

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

12
2018

VOL. 159

🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

Acknowledgement and Remorse Represent the Determination to Be Diligent

LOOKING back over the past year, some of you may be disappointed that you couldn't follow through on that one thing that you had promised yourself you would stick to. However, you've taken a step forward just by learning how hard it is to carry your determination out, despite having made up your mind.

The Japanese monk Shinran is famous for saying, "If the good person can attain rebirth in the Buddha's pure land, how much more the bad person!" Now, that sounds like it's backwards. It seems to make more sense if put this way: "Because the Buddha liberates even the worst people with his boundless compassion and mercy, all the more reason that he will certainly liberate the good person."

However, if someone arrogantly thinks they are not even the slightest bit wide of the mark, they will never

seek the Buddha's liberation nor his teachings. It is those who are truly aware of their own weaknesses and faults that inevitably seek out the teachings. It is those who have this self-realization who are closest to the Buddha.

If we are conscious of ourselves as weak and easily mistaken human beings, we can renew our resolve. If it didn't work out this year, I hope you make up your mind to do it next year without fail. If you can, your wish will certainly come true. Acknowledgement and remorse represent taking a step forward with newfound determination.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaisozuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 104-5

Living the Lotus Vol. 159 (December 2018)

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Living the Lotus is published monthly by
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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.

Awakening to Your Mission

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Becoming People Who Enjoy Practicing the Way

Tachibana Akemi (1812–68), who was born in present-day Fukui Prefecture, was a Japanese poet of the late Edo period. He left us many poems bursting with happiness, full of gratitude and joy for the minor incidents of daily life.

“What a joy it is / When, spreading out some paper, / I take up my brush / And write far more skillfully / Than I could have expected.” “What a joy it is / When my wife and children / Are at peace with each other, / Their heads nodding / in harmony as they eat.” “What a joy it is / When, rising in the morning, / I go outside and / See a flower that has bloomed / That was not there yesterday.” From such poems of his that start with “What a joy it is,” we can sense the serenity in a mind that can always accept, gratefully, whatever happens in any situation.

During these eight months, I have discussed, one by one, the practices of the Eightfold Path and described what each of them means to me. This month’s topic, “right meditation,” is the last practice of the Eightfold Path.

Right meditation means that because your mind is always peacefully abiding in the teachings of the Buddha, you are not shaken up by the changes happening around you. In a sense, the attitude apparent in the poems of Tachibana Akemi is one example of right meditation: namely, even if you have very little, you do not feel disappointed and wholeheartedly accept the happiness to be found in your situation.

Your state of happiness and being happy is truly important, which is something that I previously mentioned in my discussion of right view, the first practice of the Eightfold Path, when I wrote in the May issue of this newsletter that right view means seeing things in a way that “puts your feelings at ease.” Also, to quote from the *Analects* of Confucius, “One who knows it, falls behind one who likes it; and one who likes it, falls behind one who enjoys it.” In other words, when people are making an effort to practice the Way, the best thing of all is to enjoy doing so.

Joyfully accepting anything and everything, and taking care to maintain that perspective, puts your feelings at ease. Unswayed by the suffering before your very eyes, you can lead a life that is truly calm and pleasant.





The Aspiration of a Bodhisattva

Incidentally, the Chinese character meaning “right” (正) in each of the practices of the Eightfold Path is made up of two characters: the one on top indicates the numeral “one” (一), and that on the bottom, the verb “to stay” (止). In Buddhism, of course, *one* indicates the Truth and the Dharma. That is, each of the practices of the Eightfold Path is, for us, a practice of “staying with the Truth” and the basis for doing so is the first of these, right view. In this sense, I think it is important that those people who say that it is too much to practice all of the Eightfold Path in the course of living each day, somehow make a habit of reflecting upon themselves and returning to right view.

In particular, when things are at an impasse or your heart is in pain, if you correctly look at the phenomena occurring before your eyes, which means returning to “one”—that is, the Truth—you will be better able to understand what is troubling your mind and how to put your feelings at ease, won’t you?

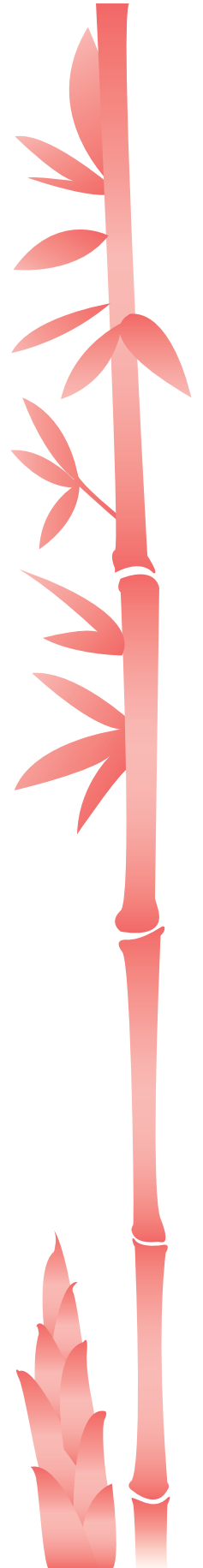
The group of people who are seeking a way of life that accords with the Truth are, in Buddhism, called “the assembly of those resolved to become awakened” (in Japanese, literally, “the assembly of those with right meditation”). Plainly speaking, they are people who are “determined to become like the Buddha,” and from this description, we can more deeply grasp the meaning of right meditation.

By seeing things just as they are (right view), like the Buddha does, you attain the purified mind of tranquility (right meditation)—which is leading a life according to the aspiration of a bodhisattva to relieve the suffering of others and help them attain the mind of compassion.

However, the method of advancing to such a vow is, of course, not limited to “right view.” The presentation of the Eightfold Path as eight distinct virtuous practices is none other than Shakyamuni’s kindness in manifesting ways of teaching appropriate to every kind of individual’s own diligent effort.

We are all mutually causing one another to live. I hope that, in the midst of this state of existence, we who have learned, through the teachings of the Buddha, a lifestyle that is appropriate to humanity, will continue to walk on the Buddha Way and fulfill our mission to reveal the buddha-nature in as many people as possible.

From *Kosei*, December 2018





Realize and Acknowledge the Importance of Positively Connecting with People



Mr. Keisuke Umetsu
Rissho Kosei-kai of Koganei

This Dharma Journey talk by Mr. Keisuke Umetsu was presented in the Great Sacred Hall on August 4, 2018, during the ceremony for the Founder's Memorial Day.

GOOD morning, everyone. I was born in 2002 as the first son of the Umetsu family in Kokubunji City, Tokyo. My family's connection with Rissho Kosei-kai originates with my great grandmother, who was guided to the faith by her niece and became a member in 1948. I was told that she had toured all over the town, disseminating the teachings that had liberated her from suffering. My grandmother, who had married into the Umetsu family, first opposed the faith. But she was moved to learn Founder Niwano's aspiration for bringing peace to the world, and inherited the faith from her mother-in-law. My parents met in the youth group activities of Rissho Kosei-kai and got married. They are still taking on roles at the Dharma center and continue their Dharma practices. Although our family was not rich, I was raised in a happy family. As a fourth-generation member, I naturally began to go to the Dharma center.

During the winter season two years ago, my mother began to lose her voice. She went to the hospital for an examination, and was told that there



Mr. Umetsu delivers his Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall, Tokyo.

was a tumor on her trachea, which caused the speech difficulty. She had surgery that would help her breathe, and since then she has always had to wear a tracheostomy tube on her throat. My mother continued to do housework as before, but the sound of her breath leaking from the tracheostomy tube was audible all the time. The scarf that she wore on her neck to hide the tracheostomy tube looked bizarre to me. Three years ago, an angioma, a benign tumor made up of small blood vessels, was discovered on her right inner ear and she had a surgery to remove an eardrum. I was perplexed with all these unfortunate events happening to her, one after another.

My mother took care of all the housework and supported the family. I was grateful for what she had done for us. But, before she got ill, every time I would come home and share with her about my day, she would say, "It all happened for a reason," and so on, which I found annoying. She would also ask me, "Have you done with your homework?" when I was about to do my homework. I wondered many times why she was so persistent.

Because of her illness, however, my mother lost her voice. She could not even say "hello" if she picked up the phone or when she had guests, so I had to do it all for her. Whenever my mother wanted to say something, she had to write it down. It was frustrating that I could not hear her response when I talked to her. Since my mother did not talk, the house was silent, and a day without my mother speaking felt very long. I worried about my future, wondering what would happen if this kind of life would continue indefinitely.

When this situation continued for two months, I felt lonely for not being able to have a conversation

with my mother, and realized that all what she had told me was an expression of her consideration for me. I realized that my mother had taught me (at the expense of her health) that being able to speak, or leading a healthy and normal life, does not come easily and we should not take it for granted. Up to that point, I had helped my mother reluctantly; but since I realized this, I was able to happily help my mother. Later on, my mother went through further treatment, and her voice, which had been diagnosed as permanently lost, has miraculously begun to return. Now, whenever she talks about her illness, she says that she was able to go through the painful treatments thanks to the support of people who prayed for her. All she feels is gratitude, she says. Having gone through these painful experiences, what she feels now is gratitude for those who cared for her. Looking at my mother, who is always considerate of others, I began to think that I would like to become like her.

While my mother was convalescing from her illness, I received a role as the head of the high school students' group of our Dharma center. Last summer, I participated in the Peace Seminar in Hiroshima, which was held by the Tama Division. Along with my fellow participants in the seminar, I learned the misery that the war and the atomic bombing had brought to people, and the sense of the preciousness of life.

One day, I heard Y, a youth member who participated with me in the Peace Seminar, had stopped going to school from the beginning of the new semester. When I heard this, I could not sit still as the head of the high school students' group, so I went to visit him right away. I was thinking about what to say while riding the bicycle to his house. However, on that day, no one answered the intercom at his house. I

was sorry for not being able to see him, so I wrote a letter to him and put it into the mailbox of his house before I left. Two weeks later, I met Y's mother at the Dharma center. She told me that Y had begun going to school since the Monday of the week following my visit to his house. It was a happy surprise to me. I felt that I might have become someone who can help others, like those who had prayed for my mother. I wanted to tell Y how happy I was to learn that he had read my letter, and he was doing his best. Although I visited him a few times since then, I have not yet been able to see him. Now I desire all the more that he does well and that I would be able to see him again soon. Through this experience, I have learned that meeting and talking to someone directly is not the only thing that matters, but continuing to be considerate of them (even if you cannot meet them in person) helps you become kinder and more warmhearted. I continue practicing *tedori*, looking forward to meeting Y again and getting more firmly connected with him.

My dream is to build a warm and loving family just like my parents did, in which the father always has a smile, and family members exchange words of thanks for everything, no matter how trivial it is. This was because when I talked with my friends, I often realized that things that seemed to be daily and ordinary occurrences in my family, were not necessarily so typical in their families.

There was something I discovered during this year's Youth Day. At Rissho Kosei-kai of Koganei, under the slogan, "Let's Take a Step! Get Connected and Create a Warmhearted Sangha That Unites All," all members of our Dharma center were united in promoting fundraising activity in front of railway stations. I had participated in the fundraising activities many times till then, but on that day, I noticed

Spiritual Journey

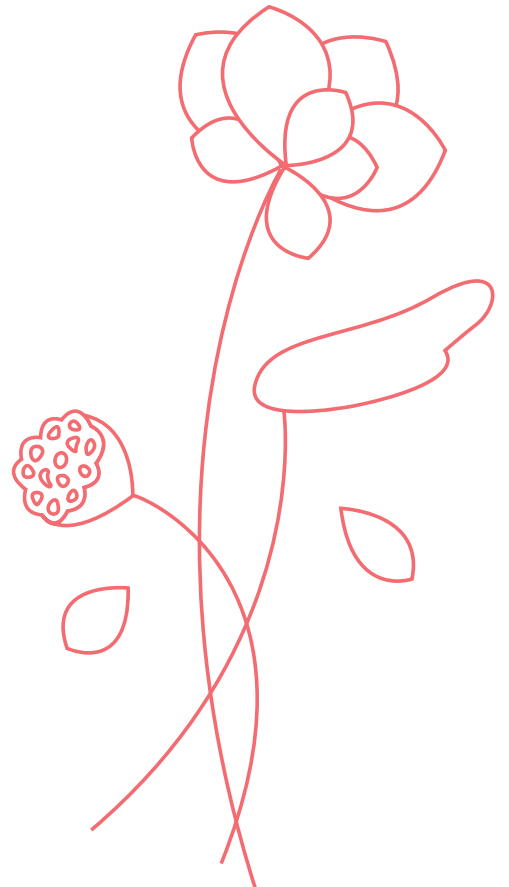
high school students in school uniforms were among those who donated money. Through the activities of the day, I witnessed the power of the sangha, which becomes manifest when the members are united as one, even if the power of each person is small. I also found that the power would bring out the buddha-nature of many people. And, more than anything, I realized that if you would act positively to get connected with others, things will work out and develop of themselves.

I hope to become someone who can help others create happy families, and in order to do that, I would like to reach out to people who are in trouble and listen to them closely.

Thank you very much.



Mr. Umetsu (far left, in the back row) participates in a Youth Camp at the Ome Retreat Center, in western Tokyo.



A stylized lotus flower graphic in shades of red and pink, positioned behind the text. The flower has multiple layers of petals, with the innermost petals being a lighter shade of pink and the outer petals being a darker red. The petals are arranged in a symmetrical, fan-like pattern.

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 3, A Parable (2)

An Outside Force or a Power Within Oneself

Another point to be noted, for example, is the way in which the elder first thought, with his own great strength and power, to gather up the children bodily into some kind of box and drag them outside, but then realized that this might be useless unless they could be made to come out by themselves.

This suggests how different it is to be liberated by an outside force or by a power within oneself. For living beings to be told nothing and dragged outside the world of suffering is to be liberated by an outside force. But, engrossed in the pleasures and joys of the things before their very eyes, they may drop away and be lost, or, in the terms of the parable, the children may feel that playing inside the broad area of their burning house is to be preferred to the confining box prepared for their rescue. This is likely unless they themselves awaken. Moreover, once outside the burning house, they may still think the inside more amusing and go back.

At this point the elder, who stands for the Buddha, determined by some way to make them deliver themselves by their own strength. It does not matter what device is used to get them to run outside. Wanting a goat cart will do, or a deer cart, or an ox cart. The point of value is that they come out of their own accord and will, for if they come out of their own accord and will, they will not go back in again unless something unusual happens. Faith must be like this. If people only call upon the gods or the buddhas to deliver them, they are not likely to reach true liberation, because the very lack of desire and effort to improve their hearts and minds, to correct their own conduct, will prevent them. Perfection of one's character through personal practice performed of one's own will is the way true liberation is achieved.

But the final goal of such practice is to do away with the little self, or ego, and, obedient to the universal truth, to become one with great compassionate heart of the Buddha. And so I would like you to know that this power within is not our own in the sense that lets us say, "*We* did this."

Faith that comes from the power within means nothing other than taking refuge in the Buddha of one's own will and effort. So it is that the power within us is the outside force and the outside force, the power within. Otherwise, there is no attainment of liberation. All of this is suggested by the action of the elder in the parable.





Let Go of Selfishness

Now we come to the matter of the single narrow door, the significance of which is that great revolution of the heart and mind that is the discarding of the egoistic self. The tremendous difficulty of this, so far as ordinary people are concerned, is symbolized by this narrow door.

Letting go of the selfish ego, or egoism, occurs in a number of stages. The first stage is awakening to the simple truth, or principle, that human suffering is brought about by the collection of greeds and desires that make up the ego. The realization of this alone represents a substantial step away from the self, but this is not enough if one does not know the principle of how the self comes into being.

At the second stage there must be the realization that, in accordance with the Law of Dependent Origination, all that we so urgently want and are attached to is a temporary appearance brought about by a concurrence of cause and condition. Further, it must be seen that, in accordance with this Law of the Twelve Causes and Conditions, the origin of those desires is ignorance, a basic misapprehension that the flesh is oneself.

When one perceives these Laws, it becomes clear that the self to which one has clung is in fact something that has no real substance, and as a result one is automatically removed from self-centered thinking.

Moreover, with further practice, one may perceive the truth that all beings in this universe are equal and exist in great harmony, and with this realization one may fully taste the sense of unity that all are brothers, that all equally possess buddha-nature and partake of the great life of the universe. When one has come this far, the selfish ego vanishes.

The Three Virtues: Sovereign, Teacher, and Parent

One of the most admirable and best-known passages in the entire Buddhist canon is in this chapter.

“Now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children. But now it is filled with disaster and trouble, and only I am able to rescue and protect them.”

The universe is the Buddha’s, all things, all



people, are his children, and he alone can deliver them from their pain and distress—this is what the above verse means.

But this is neither assertion of personal ownership of the universe nor boasting that he alone can liberate. What the Buddha is saying here is that since all people possess buddha-nature he wants to lead all people to realize it and attain the same enlightenment as his. Saint Nichiren derived from this verse the three virtues: sovereign, teacher, and parent, and revered the virtues of Shakyamuni. The virtue of a sovereign signifies protecting all living beings. The virtue of a teacher means mentoring all people, and the virtue of a parent represents loving-kindness toward all living beings.

Furthermore, through his deep contemplation and various spiritual experiences, he taught us as his awareness that the true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra possesses these three virtues.

This verse can also be interpreted in a positive way as follows.

If we can really cast away our selfish egos, we will certainly be able to find ourselves being supported by all things. Then if we can gaze upon ourselves who are given life by all things, that is, the entire universe,



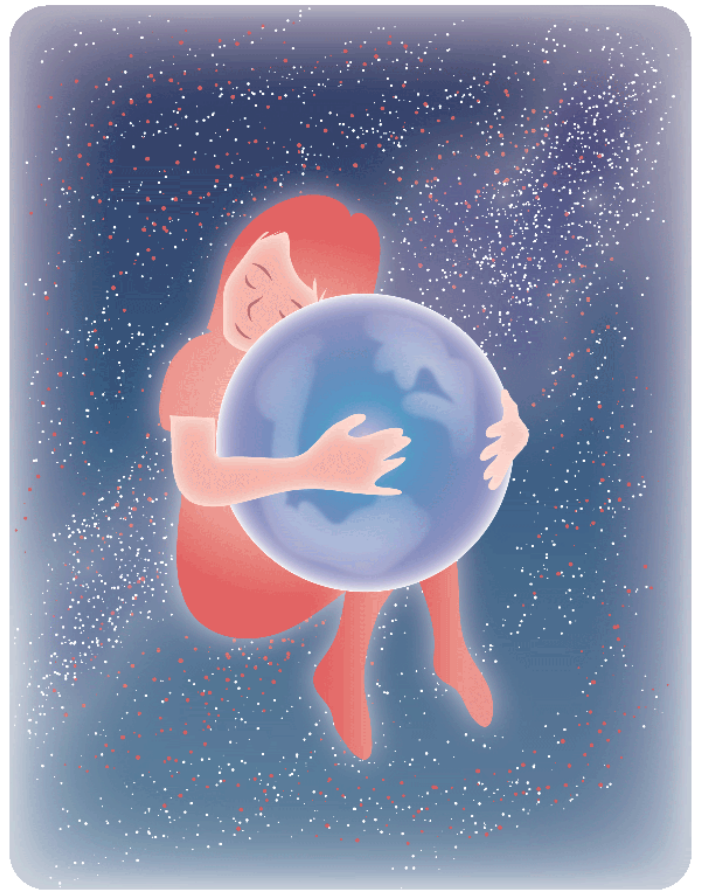
our mind can in an instant go anywhere throughout that universe, and thus we may grasp the sense of what it means for the universe to be ours.

It is in this way that the mind becomes truly free. We are not hindered by anything, and, acting as we will, we are always in harmony with the truth (Wondrous Dharma), and our acts give life to ourselves and all people.

When the universe is ours, all the life that dwells in it is part of ourselves, and all living beings that have life are our children, our brothers, or our sisters. Thus, as a parent or brother or sister, we give ourselves to serve that life. This is the great, the true, compassion. It is none other than buddhahood itself.

These, then, are some of the lessons that are merely suggested in this chapter. The reason for their being only suggested is that those in attendance when the teaching was delivered would not have understood if the lessons had been given straightforwardly. This is why Shakyamuni then patiently continued his very long exposition. He knew that through his sowing seeds of impression by suggestion, at some time later sprouting would occur, and so he proceeded.

This is an English translation of text originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 49–56).



Awakening to Your Mission

DECEMBER is the month when people see the year come to an end. For Rissho Kosei-kai, however, December is also a month of beginnings, when we make a fresh start with Dharma activities with renewed focus on our mission.

It is therefore timely that the theme of President Niwano's message for this month is "Awakening to Your Mission." Since May, we have studied the Eightfold Path, learning each of its eight practices a month. In this month's message, on the last of the eight practices, right meditation, President Niwano confirms for us the importance of enjoying everything that comes our way. Furthermore, he calls upon us to have the aspiration of a bodhisattva and take a step forward on the Buddha Way.

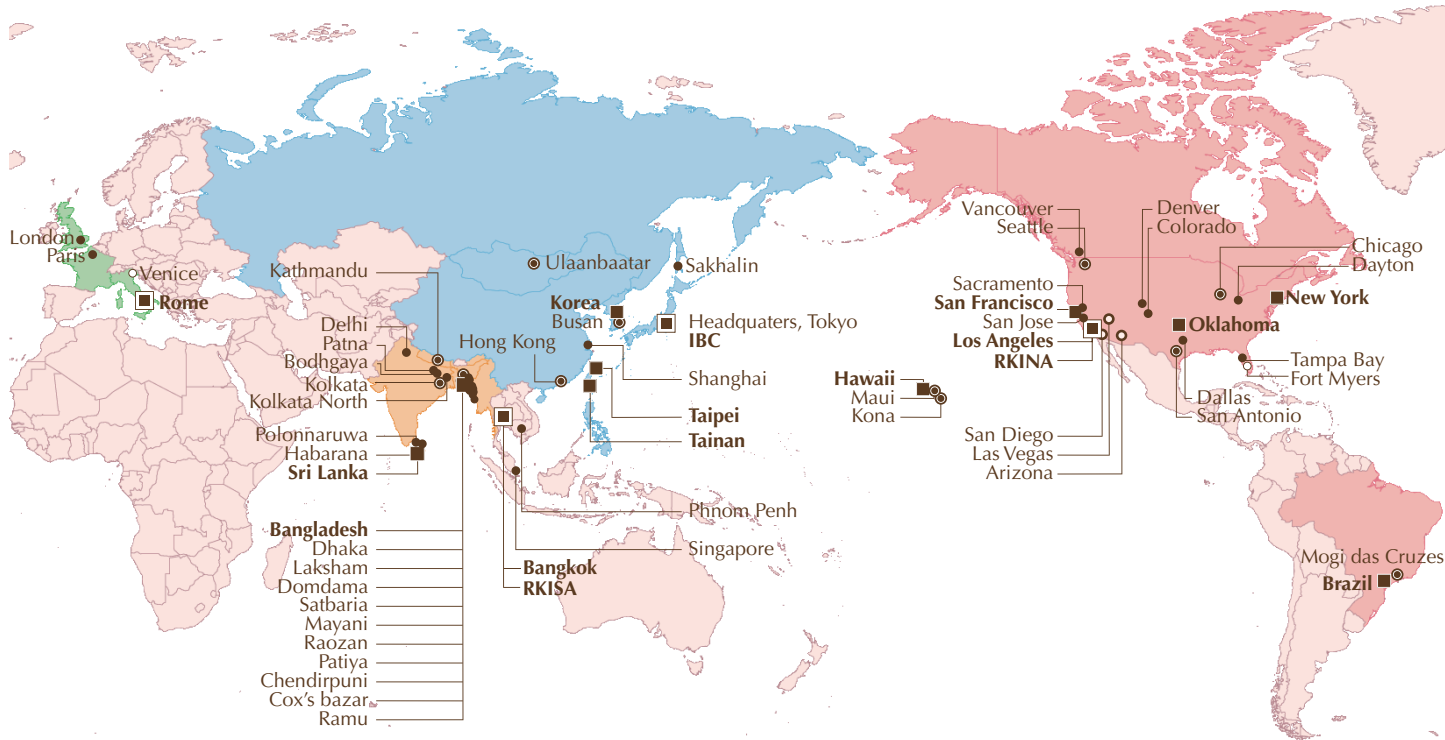
When I was assigned a duty to perform rituals at the altar of the Great Sacred Hall, I was taught that "everything starts and ends with reverence, or the mind of placing the palms together in prayer." Through the thoroughgoing practice of reverence, I learned none other than a heart of gratitude.

Next year, Rissho Kosei-kai will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Dharma dissemination in the United States, which also means the sixtieth anniversary of the beginning of the organization's official international dissemination efforts. I hope we all will awaken to our mission to share the precious teaching with people worldwide, and strive in practicing the Dharma cheerfully and lightheartedly, always with a mind of placing our palms together in prayer!

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



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