

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



VOL. 163

Founders' Essay

Knowing Human Frailty

JESUS, the founder of Christianity, had a group of elite disciples called the twelve apostles. When he was apprehended by the authorities, the apostles abandoned Jesus, even insisting that they did not know him. However, the apostles were utterly transformed by meeting the resurrected Jesus, who, having died on the cross and risen from the dead, refused to condemn them despite knowing full well of their betrayal. The apostles went on to spread Christianity at the very risk of their lives, and so the teachings of Jesus have been handed down throughout the centuries.

Jesus fully understood how frail people are, and he accepted their failings with a warm embrace. When people encounter someone who is aware of their weaknesses and failures and yet accepts them, it brings about a 180-degree change in their lives and assures them that they will not

regret entrusting everything about themselves to that person.

For us, practitioners of Buddhism, the Buddha is the one who accepts all of our human frailties with a warm embrace. The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World embodies this mind of the Buddha, extending hands of compassion to people seeking liberation by appearing to them in thirty-three manifestations. When we, having been embraced by this compassion, continue to work single-mindedly with the intention to become like the Regarder of the Sounds of the World, it gives birth to people who, in the words of the Lotus Sutra, further the teaching “even at the cost of their lives.”

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 146–47

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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.

People Who Are Like a Fragrant Breeze

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



A Fragrant Breeze Blowing through Your Mind

“Hana,” by the composer Rentaro Taki (1879–1903), is a song describing the beautiful spring scenery in Japan. The song begins with the words “a beautiful day in spring,” a lyric that many of you know very well. The cherry blossoms featured in the song are a flower representative of spring, but before the cherry blossoms appear, the sweet scents of plum flowers, daphne bushes, and magnolias fill the air and many people feel the joy of spring’s arrival.

Words expressing such joy are also found in the introductory chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “the fragrant breezes of sandalwood delight the minds of the assembled.” Founder Niwano explained this in simple language as meaning “when the fragrant breeze of the Buddha enters the minds of living beings, it produces great rejoicing.”

As we who have encountered the Buddha’s teaching continue to hear, study, and practice it, we gain many realizations. We become able to feel gratitude for people and things we disliked, and we become aware that the things that had made us feel happy up to that time were really nothing more than selfish thinking. At this point, our way of life undergoes a change.

Once we come to realize what is truly important, we spontaneously give voice to the joy of being emancipated from worrying and suffering—we have been liberated through the teaching. This is what Founder Niwano calls “producing great rejoicing,” and at this time the person “brings joy to the minds of others.” Incidentally, the Chinese character for joy (*etsu*) means removing ill feelings from the mind.

We cannot see the Buddha with our eyes. But, in the Great Sacred Hall, for instance, when we hear the Dharma Journey talk of someone who felt the Buddha’s compassion and became aware of the joy of living through the practice of the teaching, we too experience the joy of encountering the Buddha Dharma. The grandeur of the teaching blows through our minds like “the fragrant breezes of sandalwood.” From the time of Shakyamuni to the present, this has not changed.





We Are All Virtuous People

The Zen monk Ryokan (1758–1831) of Echigo (present-day Niigata Prefecture) must have known this verse about the breezes, since he made the phrase “all my life, be fragrant” his personal motto. He was determined to—and, indeed, he did—live his life as a person who could be like a fragrant breeze that surrounds people’s hearts with warmth, makes them peaceful, and brings them joy.

However, the Dhammapada tells us that “the fragrance of virtuous people advances, even against the wind” and “virtuous people fill every quarter with fragrance.” Therefore, we could take the position that bringing joy to people’s hearts requires being virtuous.

It might seem as though a well-cultivated mind or the accumulation of good deeds is the determining factor of being virtuous. However, I do not think this is necessarily so. Right now, we are living the one life we have in this world, which we receive through the blessings of nature and the virtues of our parents and ancestors. Every one of us already possesses abundant virtues. Therefore, we only need to realize our own virtuousness. Anyone who realizes his or her own virtues and cultivates them can give off a fragrant breeze and be a virtuous person.

In order to do so, it is important to feel gratitude. People are naturally drawn to those who are humble and sincere in remembering to be grateful for whatever happens. Using cheerful, kind, and warmhearted actions and words makes one’s virtuousness all the more fragrant. Interacting with consideration and in harmony with others releases the fragrant breeze of the teaching that lets people breathe easy.

This month marks both the anniversary of Shakyamuni’s birth and the end of the Heisei era in Japan. The new era will begin on May 1. I take this to be an opportunity to refresh our minds and prevent our bodhisattva practice—the practice of promoting peace among all people—from falling into a routine, a force of habit. To make this happen, living in a way that sends forth the fragrant breeze of the Buddha’s teaching will be all the more important.

From *Kosei*, April 2019





How I Learned Consideration for Others through Family Education Seminars



Ms. Mayuree Mukdathong
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Bangkok Dharma Center on Friendship Day, January 13, 2019—a day when sangha members work on deepening their friendships and strengthening their ties.

I AM truly grateful for this great opportunity to share my Dharma Journey with you today.

I was born as the first daughter of the Srimardakul family on January 29, 1967. I was brought up in a family of four with my parents and a younger sister. My father is Thai of Chinese descent and mother is Japanese.

My encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai can be traced back to when my mother was guided to Rissho Kosei-kai by Ms. Kayoko Kurokawa, a Japanese member who was working in Thailand at the time. Ms. Kurokawa was the first person to share the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai with people in Thailand.

I began to visit the Dharma center in Bangkok with my mother, and after graduating from high school in Bangkok, I enrolled in the Gakurin Women's Vocational School (now Hoju Vocational College) of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo. This school was recommended to me by Rev. Yoshie Tsukioka, the minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Tottori, who had visited the Dharma center in Bangkok while I was there.

During my twenty months at the Gakurin Women's Vocational School, I studied the teachings of the



Ms. Mayuree delivers her Dharma Journey talk at Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok.

Threefold Lotus Sutra and experienced Dharma training practice at a local Dharma center in Japan. After I graduated, I enrolled in a university in Japan. During my four years as a university student, I also continued my study of Buddhism and Dharma training at the Gakurin Seminary.

After graduating, I returned to Thailand and worked for a Japanese company for a year. Then I went to Japan again to attend graduate school, where I met my future husband. We got married in 2004, and two years later we were blessed with a daughter.

Around that time, I had several opportunities to participate as a Japanese–Thai interpreter in the family education seminars held at Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok. The seminars were held by the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education, an affiliate of Rissho Kosei-kai. Through my role as an interpreter I became acquainted with family education, but I was not particularly interested in its meaning until I gave birth to my daughter. As a mother myself, I hoped that my daughter would grow up to become a person possessing rich humanity who is considerate of others. So, I started studying family education seriously.

Family education (as advocated by the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education) is based on the principle that “children are the teachers of parenting.” As suggested by its motto, “if parents change, children will change accordingly,” it encourages parents to change through learning, practice, and by following the philosophy that if you want your child to change, you as a parent must change first.

I am learning how to change my perspectives and ways of thinking toward my daughter through my daily interactions with her. For example, my daughter is learning figure skating. It took her almost a year

and a half before she could do an Axel jump, a technique of rotating one and a half times in the air and landing on the ice. One day, however, she suddenly became unable to perform the jump. She didn't know why she could no longer do it, and she was dismayed by her failed attempts. Although she didn't say anything, she seemed broken up about it, but all I could do was wonder why.

It is said that children who are learning ice skating often experience a sudden inability to perform a jump. In my daughter's case, a fear of jumping seemed to grow within her and prevent her from doing it even if she wanted to try. At first, I would say, "Don't worry, you'll be able to do it again because you've done it before." But after a while, she still couldn't perform the jump.

I suggested that if she was scared to jump, it might be best to give up skating and try something different. But she said, "No! I'll never give up! I'll practice until I can make it again." I even told her that the additional lessons would mean we would have to pay an extra fee, but she never changed her mind.

When I mentioned the situation to a family education lecturer, she told me, "As a parent, don't ask your daughter whether she wants to give up. You should wait and let her decide what to do. What's important is to pay respect to her will to not give up. As for the lesson fee, how about thinking of it as paying for her perseverance to not give up? I'm sure your daughter will be able to make an Axel jump again."

I could not fully accept her advice then and there, and I couldn't stop thinking about the lesson fee. Then the lecturer said to me, "I was taught that it's good for anyone with a strong attachment to money to practice donation. Through the act of donation, people can get rid of their attachment and become more generous and tolerant. Why don't you give it a try?" Taking the instructor's advice, I started the practice of donation because I wanted to remove my attachment to the lesson fee.

My daughter has never been particularly talented at skating—she has often been overtaken by her friends in the same grade, or even those younger than her. Despite this, she has not given up, and she always gives her best during practice. Even when I used to make cruel comments like, "Everyone can do it, why can't you?" she did not give up skating. On the other hand, I was not reflecting on myself and my own actions, even though I was learning about family education.

After studying family education for some time, however, I gradually came to realize that it was my mindset that caused my daughter's inability to jump. I did not try to fully understand the pain, frustration, and distress that my daughter felt when she was overtaken by her peers. I did not try to accept what was happening to my daughter, nor did I praise her for her persistence from the bottom of my heart. I did not have enough faith in my daughter and did not appreciate her abilities, and I was always trying to make her do what I wanted her to do. Gradually, I began to notice my own self-centeredness.

Once I noticed my self-centeredness, I wanted to change the way I looked at things. I decided to share my daughter's pain and distress with her, give her my approval, and believe in her possibility.

Although my daughter's jump is not perfect yet, I have gradually come to witness her willingness to jump and conquer her fear. She is able to perform an Axel jump again, although only a couple of times as of yet. Her ability to jump seems to go back and forth, alternating between successes and failures, which also resembles the movement of my mind. Until the time when my mind and the skill of my daughter's jump improve and become more stable, both of us must continue our practice. I hope I will watch over my daughter with a bright, kind, and warm heart.

In October of last year, I became a certified Dharma teacher, and I am deeply grateful for it. During the four days I visited Japan to receive this

Spiritual Journey

certification, I had the opportunity to reflect on myself and my past behavior. Ms. Kazuko Yabe, then the director of the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education, told me that October 20, the day I would receive my Dharma teacher certification, is the anniversary of Rev. Tsukioka's death. (Rev. Tsukioka recommended the Gakurin Women's Vocational School to me.) Also, the Shinjuku Dharma Center—where I received my Dharma training—is the Dharma center to which Ms. Takayo Maruyama, the previous director of the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education, belongs. It was Ms. Maruyama who taught me the importance of family education.

Moreover, while I was participating in the *o-daimoku* chanting practice, I remembered the moment when I decided to go to Gakurin, after seeing the change in my mother—who had become calm and gentle after she joined Rissho Kosei-kai—and feeling that the teachings were true. I was guided to the teachings by my mother's daily practice. Reflecting on my life during the chanting practice, I realized that I was still incapable of guiding my husband and daughter by example, and I learned anew the greatness of my mother. I also realized that, in all of my encounters with so many people throughout my life, there had always been someone who connected me with the Dharma.

This year, Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok started a training program for family education lecturers, and I was assigned an important role as a lecturer for the training program. This was a new beginning in my Dharma Journey. The fact that I've become able to realize that my encounter with the Dharma was made possible through the guidance I received from my mother, Rev. Tsukioka, and Ms. Maruyama is an important first step in my path.

I thought at first that it would be enough for me to engage in the family education programs after I received the Dharma teacher certification. On the last day of my stay in Japan, however, I received guidance

from Ms. Maruyama, who told me that the teaching of family education is exactly the same as the teachings of the Buddha and the Founder, and that they are not two separate things. She also told me that if I want to share this wonderful teaching of family education with people widely, I have to understand and practice the Dharma first.

Shortly after I returned to Bangkok, another incident (separate from my experience with my daughter) helped me further realize that I am not generous and compassionate enough. It was an important realization for me as I continue my participation in family education programs.

Through the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I have noticed three important things. First, don't forget to show appreciation to those who guided you to the Dharma. Second, understand the Dharma correctly and put it into practice. Third, interact with people with generosity and compassion.

I would like to conclude my Dharma Journey talk by resolving to make these three things my goals, and to do my best to fulfill my new role as a lecturer for the family education seminars.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.



Ms. Mayuree (left) discusses the curriculum of family education with a fellow lecturer.

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 7, The Parable of the Conjured City (1)

The preceding chapters have introduced—often through parables—the Buddha and the Buddha Dharma. This chapter and the next two explain the causal relationship between the Buddha and his disciples, and these chapters are further aids to those who may not yet understand the teachings.

Here, in chapter 7, Shakyamuni expounds that his disciples have a deep causal relationship with him from their former lives. This encourages the disciples in their practice and assures them of their attainment of buddhahood in a future life. The teaching here is that the Buddha Dharma is eternal and unchanging, and that all living beings possess buddha-nature, so, ultimately, all beings can attain buddhahood.

Origin and History of the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom

At the opening of the chapter, Shakyamuni speaks of a time ages and ages ago, so distant in the past that our mind cannot grasp it, when there was a buddha named Universal Surpassing Wisdom. Previously, he had been a prince and the father of sixteen sons, the eldest of whom was named Accumulation of Wisdom. When the children were little, he had left to become a monk in a distant land and had at last attained Supreme Perfect Awakening after long practice. When Accumulation of Wisdom and his brothers learned of this attainment, they determined to follow in their father's footsteps. Their mothers and aunts were in tears to see them off, while their grandfather—the king—and an entourage of ministers and subjects went with them to the abode of the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom.

At this point in the sutra, the king praises the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom by saying, "Although you were once an ordinary being who lived with all of us, you have spent an infinite amount



of time practicing in order to liberate living beings, and here in this place you have become a buddha. When we revere you, it gives us hope that we too can become buddhas, and this brings us a joy that we have never, ever known. We ask you to teach and guide us." At this, the sixteen princes join in the hymn of praise and beg for instruction in the Dharma.

The Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom speaks, recounting how the sixteen princes have revered infinite numbers of buddhas, practiced under the direction of those buddhas, expounded the teaching of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma to countless living beings, and led them to practice it. Each of the innumerable living beings that these bodhisattvas taught and transformed have been reborn time and time again, together with the bodhisattvas. Having heard the Dharma from the bodhisattvas over many lifetimes, these living beings have all come to fully believe in and understand it.

Shakyamuni, the Buddha in the *Saha* World

Having concluded the story about the life of the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom, Shakyamuni Buddha then speaks in a serious tone of voice, saying, "Everyone! Listen carefully to what I am going to tell you—it is extremely important. The sixteen bodhisattvas who were the disciples of the Buddha



Universal Surpassing Wisdom have all become buddhas, and even now they continue expounding the Dharma in domains throughout the universe.”

The Buddha then says the names of each of those buddhas and the domains where they teach. The sixteenth of these buddhas is none other than himself, Shakyamuni Buddha, who has attained Supreme Perfect Awakening in the *saha* world, the place where he teaches and transforms living beings. He reveals that the people to whom he taught the Lotus Sutra in the past are the disciples and others now listening before him, and in the future there will be other believers—ourselves today—who by this same sutra may gain deliverance.

His exposition continues with him saying, “Everyone! I [the manifest Buddha, or the Buddha in human form] am not always in this world. Once buddhas deliver their teachings completely, they soon depart from the world, entering nirvana. But if many are firm in faith and understanding, aware of the truth of human equality, and steadfast in mind, they expound for them the teaching of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma, as they did in the past.”

He continues, “There are no two paths by which one can attain true enlightenment; there is only one path, which is the teaching of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma. However, the Buddha undertakes skillful means, that is to say, practical methods he uses to lead living beings based on thoroughly perceiving and distinguishing their natures and capacities. The Buddha knows there are living beings deeply attached to the pleasures of the five senses and who therefore personally beckon their own suffering. For these living beings he first teaches nirvana, leading them to attain peace of mind by removing their delusions.”

Hereupon, he makes what he has told clear by relating a parable, which is called the parable of the conjured city, the fourth of the seven parables in the Lotus Sutra. The story is as follows.

The Parable of the Conjured City

In a certain place, there is a steep and perilous road stretching through an extremely terrifying and remote region where dangerous wild animals and other threats frequently appear. Despite these hazards, there is a large group of people who want to take that road to seek some rare treasures. There is a guide among them, a person of superior wisdom and insight, who is so familiar with the perilous road that he knows far ahead where the road is passable and where it is blocked.

But in the party there are travelers who are tired, and still others who are impatient, and, growing totally exhausted, they turn to their guide and say, “We are completely worn out, and this road is so scary that we can go no further. The road ahead is still long, and we want to turn back!”

The guide is well acquainted with the methods for leading people in accord with the circumstances, so he thinks to himself, *I can't help but feel so sorry for*





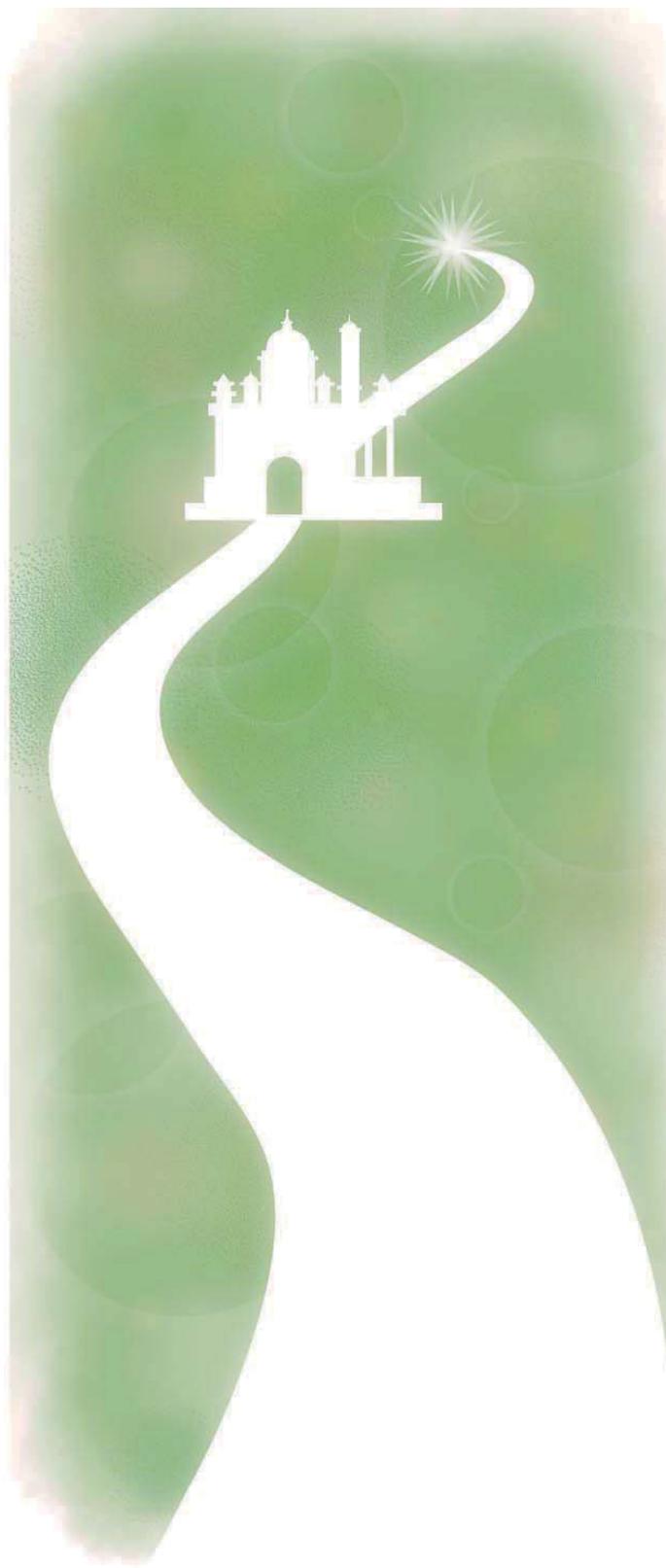
these people. How can they turn back now and give up such a great treasure within their reach?

With this thought, he uses his power of skillful means to conjure a large city just beyond the halfway point of their journey, and he turns to all in the party and says, “Everyone! There is no longer any reason to be afraid, nor do you need to turn back. You can enter that great city up ahead, stop and rest, and do as you please. If you enter the city you will find utter peace and comfort.”

The exhausted party is overjoyed, and they enter the conjured city and rest. When the guide sees that the party has completely recovered from its fatigue, he makes the conjured city disappear, and, encouraging them onward, says, “Come on, all of you, let’s go; the location of the treasure is close at hand. This great city was actually just a temporary thing, a skillful means I used to give you rest and restore your spirits.”

The guide encourages the party in this fashion, and he sets out once again, succeeding in leading them to the place where the treasure awaits them.

This is an English translation of text originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 74–80).



The Way of Life That Brings Joy to People

SPRING has come—a time when the cherry flowers are in full bloom. In April, we Buddhists in Japan hold the Hana Matsuri (flower festival) to celebrate the anniversary of Shakyamuni's birth, an auspicious event for which we are grateful.

In his message for this month, President Niwano confirms the importance of becoming a person who sends out fragrant breezes and brings relief to people's minds, just like the fragrant cherry blossoms bring the joy of spring to people.

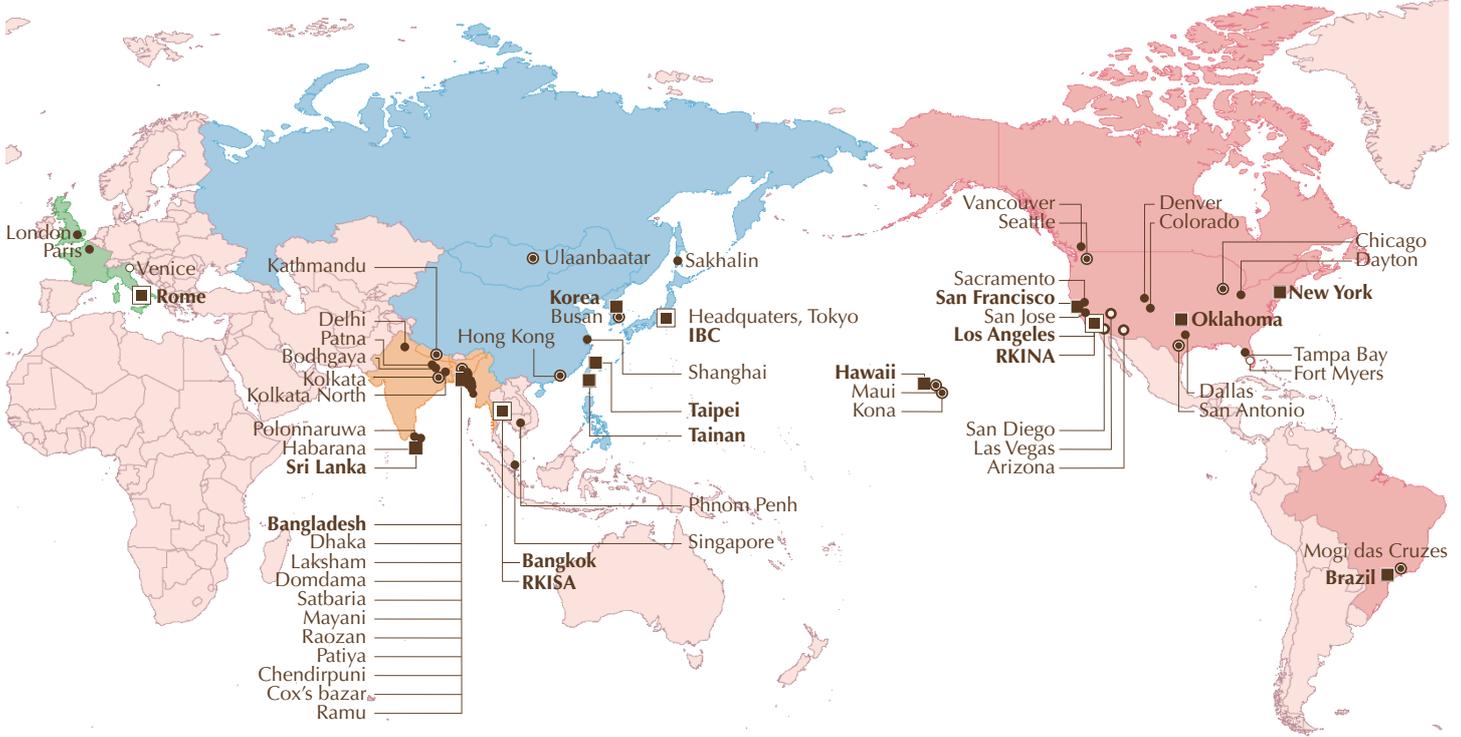
To become a person who possesses such virtues, it is important for us to be honest and humble, remembering to be grateful at all times.

This is the time when we ought to seek a way of life that brings fragrant breezes—the Buddha's teaching—to people. Let us develop ourselves by interacting with others with considerate and harmonious minds, and by always being cheerful, kind, and warmhearted in our behavior and speech.

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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