

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



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🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

What We Seek in Our Heart of Hearts

WHEN we see someone who is addicted to alcohol or suffers from anorexia, we might think that once things become so serious, we can do nothing more to help them. Yet we hear from specialists that those who seemingly cut themselves off from the people around them actually seek physical affection—they desire to be held because they feel so weak.

The Buddha tells us in the Lotus Sutra that he “knows the deepest workings of the hearts and minds of all living beings, fathoming them without hindrance.” There is often a disconnect between what people say or do and what they seek deep within their hearts. Though we intend to be nice to people, aren't we unintentionally unkind to them? Even

though we know we must do what is right, don't we allow ourselves to become lazy?

No one is utterly devoid of a conscience. We must not judge people only by their outer words and actions without making an effort to see how deeply they are suffering, even when they unintentionally end up doing the bad things they know they shouldn't.

If you cannot first take a long, hard look at your own heart, the empathetic compassion that allows you to share the suffering of others will not arise. Without that compassion, you won't be able to help liberate anyone.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 36–37

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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.

Why Don't Our Sufferings End?

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Two Meanings of "Suffering"

When people are experiencing tremendous suffering or besieged by many hardships, we Japanese say that they are going through *shiku hakku*, or the "four sufferings, eight sufferings." It is well known that *shiku hakku* is a Buddhist term—in fact, it describes the Buddhist view of human existence.

We are born into this world, grow older, have illnesses, and die. Birth, aging, illness, and death constitute "the four sufferings." In addition to these are four more: being separated from what we like, encountering what we dislike, not getting what we seek, and the aggregation of these in their totality, or the suffering produced through physical and mental functioning. Taken together, these are the eight sufferings. Buddhism teaches us that these are the sufferings that human beings are saddled with.

However, Shakyamuni's use of the word "suffering" did not seem to indicate the nuances of the word as we generally use it today—that is, to indicate the feeling that something is distressing or painful to do. "Suffering" in Sanskrit is *duhkha* (Pali, *dukkha*), which means "something that does not go as one wishes it would." Therefore, each of the eight kinds of suffering mentioned earlier carries the meaning that there is nothing you can do about it. Nonetheless, when you want to do something about a situation or become obsessed with it and are unable to let it go, your heart produces feelings of unpleasantness and pain. At those times, suffering changes into *feelings of suffering* that torture you physically and mentally.

This human condition of endlessly feeling suffering is described in chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, "Skillful Means," as follows: "In the perilous path of birth and death, / Their suffering continues with no respite. / [They are] firmly attached to the five desires, / Like the yak obsessed with its own tail."

This passage explains that because we are attached to desires, our feelings of suffering do not end. Furthermore, as the passage goes on to tell us: "Being deeply entrenched in distorted views, / Their attempts to end suffering create more suffering"—that is, when we are frustrated that we are unable to accept the fact that things do not go according to our wishes, we become anxious and more keenly feel our suffering. The scripture admonishes this state of our emotions.





Suffering Is a Source from Which Wisdom Springs Forth

There are examples we hear about, even from the people around us, of those who try to escape their feelings of suffering only to cause more suffering. Someone who is hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt may try to end the suffering of paying off a loan by taking out another loan from another party, for example. This is one attempt to end suffering that creates more suffering, and no matter how long they might attempt to escape it, their feelings of suffering will not go away.

Saigyō (1118–90), a monk and poet, lamented, “Lost in the darkness / Of this floating world, / Why do they never tire of it? / They think not of themselves, / Doing as their hearts desire.” This poem asks us—we who feel that we are suffering because we are consumed by desires and driven by them—why we never realize what is important and change our mentality.

Here, “what is important” means that you do not inflate the suffering you are facing into feelings of suffering, and that you realize that your encounter with suffering is a chance to open your eyes to wisdom. The suffering that leads to distress, sadness, anger, and pain is, unless your emotions are mixed into it, neutral (Skt., *avyakrita*, Pali, *avyakata*)—in other words, neither good nor bad. Therefore, by coming to accept suffering and taking control of your feelings, you can bring about a major change in your life.

I just mentioned the story of someone who was strapped with several hundred thousand dollars of debt. He told me clearly that when he accepted the debt as a necessary trial, he became able to think about his situation without feelings of suffering, and instead, even see it as a joy.

Once we resolve to accept suffering as it is without trying to escape from it, it becomes a source from which wisdom springs forth. If we can accept that suffering is necessary in order to activate the wisdom we innately possess, then it becomes an important signpost pointing us toward joy, and we can leave behind our feelings of suffering.

This is a way of life in which you have suffering but do not *feel* suffering. In Buddhism, there are numerous teachings about this, such as the Four Noble Truths. However, even if we have learned them, we still feel some suffering when we encounter a source of suffering. I think it is all right if we do—after all, if we never felt suffering, we might never take up the Way leading to happiness: the Buddha’s teaching.

From *Kosei*, May 2019





Spiritual Training That Has Changed My Life

Rev. Laura Meya

Minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii

This Dharma Journey talk by Rev. Laura Meya was presented at the ceremony of the monthly memorial day for Founder Nikkyo Niwano held in the Great Sacred Hall on March 4, 2019.

MY name is Laura Meya and I was born in Japan as the oldest daughter. I come from a very diverse family—my father is Filipino and my mother is Japanese. My mother became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai when I was still in her stomach. My father was a seaman who was employed by the military. He was deployed to many places, and he returned home to Japan about once or twice a year.

My first memory of my childhood is when I was two years old. I am taking my one-year-old sister out of her crib and jumping out of a big window. When I turn back to look through the window, my father is holding a gun trying to kill my mother. He always smelled of alcohol and my parents would always have big fights. During that time I would run away, barefoot, to my next door neighbors' house for help.

I entered a Japanese kindergarten. At first, many children bullied me because of my American name. But soon I was able to have many friends. When I was entering first grade, I was unable to go to the Japanese elementary school due to being American, and I had to go to an American school. I was bullied because I only spoke Japanese and did not understand



Rev. Meya delivers her Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall, Tokyo.

English. However, after a week, I had many friends, and they helped me learn English.

This situation was very hard to accept. I felt I had so many lives to live. As an elementary student, I wondered whether I was American or Japanese. I wondered what would happen if my parents divorced—would I go with my mother or my father? Why did I have these kinds of parents? So many questions, and no answers.

Due to my father's retirement, our family moved to Hawaii when I was seventeen. This was the very first time my father truly lived with us—I had never lived with my father for a long period of time before that. It was strange, and very uncomfortable and uneasy.

I left home at eighteen. When I was twenty, I went to the Hawaii Dharma Center by myself. I sincerely wanted to return to Japan. My life was not how I wanted it to be, and I needed advice on how I could return to Japan.

This was when I met Reverend Nobukazu Masuda. He welcomed me warmly, and somehow I felt very much at ease in his presence. I was able to open up immediately and confide in him. He listened, and even though he did not give any guidance toward my problem, strangely, my sorrows were lessened. At that first meeting, Reverend Masuda handed me a book. He asked me to read each chapter daily and come to the Dharma Center after I read each chapter. The book was *Buddhism for Today*, written by Founder Nikkyo Niwano. I read each chapter with excitement, and each day I went to the Dharma Center to discuss the contents of the book. I truly enjoyed these sessions. Reverend Masuda taught me that “life is suffering,” and because of the suffering, we are able to stop, think, and improve ourselves. After the last session, I continued coming to the Dharma Center to

learn more. I remember my heart was pounding with excitement.

My Dharma Center's practice was done together with a district leader, Mrs. Kyoko Kaku. Together with her, I sat in *hoza* daily and listened to everyone's stories. Life was full of suffering. Through the *hoza* sessions, I discovered that we need to change ourselves and our views of things in order to realize the cause of the problem.

The cause of the problem was me. I wanted to learn how to view things differently, and I absorbed all the guidance of the members as if it was my own. Through *hoza*, I realized that when I changed my views, the negative situation seemed to become a positive one. I discovered that I alone did not carry problems. *Hoza* guidance was an eye opener. I learned that it is very difficult to change others, but that we can change our own view of things easily if we try.

After about six months, I began the practices of enhancing members' connection with the Dharma (*tedori*). Mrs. Kaku and I visited many homes. Some people were nice to us and others were not. Some of the people served us good tea; others served us tea in a dirty cup. Whatever the situation, Mrs. Kaku told me to drink the tea with a smile and gratitude. As this practice continued, I realized how important it is to accept the situation as is with gratitude. I realized I had a habit of judging situations as good or bad, and that the *tedori* practice was good for me.

Mrs. Kaku told me, "What happened yesterday is okay, but what you do today is important." I really liked this thought. I wanted to make "today" special. I wanted to make sure I did a good thing today. She also said, "Laura, you are able to do everything and anything. So from today, we are going to do spiritual training." Those last few words caught my attention. What is spiritual training? My daily practice at the Dharma Center was "practice." The actions were almost the same each day, but my spirit was different each day. To realize and understand my spirit was always surprising. I realized I was always looking at actions and words of others and did not include myself. I saw that I was blaming others for my unhap-

piness. I learned that I am the only one who can make myself happy.

After a while, I practiced connecting people with the Dharma (*michibiki*). I made a vow to the Buddha that I would bring new people to the Dharma Center weekly. *Michibiki* changed my life. I was able to see that I, too, was able to help others in need. I prayed to the Buddha daily. The Buddha answered my prayers and I was able to introduce Rissho Kosei-kai to many people. I liked being kind to others. To be compassionate to others gave me compassion. To understand their suffering showed me that I, too, had a "good heart."

I would like to thank the Hawaii Dharma Center's Sangha for helping and supporting me through many of the turmoil and challenges I had with my oldest son. I learned to become a mother and improve myself. This was also the time when I learned to accept my parents as they are. I realized that I was giving my parents a very hard time—I wanted to change them to become better, but in reality, my parents were trying very hard to become good spouses, my father was trying hard to provide for his family, and my mother was trying to keep the family together. Everyone was trying hard for the family. I thank them for not letting me go and for giving me life, raising me, and connecting me to the Dharma.

And most of all, I thank the Buddha and the Founder. Praying to the Buddha gave me courage to accept the situation and move forward. The Buddha gave me the vision to see my inner strength. The strength to not run away or blame others, but to accept and raise myself above the problem.

Currently, I have received a duty from President Niwano as the minister of Hawaii Dharma Center. The Sangha is full of the spirit of "aloha," a Hawaiian greeting that means love, peace, and compassion; a gentle heart to accept everything warmly as it is and stay close to others compassionately with big love and kindness. Members of the Dharma Center are very welcoming, and one can almost always hear laughter and children running around.

The Sangha consists of roughly half English speakers and half Japanese speakers. The Dharma Center

Spiritual Journey

has many groups led by members. We read and practice the President's monthly guidance, which usually becomes the topic for study sessions. Activities include *tedori* and *michibiki* practice and ancestor-appreciation services. Many English-speaking members hold monthly appreciation services. Daily prayer recitation at home is now a big part of the men's group. They have also begun a monthly evening prayer recitation at the Dharma Center.

Family education sessions are held monthly for English- and Japanese-speaking mothers. Though cultures and languages differ, the love of a parent is universal. Through this education, many are learning about themselves and also about their own parents. Both mothers and fathers participate in the sessions, which have helped them become more relaxed and flexible to the needs of their children. Growth of children differ, and they do not need to be the same. Parents are learning that their relationship with the child begins at home. I sincerely believe that family education plays an important part in helping American families.

Hawaii is known as a "melting pot" of different cultures, backgrounds, and languages. However, by accepting our differences, we are able to overcome the challenges we face. I realize that the founding

leaders of Hawaii Dharma Center had very deep faith in the Dharma and the Founder to spread the teaching in Hawaii. The faith is now being transferred to the fifth generation.

Just as I was helped during the difficult time with my oldest son, I also began helping my friend with her relationship with her daughter. It is a terrible feeling to see your own daughter rebel against you. Through Risho Kosei-kai's practice, she and I learned to grasp and accept the daughter's feelings. We practiced together to view things differently based on the Buddha's wisdom. After a couple of months, my friend was able to understand her daughter's true feeling: she wished for her mother's attention. When my friend realized this, everything changed, and it was the beginning of their new chapter. My friend, who is supportive and encouraging, now guides others to the teaching. I will continue to practice the Dharma with an attitude of "firstly, for others."

The Hawaii Dharma Center will be celebrating its sixtieth anniversary this month. We will not forget the challenges and difficulties of our foreleaders, and, together with the Hawaii Sangha, we vow to move forward to our sixty-first year with compassion and a renewed spirit.



Risho Kosei-kai of Hawaii celebrated its sixtieth anniversary at its Dharma Center in Pearl City on March 31.

Living the
**LOTUS**

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 (2)

Recognize the Significance of Life

As in the parables of the burning house and the rich elder and poor son, the meaning here is the twofold principle of the One Buddha Vehicle and the truth of skillful means. But this is not a mere repetition, for there is a new shade of meaning: a suggestion that the purpose of life lies in creative living.

The long, difficult road here is the journey of our lives, and on this journey we encounter all sorts of hardships and pain. We all strive to overcome these hardships, but things seldom go as we want, and many of us, in the ordinary course of things, give up.

Many ordinary people have fallen into a defeatist way of thinking, believing that no matter how much they struggle they still get nowhere, and that their best course is in one way or another to slip out of difficulties and get whatever pleasure they can out of life. They give up trying to progress, and they escape into an easy attitude toward life.

On the other hand, there are also people of little

moral sense who readily fall into evil ways as they take shortcuts with little thought for the consequences.

People on both sides of these extremes miss the true significance of life, for, as explained in some detail earlier, constant progress is the natural course for all living things. It is the right and true way for people to live. To be defeated by the pains of human life, to forget this natural and true way to live, or to stop midway or turn back is to cast away one's worth as a human being.

To Lead a Peaceful Life

The Buddha taught a single attitude of mind, saying to humankind, "Wait! If you only do this, you may lead a peaceful life with neither suffering nor anguish. The apparent forms before your eyes are just temporary appearances that pass. Do not be swayed by them and you may always be at peace." Here, the Buddha tells us to go beyond appearances.

Thus, the aspiration may arise that if one sees things fully in this way, it becomes possible to lead a peaceful life. This is the meaning of the instruction given by the leader in the parable as he produces the great city and directs the company in his charge to go there and rest.

Creative and Harmonious Living

But while his followers rest, the leader causes the city to vanish and urges them on to the ultimate ideal of human life that lies ahead. The people are at first surprised and confused, but they recover quickly and set out once again.

"The ultimate ideal of human life" here means creative and harmonious living. The parable teaches us that we must go beyond appearances if we are to escape human suffering and reach a state of peacefulness of mind, but also that this state is only a stage on the way to enlightenment.





This is because even though we, as practitioners of the Way of the Buddha, may deliver ourselves from suffering, great numbers of people in the world remain trapped by it. To pass these people by and reach a realm of ease for ourselves alone is again a kind of escape, an arrogant selfishness. This is in no sense true enlightenment. To strive to achieve happiness together, in the midst of suffering human beings, is to live a truly human life. Therefore, we must do away with any feelings of temporary ease and contentment, leave the conjured city, and set out again upon a road of new struggles.

But even though this toilsome road may seem to be the same road we have struggled along thus far, in fact it is hard work of quite another dimension. And the worth of this work is immeasurably greater, for it is the bodhisattva's work for the happiness and well-being of people.

When we perceive that our lives take on meaning as we work to create things and ideas, our hearts are lifted to that state of mind in which this work is pleasure.

Thus, if all of us in the journey of life always strive—through our nature, talent, and occupation—to create things that make for the happiness and well-being of others as well as ourselves, then that work of creation will most certainly make for greater harmony. This resulting state of harmony is the ultimate human ideal, a treasure of unsurpassable value.

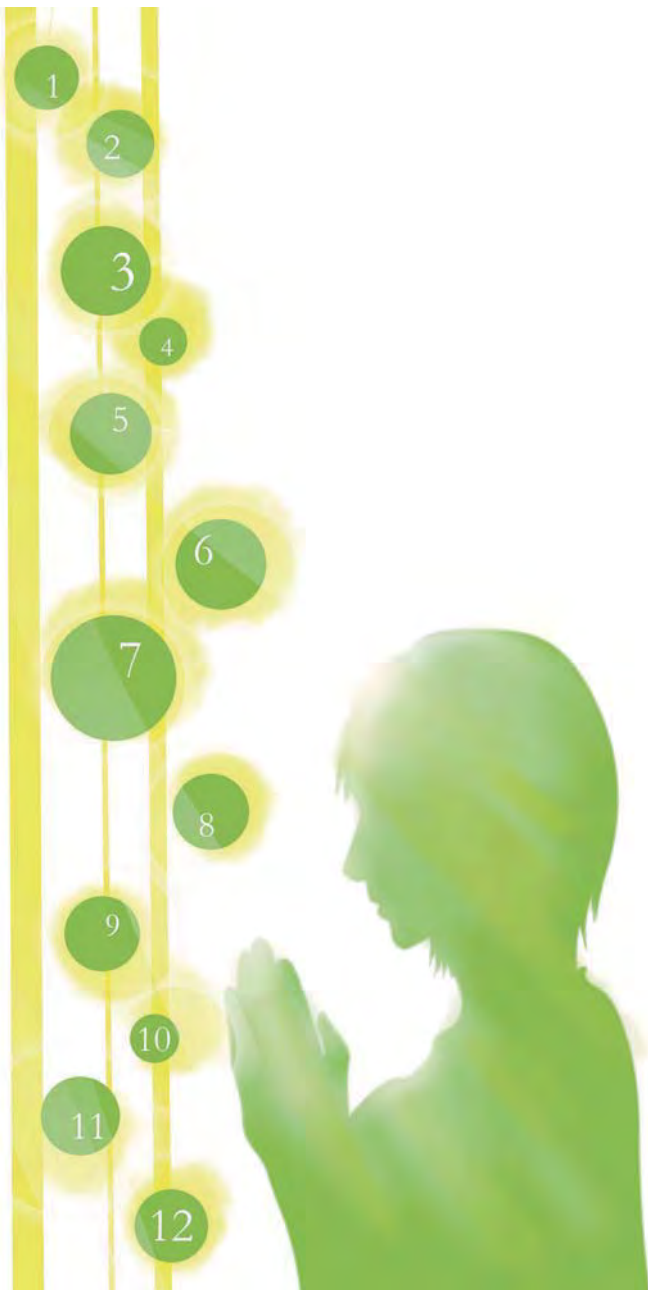
The Twelve Causes and Conditions and the Closing Verse of Vows

Besides the parable of the conjured city, this chapter abounds with important lessons. Particularly noteworthy are the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions and the following four lines in verse, spoken by the assembled Brahma heavenly kings:

May these merits
Extend universally to all,
So that we and all living beings,
Together accomplish the Buddha Way!

These four lines are known collectively as the closing verse of vows since they form the concluding words of services in many sects of Mahayana Buddhism.

This is an English translation of text that 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. 81–86).



Taking Up the Way Leading to Happiness

MAY is the month in Japan when the air is crisp and the trees grow fresh green leaves. According to the traditional calendar, summer begins in May. Also in this month is Mother's Day, an opportunity to express our gratitude toward our mothers for giving us the gift of life.

For Rissho Kosei-kai, this month marks the fiftieth anniversary of Youth Day, an annual event in which our young members engage in various activities in their local communities to contribute to peace. Founder Nikkyo Niwano placed great expectations on youths, saying that action by young people brings forth evolution. He was hopeful that young people would always engage in their activities with enthusiasm. No matter how old we may become, when we live every moment with enthusiasm, we can still be youthful, can't we?

In his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano teaches us that as long as we are swayed by earthly desires, we continue to suffer. If we resolve to accept suffering as it is, instead of fruitlessly trying to get rid of it, we are able to receive the Buddha's wisdom.

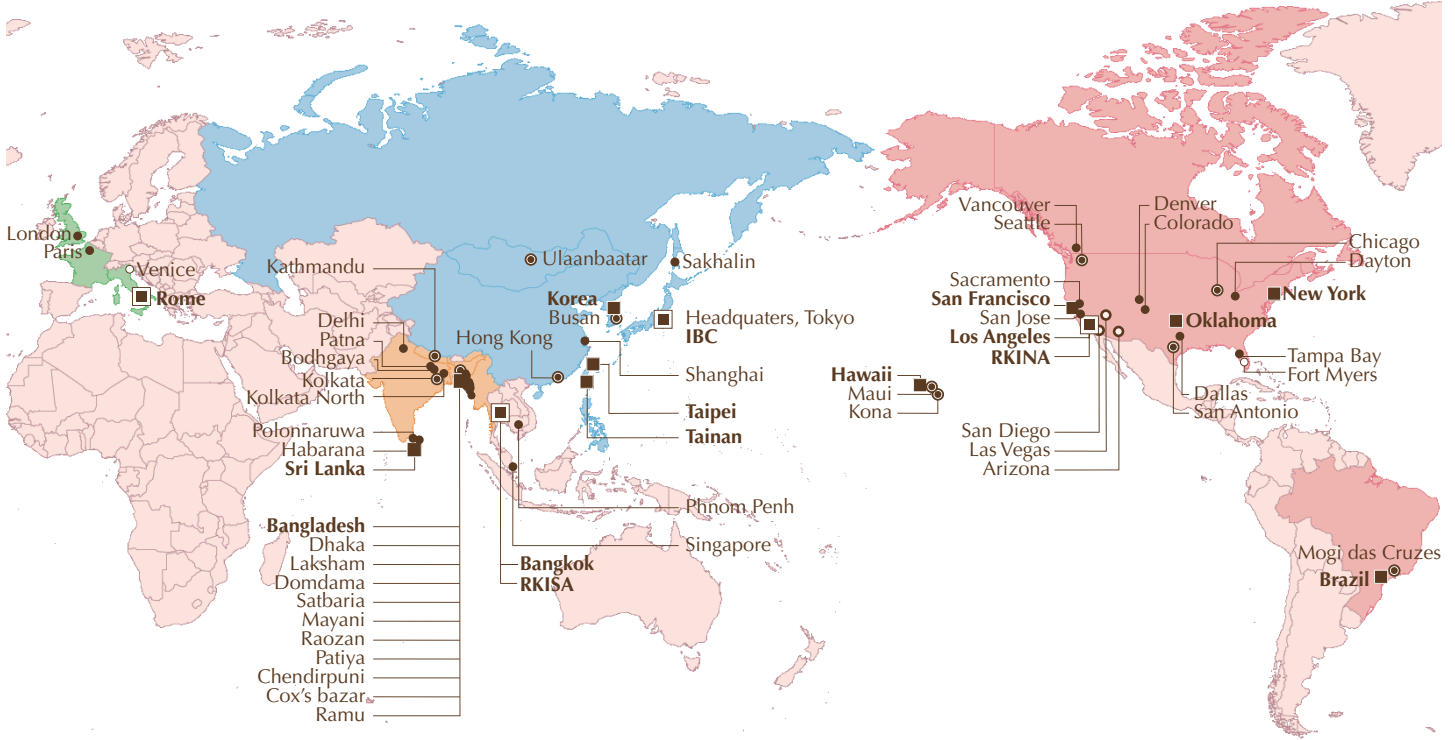
I hope all of us will apply ourselves to the service of society and people, since by doing so can we turn our suffering into fuel that enables us to grow spiritually, like the lotus that grows and brings forth beautiful flowers in a muddy pond.

Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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