

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

Fortune and Misfortune Are Opposite Sides of the Same Coin

THE new fiscal year begins next month, and personnel will be reshuffled and transferred at companies everywhere. Some people will get promoted and start the new year with enthusiasm, but the flip side of this is that there will also be people who are utterly dejected because they feel that their work is not valued by their companies.

We tend to dichotomize the things we dislike and the things that make us happy, stubbornly rejecting those not in line with our wishes and welcoming only what is to our liking. But the truth is that fortune and misfortune are linked—they are opposite sides of the same coin.

If it rains, next comes a sunny day. If sunny skies persist, a rainy day follows. If you are on the top of the

world, counting on spring and summer warmth to continue indefinitely, you will inevitably end up shivering in the cold of winter. But if you store up your strength on winter days, spring—when you can tap into these reserves—will certainly come around.

Where there is a chance for promotion, there is also a chance for demotion. What you make of this depends on how you accept your transfer. When you resolve to see your new position as a place to cultivate spiritual discipline, that itself brings forth an immediate result.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 40–41

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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.

Creating Happiness for Yourself and Others

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Because We Are Children of the Buddha

All of us, no matter who we are, want ourselves and our families to be happy. At the same time, our inherent buddha-nature means that we possess minds that want other people—even strangers—to be happy as well.

To quote from chapter 3 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings (“Ten Merits”), “All of you good sons and good daughters are now truly children of the Buddha who, with great benevolence and great compassion, remove suffering and prevent calamities.” In other words, as children of the Buddha, we are able to relieve people’s sufferings, free them from calamities, and put their feelings at ease when we focus on compassion.

Whether or not we have realized that we are children of the Buddha seems like it would be important, but in reality, very few of us have interacted with others while keeping this realization in mind.

However, I think that someone who understands, for instance, that our lives are impermanent and devoid of self is a child of the Buddha. Whether you learned about the Three Seals of the Dharma (all things are impermanent, all things are devoid of self, and nirvana is tranquil) on your own or someone told you about them, the fact that they strike a chord of truth deep within you and you say to yourself, “That’s really true,” is because you are a child of the Buddha.

To quote from the Flower Garland Sutra, “The time of the first aspiration is, namely, the attainment of perfect awakening.” This line of scripture tells us that as soon as someone has entered the gateway of the Buddha’s teaching, that person has already grasped part of the Buddha’s enlightenment. Therefore, if this person gains even a little awareness of “all things never stop changing” or “since everything is a manifestation of the buddha-nature, everything in this world is in a state of great harmony,” this is none other than a realization that he or she is a child of the Buddha. Such persons can be called bodhisattvas, as they want happiness for themselves and others and they bring happiness to their surroundings.





Becoming a Living Sutra

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we say that everyone who joins our organization is a disseminator of the teaching. In general, it is normal to think that a beginner who has only just come in contact with the teaching of the Buddha is not capable of doing something like disseminating the Dharma to others. However, a passage in “Ten Merits” clearly tells us that those who hear the Buddha’s teaching can emancipate others from suffering even if they are still unable to free themselves from delusions.

For example, a man harboring fierce anger toward a friend might hear the Buddha’s teaching and reflect on it, thinking, “My anger was caused by the self-centered mind that wanted my friend to act according to my wishes.” The man can then use this self-reflection to regain a harmonious relationship with his friend. He can also serve as an example to other people around him, who may think, “I wish I could master seeing things that way and accept them as he did. I want to feel relief and be happy.” This man, who is still quite inexperienced, can serve as an example because the Buddha’s teachings that guide him are in accord with Truth.

Everyone has the desire to get along harmoniously with others. Therefore, merely speaking honestly about what you have realized through hearing the Buddha’s teachings and how they have inspired you gives others hope that they can become a person like you, living each day with a mind that is bright, truthful, and compassionate. They will want to be like you—to draw close to others who have worries and troubles and experience with them the joy of becoming happy.

It is also written in “Ten Merits” that “this sutra abides wherever bodhisattvas are practicing.” I hope that living brightly and cheerfully shines the light of Truth into the hearts of people sunk in despair, and that we are guiding them toward a life of tranquility by serving as “good fields of blessings” for all living beings. In other words, I hope we will all become people who produce happiness.

In order to do so, at all times and for all people, we should never forget the attitude of “cheerfully, kindly, and warmheartedly.” You may not be skillful at explaining scripture, but as long as you remain steadfast in being considerate of others, you can become a “living sutra” who brings happiness to yourself and other people.

From *Kosei*, March 2019





The Wonderful Encounters That Drew Me Closer to the Buddha



Mr. Sunanda Tilakarathne
Sri Lanka Dharma Center

*This Dharma Journey talk was presented on September 9, 2018,
at the ceremony for the twentieth anniversary of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center's foundation.*

MY name is Sunanda Tilakarathne. I am fifty-eight years old. I am grateful for Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings, which have sustained my life since I became a member twenty years ago. I would like to talk about three people who are very important to me, among the many people I have met and shared wonderful experiences with in my life.

The first person who comes to my mind is my mother. Many of you probably also remember your mother first of all. I was truly my mother's son, and I couldn't live a day without seeing her face until I was thirteen years old.

The next person I dearly remember is my father. When I was three years old, my father bought me a small rocking horse and a bicycle. While I have forgotten the lullaby my mother sang for me every night, I still remember the song—in Hindi—that my father sang to me when he put me on that rocking horse.

Next, I will talk about the third person, the encounter with whom has brought me the greatest treasure in my life. In 1963, when I was three years old, I got up in the morning of Wesak Poya Day (the

full-moon day in May every year) to find my home decorated beautifully. Our family lived in a small room behind a building that my father used as his workplace. Both the room where my family lived and my father's workplace were decorated for the holiday. My father held me in his arms to show me a decoration he had made himself. The decoration was mounted with pictures of a person. I liked the pictures very much. My father told me that he had deep respect for the person, and that people were glad to make all kinds of decorations in respect to this person. Hearing this, I came to know for the first time that there was a person more venerable than my parents. That person, as you know, was none other than the Buddha.

I then learned for the first time that on the Wesak Poya Day, people offer flowers, light votive candles and incense sticks, and chant the sutra to show their respect to the Buddha. From that day forward, I began to offer the sutra recitation with my mother. My parents and the Buddha were all that mattered in my life as a child.

When I was a child, I always looked forward to Wesak Poya Day because of the many kinds of colorful decorations that would shine brilliantly all over Sri Lanka. My father made lanterns for Wesak Poya Day every year.

I began making lanterns myself when I was around ten years old, using small candles. After I got married and had children, I started making lanterns for my family every year. When, one year, my lantern got wet and broken in the rain, I couldn't help but wonder why the Buddha did not protect my offering.

Before I joined Rissho Kosei-kai, I had faith in the Buddha and I participated in various activities of the temple. I helped hold events at the temple and served



Mr. Sunanda delivers his Dharma Journey talk at the Sri Lanka Dharma Center.

as head of the temple's lay supporters. I enshrined images of the Buddha both in my home and in the photo studio I owned, and I prayed before them every day.

However, in May 1996, the month of Wesak Poya Day, an unforgettable incident happened. There was a fire in my photo studio, and the building burned down. This incident prevented me from doing business and brought me into a period of financial difficulty. The fire broke out when an employee threw a half-extinguished match into the trash after using it to light the offering candles for the Buddha. The incident devastated me.

The Buddha did not protect my photo studio, even though he received the offering of candles. I was sad and I felt unable to believe in the Buddha anymore. I lost my drive to visit the temple and make offerings to the Buddha. In Sri Lanka, when people chant the five precepts on some ceremonial occasions in front of Buddhist monks, they usually put their palms together in reverence. I began crossing my arms to express my disbelief.

The six months after the incident were a very painful time for me. It was during this time that Mr. Mahesh Rodrigo, my wife's elder brother, introduced me to Mr. Gamini Chandrasekera. Whenever Mr. Gamini met with me, he talked about a Buddhist organization in Japan. Then, a while later, he invited my family to participate in one of the organization's events.

That organization was Rissho Kosei-kai, and the ceremony was truly auspicious. I was deeply impressed by the speech of a guest from Japan, and I instantly decided to join the organization. The guest who made a speech was Rev. Masatoshi Shimamura, who would later be appointed the director of Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia. I still deeply respect him.

While participating in Rissho Kosei-kai's events, I gradually recovered my faith in the Buddha and came

to feel that the Buddha was very close to me. Although there was some distance between the Hoza center at Dehiwala and my home at Wattala, I felt the Hoza center was very close.

I traveled to many places in Sri Lanka to disseminate the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. I also participated in Rissho Kosei-kai seminars in Bangkok and Tokyo to continue my study to become qualified as a Dharma teacher. I drew ever closer to the Buddha. I was also able to guide more than fifty people to Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings, getting them connected with the Dharma and the sangha. One of the people whom I guided to the teachings was Mr. Percy Wijeyaratne, who would later become a chapter leader. I am very happy to see him make diligent efforts for the Dharma every day as a leader.

Throughout the twenty years I've been a member of Rissho Kosei-kai, I've had a lot of experiences that were joyous and pleasant. But at the same time, there were also things that were sad and painful, which made me feel like running away from the organization.

In the Sri Lanka Dharma Center, there were times when members who did not correctly understand the teachings were in discord with another group of members, quarreling with each other and calling each other names. In 2010, when the sangha was experiencing its most difficult time, Rev. Yoshiaki Yamamoto came to Sri Lanka from Japan to be our minister. It was a blessing for our sangha.

Even after Rev. Yamamoto began to serve as our minister, however, the discord among the sangha members persisted. But Rev. Yamamoto treated all members equally and with warmth and continued to revere the buddha-nature in each and every member.

As the years and months passed by, the members' trust in Rev. Yamamoto deepened little by little. The fact that his wife, Mrs. Kayoko Yamamoto, came to Sri Lanka with her husband was a huge help in developing amiable ties among the members. Eventually,

Spiritual Journey

last year, a new Dharma Center building in Wattala—the construction of which Sri Lankan members had been awaiting for nearly twenty years—was finally completed. I am so happy that the Sri Lanka sangha has grown into a wonderful sangha worthy of a new Dharma center building.

Some time ago, when my mother participated in a Memorial Day ceremony held in the Dharma center in Wattala, she began to feel ill during the service because of her chronic high blood pressure. Her home was very close to the Dharma center, and members could have easily taken her there to rest. Instead, the members were considerate of my mother's hope to participate in the service and hear the preaching, and they kindly took care of her by giving her the necessary medicine and helping her lie down on a mattress.

When I arrived at the Dharma center a short while later, I saw my mother delightfully listening to a monk's sermon on the mattress, supported by members. My heart was filled with gratitude upon seeing this. My mother died not long after that, but I believe she was overjoyed to experience this wholehearted support from her fellow members.

Through the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I became able to face any hardship without running away from it, by always keeping the Buddha's teachings in mind. Whenever I've faced difficulties in my life, the Buddha has always helped me, sending me someone who would extend a helping hand.

My mother held temples in great esteem and listened to the preaching of monks throughout her life. Ten years ago, however, when my father died, none of the relatives on my mother's side in Bemmulla turned out for my father's funeral. She resented her relatives' show of disrespect for her husband, and since then she did not wish to visit her hometown of Bemmulla. I understood her feelings and also kept my distance from her home.

Ten days before my mother passed away, I wanted to somehow lessen the anger that she felt toward her

relatives in Bemmulla. I talked to her about the teaching expounded in chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra, "Devadatta." When I spoke about the importance of throwing away resentment against others and revering the buddha-nature in them, she understood my wish. A week before she died, she visited her home at Bemmulla, accompanied by her family, and spent a pleasant and fulfilling day with her relatives. I believe that the reconciliation with her relatives may create a large merit that will benefit her in her next life.

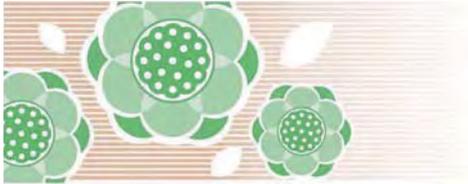
When my mother knew her death was close, she told a monk that she wanted to donate her oxygen inhaler to the temple after she died. During the last week of her life, she lived like a bodhisattva in the Lotus Sutra.

I am sincerely grateful for Mr. Gamini for introducing the wonderful teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai to Sri Lanka, and for Mr. Mahesh for guiding me to Rissho Kosei-kai. I am truly grateful for my wife, for it was her who enabled me to meet Mr. Mahesh, and for my father and mother, because it was my parents who introduced a wonderful woman to me as my wife. Thanks to my encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai, I was able to deepen my understanding of Buddhist teachings and affirm my faith in the Buddha, which is the most valuable, unsurpassable treasure for me.



Mr. Sunanda (right) participates in Rissho Kosei-kai International Leader's Training Seminar, in Tokyo.

Living the
 **LOTUS**



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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 5, The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs



This chapter opens with the Buddha's commendation of Maha-Kashyapa for relating the parable that formed the heart of the preceding chapter on faith and understanding—a parable that aptly explained the true merit of the tathagata, one who has earned the highest title of a buddha. The Buddha then proceeds with the parable of the three kinds of medicinal herbs and two kinds of trees, which explains the relationship between the teaching and the living beings who receive it. The summary of his exposition is as follows.

The Parable of the Three Kinds of Medicinal Herbs and Two Kinds of Trees

The Buddha affirms Maha-Kashyapa's statement that the tathagata has infinite merit, full knowledge of the truth, and full freedom in presenting it so that it serves all people equally, leading them to perfect their knowledge of the Buddha. By way of illustrating this, the Buddha describes how the plants that grow over the earth come in every size, shape, and disposition, but all thirst for the same moisture-giving rain.

A great cloud covers the sky, and rain falls. The rain falls everywhere upon the earth, and all the plants are wetted evenly and abundantly. Small plants, medium-sized plants, large plants, saplings, and great trees all take in the life-giving moisture that restores their vigor and fuels their growth.

And though the rain falls upon all alike, each grows, takes shape, blossoms, and bears fruit according to its own nature.

Just so, the Buddha tells Maha-Kashyapa, is the tathagata. He is the cloud covering the sky. His teaching is the rain falling everywhere upon the earth, and living beings are the infinitely varied plants and trees. The tathagata's teaching is the truth of the universe;

the ultimate reality of all things. It, like the moisture-giving rain, is of but a single flavor and attribute. But people differ in makeup and nature, birth and upbringing, health, surroundings, and occupation. These differences, despite the fact that all people are absolutely alike in their basic buddha-nature, affect how receptive they are to the rain of truth. But however great their differences in receptivity, all people receive the rain of truth that is best suited to them, according to their given nature—just like a plant, which has no knowledge of whether it is large, medium-sized, or small, merely grows, flowers, and bears fruit according to its nature.

A human being, in the eyes of the Buddha, is like a plant. What is one's present spiritual level? What is one's value in the universe? Only the Buddha can know. The Buddha rightly discerns the circumstances in which every person lives, as well as their level of spiritual growth. And the Buddha further knows that all people are absolutely equal at the root of their being.





On the basis of this knowledge, the Buddha presents the teaching in a fashion suited to every individual, thus delivering all from the sufferings of life and setting everyone upon the right road of spiritual progress. Liberation appears to take various forms, but there is only one core teaching, and it falls like rain upon everyone alike. It is on this account that the form of teaching, of liberation, varies with the nature, character, and circumstances of each person, so that every person may be enabled to accept it. This is a supreme quality of the Buddha Dharma.

The Unique Attributes of Existence and the Discriminative Aspect of Phenomena

The lesson of the parable is thus the variety and identity of Buddhist liberation, but we should also glean the lesson that true wisdom is the awareness of the fundamental oneness of humankind in the presence of apparent difference.

To lean entirely toward the awareness of humankind's essential equality is to be like those Chinese "immortals" of old—so remote from the world that they subsisted on air, an attitude that is scarcely suitable to real life. But it is equally wrong to be seized entirely by the infinite variety of human beings, as feelings of superiority and inferiority give rise to the snares of pride, arrogance, haughtiness, envy, hatred, conflict, and desire, which lead to struggle and pain.

Whatever differences there may be in our superficial forms, the true nature central to all people is our oneness with the Buddha. Whoever has a firm grasp and awareness of this truth is enabled to live rightly, making his or her own life and the lives of others truly meaningful. It is in this way that we may apply the lesson of this chapter to our lives today.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 6, Giving Assurance of Buddhahood



In this chapter, after hearing the parable related by Maha-Kashyapa in chapter 4 of the sutra, Shakya muni recognizes that four disciples—Maha-Kashyapa, Maha-Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, and Maha-Katyayana—have achieved faith and understanding in the Dharma, and here he foretells their buddhahood.

"Assurance" here, as pointed out earlier in chapter 2, means giving someone the assurance that they will attain the enlightenment of a buddha and thus attain buddhahood at some future time.

Assurance is Conditional

But this assurance is conditional. As it is stated in this

chapter, the achievement of buddhahood may seem near at hand, but in fact can only be attained after long practice. If we think about the meaning of this in contemporary terms, it is somewhat like being admitted to a fine school or university. The admission is essential and important, but admission papers are not a diploma. Study is an absolute requirement in learning. We must remember here that the true way to achieve liberation is by taking refuge in the Buddha of one's own will and effort, as suggested in the parable of the burning house in chapter 3.

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).

Let Us Bring True Happiness to Ourselves and Others

MARCH has arrived—a time when we celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai. This year, we mark the organization's eighty-first year, another step toward our centennial.

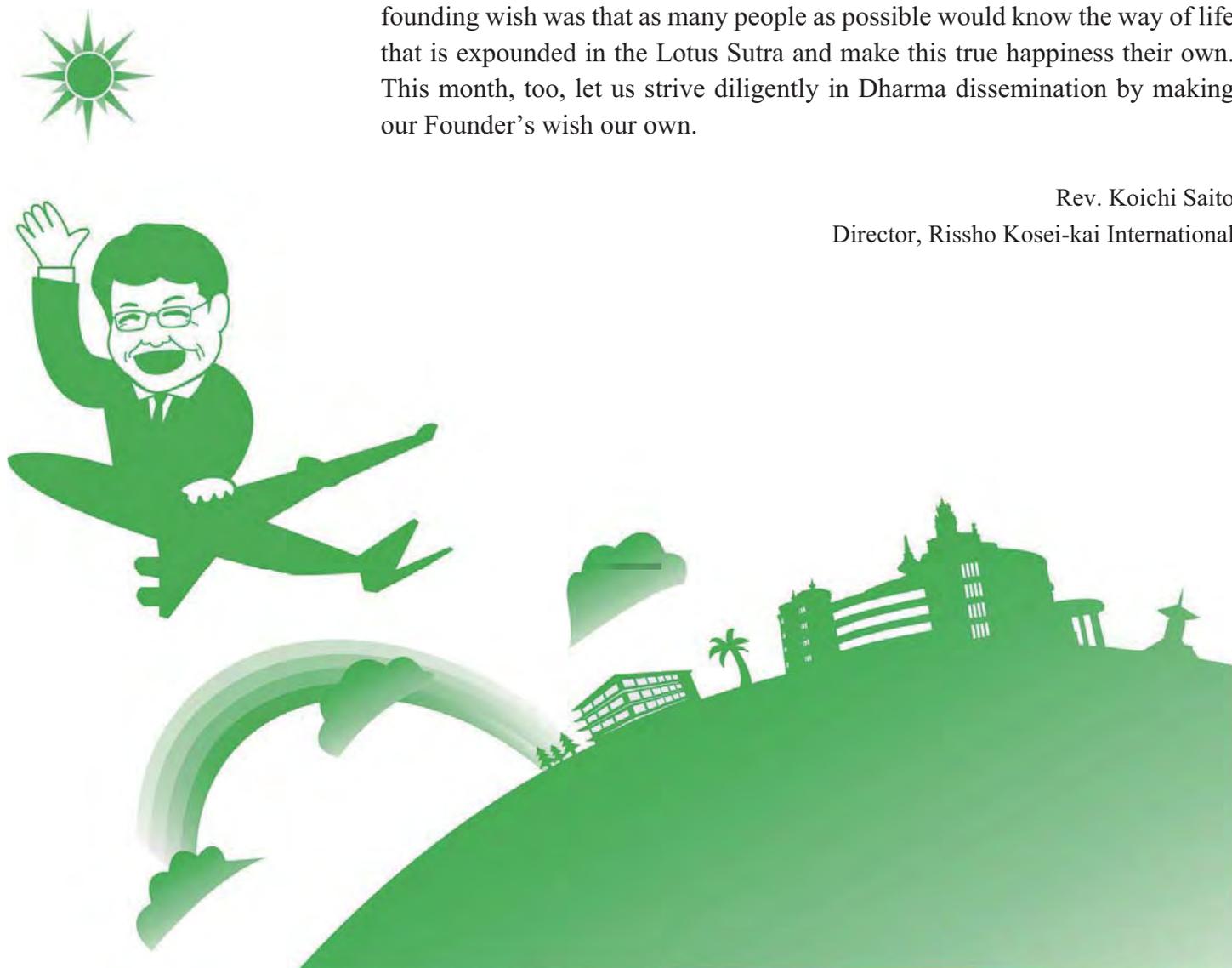
At the beginning of this year, President Nichiko Niwano gave us an annual theme: “Let Us Develop Ourselves.” In the New Year's Dharma Guidance in January, President Niwano said Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) had defined the “self” as a large entity that contains both oneself and the self of all others in the universe. In line with this discussion, President Niwano confirmed his recognition that oneself and others are one and not separated, and that all things are united.

In his monthly message for March, President Niwano quotes passages from chapter 3 of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, “Ten Merits.” He calls upon all of us to be aware that we are the Buddha's children, to always be considerate of others, and to bring happiness and liberation to ourselves and others.

When Founder Nikkyo Niwano established Rissho Kosei-kai in 1938, his founding wish was that as many people as possible would know the way of life that is expounded in the Lotus Sutra and make this true happiness their own. This month, too, let us strive diligently in Dharma dissemination by making our Founder's wish our own.

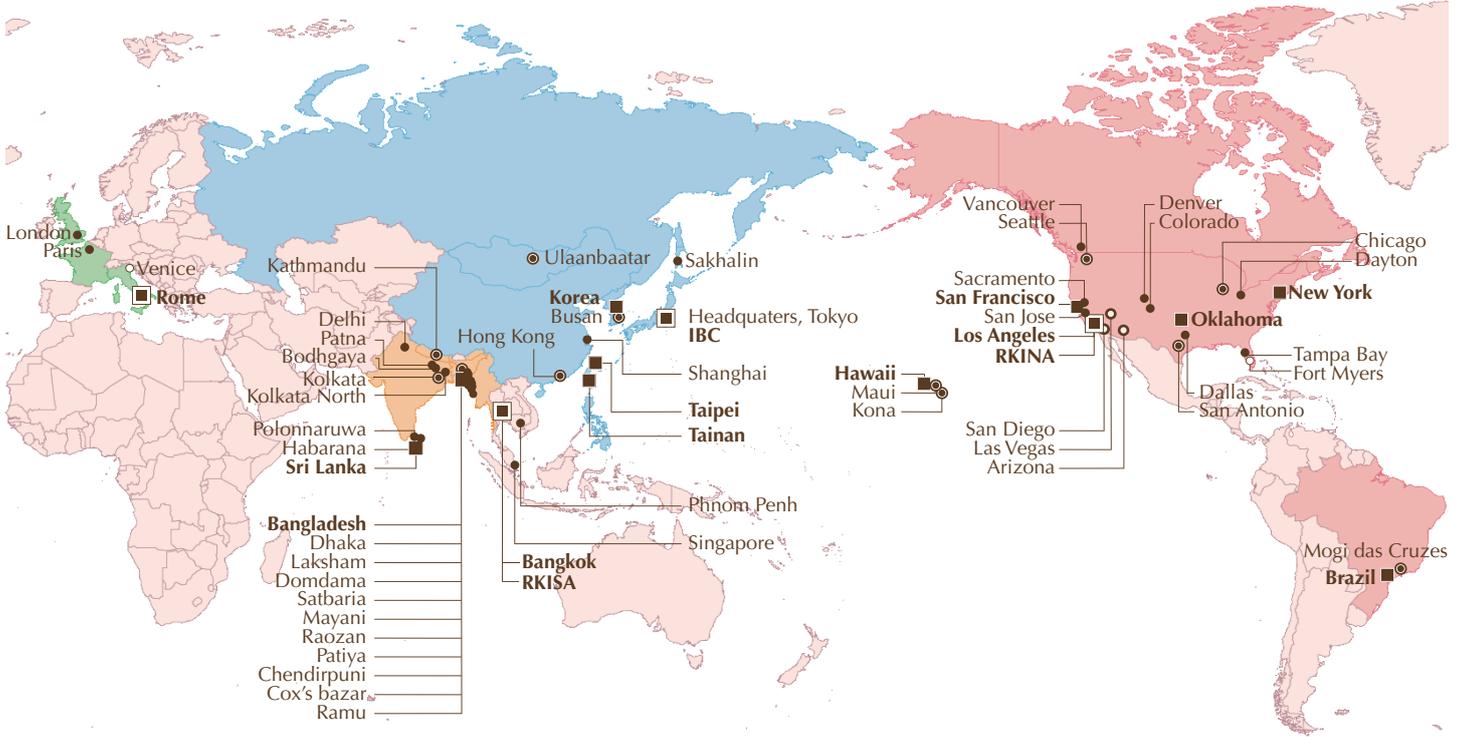
Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



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