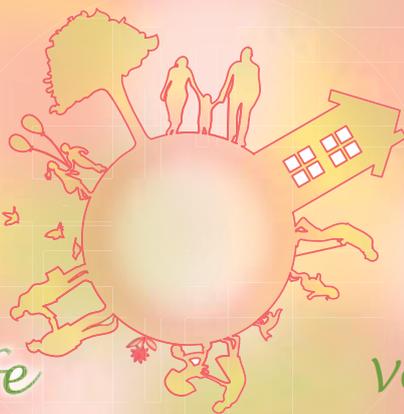


Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

2
2018

VOL. 149



🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

Success and Failure

NOBODY likes to fail, but aren't more people among the young so terribly afraid of failure that they don't do, and can't accomplish, anything? If you fret about the results before beginning things you'll never be able to do anything.

In any case, first give it your best shot and see what happens, and if you don't get the results you've hoped for, you can give it another try. Even Shakyamuni Buddha did this. For six years he pursued harsh ascetic practices that could have taken years off his life, but abandoned them once he realized they were not the way to enlightenment.

We think it's a tremendous failure if all the trouble someone goes through to graduate from a university doesn't contribute to their advancement. But, unless

you have toiled for several years at college you are in no position to tell if it is a waste of time or not. There is nothing in this world which is useless or a waste of time, because success is the flip side of these failures. Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment would have been unattainable without those six years he risked his life practicing asceticism.

What looks like success or failure in our eyes are two sides of the same coin. We never ever forget the lessons we learn through the humiliation of failure. If we give everything our best, our failures will lead to success, and if we are arrogant about our successes then failure awaits us.

From *Kaisozuikan 9* (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 88–89

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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.

Life Is a Solemn Matter

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Living Solemnly

This month's theme is "life is a solemn matter" and, to begin with, the life of each and every person, seen at any point during the process of "birth, aging, sickness, and death," is nothing other than a solemn event. Although we are usually unaware of this, we are all leading solemn lives. Therefore, we could say that the key to making life a solemn matter is to clearly know this fact and live with an awareness of this truth.

However, looking up "solemnity" in the dictionary, it says, "a solemn feeling, character, or appearance; serious or awesome quality; and gravity," and were we to always maintain such an air, we would come to feel that we could not possibly live with such stiff formality. This must be why someone said in the most easily understandable terms that "living solemnly means living, from the perspective of impermanence, by making the most of the present moment." It is important to live attentively, without wasting a single day, a single hour, or even this single minute or second now before our eyes.

This kind of comprehension creates mental space and, therefore, your emotions become relaxed, calm, and gentle, and you can get along well with the people around you and enjoy being with them. The accumulation of such time can be called a happy and solemn life.

Zen master Ikkyu (1394–1481) left us a Buddhist poem that reads, "I have no desire / to turn into a buddha / after I have died; / rather, while I still have life, / I must be a good person." As suggested in the poem, by deeply reflecting on the truth that, instead of waiting to become dignified after going to the next world, we are already leading dignified lives right now in this *saha* world, we should move forward, with certainty, from one day to the next. As I am always saying, because we all possess the buddha-nature, anyone can awaken to the truth. If you accept that "This *saha* world is already the Land of Tranquil Light," then you will continue to lead your life as a solemn, dignified matter.



Turning On the Switch in Your Mind

The educator Yoshio Toi (1912–1991), who composed many excellent Buddhist poems, was the principal of an elementary school. One day he saw the following statement posted in a classroom:

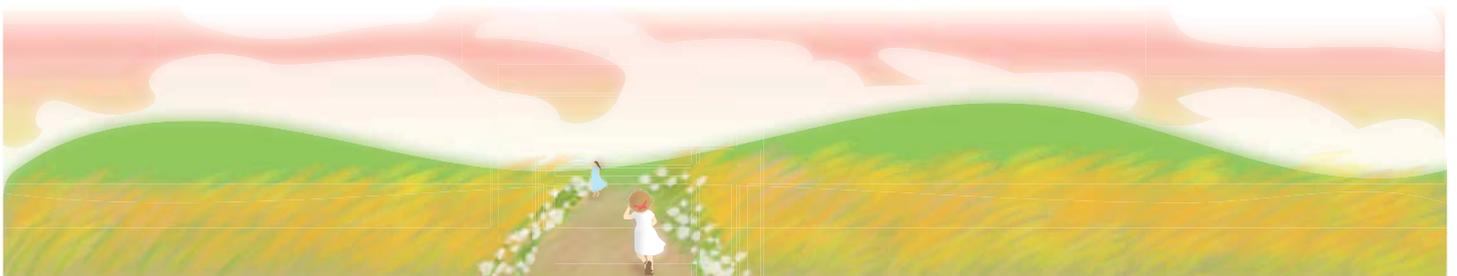
“It has become really cold, / but don't linger / in bed forever. / How about turning on the switch / in your mind with a ‘click’ / and getting up with a ‘pop’? / Just like the ‘click’ turns on the switch / and the ‘pop’ makes the lights come on, / let's start every morning with a ‘click’ and a ‘pop.’” (*Inochi no oshie* [Teachings on life], Kosei Publishing, 1992)

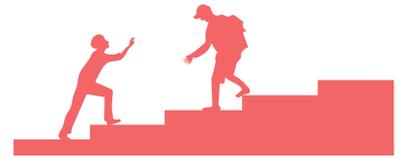
Right now, we are in the coldest time of the year, and while I suppose that for all of us, there is something likely that comes to mind, this “click and a pop” can be useful in many different scenarios. It is fine to try turning on the switch in your mind when up against something you are not very good at doing, and it may also help you to realize the truth in the course of your daily life.

In the morning, when you offer prayers before the Buddhist home altar; when you are leaving the house to go to school, your workplace, or your Dharma center; or when you say “good morning” and exchange greetings with people—why don't you take one such everyday event and make it the opportunity to “turn on the switch in your mind” so that you can “click” on your mind and turn on the electric current of the truth. By doing so, the “lamp of the truth” that inspires you with the sentiment that “all day today, I will be caring toward the people I encounter and I will make good use of my time” comes on and with a “pop” it lights up your mind. *Arigato*, a Japanese word expressing gratitude, is derived from the word *arigatai*, which reflects the solemn reality that we are “existing, here and now” and, therefore, it is perfectly suited to turning on the “switch in your mind” in order to deeply reflect on the truth. When we have made this a personal habit, then even if we are not particularly aware of it, our daily lives will naturally become dignified.

Before entering nirvana, Shakyamuni said, “Everything goes on changing. Without slacking, be diligent in the practice.” At the Anniversary of Shakyamuni's Entrance into Nirvana, I hope we will direct our thoughts toward the mind of Shakyamuni, who, facing his own death, expounded anew the teaching of impermanence to promote diligent practice.

From *Kosei*, February 2018





Getting Connected with Others Cheerfully, Kindly, and Warmheartedly



by Mrs. Sung Suunkhee
Korean Dharma Center

This Dharma Sharing (Spiritual Journey) speech by Mrs. Sung Suunkhee was presented at the ceremony for the First Day of the Month and the Uposatha Day held at the Great Sacred Hall on November 1, 2017.

I WAS born in 1955 on a small southwestern island of South Korea. A year later, my father died, so my mother went out to a large city to work. I was left in my maternal grandparents' house, and grew up receiving their abundant affection. When I was ten years old, my mother got married again. Since her new husband had six children from his previous marriage, my mother worried if I might have hard times with them. So that I would be able to receive satisfactory school education, as well, she decided to entrust me to my aunt in Busan. Six years later, my stepfather lost his property because of a sudden change in the governmental policy, and committed suicide in despair. My mother became a single parent again at the age of thirty-nine.

My mother devoted herself to work to raise my younger brother and me. But I took her effort for granted, and have never expressed my appreciation to her. Moreover, I was rude to her and did not talk to her at home. I decided everything by myself. After I graduated university, I started to work at a British

company, and when I was twenty-seven years old, I married a man who I met in the workplace.

The reality did not go as I expected, however. I was good at school studies, but I was not a type of person who could always tidy things up and keep the house clean. I had little sense of economy, either, and I used whatever money I had, and did not care if we were out of money. So, I often quarreled with my husband, who wanted to keep everything tidy and in order. His words and attitude pointed out every error I made, which hurt my self-esteem, but I could not communicate to him how I felt honestly and I held my feelings within. I converted my pent-up frustration into negative energy, which I poured into my children's education. When my elder son didn't do as I wished, I threw him out of the house, and I even tore apart my elder daughter's mathematics textbook. My children were always reading my expression, worrying if I might suddenly get angry at them, so they kept quiet in front of me. But gradually the problem brought to the fore. My elder son lost his smile and became taciturn, although he was doing well in school. The suppressed anger of my elder daughter, who was self-willed, brought out a tic disorder. My second daughter took money from home and gave it to her friends. She also began telling lies. In addition, my husband began to live with a woman who was tidy and obedient; they even had a child together. Shortly thereafter, my husband's company, which had been doing well, bounced a check. I borrowed money from Mrs. Kim Seon-ja who lived near my home, who later guided me to Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings.

I first visited the Korean Dharma Center on July 15, 1995, and it became my second birthday. The guidance I heard on that day was, "If you change,



Mrs. Sung delivers her Dharma Sharing speech in the Great Sacred Hall.

others will change accordingly.” For me, a person who had always tried to change everyone and everything other than myself, the phrase was truly novel and attractive. I felt my eyes were opened when I learned the principle of causation that “the outcomes change unlimitedly depending on what kind of connections we build with others, here and now.” Soon after that, I had the comprehensive posthumous name for ancestors of my family enshrined in the home Buddhist altar, and started to hold devotionals every morning and evening. I also began the three practices (exchanging morning greetings, responding clearly and positively when called by others, and arranging our shoes together neatly). Such was all that I did, but my children said I had become gentle and our home had become cheerful after I started to visit Rissho Kosei-kai. I was surprised by the result of these simple practices. However, my understanding of the teachings was still very shallow. I thought, “I want to make my mother-in-law hear the passage in the *Kyoten* (Sutra Readings) ‘Make a miserly one give rise to the mind of generosity,’ or my husband, rather than I, must listen to the passage ‘Make an angry one give rise to the mind of forbearance.’” I judged them in my mind. My mother-in-law might have detected what I had thought and told me, “Something bad will happen if you go to that Japanese Buddhism temple.” As she was strongly opposed to my going to Rissho Kosei-kai, I was not able to visit the Dharma center for two years. But, thanks to the head of the Dharma dissemination group of Korean Rissho Kosei-kai at that time who kindly arranged for me to take part in the memorial services or *hoza* meetings at a member’s home near my house, I remained connected to the Dharma.

In 1998, Kina, the second daughter of my neighbor Mrs. Pak Yeong-hui, who was a tenth grader, began unable to go to school because of an unidentified physical and psychological pain. Mrs. Pak cried every day. I took Kina to the Korean Dharma Center by coaxing her, while she was resisting all the way.

The late Rev. Kyoko Lee, the minister of the Dharma center at the time, made a toast for her and asked her, “Kina, how many things can you find here and now, for which you can be thankful?” She has hands to hold the toast, a mouth to eat it, water to wash her hands before and after eating, and so on; that day, with a help of people around her, Kina found lots of things she is thankful for, actually more numerous than she could count, and went home joyfully. Then from the next day on she became capable of going to school every day. On that day, I was strongly moved by the kindheartedness of Rev. Lee, who made most of this first meeting with Kina to get connected with her firmly.

Rev. Lee spoke to me also that “You also must practice diligently.” I was always reading the faces of my mother-in-law and my husband and I could not go to the Dharma center. But my desire to learn this wondrous teaching was very strong and I gathered courage to start visiting the center again. I couldn’t wait to participate in *hoza* sessions. When I asked for guidance from Rev. Lee about various problems of mine, I always was taught that my ignorance was the original cause of the problems. I was at first frustrated when I was told that the cause of my husband’s affair was within me, not my husband or the woman, but the guidance made me feel refreshed. Although I wanted to apologize to my husband for my coldheartedness to have ignored him in my heart, I couldn’t convey my feelings directly to him. So I expressed my apology by writing a letter to him. I apologized for making him feel deserted, which had eventually caused him to create a family with another woman and have a child, for which he must have felt sorry. I was pleased to be able to tell my honest feelings and I was proud of my being able to do it, more than I was concerned about my husband’s reactions.

When you introduce Rissho Kosei-kai to people in South Korea, if you say it is a religious group coming from Japan, some people try to keep distance because they remember bitter experience during the Japanese

Spiritual Journey

occupation of Korea, or because some others confuse Rissho Kosei-kai with another religious group in Japan whose members also chant *o-daimoku*. Moreover, they reject the enshrinement of the Buddha image or their ancestors in the house at first because of cultural differences. But their minds will change when they get in touch with the teachings of Founder Nikkyo Niwano and President Nichiko Niwano. They will become liberated and grow spiritually by practicing the teachings diligently. In addition, seeing other members become happy together with their family and people around them, their own faith in the teachings will deepen gradually. I enjoyed visiting members' houses for *michibiki* (guiding people to Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings) and *tedori* (supporting the members in the Way) together with senior leaders. I guided my relatives and acquaintances to Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings and received the headquarters-bestowed Gohonzon in 1999. I became the publication distribution director, and in 2009 I was appointed as the head of the Dharma dissemination group and a chapter leader. I was also glad to make humble contribution to translation and publication projects, including the publication of *Monthly Kyo-seong*. Working on books and magazines was a happy moment for me. My understanding of the teachings was superficial, or only a piece of knowledge, however, but I was arrogant enough to misunderstand that I had made the teachings my own.

Mrs. G, an area leader, visited the Dharma center every day and often went for *tedori*. But she was suffering from troubled relationships between her daughters. I advised her to understand and accept her daughters' feelings and praise them as a means of improving their relations. However, she told me harshly, "I can't follow your advice because I don't find pleasure in practicing the teachings. It is because you don't accept me." That moment, I realized my mistake. I realized that I was a very coldhearted person, who did not sympathize with Mrs. G and instead only tried to make her understand the teach-

ings logically. Rev. Lee, on the other hand, recognized and praised all people impartially and was always standing by them, which made everyone feel as if he or she was loved by her more than anyone else. To repay my thanks to her, I made up my mind to be a person who could connect with people impartially, and also cheerfully, kindly, and warmheartedly. I am thankful to Mrs. G from the heart for giving me this important lesson.

There are many senior leaders who have practiced the Dharma single-mindedly since the beginning of Korean Rissho Kosei-kai. My daily interaction with them, all of whom are unique and remarkable, was valuable practice for me to correct my behavior and mind-set that were hard to change. Thanks to this practice, the relationship with my mother-in-law also improved. Four years ago, my mother-in-law was paralyzed below her neck after she had a surgery to remove tumor in cervical vertebrae. Thanks to the teachings and practice, I was able to take care of her with all my heart. She passed away two years ago, but until then I had recited the Threefold Lotus Sutra at her bedside every morning and evening, communicated with her closely, and cared for her body and soul. All of them are fond memories for me now.

Four months after my mother-in-law's passing, my own mother got food caught in her throat and died. It was so sudden, and I regretted deeply and blamed myself, as it happened exactly as I had thought that the time had finally come for me to repay the kindness received from my mother. It was then that I found relief in the words of President Niwano, "The true performance of filial piety starts after the parents are gone. It involves practicing the bodhisattva way through the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and becoming a person who can make others happy."

I have devoted myself to the practice of the teachings for twenty years by keeping in mind Rev. Lee's guidance, "Before everything else, enlarge your spiritual capacity," which she gave me when my husband's company bounced a check with huge

debts. My four children have all grown up now. They are serving the society in their respective places and are taking good care of me. My elder daughter graduated from Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary and is working in Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo. And the strong and kind father, whom I have longed for the most, is with us, close by.

I might have led a worthless life while I was bestowed with a precious life as a human being. Having encountered Rissho Kosei-kai, however, I was enabled to live a magnificent life, in which I can always practice "putting others first," walking the Way toward the objective of perfecting the character. When I realized that all things I have gone through were the Buddha's arrangements to guide me to the Way and that I had been born with a vow to guide people to attain buddhahood, all of my past experiences have turned into a valuable treasure.

This year, Korean Rissho Kosei-kai marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of its founding. The present minister, Rev. Sachiko Lee, is the daughter of Rev. Lee. She speaks fluent Japanese and she translates the teachings of the Founder and the President into Korean for us correctly, instantly, and warmly, for which I am truly grateful. I pledge to make best effort to share with many people in South Korea the true teaching of the Buddha and the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, which the Founder had expounded for us in easy-to-understand, everyday terms, and continue to walk the Way that will lead us all to happiness.



Mrs. Sung gives a lecture at the Korean Dharma Center.

The 7 Parables of the Lotus Sutra

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower
of the Wonderful Dharma
Chapter 5: The Parable of the Plants

The Parable of the Plants and Trees

It happened on a very hot day; the sunlight was strong and baked the ground dry. Then, a dense cloud spread out across the whole sky, enveloping the entire world, and rain poured down everywhere in the same way. Throughout the world there were various types of plants and trees. The rain fell on all of them equally and moistened the ground all over the world.



There were large, medium-sized, and small trees; herbs; and other kinds of plants. Their roots, stalks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits received the blessing of rain equally, and began to shine vividly. Even though they receive the rain from the same cloud impartially, the amount of moisture each of them takes differs according to their size and kind. A large tree needs a lot of moisture while a small herb needs only a little. Each of them grows and matures according to its own nature, blooms, and produces fruits.

A large tree has its own role in the forest, and so does a small tree. A small tree is not inferior to a larger one. All plants and trees live their lives to their fullest, according to their innate nature. As everyone performs their own role, the whole world becomes alive.



Commentary

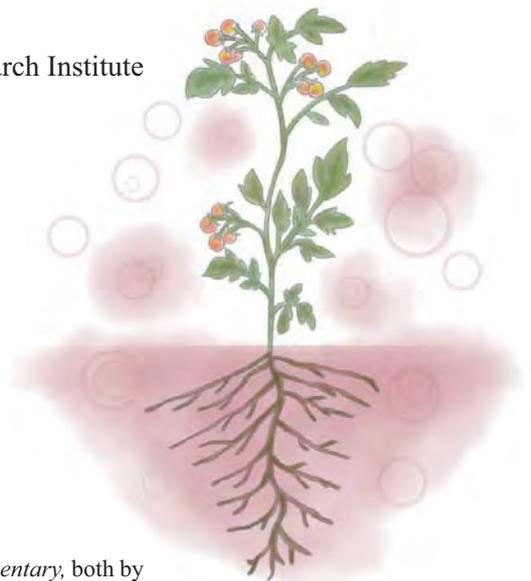
The dried ground baked by the strong sunlight indicates that we live among worries and various kinds of suffering. The large cloud symbolizes the Buddha, and the blessed rain represents his teachings. As plants and trees are waiting for the rain, we are awaiting something to quench the thirst in our hearts. The Buddha as a large cloud covers the whole world and pours down the rain of the teachings on everything equally. As all people have different characters and abilities, and the circumstances in which they grew up are different, they accept the teachings in different ways. But they all can grow in proportion to their respective abilities.

The roots, stalks, branches, and leaves symbolize faith, precepts, meditation, and wisdom, respectively. Roots, the vital part of plants and trees, symbolize faith. Because we have faith, we can keep the precepts, or the rules that people who take refuge in the Buddha's teachings must follow. Keeping the precepts, in turn, brings us to the state of meditation, in which we can concentrate on the truth and do not waver. As we enter the state of meditation, we can obtain the supreme wisdom. However strong their roots may be, plants will eventually die if their branches and leaves wither or if their stalks are cut. Religious practice begins with faith, and culminates in wisdom by way of precepts and meditation, and all of these four aspects are essential for any religious practice.

Just as there is difference in the size of plants and trees, there are all kinds of differences in the characters and abilities of human beings. However, even though we have differences, all of us are a noble existence if we demonstrate our full potential according to our own abilities. You do not need to feel inferior when you see a tree larger than you. We are just like plants and trees that grow from the same soil, and we all live in one life. We are sustained by the great compassion of the Buddha. In this sense, although we have superficial differences to one another, we are all equal.

There is a meaning in itself that all people are different in their appearances and abilities while they all receive the Buddha's life equally. It is important to know what kind of roles we have in our lives. To perform our roles in the world to the best of our abilities means practicing the bodhisattva way, which is symbolized in this story as flowers. We will definitely be able to attain the buddhahood, symbolized as fruits in the story, if we continue practicing the way with diligence.

Editorial supervision by the Chuo Academic Research Institute



*Commentary is based on *Buddhism for Today* and *The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary*, both by Nikkyo Niwano.



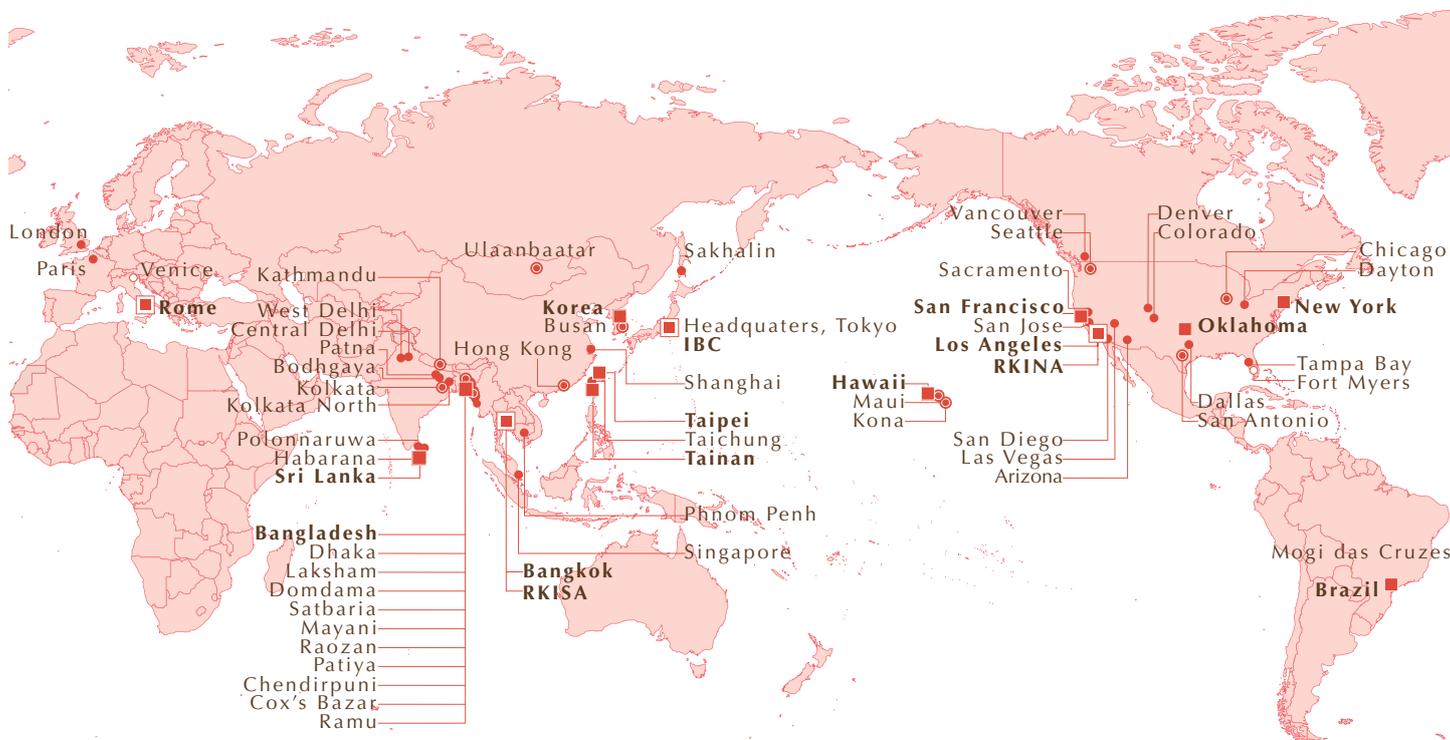
Toward a True and Independent Faith

MANY of you may feel that a new year has really begun when the annual midwinter sutra recitation is over. I think this is because our mind and body are purified, and we are able to make a new year's vow while we are reading the whole Threefold Lotus Sutra. It would be nicer if we have an objective in our minds when we are taking part in the religious practice.

In the New Year's Message, President Niwano teaches us the importance of working on one objective with concentration. We should make an effort toward a single objective, and when it is achieved, we set a new objective. The repetition of this is a process of reinvigoration, or continuous creation, which is an important process toward a true and independent faith. I hope that we would always have an objective in our minds, and constructively approach the things we encounter every day with a renewed spirit.

Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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