

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



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🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

The Power of Habitual Practice

WHETHER it be performing a judo throwing technique, hitting a baseball, or swinging a golf club, just because we've been shown how to do something does not mean we can immediately perform it exactly in the manner we were taught. Only after practicing such things over and over again on a daily basis do we acquire the skill to pull off those techniques in an actual match or game.

Faith is also like this. You may understand the logic of a religious teaching by hearing it only once, but you won't really internalize it without practicing it day in and day out. People are prone to hold on to the illusion that they can do anything as long as they set their minds to it, but we should not forget the enormous power of habitual practice.

Once a person has acquired habits both good and bad,

such habits come to dominate their will and their judgment, all the way up to and including their very lives. When one acquires good habits, things readily come to fruition seemingly without deliberate intentional effort. On the other hand, once someone has picked up bad habits, they are pulled in directions that run contrary to their will.

You can understand how important it is to develop habits that will make our daily encounters (and our attitudes toward those experiences), as well as our ways of thinking and acting, all accord with the Buddha's teachings. The training ground where you make those habits second nature is the Sangha, and the Dharma center.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaisozuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 30–31

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Senior Editor: Koichi Saito
Editor: Kensuke Suzuki
Copy Editors: Allan Carpenter, Naoki Taketani,
Kazumasa Osaka, Katsuyuki Kikuchi

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Rissho Kosei-kai International,
Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada,
Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan.
TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 / FAX: +81-3-5341-1224
Email: [living.the.lotus.rk-international](mailto:living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp)
[@kosei-kai.or.jp](mailto:living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp)

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.

Everyone Has the Roots of Goodness

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Providing Moisture to Dry Roots

Happy New Year! Once again this year, with joy in our hearts and single-minded determination, let us together walk the Buddha Way.

I think that right now, all of you, with your own personal vows in your hearts and clear, fresh feelings, are eager to be even more diligent in your practice.

Even so, there may be some people whose circumstances prevent their hearts from feeling clear and refreshed and are unable to be optimistic.

This is a story I heard about someone who had become ill at an early age and had been told that the illness would be a constant companion for the rest of his life. When he felt that the future was without hope, he fell into a state of disappointment and despair, but his mentor in the faith told him over and over again that he possessed the roots of goodness.

In the course of receiving such encouragement, his feelings of worthlessness and his view of life as hopeless disappeared, and the idea came bubbling up in his mind that he himself wanted to do something for other people and that even he could do it.

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, part of the Threefold Lotus Sutra that we recite, includes the phrase, “Saturate living beings’ roots of goodness” (cited from the “Virtuous Practices” chapter). The roots of goodness are roots that form a foundation producing beneficial results, which I understand to have the same meaning as the buddha-nature, for everyone possesses the same nature and characteristics as the Buddha and everyone is a manifestation of the Buddha. Therefore, we can say that everyone has the roots of goodness. However, in order for those roots to have healthy development and grow, the dry roots need moisture, which gives them vitality.

In the case of the young man who felt that life was hopeless and had a negative self-image, giving affirmation to his essential being by telling him, “You have roots of goodness that are precious” was tantamount to generously providing plenty of moisture to parched roots.

Now, that person is nourishing the roots of goodness in other people who are suffering from the same difficulties that he himself faced, and he is performing his role in spreading the Buddha’s blessings everywhere.





A True Assembly of Those Resolved to Become Awakened

“Saturate living beings’ roots of goodness,” the passage from the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings cited earlier, continues as follows: “Sow the seeds of goodness in the field of merits.” This passage encourages us to sow many seeds of goodness, which become the basis of deeds that will do the most for the sake of other people and the sake of the world. In short, it advocates dissemination of the Dharma to make ourselves and other people happy together by sharing the Buddha’s teachings. I think that “sowing the seeds of goodness” is the same as providing moisture to many people’s parched roots of goodness.

There is one reason that this passage of the sutra encourages us to disseminate the Dharma. After listening to the teachings of the Buddha like the young man mentioned above, the roots of the heart get moistened, one escapes from the pit of despair, which awakens the spirit of boundless compassion, and one thinks, “I want other people, too, to escape from their suffering, just like me, and realize that happiness is right in front of them.”

It seems unlikely, however, that the young man, who was suffering and worrying, would have been able to faithfully accept the Buddha’s teaching from the start. In this sense, in our approach to disseminating the Dharma, what is important for us is that, above all else, we lead our lives with the hope that we will have good connections with the people close to us. Words and behavior that demonstrate kindness and consideration for others provide moisture to the dry roots of goodness in the hearts of people who are suffering.

Then, while we perform our basic daily practices, including sutra recitation and the study and practice of the Dharma, we are continuing to reach out to people who have no connection to the Buddha’s teaching. Doing so leads to the highest form of living, which is, as the previously cited passage tells us, to “Make all people, without exception, put forth the sprouts of buddhahood” (in other words, “to cause people everywhere to aspire to the awakening of the Buddha”).

My university mentor told me, “Without dissemination, there is no religion.” The prerequisite for his words was that we are all friends determined to become like the Buddha—that we form, in the truest sense, “an assembly of those resolved to become awakened.” I hope that we are making our sangha “an assembly of those resolved to become awakened,” where the minds of all people who are seeking liberation are always at peace.

From *Kosei*, January 2019





Being Fully Present With the Reality of Life



Mr. David Rose
Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma

This Dharma Journey talk by Mr. David Rose was presented in the Great Sacred Hall on November 1, 2018, during the ceremony for the Uposatha Day.

I would like to express my deep gratitude for the opportunity to share my spiritual journey with you today.

For the last decade I have been reluctant to write my Dharma Journey. I realize that sharing your Dharma Journey is an important part of Rissho Kosei-kai, however expressing emotions was not something done easily in my family.

I was born in 1948 into an Air Force family (three years after the end of World War II). My father was a pilot and every few years we were off to a new duty station, usually around the United States, but also Misawa Air Base and Fuchu Air Station in Japan in the early 1960s and the US Embassy in Taiwan in 1970. The idea that everything was impermanent was ever present in a life of relocating every few years to new schools, new friends, and often new countries. During this time our family stability was provided by my mother who was always there waiting when I returned home from school.

As a youth I never doubted what I wanted to do in life. Immediately after high school I joined an Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps program in



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

college with the intent of following in my father's footsteps. The only real disruption to the plan came when my father was killed in a plane crash shortly after I began the program. I deeply felt his loss but never questioned my goal of becoming a pilot.

After completing pilot training in 1972, I had a short marriage which ended in divorce, primarily due to growing apart during separations while in the military. It was painful at the time, but having moved from place to place during my childhood, letting go was something that came naturally. Looking back, it was also an opening to new things that never would have happened without this loss.

After a few years of focusing on my career in the Air Force, I met Jan who would become my wife, best friend, and spiritual partner for the next thirty-five years. We married in 1982 and moved from Air Force base to Air Force base, with both of us focused on continuing our education and careers.

I credit Jan with my growing interest in a spiritual life. I was not really searching but was always willing to try something new with her. She, on the other hand, was always looking for meaning in her life and explored many different avenues. Originally this search meant Christianity. Although we had both been raised in Christian homes it never really made sense to me, and when I tried it the second time I still did not feel any connection.

My interest in Buddhism started about the time I retired from the Air Force in 1992 and took a job as a pilot with Southwest Airlines. I remember reading a book on Zen Buddhism and thinking it made a lot of sense. After that I became what is known as a nightstand Buddhist. I would find an interesting Buddhist book and each evening would read passages until falling asleep. This eventually led to both Jan and I

practicing Zen meditation on a regular basis with friends at our aikido dojo.

For the next twelve or thirteen years I read many books on Buddhism and practiced meditation sporadically but never really connected with a sangha. In the Spring of 2005, Jan, always the spiritual explorer, attended the Dharma Center of Oklahoma with some neighborhood friends. I tried it out shortly after, and both of us soon became members.

Two years after we joined Rissho Kosei-kai, in June of 2007, Jan was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. I had a chance to go online and look up this new disease I was unfamiliar with. The outlook was bleak. We spent the weekend in shock as we gradually grew accustomed to this new challenge in our lives. By Monday morning, with me following Jan's lead, we both settled in to a place of determination to face whatever was to come.

During the summer Jan began radiation treatment, which resulted in a hospital stay (even swallowing water had become very painful) and chemotherapy, which left her exhausted and sick most of the time. I found myself focusing more and more on my practice for support.

In September of that year we traveled to Houston, Texas, and Jan checked in to the hospital at MD Anderson Cancer Center for a surgery to remove her esophagus and most of her stomach. The night before surgery I recall holding Jan's hand and noticing that every time I would start to think or worry about the future it was as if she disappeared. I realized that to appreciate each moment required being fully present with it. It seems like such a simple thing but was a profound experience for me at the time.

The next day in the pre-op room waiting for her to go in for surgery we were both relaxed and calm, living in the present despite the major challenges ahead. I could clearly see the changes taking place in both of us due to our encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai and the Lotus Sutra.

Because of complications, Jan's surgery ended up lasting twelve hours and during this time, and over the next two weeks, I had many more opportunities to observe the changes that were occurring because of our practice. The things we were going through were still difficult, but I was grateful for our ability to take each day as it came without dwelling on the past or constantly worrying about the future.

In the months and years to come Jan kept having good follow-up tests and we immersed ourselves in practice at the Dharma center.

With the encouragement of Rev. Kris Ladusau, minister of the Dharma Center of Oklahoma, Jan started an evening *hoza* group and together we began a meditation group that included both silent meditation and chanting parts of the *Kyoten* (Sutra Readings) as an entry point for Americans who have only experienced Buddhism as mindfulness or silent meditation.

In 2009 I retired early from flying and was grateful for the additional time this gave me at home. Jan was still free from cancer but there were physical challenges from her previous surgery. Retirement also provided a great opportunity when Rev. Ladusau asked me to take over the Basic Buddhism class at the Dharma center. It was a wonderful experience that continues to this day. I was amazed at how much I



Dave and Jan Rose after his final flight at Southwest Airlines.

Spiritual Journey

had to learn about Buddhism and quickly discovered that explaining the teachings to others required a much deeper level of understanding.

Over the years leading up to 2013 I found that contemplation on our mortality was never far from my mind. That year, Jan's difficulties increased and by Autumn she would spend another three weeks in the hospital for a second surgery. I recalled the quote by Shantideva that "All the suffering in the world comes from seeking pleasure for oneself. All the happiness in the world comes from seeking pleasure for others." I found this to be true in my own situation and could always find peace of mind when I was able to let go of my own self-interests and focus on helping Jan.

In 2015 Jan's cancer returned and was not curable. She knew it was back before her doctor did, and by the time it was diagnosed she was in so much pain I was not sure she would survive long enough to begin a new series of chemotherapy. I realized it was easy to read about the teachings of the Buddha but seeing and practicing them while experiencing daily life was much more challenging. Being mindful each day for the next year was a gift, sharing both sorrow and laughter, even in the final two weeks of her life spent at home surrounded by family.

I cannot imagine going through that final year of Jan's life, or the years since, without this practice for support and equanimity. Through the pain of it all I believe both of us took comfort in helping each other through the daily hardships. We continued to take each day as it came but recognized on a deep level that our time together was coming to an end.

The days, weeks, and months following Jan's death were most difficult when I was reminded by the small things. The place on the drive home from the Dharma center at night where I would call to let her know I was on the way home. Arriving home at night to a dark, empty house. Stopping at the grocery store and calling to see if there was anything she needed. The

loss of someone to share in the ups and downs of life.

In hindsight I realize that losing your life, or the life of someone very dear to you, can only be truly understood through experience. In his book *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, President Nichiko Niwano says, "The only way to overcome death, the greatest suffering that afflicts human beings, is to recognize the law of transience. Gazing unflinchingly at death, let us give thanks for the life we have here and now."

I first read that quote years ago and at the time didn't fully grasp its meaning. Only after experiencing the death of my wife was I able to begin to see that our suffering was not some unusual event in our life to be avoided. Instead it is the very nature of life, and a normal event that we can embrace and use to transform ourselves and see the joy around us every day, never losing sight of how precious but limited our time is.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano once said that enlightenment is in the encounter. For me this is the perfect way to look at the world. Whether at the Dharma center or the grocery store, every day is another opportunity for new encounters, but only if I am present and aware of them.

I have finally accepted that birth, old age, disease, death, and the other sufferings are simply normal encounters with life, not to be avoided or clung to. Each is a new opportunity to change my perspective and transform my life. Each encounter is a new opportunity to embrace life with gratitude.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents for this life I have been given. I am also thankful for my family, friends, and the many people who have served as my teachers, often without the knowledge they were doing so.

I would also like to thank Reverends Kris Ladusau and Yasuko Hildebrand for their support and encouragement over the years. I would not be standing here without it.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude for my

assignment as Head of Education for the Dharma Center of Oklahoma. It is helping me repay the many gifts I have received over the years, through developing and teaching classes, preparing course materials, and both training and mentoring a new generation of leaders. It is helping me continue a vow I made years ago which is best expressed in chapter 16 of 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 bud-
dhas?”

Thank you very much.



Members of the Oklahoma and San Antonio Dharma centers after a joint weekend training held at the Dharma Center of Oklahoma in 2016.

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 4, Faith and Understanding (1)



Faith and Understanding

Understanding, the second element of the title of this chapter, refers to understanding in the sense of rational thinking and deciding in the mind that a thing is true, while faith, the first element, refers to the fixing of that understanding within the mind, a condition of certainty in the truth of what has been understood.

We are accustomed to think it sufficient in our ordinary daily lives to understand academic or technical information and to put it to proper use, which is to say, in conformity with theory, but that alone is not enough for the smooth functioning of our lives, since faith is essential.

A convenient example is the multiplication table we use every day. We need not stop to think each time we calculate, for example, why eight times nine is seventy-two. The understanding of the tables we were taught as elementary-school students becomes an embedded faith in fact, and so we calculate smoothly, reciting with certainty the words seven times nine is sixty-three, eight times nine is seventy-two, and so on. With any truth, with any fact, this is enough, and indeed it is indispensable.

When we come to the teachings of religion, such faith is absolutely essential. Buddhism is a teaching fully in conformity with contemporary science, and so at the outset understanding is important, but this alone is not sufficient. Through a deepening of our understanding, a powerful feeling is born, a joy wells up in our being, and we achieve true liberation as we come to embrace the teaching from the bottom of our hearts. This state of mind is one of belief, of faith. However rational the teachings of Buddhism are, unless we have faith and belief in them, their true worth does not become clear.

Now, returning to the text itself, we find at the

opening of the present chapter that four other disciples have, like Shariputra, attained full faith and understanding through hearing the parable in the preceding chapter. These four are Subhuti, Maha-Katyayana, Maha-Kashyapa, and Maha-Maudgalyayana. They have all come to full faith in, and understanding of, the lesson taught by implication in the chapter on skillful means. The lesson is that all people alike are endowed with the buddha-nature; that anyone, no matter who, may become a buddha; and that while the Buddha employs all kinds of skillful and artful means in explaining the teachings, those skillful teachings are all for the sole purpose of helping people discover their own buddha-nature and awaken to the buddha state of mind.

Here the four disciples declare the awakening in their minds and hearts, and they then go on to explain in the presence of the Buddha precisely how they awakened. This is of importance because when one recounts a spiritual experience to others, the experience itself becomes firmer and more nearly perfect. Maha-Kashyapa stands as spokesman for the four and tells of their experience in one of the treasures of the Lotus Sutra, the parable of the rich elder and his poor son.





The Parable of the Rich Elder and Poor Son

There was once a boy who left home and became a wanderer. Until he was fifty, he wandered from place to place, working as a poor hired hand, but as the shadow of age crept upon him, instinctively, and in spite of himself, he found his way to his father's place.

His father had grieved over the loss of his only son and had gone everywhere in search of him, but, never finding him, at last had settled in a certain town. He was a man of exceedingly great wealth, and he built in this town a magnificent mansion.

The son at the end of his wanderings happened upon this place and passed before his father's house. Thinking to get some work there, he looked in and saw a person so magnificent that he seemed to be a king, attended by crowds of servants in the midst of gorgeous surroundings. He was overcome with fear, for this surely was no house to employ a man like him, and, alarmed at the thought of being seized and forced to work if he loitered, he started to walk away to find some poor place more suited to him.

Meanwhile, his father, who never for a moment had forgotten that face, had at once recognized the poor man standing before his gate as his son and immediately sent servants to bring him in. But the son, who had no idea of what was in his father's mind, feared that he might be killed, and he fainted as he tried to break away from the servants sent for him.

Seeing all this, the father told the servants not to force the poor man to come. A few days later he sent two servants in shabby clothes to the wretched hut where his son now was, having instructed them to allure him with the offer of twice the usual wage for the lowly work of removing a heap of filth. By this means they were able to bring him back to his father's house. The rich man himself dressed in poor clothes and was thus able to calm his son's fears and to approach him, give him kind words, and encourage him. After a time, he told him he wished to treat him as his own son.

The poor son, for his part, rejoiced in such treatment, but he could never shake the feeling that he was an underling. The father bit by bit gave him more and more important work to do until at last he made him manager of all his property. The poor son worked faith-



fully and discharged his duties beautifully, but still he could not throw off the consciousness of his lowliness.

In time the poor son's feeling of inferiority lessened, and the father, in anticipation of his death, called together the king and the principal citizens to announce that the man he had taken in was actually his son and that all his property belonged to this son. It was only now that the poor son realized that this very rich man was actually his father, and his joy was unbounded as he learned that his father's vast properties were his own.

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. 57–63).

Make Our Sangha a True Assembly of People Resolved to Be Awakened

A NEW year has begun. My second year as the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International has also started. This year, again, I would like to diligently strive to practice the Dharma, making Gratitude and Bodhisattva Practice as my theme for the year.

In the "President's Message" for January, President Niwano indicates anew the importance of Dharma dissemination. He calls upon us to create a good relationship with others with kind words and compassionate attitudes, so that we can help everyone awaken to the value of the self, while each one of us growing toward becoming a person who can bring comfort to those in distress.

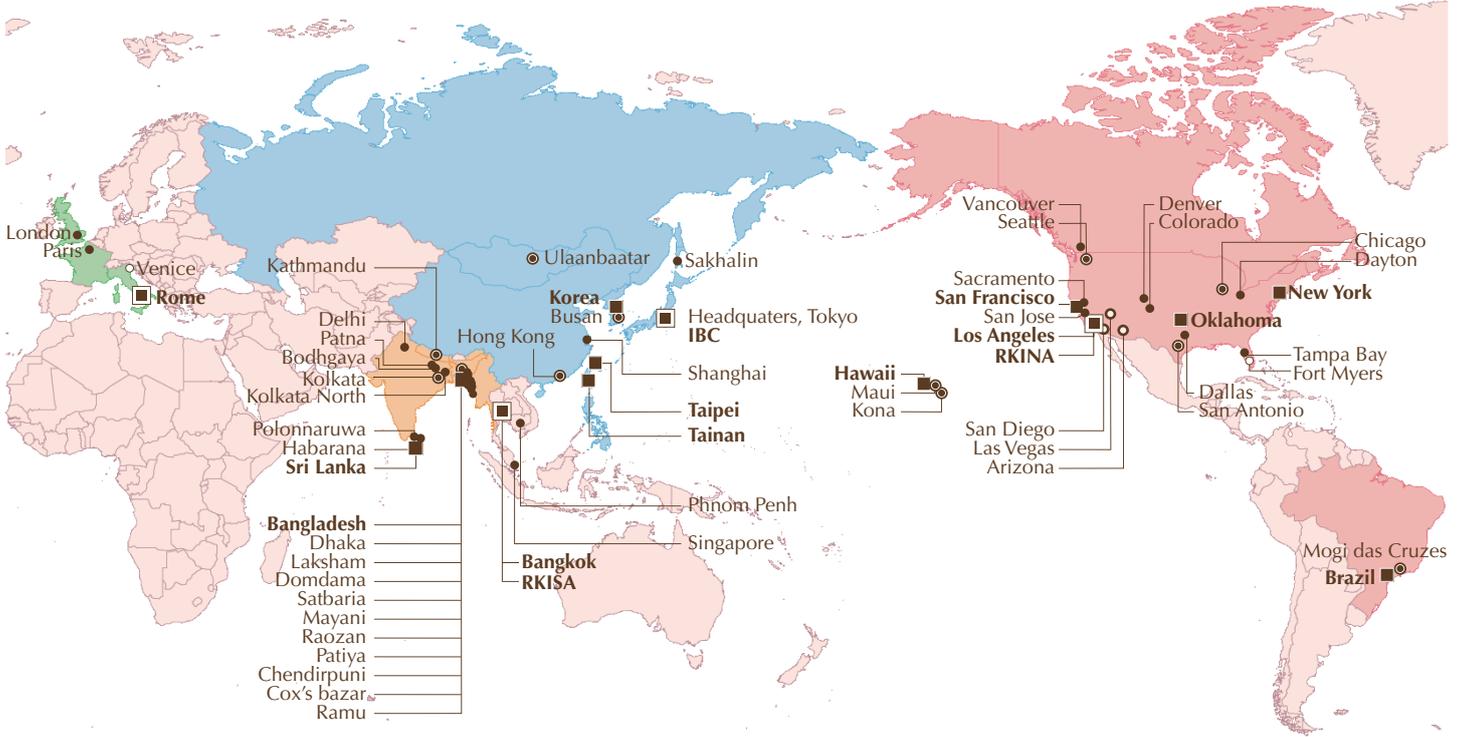
This year, Rissho Kosei-kai will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Dharma dissemination in the United States, which also means the sixtieth anniversary of the official start of the organization's international dissemination efforts. I hope that all of us will get back to the starting point of Dharma dissemination and continue to move forward in our efforts to make Rissho Kosei-kai a true "assembly of people resolved to become awakened (in Japanese, *shojoju*)," while promoting, along with the sangha members worldwide, our shared mission to liberate people all over the world through the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

I look forward to your continued effort in the new year.

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



Rissho Kosei-kai International

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
 Tel: 81-3-5341-1124 Fax: 81-3-5341-1224
 e-mail: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA)

2707 East First Street, Suite #1, Los Angeles, CA 90033, U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-323-262-4430 Fax: 1-323-262-4437
 e-mail: info@rkina.org <http://www.rkina.org>

Branch under RKINA

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

28621 Pacific Highway South, Federal Way, WA 98003 U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-253-945-0024 Fax: 1-253-945-0261
 e-mail: rkseattlewashington@gmail.com
<http://buddhistlearningcenter.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

6083 Babcock Road, San Antonio, TX 78240, U.S.A.
 P.O. Box 692148, San Antonio, TX 78269, U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-210-561-7991 Fax: 1-210-696-7745
 e-mail: dharmasanantonio@gmail.com
<http://www.rkina.org/sanantonio.html>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay

2470 Nursery Road, Clearwater, FL 33764, U.S.A.
 Tel: (727) 560-2927 e-mail: rktampabay@yahoo.com
<http://www.buddhismtampabay.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782, U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-808-455-3212 Fax: 1-808-455-4633
 e-mail: info@rkhawaii.org <http://www.rkhawaii.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

1817 Nani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793, U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-808-242-6175 Fax: 1-808-244-4625

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740 U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-808-325-0015 Fax: 1-808-333-5537

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

2707 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033, U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-323-269-4741 Fax: 1-323-269-4567
 e-mail: rk-la@sbcglobal.net <http://www.rkina.org/losangeles.html>

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Arizona

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Colorado
 Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Diego
 Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Las Vegas
 Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Dallas

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-650-359-6951 Fax: 1-650-359-6437
 e-mail: info@rksf.org <http://www.rksf.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sacramento

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Jose

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

320 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016 U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-212-867-5677 Fax: 1-212-697-6499
 e-mail: rkny39@gmail.com <http://rk-ny.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

1 West Euclid Ave., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056 U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-773-842-5654 e-mail: murakami4838@aol.com
<http://rkchi.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

<http://www.rkftmyersbuddhism.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

2745 N.W. 40th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73112 U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-405-943-5030 Fax: 1-405-943-5303
 e-mail: rkokdc@gmail.com <http://www.rkok-dharmacenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Denver

1255 Galapago Street, #809 Denver, CO 80204 U.S.A.
 Tel: 1-303-446-0792

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

425 Patterson Road, Dayton, OH 45419 U.S.A.
<http://www.rkina-dayton.com/>

Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil

Rua Dr. José Estefno 40, Vila Mariana, São Paulo-SP,
 CEP 04116-060 Brasil
 Tel: 55-11-5549-4446 / 55-11-5573-8377 Fax: 55-11-5549-4304
 e-mail: rissho@terra.com.br <http://www.rkk.org.br>

Rissho Kosei-kai de Mogi das Cruzes

Av. Ipiranga 1575-Ap 1, Mogi das Cruzes-SP,
 CEP 08730-000 Brasil
 Tel: 55-11-5549-4446 / 55-11-5573-8377

Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei

4F, No. 10 Hengyang Road, Zhongheng District,
Taipei City 100, Taiwan

Tel: 886-2-2381-1632 Fax: 886-2-2331-3433
<http://kosei-kai.blogspot.com/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan

No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street, East District,
Tainan City 701, Taiwan

Tel: 886-6-289-1478 Fax: 886-6-289-1488

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai

6-3, 8 gil Hannamdaero Yongsan gu, Seoul, 04420,
Republic of Korea

Tel: 82-2-796-5571 Fax: 82-2-796-1696
e-mail: krkk1125@hotmail.com

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai of Busan

3F, 174 Suyoung ro, Nam gu, Busan, 48460, Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-51-643-5571 Fax: 82-51-643-5572

International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan

Tel: 81-3-5341-1230 Fax: 81-3-5341-1224

e-mail: ibcrk@kosei-kai.or.jp <http://www.ibrk-rk.org/>

Branches under the Headquarters**Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong**

Flat D, 5/F, Kiu Hing Mansion, 14 King's Road,
North Point, Hong Kong, Republic of China

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

15F Express tower, Peace avenue, khoroo-1, Chingeltei district,
Ulaanbaatar 15160, Mongolia

Tel: 976-70006960 *e-mail:* rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin

4 Gruzinski Alley, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk
693005, Russian Federation

Tel & Fax: 7-4242-77-05-14

Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai**Rissho Kosei-kai of South Asia Division**

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand

Tel: 66-2-716-8141 Fax: 66-2-716-8218

Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia (RKISA)

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

Branches under the South Asia Division**Rissho Kosei-kai of Delhi**

77 Basement D.D.A. Site No. 1, New Rajinder Nagar,
New Delhi 110060, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata

E-243 B. P. Township, P. O. Panchasayar, Kolkata 700094,
West Bengal, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata North

AE/D/12 Arjunpur East, Teghoria, Kolkata 700059,
West Bengal, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya

Ambedkar Nagar, West Police Line Road
Rumpur, Gaya-823001, Bihar, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu

Ward No. 3, Jhamsilhel, Sancepa-1, Lalitpur, Kathmandu,
Nepal

Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

#201E2, St 128, Sangkat Mittapheap, Khan 7 Makara,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patna**Rissho Kosei-kai of Singapore****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: info.thairissho@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Tel & Fax: 880-31-626575

Rissho Kosei-kai of Dhaka

House#408/8, Road#7(West), D.O.H.S Baridhara,
Dhaka Cant.-1206, Bangladesh

Tel & Fax: 880-2-8413855

Rissho Kosei-kai of Mayani

Mayani(Barua Para), Post Office: Abutorab, Police Station:
Mirshari, District: Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patiya

Patiya, sadar, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Domdama

Domdama, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Cox's Bazar

Ume Burmese Market, Main Road Teck Para, Cox'sbazar,
Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Satbaria

Satbaria, Hajirpara, Chandanish, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Laksham

Dupchar (West Para), Bhora Jatgat pur, Laksham, Comilla,
Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Raozan

West Raozan, Ramjan Ali Hat, Raozan, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chendirpuni

Chendirpuni, Adhunagor, Lohagara, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ramu**Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation, Sri Lanka**

No. 628-A, Station Road, Hunupitiya, Wattala, Sri Lanka

Tel: 94-11-2982406 Fax: 94-11-2982405

Rissho Kosei-kai of Habarana

151, Damulla Road, Habarana, Sri Lanka

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa**Branches under the Headquarters****Rissho Kosei-kai di Roma**

Via Torino, 29-00184 Roma, Italia

Tel & Fax: 39-06-48913949 *e-mail:* roma@rk-euro.org

Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK**Rissho Kosei-kai of Venezia****Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris**