows, as a solemn example of the truth of impermanence.

Pain and suffering exist in every era. The symbolism of the lotus blossom seems all the more profound, however, in an age like ours of many trials and difficulties. For the lotus flower to bloom beautifully, the mud from which it springs is needed. What does that teach us?

The mud can be likened to the trends of our times and the events that bring us pain and suffering. Not giving in to such trends or being dejected by such events is like keeping ourselves unsullied. But, then, even when the world seems so filled with tragic happenings that we want to express our unhappiness aloud and when so many things that occur seem to be to our disadvantage, if we change our way of looking at events and accept them as manifestations of the Buddha’s teachings and important lessons for us, then all of our hardships can become rich spiritual nourishment. That is what the Buddha teaches us through the symbolism of the lotus blossom.

Precisely because we ourselves experience pain, we empathize with the hardships of other people. Our failures and setbacks might be the working of compassion, teaching us humility. Even sickness can be an opportunity to foster the spirit of being grateful for being caused to live here and now.

In other words, like the lotus that thrusts a great circle of a blossom from muddy water in which it grows, the experience of suffering allows human beings to also blossom in their feelings of true joy and gratitude.

Incidentally, the Lotus Sutra verse mentioned earlier, which reads, “And are as untainted with worldly things as the lotus flowers in the water,” is preceded by the words “They [sons of the Buddha] have ably learned the bodhisattva way.” In order to lead our lives like the lotus blossom it is important that we follow the bodhisattva practice by which we diligently study the Buddha’s teaching. A great example of such a bodhisattva is Nichiren, who risked his personal safety to promote his understanding of the Lotus Sutra. His life was certainly not an easy one.

However, all of us are capable of being welcoming and cheerful toward the people we encounter, like lotus blossoms bathed in sunlight, and can create a pleasant atmosphere like a refreshing breeze fragrant with the perfume of the blue lotus. In other words, “I, together with other people, cheerfully.”

Day after day, full of energy and good cheer—if each and every one of us has such a positive attitude, we will without fail build the basis for a happy society for ourselves and other people.
The Buddha says in the Lotus Sutra, ‘Ever making this my thought: How can I make living beings / Obtain entry into the unsurpassable Way / And quickly accomplish embodiment as buddhas?’ The Buddha makes his appearance in our world to pursue his wish that everyone should enter the Buddha Way and quickly attain the same state of mind as the Buddha enjoys. That is the Buddha’s original vow”

(San Reizan Meiso [Meditations of Three Holy Mountains], p. 63)

Founder Nikkyo Niwano said, “The Buddha is always near us; we need only to awaken to this presence, accept his compassion directly with an open mind, and always act in accordance with the Buddha’s spirit.”

Chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, "Skillful Means," tells of how the Buddha made a vow to lead all people into a state of mind like his own, without delusion, and to help us attain a happy mental condition that allows us to lead our entire lives in contentment.

Also, chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Eternal Life of the Tathagata," tells us that the Buddha knows what we have been able to do and what we could not do, what suffering we have faced and how we have tried to overcome it, and that he is always sending us messages in the guise of events perfectly tailored to our circumstances, past and present. It also tells of how he arranges various meetings and encounters that will lead us quickly, easily, and directly to a state of mind like the Buddha’s.

“The reason you joined Rissho Kosei-kai was not for the young men’s group or men’s group activities. What your first wish should be is to fulfill the Buddha’s original vow, to attain buddhahood.”

(From a speech by the founder in the Great Sacred Hall, Tokyo, November 15, 1985)

In April 1986, a major catastrophe occurred when the Chernobyl nuclear power reactor in Ukraine exploded. Huge amounts of radioactivity were released and spread over a wide area, and high radiation levels were detected in vegetables, water, and mother’s milk even in Japan.

The news media reported on this event day after day, filling my mother with apprehension to the point where she asked the founder, “What is to become of us? Will we survive? What shall we do?”

To this the founder promptly replied, “Do not worry. The best thing we can do is to put all our energy into devoting ourselves to the Buddhist faith. For us, devotion to the Buddha Way is everything.”

If we experience any type of major disaster beyond our control including a nuclear reactor accident, our human-centered vision can see no meaning in it, and we tend to despair.

The founder tells us without hesitation that when we are faced with such a situation we
President-designate Kosho Niwano

President Nichiko Niwano’s oldest daughter, Rev. Kosho Niwano was born in Tokyo. After graduating with a degree in Law from Gakushuin University, she studied at Gakurin Seminary, the training institution for Rissho Kosei-kai leaders. Presently, as she studies the Lotus Sutra, she continues to act as President-designate, making speeches for participants in the main ceremonies of Rissho Kosei-kai, and handling activities for interfaith cooperation at home and abroad. Married to Rev. Munehiro Niwano. Mother of one son and three daughters.

should not worry, but should keep on believing in the Buddha’s original vow, focus squarely on that without wavering, and that the most important thing is to go on living. Isn’t that the real meaning of truly acceding to the wish of the Eternal Original Buddha?

“The principal and most crucial point of religious training in Buddhism is ‘crossing over a bridge of suffering from birth, old age, sickness, and death.’ We begin with our birth, our flesh sometimes suffers from illness, we age as the years pass, and we finally die. . . . All things possessing life eventually experience death. We cannot escape this aspect of our own existence, nor is it one for which we can hold others responsible; it is something we must work out for ourselves. The Buddha used the phrase ‘crossing over a bridge of suffering’ in the sense of overcoming one’s troubles and difficulties.”

(Kosei, April, 1966)

All people originally have the same spirit as the Buddha, and we are living now for the purpose of expressing it. The Buddha is willing us to express that spirit and give it life; to this end he provides us with encounters and opportunities to do so. Still, we continue to live deluded by superficial elements of good and evil, driven aimlessly by the immediately apparent phenomena of the world. However, the truth is that everything that happens to us is necessary for us in the here and now.

All events must happen just as they do to enable our inherent buddha-nature to shine forth, and all circumstances of our lives are nothing but fortunate karmic conditions conducive to our attainment of buddhahood. All are necessary divine arrangements without which our buddha-nature cannot shine forth. All we need to do is to believe that everything is an expression of the Buddha’s compassion.

It is this kind of faith in the Buddha’s compassion that allows us to truly accept the promise of the Buddha’s original vow.

“If we are firmly rooted in such faith, the wall of delusions and defilements that surrounds us will cease to be a barrier even though it remains; it will become permeable, as it were. The buddha-nature that was closed off by that wall will come into direct contact with the compassion of the Original Buddha and become one with it. In this way, the Buddha’s compassion can work to the full within us.”

(Shinshaku Hokke Sambu-kyo [New Commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra], vol. 6, p. 100)

From "Kaiso-sama ni Naraitte" (Kosei Publishing Co.) P.70~75
I was born the second daughter of the Tomita family in Tomé-Açu, which is in the Brazilian state of Pará. My parents crossed the ocean from Yokohama Port to Brazil via the emigrant ship “Argentina-maru” in 1963. They colonized Tomé-Açu, which is in the upper country of the Amazonian jungle. Just as my parents had begun to earnestly cultivate and harvest pimenta (a type of pepper), my father died of liver cancer at the age of 26. My mother was just 25 years old at the time, and she had three children: my brother, who was 5 years old; my sister, who was 2 years old; and at just six years old, me. Developing new land was much too difficult for my mother to handle on her own, so she decided to go back to Japan. However, shortly after the ship had cast off, she handed her wallet to her 5 years old son and committed suicide by throwing herself into the sea. After my mother’s death, we fortunately were able to arrive in Japan safely, thanks to the help of many people. At that time, my brother was taken care of by relatives on our mother’s side, and my sister and I were taken care of by our paternal aunt’s family in Saitama Prefecture. I was raised by my adoptive parents but when I entered junior high school, I was taken care of by relatives on our mother’s side, and my sister and I were taken care of by our paternal aunt’s family in Saitama Prefecture. I was raised by my adoptive parents but when I entered junior high school, I was taken care of by my other uncle’s family, and started to live with them. I had encountered much criticism, and could not wipe away the feeling that I had been abandoned by my parents.

I spent some years in this condition, and, when I was 20 years old, I met a man and married him. Like my parents, I had three children. After several years of marriage, my husband and I had an opportunity to own a home, exactly as I had been wishing for. At my aunt’s suggestion, I went to Rissho Kosei-kai for the first time to receive guidance about the direction in which I should build my home. Then I met the Head of the chapter and the Area leader at the time, and talked to them about my childhood and how I had grown up. They listened to my story seriously, and recommended that I become a member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Right after I became a member, the Chichibu Dharma Center marked its 35th anniversary, and I received a duty of sharing my spiritual experience during the ceremony. On this occasion, Rev. Nezu, (the former Vice Chairman of the Board) who was invited as an instructor, kindly sent my manuscript to the Brazil Dharma Center beforehand. The morning of the ceremony, I received a message via fax from the Brazil Dharma Center. It said, “We, your brothers and sisters of your birthplace Brazil always watch over and pray that you will carry out this important duty during the ceremony. Please come back to Brazil someday to pray that your parents rest in peace.” I remember how moved I was to realize my good fortune in having such encouragement from Sangha members from the other side of the planet, even though they don’t really know about me at all.

After that, I had a chance to meet Rev. Mori, who is the former minister of the Brazil Dharma Center. He looked at a receipt written in Portuguese that had been found in a collection of my father’s belongings and said, “Your father bought cans of baby formula every time he went over a long distance to shop. At the time, it was difficult to get baby formula in the plantation. Even in such a difficult situation, your father took many days to get to Belém, which is very far from his home.” This made an unmistakable impression on me, and upon hearing this, my heart

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Shanzai welcomes your religious experience. Why don’t you share your religious experience through Shanzai with members all over the world? Please send the script or inquiry to the email address; shanzai.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp. Thank you.
reached out to my parents. Immediately, I had an opportunity to install the focus of ancestor appreciation, and was filled with great joy to be able to personally venerate my parents through recitation of the Sutra. Then I became involved in the practice of leading and guiding others to the Dharma, because I wished to share the teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai with others; this practice helps us to cultivate our minds. Since the time I received the role of Head of the Chapter wives, my like-minded peers in the group have offered me mental and spiritual support. Now, two among my children in faith have received the focus of devotion.

About four years ago, the Chichibu Dharma Center welcomed its 45th Anniversary and at the time, I met our instructor, Rev. Sakai. Rev. Sakai is an Emeritus Member of the Board of Trustees of Rissho Kosei-kai. I talked to him about my upbringing. After that, Rev. Sakai went to Brazil and brought me back some soil and seawater from the area in Brazil where my parents are buried. This compelled me to make a connection with my brother. We had been out of touch for nearly 20 years, and I wanted the three of us siblings to see each other once again. Also, Rev. Sakai asked Rev. Nagashima, the Minister of the Brazil Dharma Center, to research my father’s grave during his stay in Brazil. I had heard that my father’s grave was deep in the jungle, deserted and overgrown with vegetation. However, I soon received news that proved that rumor to be totally untrue! Surprisingly, my father’s grave was found in Tomé-Açu, Amazon. Rev. Nagashima visited the grave in place of my brother, sister and me. The area is right on the equator, and it took three hours by airplane from Sao Paulo, plus six hours by ship and car. His visit set the pattern for my own future reunion with my father. Rev. Nagashima also asked about the condition of our uncle, Mr. Hiroshi Muroi, who is our mother’s cousin. Mr. Muroi had taken care of our father’s grave for about 40 years. Both Ministers of the Chichibu and Brazil Dharma Center listened seriously to my wishes to visit my father’s grave and to meet with Mr. Muroi to convey my gratitude. My wish to visit Brazil came true during a very special year; the Centennial Anniversary of Japanese Immigration in Brazil, the 50th Anniversary of the Founder Niwano’s inspection trip to Brazil, and the 70th Anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai.

(To be continued...)

In 2008, Ms. Magara (front, second from left) visited Brasil.
Sensitivity to Suffering

Haven’t we all had an experience like this? We try to guide a person to the Dharma, hoping that he or she will connect with it; but the person says, “I really don’t have any problems, so I guess I don’t need the Dharma”. This leaves us disappointed.

There are many people who think, “I don’t really encounter any suffering in life.” This is because their perspective is too narrow, and they only think of themselves, or their own family. Even when it seems like there is no suffering in one’s immediate vicinity, if a person broadens their view to include the office, society, and nation, he or she can’t say that there is no suffering in their midst. The problem is the self-centered mind that says “I only care about myself, so I don’t care about other people.” If one thinks like this, he or she will certainly meet many obstacles.

There is a people who say, “When I have a problem, I’ll learn to develop faith,” but by then, it will be too late. For example, a car can’t just stop suddenly when you want it to stop. You have to step on the brake gradually before you want to stop the car from moving. Then you can stop the car at the place where you want it to stop.

It is important for us to have an attitude of caring about the suffering of other people and society in general. Having such an attitude will function as preventive medicine against our own suffering.

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization whose holy scripture is the Threefold Lotus Sutra. It was established by Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Co-founder Myoko Naganuma in 1939. This organization is composed of ordinary men and women who have faith in the Buddha and strive to enliven their spirituality by applying his teachings to their daily lives. At both the local community and international levels, we, under the guidance of the President Nikkyo Niwano, are very active in promoting peace and well-being through altruistic activities and cooperation with other organizations.

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Senior Editor: Rev. Kotaro SUZUKI Editor: Ms. Shiko MATSUOKA Editorial Staff: Ms. Chika ITOBUCHI, Ms. Akiko IMAFUJI, Ms. Prapan SNRAT and Ms. Yukino KUDD

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Live Broadcasting on Web

Ceremony for the Annual Memorial Day of the Cofounder

September 10th is the annual memorial day of the Cofounder. We will broadcast the ceremony at the Great Sacred Hall both in English and Japanese to the overseas branches on live by Internet. Everyone can participate in it from your location. Please join the ceremony through Internet!!!

Date and Time: Thursday, 10th September 9:00 a.m. ～ (Japan Time)

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Ms. Imafuji, Rissho Kosei-kai International.

E-mail address; akiko.imafuji@kosei-kai.or.jp

インターネット配信のお知らせ

脇祖さま報恩会

9月10日は脇祖さま報恩会の日です。大聖堂で行われる式典の模様を、インターネットを通じて日本語と英語の二ヶ国語で、海外の各拠点に配信いたします。どなたでも、どこからでもご覧になることができます。全世界からのご参加を心よりお待ちしております。

配信日時: 9月10日（木）
午前 9：00 ～（日本時間）

ご不明な点は、国際伝道本部今藤までお問い合わせ下さい。

メールアドレス: akiko.imafuji@kosei-kai.or.jp
Dear All,

Ceremony for the Annual Memorial Day of the Cofounder will be held on September 10, 2009. Using WebEx, meeting system on the web, overseas branches can participate in the ceremony at each place. Please find the following instruction.

The site named “Rissho Kosei-Kai WebEx Enterprise Site” shall be opened.

2. You can find two topics of meeting in the “Browse Meetings” in this site.
We prepare two meetings for Japanese and English.
Choose whichever you want to join and click “Join.”
3. Please provide your information; 1. Your name, 2. Email address, 3. Meeting password.
   The meeting password is “cofounder”
   And then, click “Join Now”
   And click “Yes” if the security warning dialog box appears.

4. When the meeting starts, the dialog box of “Join Integrated VoIP” appears.
   Please click “Yes”. You can hear the sound and voice.

5. You can find a video in the window, and there are two buttons under the video.
   Left button is for “Undock the video panel,” and right one is for “View in full screen mode.”
   If you want to watch the video in large size, please click these buttons.
6. Right side of the window of this meeting, you can find the panel of “Chat.”

If you have any troubles or questions in the meeting, please let us know through the chat. We will reply soon through chat.
Rissho Kosei-kai
Oversea’s Dharma Centers
2009

Rissho Kosei-kai Intenational
5F Funmon Hall, 2-6-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1124 Fax: 81-3-5341-1224

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America
4255 Campus Drive, University Center A-245, Irvine, CA 92612, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-949-336-4430 Fax: 1-949-336-4432
E-mail: info@buddhistcenter-rkina.org http://www.buddhistcenter-rkina.org

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles
2707 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033, U.S.A.
Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles
1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, U.S.A.
E-mail: rkksf@sbcglobal.net Fax: 1-323-945-0024

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Las Vegas
73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua, Kona, HI 96750, U.S.A.
E-mail: info@mail.rkhawaii.org Fax: 1-808-244-4625

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Oklahoma
2745 N.W. 40th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73112, U.S.A.
Tel & Fax: 1-405-943-0024 Fax: 1-405-943-0025

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Dallas
Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Klamath Falls
724 Main St. Suite 214, Klamath Falls, OR 97601, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-541-810-8127

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Hawaii
2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782, U.S.A.
Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco
28621 Pacific Highway South, Federal Way, WA 98003, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-253-945-0261 Fax: 1-253-945-0262

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Vincent
423, Han-nam-dong, Young-San-ku, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-2-796-5571 Fax: 82-2-796-1696

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Tainan
1258-13, Dae-Hyun-2-dong, Nam-ku, Kwang-yok-shi, Pusan,
Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-51-643-5571 Fax: 82-51-643-5572

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Taipei
4F, No.10 Hengyang Road, Hsingheng District, Taipei City 100
Tel: 886-2-2381-1632 Fax: 886-2-2331-3433

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Oklahoma
2745 N.W. 40th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73112, U.S.A.
Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Oklahoma
Tel & Fax: 1-405-943-0024 Fax: 1-405-943-0025

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Klamath Falls
724 Main St. Suite 214, Klamath Falls, OR 97601, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-541-810-8127
Rissho Kosei-kai of South Asia Division
3F Fumon Hall, 2-6-1 Wada, Sugamitchen-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1017 Fax: 81-3-5341-1224

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 Fax: 66-2-716-8218
e-mail: thairissho@csloxinfo.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh
85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-31-2850238 Fax: 880-31-710572 (c/o Hotel Agrabad)
e-mail: bimanrkk@bimanrkk@yahoo.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Dhaka
House No.465, Road No-8, D.O.H.S Baridhara,
Dhaka Cant.-1206, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-8316887

Rissho Kosei-kai of Mayani
Mayani Barua Paya, Mirsarai, Chittagong,
Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patiya
Patiya, Post office road, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Domdama
Domdama, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

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Rissho Kosei-kai of Raozan
West Raozan, Ramjan Ali Hat, Raozan, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Branches under the South Asia Division

Rissho Kosei-kai of Colombo
No. 18 Anura Mawatha, Off Anderson Road, Kalubovila, Dehiwala,
Sri Lanka
Tel: 94-11-2763035 Fax: 94-11-4205632
e-mail: rkksrilanka@visualnet.lk

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa
No. 29 Menik Place, Kaduruwela, Polonnaruwa,
Sri Lanka

Rissho Kosei-kai of Habaranas
151, Damulla Road, Habaranas, Sri Lanka

Rissho Kosei-kai of Galle
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Rissho Kosei-kai of Kandy-wattegama
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Delhi Dharma Center
B-117 (Basement Floors), Kalkaji,
New Delhi-110019, India
Tel: 91-11-2623-5060 Fax: 91-11-2685-5713
e-mail: sakusena@hotmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata
E-243 B. P. Township, P. O. Panchasayar,
KOLKATA 70094, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu
3/3 Jhansihel, Sancepa-1, Lalitpur,
Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 977-1-552-9464 Fax: 977-1-553-9832
e-mail: mkk@wlink.com.np

Rissho Kosei-kai of Lumbini
Shantiban, Lumbini, Nepal