

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



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Founder's Essay

The Two Practices of Revering Others

THE Lotus Sutra tells us about the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, who never stopped practicing reverence toward others, even when rocks were thrown at him and he was struck by people's canes.

Another example of practicing reverence is Shakyamuni Buddha's declaration that "Devadatta was my good friend," by which the Buddha teaches the practice of revering as your spiritual mentor an adversary who does you wrong.

Anyone who never forgets to observe these two practices of revering others qualifies as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

When we seek our own convenience, wanting it this way or that, it has entirely the opposite effect as the Lotus Sutra's two practices of reverence—

more often than not, it causes us to end up with a habitual frown on our face. When you do nothing but worry about everything, it tends to turn out just as you feared.

This is why no matter what happens to you and whatever kind of people you may come across, it's important to think to yourself, "This is an assignment given to me for my practice!"

If you are so resolved, you'll be able to think about everything from other points of view rather than being picky about what is good or bad, preferable or undesirable according to your own convenience. Then you'll gain the mettle to respond to whatever comes at you with everything you have.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 194–95

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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.

Speaking Eloquentlly

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Power of Words

The Bible's Gospel of John begins with the famous phrase, "In the beginning was the word." Certainly this phrase suggests that through the use of words, our human hearts have developed and progressed, doesn't it?

The "heart" that we human beings are given at birth—that is, the unvarnished emotions and thoughts that make a person—develops through our use of words in order to communicate with and express ourselves to others.

While this attests to how great the power of words is, on the other hand, the poet Shuji Terayama (1935–83) points out that "what modern people are losing is not such things as 'talking to each other,' but rather, 'being silent together.'" It could be that the evolution of the mind does not keep up with the development of words, or that the mind atrophies, for in many cases words are used as weapons to hurt others.

So, while the power of words is great, instead of talking a lot, it may be more important to take time to reflect upon ourselves in silence. What we talk about and how we communicate—including being silent together—are important parts of building better relationships.

Learning from Purna

In chapter 8 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Assurance of Buddhahood Given to the Five Hundred Disciples," Shakyamuni praises Purna, who is said to be foremost among the teachers of the Dharma, saying that "no one but he can so eloquently explain its doctrines" (that is, no one but Purna has such great ability to use and demonstrate the power of words). The words of Purna—who single-mindedly transmitted and taught the Dharma due to his "desire to make these people happy"—must have strongly resonated in people's minds.

In regard to how we should transmit the Dharma to people, the scripture teaches that we should bring joy to people's minds, understand that everyone we engage with has his or her own way of interpreting things, and make important points readily understandable, which seem to be things that people are capable of doing.





Eloquence does not mean that one has to be extremely knowledgeable and intelligent, or that they must speak as smoothly as water running down an upright plank. What is more important is a gentle attitude—which often makes the people you're talking to smile automatically—and exchanging words full of consideration. By doing this, the words you speak will naturally become kinder and easier to accept, and they will be well received in the minds of the people you talk to.

When you feel for the people you are talking to and communicate with consideration for their feelings as well as their circumstances, the words you choose will, I think, demonstrate a power equal to that of Purna.

However, there may be one area where we feel that the hurdle is high: communicating with people in a manner that makes important things readily understandable. The novelist Hisashi Inoue (1934–2010) wrote, about the way to use words, “make difficult things simple and simple things, profound,” and it may be that from Shakyamuni's time down to the present day, the basics of communicating with people has not changed very much.

However, it is one thing to say we understand this, but speaking so everyone can readily understand what is important when undertaking the dissemination of the Dharma is, nevertheless, difficult. In this regard, there are two helpful quotations from Inoue about how to write an essay: “simply and in easily understandable words” and “write in your own words about what you alone can write.”

If we talk about our personal experiences, we can speak in our own words. Talk frankly about the inspiration and realizations you have experienced. Since no one is perfect, even if you do not fully understand the teachings, speaking of what you yourself do know—with feelings of gratitude and happiness—will communicate important things that can be readily understood by anyone.

What inspirational experiences have you had this year? Now, what important things are you going to communicate to other people?

From *Kosei*, December 2019





How the Teaching Helps Me Control My Anger and Purify My Mind



Mr. Ruman Barua
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

This Dharma Journey talk was presented in the Great Sacred Hall on November 1, 2019, during the ceremony for the first day of the month (Uposatha Day).

MY name is Ruman Barua and I am a member of the Cox's Bazar chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh.

I was born in Cox's Bazar in 1974 to a Buddhist family of five: my parents, my elder sister, my elder brother, and me. As the youngest child, I was brought up with the ample love and attention of my family. I was a spoiled child who acted selfishly toward my brother and sister and demanded everything I wanted until I got it.

When I was a high school student, I engaged enthusiastically in extracurricular activities and was a popular student who everyone knew. I caught the eye of a politician in my town who invited me to join a political group of which he was a member. At that time, joining a political movement put you in danger. Soon after I became a member of the group, I found myself being targeted by Islamic fundamentalists.

To secure my safety and allow me to receive higher education, my parents sent me to Moscow a few years before the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. Life in

the Soviet Union was full of surprising experiences. As far as I knew then, it was a quiet and peaceful country, and I was especially fascinated by its rich natural environment.

Although the Soviet Union was a communist country, many religions were sending in missionaries. I was invited to join several religious groups, but not a single one was Buddhist.

One day, I visited a Christian church with a friend. I heard a beautiful sermon and learned about the compassion that Jesus Christ expounded. I met a Polish young man there who was seeking a religion. When I told him I was a Buddhist, he asked me what my religion taught. I was embarrassed by his question as I had not sought Buddhism seriously at that point and did not know much about it. By making an excuse that I had to return to the dormitory, I left the church as if fleeing from him. I met him again a few days later, but I again fled from him. I am still remorseful for not having been able to talk with him about Buddhism, as it might have been helpful in his spiritual quest.

After this happened, I became interested in learning about Buddhism and began looking for a Buddhist temple in the Soviet Union. I searched until I graduated high school and was about to return to Cox's Bazar, but I couldn't find any. (If I had found a Buddhist group and joined it, however, I may not have encountered Rissho Kosei-kai and learned the true teaching of the Buddha that Founder Nikkyo Niwano left for us to study and practice.)

Although Islam was made the state religion in Bangladesh in the 1980s, Buddhism is one of the religions permitted by the Bangladeshi government. I had studied Buddhism a little at school, but my faith



Mr. Barua delivers his Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall on November 1.

had remained the kind where I simply prayed for the Buddha to give me better scores on exams.

When I was young, I liked a Buddhist festival called Probarona Purnima very much. On the day of the festival I wore sunglasses, and, in cool clothes and expensive shoes, had fun with girlfriends after I worshipped at temples. I had always attended major Buddhist events in my hometown—my mother would tell me that I would receive good merits if I heard the Buddha’s teaching. Her words were always in my mind. She would also tell me I could go to heaven if I did a good thing, but that I would end up in hell if I did a bad thing.

As a child, I often told lies. Hoping to correct my bad habit, I went to Buddhist gatherings often to hear the Buddha’s teachings. During the gatherings, however, the monks only chanted sutras, the meaning of which I could not understand. I just repeated with other participants, “Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!”—which means “wonderful” in Bengali—after the monks chanted. The gatherings usually lasted two hours, but sometimes went for as long as five to six hours. We were not allowed to leave until the events finished, and we were told that we would incur severe punishments if we left. This made me dislike Buddhism, and I stopped attending the gatherings.

Some time later, when my dislike of Buddhism began to dissipate, Mr. Bobby Barua, a relative of mine, invited me to a Rissho Kosei-kai meeting held at the Cox’s Bazar chapter. I began to attend the center’s activities and soon found myself engaged in Dharma practice with diligence. After a while, I was appointed head of the chapter’s youth group.

Disseminating the Dharma in Bangladesh was a challenging task—it was not easy to transmit the Founder’s teaching of the One Vehicle to people who grew up in a Theravada Buddhist tradition. I focused on young people since I thought they were more open to new ideas. Many young people listened attentively to what I explained about Rissho Kosei-kai.

Together with four young members of the Cox’s Bazar chapter, I visited village after village to share the teaching with young people. We were able to set up hubs in several places where young members could gather, and these hubs developed into a network of young members after about two years. This network became a source of power for youth group activities.

Around this time, Rev. Norimasa Aritomi, minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh, asked if we could hold a youth conference in Cox’s Bazar for roughly ten thousand young people. I thought this was impossible, so I declined. Mr. Kanchan Barua, general affairs director of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh, then said to me, “Don’t worry. We all will stand by you.” Seeing Rev. Aritomi’s determined face, I made up my mind. Enthusiasm welled up in me when I heard Rev. Aritomi say that we would invite President-designate Kosho Niwano to attend.

When preparations for the conference began, however, some people tried to interfere with us. Many obstacles stood in our way, and I even felt that I became a target of potential physical violence. Some acquaintances of mine seemed to become envious of me and tried to disturb the project. I was angered and saddened by the interferences, but Rev. Aritomi encouraged me by saying that nothing is more difficult than Dharma dissemination. He told me about the hardship Shakyamuni Buddha went through when he disseminated the Dharma to people in ancient India. He also said that Founder Niwano faced unimaginable difficulties when he endeavored to establish Religions for Peace in 1970.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught us that the world we live in is filled with suffering and sorrow. Some people act in a self-centered way, speak ill of others, and even do harm to others. It is also true, however, that this world of suffering is none other than the place where we should work for other people’s happiness, just as the lotus flowers grow and bloom in a

muddy pond. I realized then that I should be like a lotus flower myself.

One day, Mr. Kanchan Barua said to me, “You have a lot of seeds of virtues, but if you harbor anger in your mind, the seeds of virtues cannot sprout.” I took his words seriously and remembered them often. I came to realize that my anger was a real impediment for me.

Six months after we began preparations, the youth group conference was held with great success, with thirteen thousand young people participating. This was the largest conference of Buddhist youths in the history of Bangladesh. I learned a lot of things from the conference, and many new youth group leaders were born. The name Rissho Kosei-kai came to be known throughout Bangladesh.

The Founder taught us that if you change, others will change. I was able to change when I learned through experience the teaching expounded in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.” In this chapter, the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect pays respect to and commends everyone he sees, saying that he could never find them unworthy of respect as they would all become buddhas, even though many of them ridicule or attack him.

I learned this teaching when I was receiving practical training in Dharma dissemination at the Nerima Dharma Center in Tokyo. Ms. Yasuko Kase, chapter head of the Nerima Dharma Center, mentored me during my training period. One day, she took me out for Dharma dissemination and we made visits to non-members’ homes. We brought copies of Rissho Kosei-kai’s monthly magazines, *Kosei* and *Yakushin*, to present to people who might be interested in them. We introduced ourselves to the residents through the entrance intercom, but most of the time there was no response or they told us they weren’t interested. Others told us not to bother them as they were busy. It was a discouraging experience for me.

During lunch, I asked Ms. Kase if she felt humiliated or discouraged when people we visited treated us in an unfriendly manner. That was when Ms. Kase told me the story of the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect. She said, “Connecting people to the teaching is not the sole purpose of Dharma dissemination. Another important purpose is to purify our hearts through it. Some people may have doubts toward our religion and throw unfriendly remarks at us. But we should persevere and continue our efforts to transmit the Dharma. Through the practice of dissemination, we can cleanse our minds by getting rid of our selfish ego and anger.”

As a matter of fact, I possessed a strong ego and often harbored anger. After learning the teaching about the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, I began to be capable of controlling my anger little by little. I was pleased to hear Rev. Aritomi speak about this during a gathering at the Cox’s Bazar chapter—he said I was able to control my anger better than before. Although I still can’t control my anger perfectly, if I compare my present self with the past self, I feel I have changed a lot and I am proud of myself.

Thanks to my fellow members in the sangha, I have become able to look at myself in light of the Buddha’s teaching. I’ve realized that Buddhism is a teaching of wisdom. I am now practicing the teaching by keeping in mind a phrase in “Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures”: “May we, with all the living beings, embrace the riches of the sutras and make our wisdom as wide and deep as the sea.”

I would like to conclude my Dharma Journey talk by making a pledge to purify my mind and devote myself throughout my life, as is expounded in the Members’ Vow, “to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries, and to the world.” Thank you very much for your attention.

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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 12, Devadatta

(1)

In the preceding chapter, “The Appearance of the Jeweled Stupa,” the great truth was made plain: that people’s true nature is the buddha-nature. Accordingly, to perceive that one’s own true nature is the buddha-nature is the first and highest way to perfect oneself as a true human being. Indeed, whoever fully attains this perception is none other than a buddha. Therefore, any person at all—be it an evil person despised by the world or a toddler—who fully awakens to his or her own buddha-nature, if he or she firmly believes it, will become a buddha.

The teaching of awakening to one’s own buddha-nature is developed in the present chapter, “Devadatta,” which is made up of two parts, the first dealing with an evil man’s attainment of buddhahood and the second with a woman’s attainment of buddhahood.

Attainment of Buddhahood by Evil People

The chapter opens as Shakyamuni tells a story about himself in a previous life, when for a very long time he was a king. He had not been content with his life of ease and kept seeking a doctrine of truth (the Wondrous Dharma). For the sake of finding such a doctrine, he didn’t mind giving up his entire way of living, and he announced to his kingdom that he would become the servant of any person who might teach him how all people could be liberated.

After a while, a hermit came to him and said that he knew the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma, by which all people could be liberated, and that he would instruct the king if the king would keep his word.

Then and there, the king became the hermit’s servant. He gathered fruit and nuts, drew water,

attended to all of his needs, and even went so far as to lie on the ground so that his master the hermit might sit and rest on his body. Laboring in this way, he could hear the supreme teaching.

This story is repeated in verse. Then, Shakyamuni announces that his own attainment of enlightenment had a distant but major connection with his practice and austerity in this previous life, and that the hermit who had taught him was none other than Devadatta in a previous life. Owing to this good friendship with Devadatta, he had thus become a buddha and been enabled to liberate many living beings. He then declares that at a time far in the future, and after long practice, Devadatta will become a buddha.

Now, this Devadatta was Shakyamuni’s cousin, numbered among the disciples. Although he was sharp of mind, his spirit was warped and he became





opposed to everything, breaking up the harmony of the sangha and even making attempts on Shakyamuni's life, so evil a man he was. The listeners are greatly astonished and strangely moved to hear Shakyamuni say that such a great traitor was his own good friend, that it was thanks to Devadatta that he had become a buddha, and that at last Devadatta too would become a buddha.

An Unwavering Spirit of Gratitude

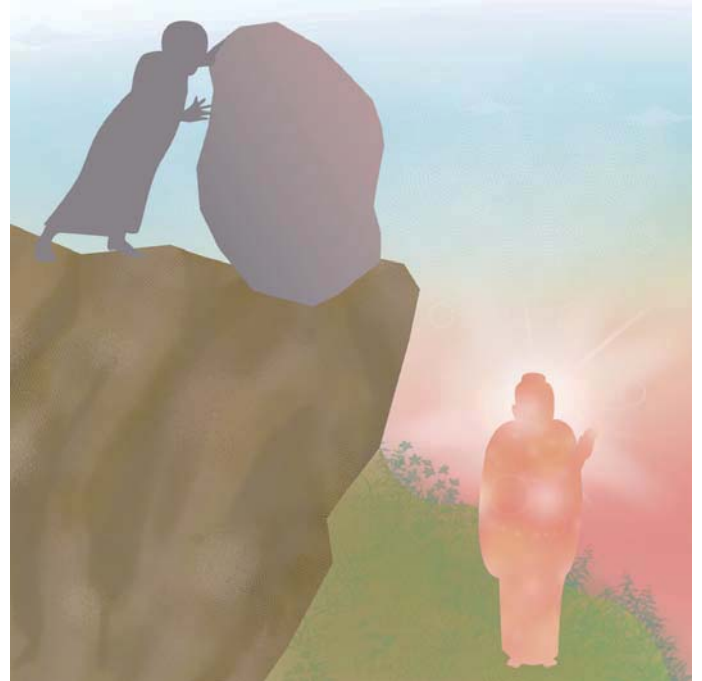
We may wonder here why Shakyamuni describes this story of his previous life and says that all was “due to the good friendship of Devadatta.” But to one with so pure a spirit as Shakyamuni, all things—whether good or evil—are causes of enlightenment. So, naturally he feels gratitude for all things in heaven and earth, for whatever transpired helped him toward enlightenment.

This is a lesson we must learn from Shakyamuni's unwavering spirit of gratitude: that all things, both good and bad, are to be seen as causes of deeper enlightenment for which we may be grateful. This is the first essential point of this chapter.

A further question one may ask is why an evil man like Devadatta was also granted buddhahood. Well, even though the evil he had done became a cause of Shakyamuni's deepening enlightenment, Devadatta did not deserve the credit for it, nor did it cancel out the evil he had done. Thus, there is no connection between the gratitude to Devadatta and the assurance of his buddhahood.

Shakyamuni uses the example of Devadatta to drive home, in a startling and dramatic way, the truth he has expounded over and over: that all human beings possess the buddha-nature equally. Shakyamuni uses this brilliant skillful means to allow all people to see their buddha-nature for themselves.

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. 121–26.



Let Us Share Our Joy of Faith with Many People!

HAVING entered December, the year's end is approaching. How was 2019 for you?

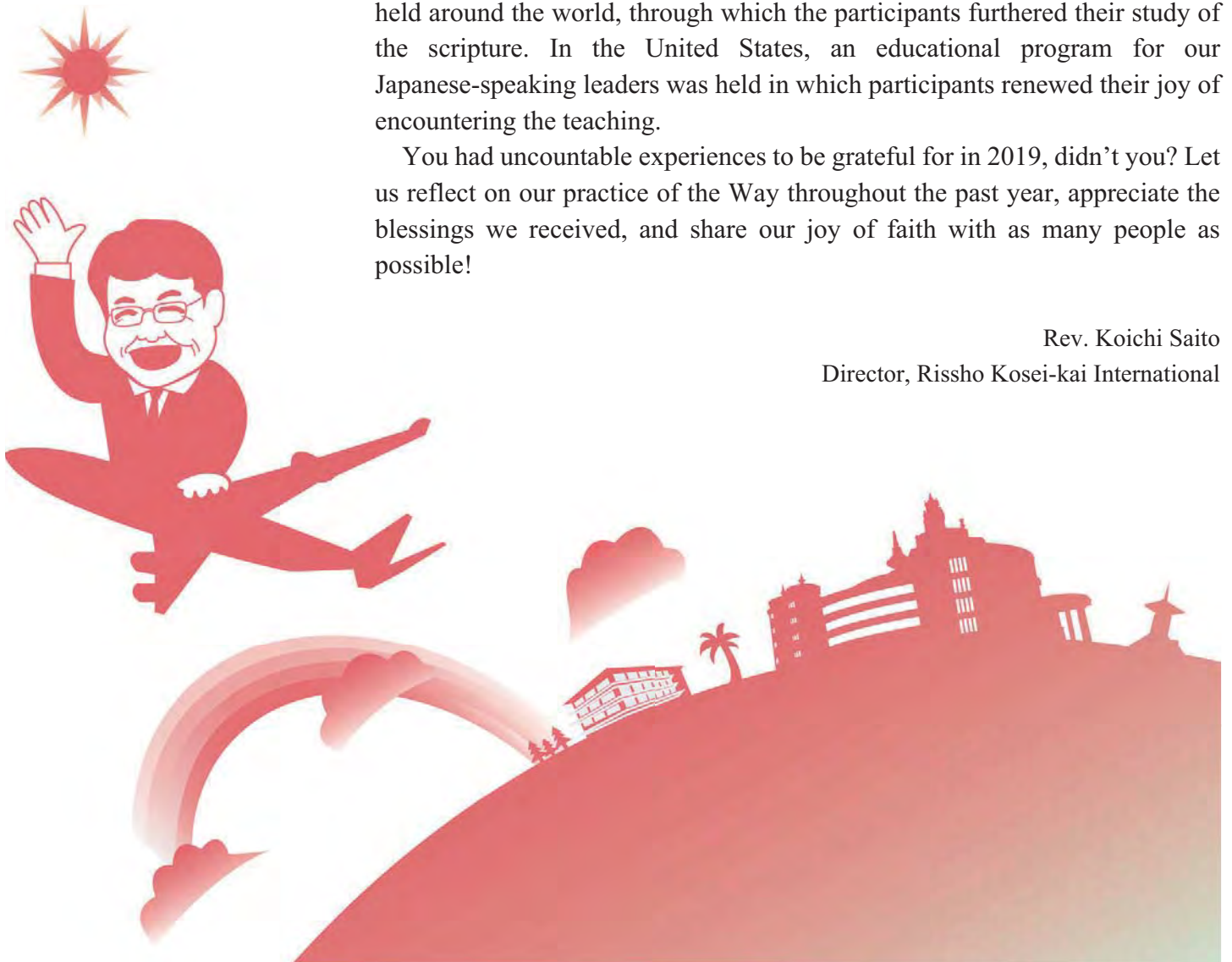
This year, Rissho Kosei-kai commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of Dharma dissemination in the United States and celebrated the anniversary of our Dharma centers in Hawaii (sixtieth anniversary, March 31), Los Angeles (sixtieth anniversary, October 6), and San Francisco (fortieth anniversary, September 29). Many overseas members received the focus of devotion (a statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni) to enshrine in their home altars and many others received Dharma Teacher qualification. All of these members pledged to engage in further bodhisattva practice.

This month, a Dharma Teacher qualification ceremony will be held in Bangkok by Rissho Kosei-kai's South Asia division. It will be the first time that this presentation is performed overseas.

In South and East Asia, many members participated in seminars for dissemination leaders and youth leaders. Seminars on the Lotus Sutra were held around the world, through which the participants furthered their study of the scripture. In the United States, an educational program for our Japanese-speaking leaders was held in which participants renewed their joy of encountering the teaching.

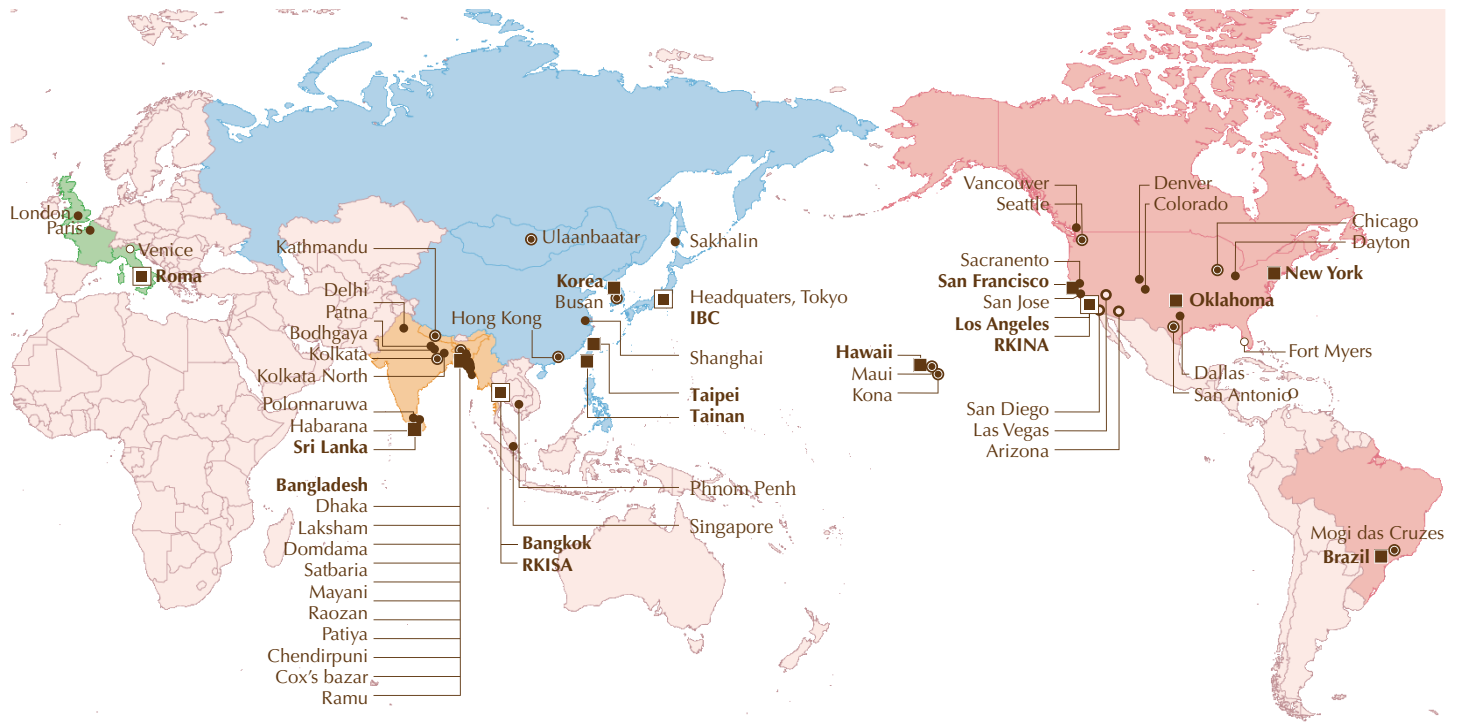
You had uncountable experiences to be grateful for in 2019, didn't you? Let us reflect on our practice of the Way throughout the past year, appreciate the blessings we received, and share our joy of faith with as many people as possible!

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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