

The Trunk of a Tree Takes Priority over Its Branches and Leaves

SOMETIMES you have a meeting that ultimately fails to reach any conclusion, despite heated discussions that go on all day long. This happens when you fuss over nothing but minor details which are unrelated to the basic points.

If you hold discussions with people having determined how much you can contribute to further a project along, and have also decided how much you are willing to sacrifice to do so, you will reach a decision right away. But instead you harangue people with all the reasons that you can't do something. When you look at why your meeting ended that way, you'll find that it was because you had been intent on making sure you didn't wind up at a disadvantage.

A tree can become overgrown, and when it does its

branches and leaves thicken so much that they obstruct the breeze and block out the sunlight, causing the tree to wither. For an organization too, if it is careless it will attach great importance to its branches and leaves that have grown too lush, and with everyone worrying only about their own divisions, the organization tends to lose sight of the basics.

The aim of Rissho Kosei-kai lies in helping people embark on the Buddha Way, so that we travel the Way together with others to reach true happiness. To keep our eyes fixed on this basic point, we have to wisely decide what branches to trim and which to preserve.

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

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

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

Living Joyfully

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Which Is More Enjoyable?

To bring up a topic from a little while ago, in late January–early February of this year, Japan had a series of very large snowfall that blanketed the whole country. The snow fell during the time of one of Rissho Kosei-kai's annual observances, midwinter religious training (*kanshugyo*), in which members gather at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo or at local Dharma centers in the predawn darkness to recite the Threefold Lotus Sutra during the coldest time of the year. It seems that there were many members who were unable to make it to their Dharma centers. There was so much snow that at times it caused delays in the Tokyo transit system. At the time of the snowfall, someone made the following comment at the Great Sacred Hall.

“Why does it have to snow like this, just when I am going to the trouble of practicing midwinter religious training?”

Of course, it may be natural for people to grumble because the snow makes it difficult for them to leave home early in the morning and get to their Dharma centers by car, bus, or train.

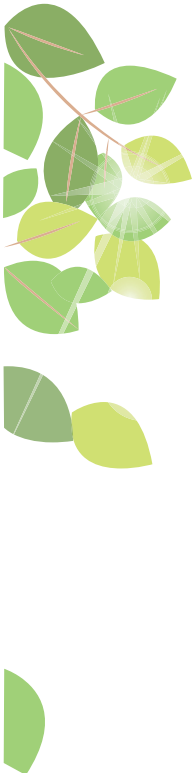
On the other hand, someone else said, “I am glad that, thanks to the snow, I have been able to perform the midwinter religious training in the truest sense!”

The question that I want to ask all of you is this: Which person's viewpoint do you think represents the more enjoyable way of life? I think that the second person will be declared the winner. The second person did not say anything particularly difficult. What is wonderful about the second point of view is this ability to see the changes in the natural world with humble eyes and accept them, just the way they are. Why is it, though, that merely accepting things humbly like this makes you feel as if you have thrown off the cold and the sleepiness for yourself and for the people around you?

I think that the difference is whether or not you are seeing things with right view.

The Middle Way (Moderation) Is Important

We may be apt to think that the right view of Buddhism's Eightfold Path is something we cannot easily have or that is attainable only by enlightened persons, because we feel overwhelmed by the weight of the word “right.” Some people might immediately reply



that “seeing things from right view” means “doing the impossible,” but, as with the previously mentioned example of the snowy day, seeing the workings of the natural world for what they are—that is right view, isn’t it?

Right view also means seeing things by accepting whatever happens in a broadminded way—including what dissatisfies you or makes you angry when you see it with a wrong view or biased view, in other words, self-centered views—and, as a result, it puts your feelings at ease. It is certainly quite difficult to fully grasp such matters as the Buddha’s wisdom and the real aspect of all things, but a way of seeing things (wisdom) like the example of the snowy day must be already at work, naturally, in the course of our daily lives.

Recently, a man who was released from the hospital after heart surgery calmly said that, “Up until now, I was never grateful for the fact that my heart was beating. However, that is not something to take for granted.” When I heard this, I felt as if I were being taught anew what right view really means.

Without your willing it to do so, your heart goes on beating, without resting. When that man looked directly at this natural providence, his refreshed feelings erased the anxiety of illness. That he felt completely at ease could be perceived from his expression. I was taught anew that if we see, from the perspective of right view, the fact that we are alive here and now, then even sickness can become the object of our gratitude.

To see things in the light of the truths of this world—All things are impermanent; All things are devoid of separate self; All phenomena are characterized by suffering—indicates right view, the first component of the Eightfold Path, which teaches us the true way to eliminate suffering. This is the basis, and we could also call this the entirety, of living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha.

Since Buddhism teaches us a way of life, namely the Middle Way, which is neither suffering from overindulgence in pleasure nor being restrained by asceticism or abstinence, our religious practice should therefore not be difficult. On this occasion, taking into consideration the meaning of the word “right,” I hope to continue learning the Eightfold Path for some time, together with all of you.

From Kosei, May 2018





Learning the Importance of Consideration for Others



By Mr. Pedro Cazella Netto
Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil

This Dharma journey speech was presented at the ceremony for the Founder Nikkyo Niwano's Entrance into Nirvana at Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil in São Paulo on October 8, 2017.

THE Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, please guide me. President Niwano, please guide me. Everyone, please guide me.

My name is Pedro Cazella Netto and I work as an architect. I am single. Instead of keeping animals as pets, I grow two small plants as if they are my pets.

My first encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai was in 2010. I play the shakuhachi, the Japanese bamboo flute. One day, when I was to give a concert with players of other instruments and a chorus group, a rehearsal was held at the Brazil Dharma Center in São Paulo; it was then that I visited the Dharma center for the first time.

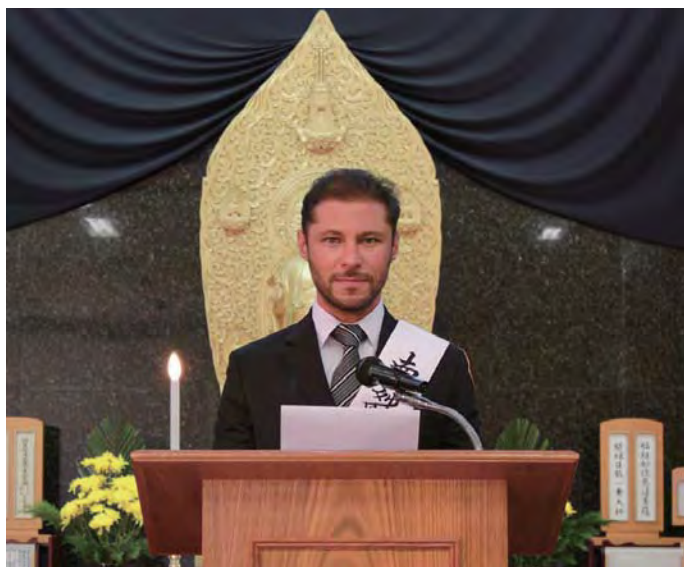
Until then I had hoped to study Buddhism and had read several books about Buddhism, but I had never visited a Buddhist temple. When I was a child, I went to a Catholic school and received a Catholic education. I also received baptism, and I had a very fulfilling childhood. Later, as a school student, I took part in charity activities, collecting groceries and clothes

to give to the poor. I also participated in the street theater to praise Jesus Christ. On Christmas Eve, I helped Santa Claus distribute presents for underprivileged children.

However, I gradually began to feel that something was lacking, and distanced myself from the Catholic faith. When I was looking for a faith best suited for me, I encountered Rissho Kosei-kai. I was warmly welcomed and accepted by members at the Dharma center and I began to gradually participate in the Dharma center's activities.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, I learned a lot of things. Not to criticize others was one of them. I learned that if people do things that you would think inappropriate, there is a purpose or reason that people do so. I also learned that I should not grieve if things do not go as I wish. This sounds somewhat difficult to do, but what it means is that we should change our "lenses" through which we look at things if things do not proceed as we desire. And, most of all, I learned that there is a reason for everything that happens.

Since I was a small child, my parents would often quarrel in front of me. Whenever they had a quarrel, they asked me how they had to behave as parents. As their son, my mind was occupied with my parents' quarrels, and I was always thinking how I could be a help to them. At present I make it a habit to jot down in my notebook pieces of teachings I learned in the Dharma center, and when I am talking with my mother on the phone I try reading from them or positively communicating my father's good points to her. Gradually, I also began to talk about the teachings with my father. When I shared what I had learned with my parents, that Buddhism teaches us is not to blame others but to be the first to apologize, they



Mr. Netto delivers his personal spiritual experience in the Brazil Dharma Center.

began to communicate their ideas about the teachings with one another. That my parents came to understand the teachings is the source of great pleasure to me. They have become more harmonious as husband and wife than they had been before.

There was another problem in our family. My father has a younger brother. My grandfather took better financial care of his younger son than he did for my father, and this had been a source of displeasure for my father. One day, I asked my father, “Suppose that my younger sister and I are climbing the mountain and both of us have become unable to move any more on the way, and that you are able to help only one of us. Who would you hope to help?” I know, of course, that my sister needs help more than I do. So if my father said he would help my sister and enable her to reach the summit, it would be a great pleasure for me also. My father understood the intent of the story, and listened to it by applying it to the real-life situation involving him and his younger brother. From that time on, my father stopped quarreling with my grandfather or my uncle. From this, I learned the importance of putting myself in another person’s standpoint as well as the importance of making an effort to know and understand others.

My work as an architect includes designing and building houses. One day, I learned that it was necessary for a few trees to be cut down in order for a house to be built. I was troubled by this and asked the minister, Rev. Nakahara, for guidance. I told him that as part of my job as an architect I couldn’t help but have some trees cut down. Rev. Nakahara advised me, saying: “To build the Dharma center, there was a need to have the trees growing on the building site cut down and as a result the creatures living there would be robbed of their homes. You, too, please make efforts to convert the energy of life of the trees to be felled and the creatures to be sacrificed into good deeds to benefit many people.” Following the minister’s guidance, I tried to respond at once whenever there was trouble with the person who had bought the house. Thanks to this, I believe,

I was blessed with many friends. In front of the house, where some trees had had to be cut down, I planted the same number of trees. The trees have grown now, and provide pleasant shade and safe haven for small birds.

I like the Brazil Dharma Center very much. I love members of the Dharma center, this place, and the teachings.

Through participation in the seminars on basic Buddhism, I was able to learn about the suffering I experienced myself. I always look forward to hearing a variety of questions other participants make in the seminars. By listening to stories of Dharma experiences of other participants—including who are suffering from what problems—I am pleased that I am able to see the interrelatedness of all things.

Two years ago, the locally-bestowed Gohonzon (the focus of devotion) was installed in my home altar, and the enshrinement ceremony was held at home. That day became my special day. I offered the sutra recitation and also played the shakuhachi before the Gohonzon.

I pledge hereby that throughout my life I will always praise others and put into practice warm-hearted consideration for others.

The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, thank you very much. President Niwano, thank you very much. Everyone, thank you very much.



Mr. Netto serves as an audiovisual coordinator for the seminar on Buddhism at the Brazil Dharma Center.

The 7 Parables of the Lotus Sutra



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower
of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 14: Peaceful and Agreeable Practice

The Parable of the Jewel in the Topknot

There once was a great, incredibly powerful king, known as a holy wheel-rolling king. He tried to govern the petty kingdoms around his domain to establish peace, but the monarchs of these kingdoms refused to submit to his rule. The king sent his armies to battle with the petty kingdoms and subjugated the rulers, who had made their people suffer.



The soldiers, who had achieved great feats in battle, received rewards from the great king according to the degree of their accomplishments. The king praised the soldiers' performance and rewarded some with houses to live in; others were given farmlands, building lands, villages, or towns; and others garments, jewelry, unusual treasures, golds, silvers, and lapis lazuli; while others people to govern. However, the king had never awarded the crown jewel in his topknot to anyone.



The jewel in the topknot is a singular, supreme treasure in this world. The jewel was so precious that if the king gave it to anyone, the recipient as well as people around him would be amazed and puzzled. Nevertheless, the king was always willing to award it to anyone who had made a glorious achievement beyond comparison.



Commentary

The great holy wheel-rolling king symbolizes the Buddha, and the soldiers who take part in the battles with the petty kingdoms represent us. The petty kingdoms resisting the rule of the great holy roll-wheeling king indicate the excessive earthly desires and illusory thoughts of human beings.

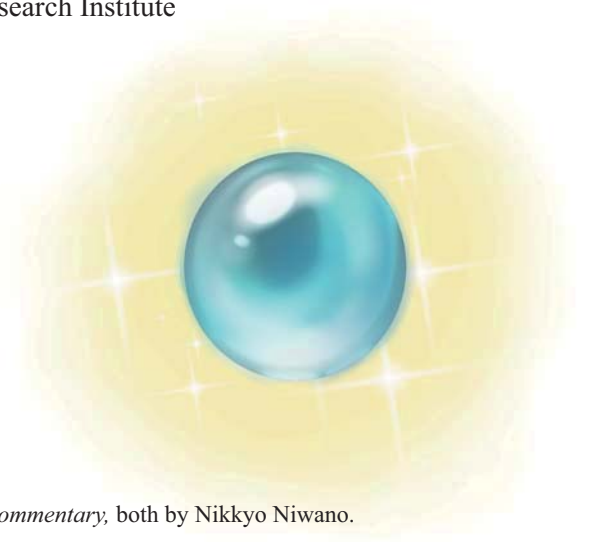
We possess all kinds of earthly desires. The Buddha expounds a teaching appropriate to each of these desires, in order to liberate us from attachments. We make efforts to defeat evils within our hearts through learning and practicing the Dharma, and the Buddha is always encouraging us and trying to make us happy. As the reward for our struggles, we obtain spiritual composure, deliverance from suffering, and other peaceful states of mind, which are symbolized in the story as houses, villages, garments, unusual treasures, and people.

However, Shakyamuni Buddha has not expounded the Lotus Sutra for a long time. The crown jewel in the topknot of the king indicates the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is a superior teaching that leads all human beings to the Buddha's awakening. However, if those who only have shallow understanding of the Buddha's teachings hear the Lotus Sutra, they may become confused or come to feel resistant to it. Therefore, Shakyamuni has kept this supreme teaching to himself until we attain the spiritual state capable of accepting the Lotus Sutra properly.

We need to undergo practices to rid ourselves of earthly desires and purify our hearts in order to understand the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the supreme treasure. As we continue to cultivate our hearts and accumulate good deeds for the benefit of others, we become capable of understanding deeply the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra.

Now, as the Buddha discerned that our hearts have become purified enough to understand the Lotus Sutra, he has finally expounded the supreme teaching for us. The Buddha trusted us and gave us the supreme treasure. Let us receive and accept it with all our hearts and apply ourselves diligently, so that we ourselves will be able to embody its true value.

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Living in Accordance with the Buddha's Teachings

I REMEMBER when I was a junior high school student I memorized “May” first among the English names for the months of the year as it is the shortest. Speaking of May, I still remember the English proverb: “March winds and April showers bring forth May flowers.” This phrase deeply brings home to me the wonder of the law of nature.

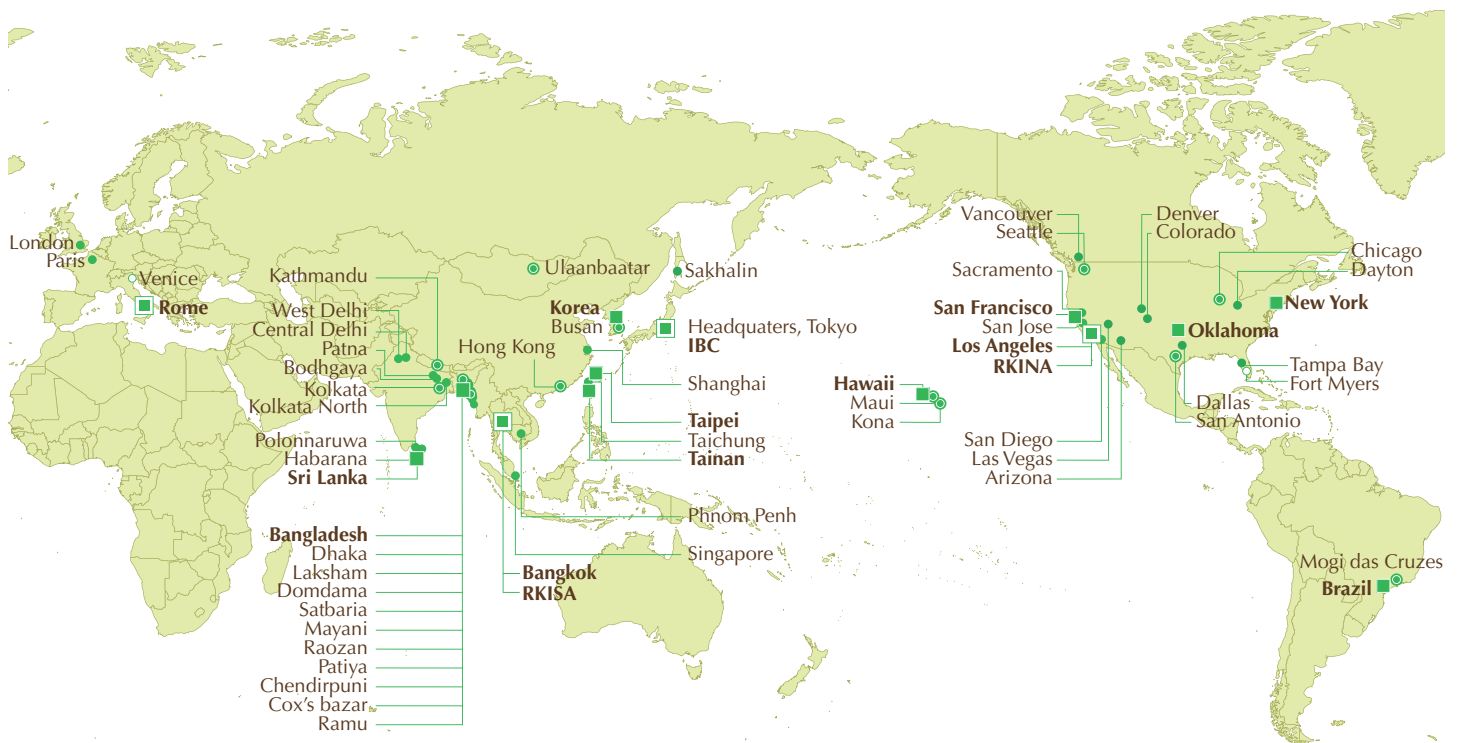
In the President's Message for this month, “Living Joyfully,” President Niwano shares with us the importance of seeing with humble eyes and accepting the changes in the natural world.

The Buddhist teaching of the Middle Path exhorts us to see things as they are, and concept of right view in the Eightfold Path indicates the way of seeing things in light of the truth.

Now, in this season when we have renewed our appreciation for the wondrous working of nature, I hope that we will firmly grasp the Buddha's way of seeing things.

Rev. Koichi Saito

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



 **RISSHO KOSEI-KAI INTERNATIONAL BRANCHES** 

Rissho Kosei-kai Overseas Dharma Centers

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Rissho Kosei-kai International

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1124 *Fax:* 81-3-5341-1224

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA)

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

Branch under RKINA

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Arizona

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sacramento
Rissho Kosei-kai of San Jose

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

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

Rissho Kosei-kai, Dharma Center of Denver

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

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

Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil

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

Rissho Kosei-kai de Mogi das Cruzes

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei

4F, No. 10 Hengyang Road, Zhongzheng District,
Taipei City 100 Taiwan
Tel: 886-2-2381-1632 *Fax:* 886-2-2331-3433
<http://kosei-kai.blogspot.com/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Taichung

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan

No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street, East District,
Tainan City 701 Taiwan
Tel: 886-6-289-1478 *Fax:* 886-6-289-1488

Rissho Kosei-kai of Pingtung

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai

6-3, 8 gil Hannamdaero Yongsan gu, Seoul, 04420, Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-2-796-5571 *Fax:* 82-2-796-1696
e-mail: krkk1125@hotmail.com

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai of Busan

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

Branches under the Headquarters

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

15F Express tower, Peace avenue, khoroo-1, Chingeltei district,
Ulaanbaatar 15160, Mongolia
Tel: 976-70006960 *e-mail:* rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin

4 Gruzinski Alley, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk
693005, Russian Federation
Tel & Fax: 7-4242-77-05-14

Rissho Kosei-kai di Roma

Via Torino, 29-00184 Roma, Italia
Tel & Fax : 39-06-48913949 *e-mail:* roma@rk-euro.org

Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK

Rissho Kosei-kai of Venezia

Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris

International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1230 *Fax:* 81-3-5341-1224
e-mail: ibcrk@kosei-kai.or.jp <http://www.ibc-rk.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of South Asia Division

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 *Fax:* 66-2-716-8218

Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia (RKISA)

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 *Fax:* 66-2-716-8218
e-mail: thairissho@csloxinfo.com

Branches under the South Asia Division

Rissho Kosei-kai of Central Delhi

224 Site No.1, Shankar Road, New Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi,
110060, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of West Delhi

66D, Sector-6, DDA-Flats, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075, India

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,
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Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya Dharma Center

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu

Ward No. 3, Jhamsilhel, Sancepa-1, Lalitpur,
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Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

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Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patna Dharma Center

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Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 *Fax:* 66-2-716-8218 *e-mail:* info.thairissho@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh
Tel & Fax: 880-31-626575

Rissho Kosei-kai of Dhaka

House#408/8, Road#7(West), D.O.H.S Baridhara,
Dhaka Cant.-1206, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-8413855

Rissho Kosei-kai of Mayani

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patiya

Patiya, sadar, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Domdama

Domdama, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Cox's Bazar

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Satbaria

Satbaria, Hajirpara, Chandanish, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Laksham

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

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

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Chendirpuni, Adhunagor, Lohagara, Chittagong, Bangladesh

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Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation, Sri Lanka

No. 628-A, Station Road, Hunupitiya, Wattala, Sri Lanka
Tel: 94-11-2982406 *Fax:* 94-11-2982405

Rissho Kosei-kai of Habarana

151, Damulla Road, Habarana, Sri Lanka

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa

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Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai