

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



Founder's Essay

Rock-Solid Composure

AROUND the time I had just arrived fresh in Tokyo, a fortune-teller at a street fair told me, “You’re the type of person who’s no-good without some kind of stimulus.” After that, whenever I ran into a difficult problem, I started telling myself, “Things are finally about to get interesting!”

In normal times when everything is going well, making big changes to the way you’ve been doing things seems possible, and yet it’s still very difficult to do. But when a crisis drives you to the edge of a cliff, you can’t avoid having to change.

The same goes for the workplace. In a tightly buttoned-down organization, there are all kinds of obstacles that make it extremely hard to change the way things are done, even when everyone knows they can’t continue as they are.

If anything, it’s times of economic recession that can provide the perfect opportunity for radical reform. Everyone unites as one to work together, knowing that the difficulties they face must be overcome. This is the approach of the Lotus Sutra, which shows that even Devadatta, the bitter enemy of the Buddha, was a good spiritual friend.

If you can learn to turn a crisis into an opportunity, there will be nothing left for you to fear. Whether the situation is good or bad, you’ll say to yourself with rock-solid composure, “Things are finally about to get interesting!”

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 182–83

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Senior Editor: Koichi Saito
Editor: Kensuke Suzuki
Copy Editors: Molly McCowan, 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

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.



President's Message

Encouragement and Diligence

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Encouragement from the Buddha

In the world of faith, we often use the phrase “liberated by the gods and the buddhas.” In Buddhist terms, although we say that “the Buddha liberates us,” this does not mean we should simply wait for “liberation” to come.

To quote from chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra (“The Parable of the Conjured City”), “[Buddhas] can compel living beings / To leave the hells of the threefold world.”

Here, “compel” means to exhort or encourage. Founder Niwano explained these lines of scripture as follows: “The Buddha does not unconditionally free us from this world full of sufferings and worries (hells). He instead reveals the Truth for us and encourages us to come to know it through the teachings and thereby free ourselves from the place of suffering.” The Founder clearly stated that “we must free ourselves from the world of suffering through our own efforts that are grounded in the teachings.”

Since we members of Rissho Kosei-kai are connected to the Buddha’s teachings and therefore have already received—and are always receiving—encouragement from the Buddha through these teachings, we strongly feel the importance of our own practice, by which we are freed from this world of suffering.

By the way, do you know the last lines of the verse quoted from the “Parable of the Conjured City” above? These lines are familiar to us as the “Universal Transfer of Merit”: “May these merits / Extend universally to all / So that we and all living beings / Together accomplish the Buddha Way.”

These lines, which expresses our wish that we will all approach the Buddha’s level by transferring (redirecting) the merits of our offerings to many other people, may give us the impression that this is difficult to do. However, if we reread them in the context of our daily lives, this wish emerges as forms of diligence that are surprisingly close and familiar to us. I interpret this passage as: “Let’s always be kind to everyone we come into contact with, starting with our family and friends. Through our morning and evening sutra recitations, let’s reexamine our own mental state and our actions. By doing so, we are creating good karmic connections with





many people, making good friends and, together with them, experiencing real happiness.”

When we think about what it means to receive encouragement from the Buddha and “make our own effort” to practice the teachings, these familiar forms of diligence come to mind, grounded in our great wish as described in the scripture quoted above.

Living Attentively

Speaking of good friends, there is the famous conversation in which one of the Buddha’s disciples asks, “Is having good friends and good companions half of the Buddha Way?” and Shakyamuni replies, “Yes indeed, it is the whole Buddha Way.” Some days later, Shakyamuni refers to this exchange in his advice to King Pasenadi of Kosala.

Shakyamuni says, “King Pasenadi, you should be a good friend and good companion of the people and strive to lead them by performing good deeds. By doing so, all of the people who see and hear about your good efforts will think that they themselves should not be remiss and should also make an effort, much more so than if you tried to encourage them by scolding and admonishing them.”

This is good advice for us as well. When parents encourage their children because they want them to be happy, the parents’ own “innermost wish”—that is, what kind of human beings they themselves want to be—is important, which also resonates with Shakyamuni’s advice to King Pasenadi. Then, if we ask what it means to “strive to do good deeds,” it is not becoming complacent and supposing that in our daily lives, we are doing so as a matter of course. It means living each and every day attentively.

No matter who you are, wherever you are right now is “a place of the Way” for practicing the Buddha Way. Therefore, by continuing to always express gratitude for the things we often take for granted, you can hone your character and experience happiness together with those around you. This is diligence, and the meaning of “together accomplish the Buddha Way.”

However, we sometimes give rise to the mind of laziness and are unable to do what we can ordinarily do. At such times, our hope and our wish sustain us. The best thing is to start moving forward again, without rushing ourselves, toward the goal of becoming more like someone we see as our ideal—the Buddha, who wants all people to have real happiness—and wishing to be the kind of person who is a good friend to many.

From *Kosei*, November 2019





Realizing the Importance of Putting Compassion into Action



Mr. Cleiton Souza Lima
Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil on July 21, during the ceremony celebrating the forty-eighth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil.

HELLO, everyone. My name is Cleiton Souza Lima. I am thirty-three years old and single. I left my parents' home in late 2007 and moved from the east side to the south side of São Paulo to live on my own. I was looking for a more convenient lifestyle, so I picked a place close to work with easy access to the metro system. I found out later that I'd moved right next to Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil. Through my window, I saw people performing Japanese taiko [drum] and thought it must be a center for Japanese people living in Brazil. That was my first encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai.

I work as a computer systems developer. My work is extremely busy—in addition to creating computer systems, I also provide customer support. Our clock-in time is fixed, but not when we go home, and we usually try not to leave before the work is complete. So, when I am finally able to go home, my body is totally fatigued.



Mr. Cleiton Souza Lima delivers his Dharma Journey talk during the ceremony celebrating the forty-eight anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil.

Even while leading this busy life, I have always been interested in improving my character, lifestyle, and decision making. I've read many books about philosophy, and in those books I learned that Buddhism is not a philosophy but a religion, and many thoughts are contained within it. But even though I was eager to learn more about Buddhism, I couldn't find the kind of information I was looking for. Since Rissho Kosei-kai was right next to my apartment, I decided to pay it a visit.

I checked the schedule of Buddhist seminars posted on the Dharma center's billboard and thought, "Now is the only chance." This January, after ten years of living next door to it, I stepped inside the Dharma center for the very first time.

The Buddhist seminar was easy to understand and I was satisfied with what was taught there. I learned about the importance of fostering a compassionate mind, respecting the person before you, putting yourself into others' shoes, and showing appreciation to our ancestors. While listening to the lecture by Rev. Kazuyoshi Nakahara, minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil, I was convinced of the truth in what was taught and thought I might have been a Buddhist from the beginning, though I had not been aware of it.

That day, I also learned about the meditation of compassion. The first phrase in the meditation is, "I wish to obtain happiness."

That was right! I wished to become happy.

The second phrase is, "I wish everyone I like to obtain happiness."

Yes, just as it says, I also wanted my friends and family to be happy.

The third phrase is, "I wish everyone I dislike to obtain happiness."

That is right; I also wanted them to be happy.

The last line is, “May everyone who dislikes me obtain happiness.”

Um, hold on, I can’t do that, I thought.

I screamed inside. That was the moment I realized that I had been participating in the seminar with a selfish mind. Later in the seminar, I learned various new ways of thinking and decided to find out more about Rissho Kosei-kai.

I have since participated in many of the Buddhist seminars and lectures on basic Buddhism. I also began participating in the Dharma center’s sutra recitation at least once a week and helping out at the center as much as I can.

Although I only recently encountered the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I am thankful for the improvements the teachings have brought about in my life so far.

For example, I was in a relationship for three years. The relationship was not going well, and through learning the teachings, I realized I was the reason it had gone sour. Although we ended up separating, thanks to the teaching that “all things are impermanent,” I was able to overcome the grief. Also thanks to the teachings, the last talk between my girlfriend and I gave us both an opportunity to realize our shortcomings, and we talked about improving ourselves and learning to be more forbearing.

In my workplace, I used morning greetings as a way to put the teachings into practice. Many of the employees are divided into different teams that work on separate projects, but because each team’s work correlates closely with the other teams’, delays directly affect everyone. So, when we cannot meet a deadline, tension sometimes grows among a few of my colleagues. During such times, a simple greeting like “good morning” can cool them down, and I saw many times that the angry faces of my colleagues softened.

A few years ago I experienced a midlife crisis, which happened to me earlier than most other people. (A midlife crisis is feelings of unhappiness, worry, and disappointment that some people experience when they are in their forties or fifties.) I was obsessed with

metaphysical questions and my mind was restless, trying to find answers. On the other hand, I had almost no interest in applying what I learned. Fortunately, through my encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai, I learned the importance of moderation and practice.

This April, I received the Gohozon (an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni as the focus of devotion) during the ceremony of Shakyamuni Buddha’s birth. It was such an honor that I was able to receive the Gohozon on such a blessed day. A week later, when the installation ceremony of the Gohonzon was held at my home, Rev. Nakahara, Ms. Marta Michi Terada, Ms. Mery Candido De Oliveira, and Ms. Marli Sanchez Ribeiro De Mattos came to my house for the ceremony. After the ceremony, we shared our thoughts and enjoyed some tea. Before the ceremony, I was not very close with the members who attended, but I felt their kindness and became friends with them. For a few days after the ceremony, I continued to feel the energy my sangha members had shared with me when I prepared offerings for the altar and practiced sutra recitation.

I would like to take a vow to share my awareness of the importance of putting compassion into action with as many people as possible. I also vow to strive to be helpful to others and to transform the happiness I receive into energy to make everyone in front of me happy.

Everyone, thank you very much.



Mr. Lima participates in a cleaning activity in the garden of the Dharma center.

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 11

The Appearance of the Jeweled Stupa

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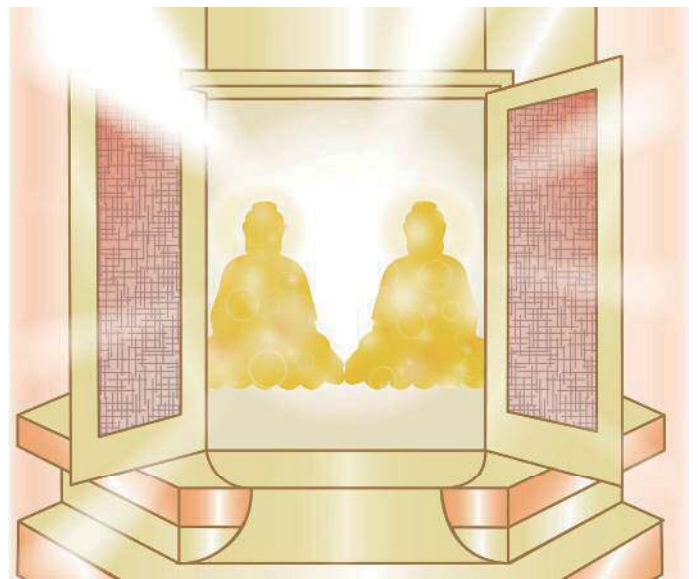
In the first half of this chapter, a jeweled stupa sprang up from the earth and a great voice reverberated from within. Shakyamuni told the assembly that the buddha called Tathagata Abundant Treasures was inside.

Shakyamuni then explained that Tathagata Abundant Treasures had made a vow that after he became a buddha, if the Dharma Flower Sutra was expounded in any of the lands in the ten directions his stupa would arise and appear there to hear the sutra, bear testimony to it, and extol it.

The Bodhisattva Great Joy in Teaching then spoke for the congregation, asking if they could see the body of Tathagata Abundant Treasures. Shakyamuni addressed him, saying, “Tathagata Abundant Treasures has made a vow: ‘If the buddha who expounds the Dharma Flower Sutra wishes to reveal my body to the assembly, he must first call in all his emanated bodies who are expounding the Dharma throughout the world of the ten directions and gather them in one place.’”

Assembling All the Emanated Buddhas in the Ten Directions

At this point in the chapter the Bodhisattva Great Joy in Teaching again speaks for the congregation and asks that they might see these buddhas, and Shakyamuni illuminates the universe in the ten directions to call them in. It thus becomes clear that the entire universe, not only the *saha* world of Shakyamuni, is filled with emanations of the Buddha’s body. When all have assembled, Shakyamuni himself rises into the sky and comes to rest in front of the precious stupa.



What Sets the Ultimate Truth in Motion

Shakyamuni then stretches forth his right hand, the symbol of wisdom, and opens the door of the stupa to reveal Tathagata Abundant Treasures seated motionless, as though in meditation.

The tathagata says, “Excellent, excellent. Shakyamuni Buddha expounds this Dharma Flower Sutra with pleasure.”

Something very important is symbolized here. Tathagata Abundant Treasures, being the perfect aspect of the truth, sits perfectly still, indicating that the ultimate truth is everlasting and unchanging. But what is unmoving has no power to change our lives. Only when someone explains something so it moves the hearts and minds of people does it become able to liberate the human world. This is why Tathagata Abundant Treasures, being the ultimate truth, praises Shakyamuni, for it is Shakyamuni who in expounding the truth is setting it in motion.



In this way, Tathagata Abundant Treasures symbolizes hope that the ultimate truth itself will be explained, widely understood, and put into motion and applied to daily lives.

The Two Buddhas Sharing the Same Throne

As the chapter continues, Tathagata Abundant Treasures, sitting squarely in the middle of the lion seat, slips to one side and offers the other half to Shakyamuni, who then enters the stupa and sits there with him.

This brief action shows us two significant things. First, it breaks down many people's mistaken idea that Tathagata Shakyamuni is just a buddha with a mortal body by showing that he is immortal like Tathagata Abundant Treasures—he is able to appear and disappear at will and he is not subject to the normal rules of life and death. This is made plain in chapter 16, but here it is merely suggested.

Second, the Dharma body of the Buddha (represented by Tathagata Abundant Treasures) and the manifest body of the Buddha (the human form in which Shakyamuni appears) are shown to be equal, with no difference in terms of superiority. Therefore, the ultimate truth (the complete and unified form of the truth itself) and the interpreter of that truth are shown as equally worthy beings.

May the Righteous Dharma of the Buddha Last Forever

Now, when all those assembled in the stupa see the two tathagatas seated on the lion seat floating high in the sky above them, they begin to think of the buddhas as being remotely high and distant, and they wish that they might also be gathered up into the sky.

Shakyamuni, at once perceiving their thought, lifts them up, saying, “So to this great assembly I say that those who, after my passing, are able to protect, keep, read, and recite this sutra should now pledge themselves by making a vow in the presence of the

Buddha. Although extinguished long ago, the Buddha Abundant Treasures, with his great and solemn vow, unleashes a lion's roar. All of you must know why the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, I myself, and my emanated buddhas are gathered here. Any buddha child of mine who is able to protect this teaching must make a great vow so that it will long abide. Those who are able to protect the Dharma of this sutra have thereby paid homage to me and to Abundant Treasures.”

This address of Shakyamuni is known as “May the Righteous Dharma of the Buddha Last Forever.”

The Six Difficulties and Nine Easy Practices

In this way, Shakyamuni calls on and encourages all those in the assembly to strive to propagate the Lotus Sutra. At the same time, he explains that it will be extremely difficult to expound the Lotus Sutra after his passing, and thus its merit will be all the more profound.





Shakyamuni then explains the six kinds of difficulty in expounding the Lotus Sutra after his death. The six kinds of difficulty are “the difficulty of preaching the sutra,” “the difficulty of copying and keeping the sutra,” “the difficulty of reading the sutra for but a moment,” “the difficulty of expounding the sutra,” “the difficulty of hearing and receiving the sutra,” and “the difficulty of reverently keeping the sutra.” These are called the “six difficulties” coupled with the “nine easy practices” that Shakyamuni also explains in this section.

Two Places and Three Assemblies

Up until this point, the assembly has taken place on the summit of the Divine Eagle Peak. From this point to the end of chapter 22, “The Entrustment,” it is held in the sky. Thereafter, it is held again on the summit of the Divine Eagle Peak. Since the assembly of the Lotus Sutra is held three times in two places, it is called “the two places and the three assemblies.”

There is a deep significance in this. The summit of the Divine Eagle Peak indicates our actual lives, while the sky represents our ideal state. When we learn something new, we must start from what we already know so it isn’t too threatening or hard to understand. This is why the Buddha begins his explanation with actual problems, such as how to shake off delusion and be delivered from human suffering.

Even limiting ourselves to the Lotus Sutra alone, we see that at the very beginning the Buddha teaches the wisdom of understanding issues such as how the world is formed, what it means to be human, and how we should interact with others.

As we assimilate this wisdom, we must finally be shown the ideal state, which is to become one with the Eternal Buddha. This state is hard to grasp for ordinary people, and awakening is impossible unless we engage in the religious practices within the sangha.

Having attained this awakening, it is then possible to return to actuality and put that awakening into



practice in this world. But unless one reaches many others, unless all of humanity is rescued, personal liberation is incomplete. This is why the locale of the closing session of the sermon, in chapters 23 to 28, is back on Divine Eagle Peak. The Lotus Sutra is thus highly rational in its structure.

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. 115–21).

Bringing Liberation to Ourselves and Others

THIS month, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrates the anniversary of the birth of Founder Nikkyo Niwano. In addition to this, November is an important month for the organization as we begin to reflect upon the activities of the year and prepare for the new one.

Founder Niwano established Rissho Kosei-kai with the hope to “liberate people from suffering and make the world a better place.” He dedicated himself to practicing the teaching that brings liberation both to ourselves and others and helps us bring peace to the world.

In his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano quotes passages from chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Parable of the Conjured City.” He teaches us that we members of Rissho Kosei-kai, who have encountered the Buddha’s teaching, are always receiving encouragement to free ourselves from suffering through our own efforts grounded in the teaching. He continues by saying that it is important for us to be attentive of everything we do in our daily lives and create good connections with many people so that we, together with everyone, will achieve liberation.

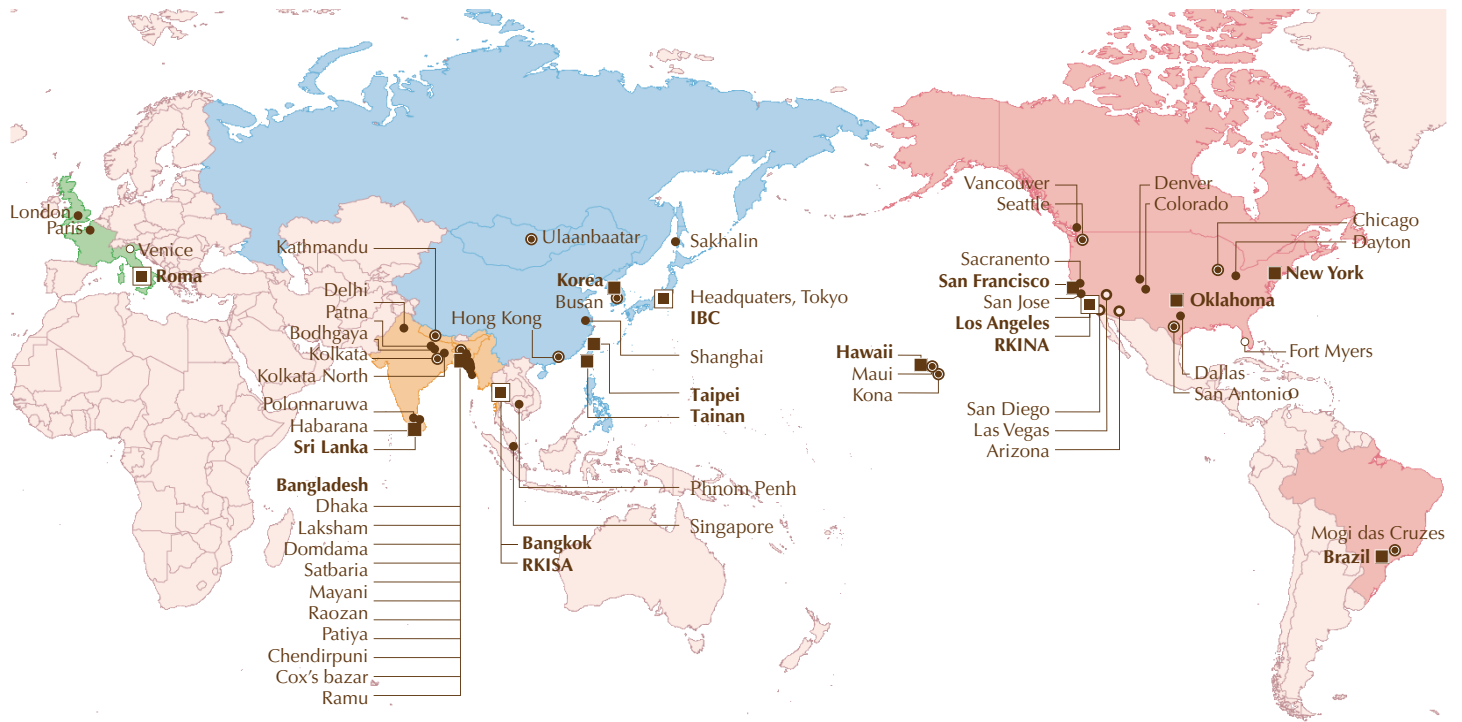
Let us reciprocate the Founder’s compassion by sharing this invaluable teaching with people around us who have not yet encountered it. Let us dedicate ourselves to practicing the teaching so we can help bring happiness to them!

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



 We welcome comments on our newsletter *Living the Lotus*: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp.

Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782, USA
 TEL: 1-808-455-3212 FAX: 1-808-455-4633
 Email: info@rkhawaii.org URL: <http://www.rkhawaii.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

1817 Nani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793, USA
 TEL: 1-808-242-6175 FAX: 1-808-244-4625

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740, USA
 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, USA
 POBox 33636, CA 90033, USA
 TEL: 1-323-269-4741 FAX: 1-323-269-4567
 Email: rk-la@sbcglobal.net URL: <http://www.rkina.org/losangeles.html>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

- 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, USA
 POBox 778, Pacifica, CA 94044, USA
 TEL: 1-650-359-6951 FAX: 1-650-359-6437
 Email: info@rksf.org URL: <http://www.rksf.org>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

- 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, USA
 TEL: 1-212-867-5677 Email: rkny39@gmail.com URL: <http://rk-ny.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

1 West Euclid Ave., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056, USA
 TEL: 1-773-842-5654
 Email: murakami4838@aol.com URL: <http://rkchi.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

2745 N.W. 40th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73112, USA
 POBox 57138, Oklahoma City, OK 73157, USA
 TEL: 1-405-943-5030 FAX: 1-405-943-5303
 Email: rkokdc@gmail.com URL: <http://www.rkok-dharmacenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Denver

1255 Galapago St. #809 Denver, CO 80204, USA
 TEL: 1-303-446-0792

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

617 Kling Drive, Dayton, OH 45419, USA
 URL: <http://www.rkina-dayton.com>

The Buddhist Center Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA)

2707 East First St., Suite #1, Los Angeles, CA 90033, USA
 TEL: 1-323-262-4430 FAX: 1-323-262-4437
 Email: info@rkina.org URL: <http://www.rkina.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

(Address) 6083 Babcock Road, San Antonio, TX 78240, USA
 (Mail) POBox 692042, San Antonio, TX 78269, USA
 TEL: 1-210-561-7991 FAX: 1-210-696-7745
 Email: dharmasanantonio@gmail.com
 URL: <http://www.rkina.org/sanantonio.html>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

28621 Pacific Highway South, Federal Way, WA 98003, USA
 TEL: 1-253-945-0024 FAX: 1-253-945-0261
 Email: rkseattlewashington@gmail.com
 URL: <http://buddhistlearningcenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Please contact RKINA

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
 Email: risho@rkk.org.br URL: <http://www.rkk.org.br>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/rishokosseikaidobrasil>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/rkkbrasil>

Rissho Kosei-kai de Mogi das Cruzes

Av. Ipiranga 1575-Ap 1, Mogi das Cruzes-SP, CEP 08730-000, Brasil

在家佛教韓國立正佼成會

〒 04420 大韓民國 SEOUL 特別市龍山區漢南大路 8 路 6-3
6-3, 8 gil Hannamdaero Yongsan gu, Seoul, 04420, Republic of Korea
TEL: 82-2-796-5571 FAX: 82-2-796-1696

在家佛教韓國立正佼成會釜山支部

〒 48460 大韓民國釜山廣域市南區水營路 174, 3F
3F, 174 Suyoung ro, Nam gu, Busan, 48460, Republic of Korea
TEL: 82-51-643-5571 FAX: 82-51-643-5572

社團法人在家佛教立正佼成會

台灣台北市中正區衡陽路 10 號富群資訊大廈 4 樓
4F, No. 10, Hengyang Road, Jhongheng District, Taipei City 100, Taiwan
TEL: 886-2-2381-1632, 886-2-2381-1633 FAX: 886-2-2331-3433

台南市在家佛教立正佼成會

台灣台南市崇明 23 街 45 號
No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street, East District, Tainan City 701, Taiwan
TEL: 886-6-289-1478 FAX: 886-6-289-1488
Email: koseikaitainan@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai South Asia Division

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkok, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8216 FAX: 66-2-716-8218

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu

Ward No. 3, Jhamsikhel, Sanepa-1, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata North

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya Dharma Center

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patna Dharma Center

Rissho Kosei-kai of Central Delhi

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Singapore

Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

W.C. 73, Toul Sampaov Village, Sangkat Toul Sangke, Khan Reouseykeo,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

RKISA Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkok, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8141 FAX: 66-2-716-8218

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkok, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8216 FAX: 66-2-716-8218 Email: info.thairissho@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation

No. 628-A, Station Road, Hunupitiya, Wattala, Sri Lanka
TEL: 94-11-2982406 FAX: 94-11-2982405

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa

Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh

85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh
TEL/FAX: 880-31-626575

Rissho Kosei-kai Mayani

Mayani Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Damdama

Damdama Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Patiya

China Clinic, Patiya Sadar, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Satbaria

Village: Satbaria Bepari Para, Chandanaih, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Chendhirpuni,

Village: Chendhirpuni, P.O.: Adhunogar, P.S.: Lohagara, Chittagong,
Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Dhaka

408/8 DOSH, Road No 7 (West), Baridhara, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Laksham

Village: Dhupchor, Laksham, Comilla, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar

Ume Burmize Market, Tekpara, Sadar, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar, Ramu Shibu

Rissho Kosei-kai Raozan

Dakkhin Para, Ramzan Ali Hat, Raozan, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Buddiyskiy khram "Lotos"

4 Gruzinski Alley, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk 693005, Russia
TEL: 7-4242-77-05-14

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

(Address) 15F Express Tower, Peace avenue, khoro-1, Chingeltei district,
Ulaanbaatar 15160, Mongolia

(Mail) POBox 1364, Ulaanbaatar-15160, Mongolia

TEL: 976-70006960 Email: rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai of Erdenet

2F Ikh Mandal building, Khurenbulag bag, Bayan-Undur sum,
Orkhon province, Mongolia

Rissho Kosei-kai di Roma

Via Torino, 29, 00184 Roma, Italia

TEL/FAX: 39-06-48913949 Email: roma@rk-euro.org

Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK

Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris

Rissho Kosei-kai of Venezia

Rissho Kosei-kai International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

166-8537 東京都杉並区和田 2-7-1 普門メディアセンター 3F

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan

TEL: 03-5341-1230 FAX: 03-5341-1224 URL: <http://www.abc-rk.org>