

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Essay



VOL. 158

The Importance of Making a Vow

HUMAN beings are fundamentally weak of will, so although we want to do the virtuous things we know we should, we are all too soon enticed by laziness.

There is a story about “bird’s nest Zen master” Daolin, who was always sitting in Zen meditation atop a tree. The literati poet Bai Juyi, who had been appointed the administrator of that region, went to the master and asked him, “What kind of teaching is Buddhism?” Daolin answered by telling him exactly what Buddhism teaches: “To refrain from doing evil, to undertake the good, and to purify oneself is the teaching of Buddhism.”

Bai Juyi countered by saying, “That’s something even a three-year-old child knows.”

To which Daolin replied, “What a three-year-old child knows is something that even an eighty-year-old gentleman is incapable of putting into practice.”

How can we overcome this human weakness? Our compatriots, the Sangha, are crucial to this. We do not make a silent promise to ourselves simply within our hearts, but make a pledge by putting it into words in front of many of our compatriots. This is what it is to “make a vow.”

For the practice of faith it’s important to transform one’s heart, but not many people can do it all by themselves. Everyone in the Sangha has complete faith in the buddha-nature of the person who makes a vow, and the Sangha continues to watch over them affectionately even if they suffer a few failures. The motivation to unfailingly respond to the Sangha’s encouragement and expectations are what transforms a person.

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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.

President's Message

With Consideration for Others Always in Mind

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



A Tranquil Time Is the Right Time

The beloved season of enjoying the warmth of hot springs is upon us. Soaking in a tub full of hot water, murmuring to yourself, “Ah, this is heaven”—in such moments, many people feel a calm peacefulness come over them.

When we are enjoying a pleasant time, when our minds are at peace and free, for instance, even when we are soaking in the waters of a hot spring, aren’t we removed from such emotions as worries and grievances? Delusions and attachments come loose and slip away from our minds, nothing is tying us down, and we are peaceful and completely content.

The Chinese character meaning the Buddha is read *hotoke* in Japanese. One explanation says that the word *hotoke* is derived from the verb *hodokeru*, meaning “to be freed from attachments.” Therefore, we could say that if you can manage, even if only for a little while, to be tranquil and without any cares or worries, then you have freed yourself from whatever binds you and have reached the realm of the Buddha.

Incidentally, Buddhist teaching tells us that it is important to “have your mind always turned toward the right direction.” This is “right mindfulness,” the seventh practice of the Eightfold Path that Shakyamuni explained in his first preaching of the Dharma.

However, I think that many people would confess that they don’t really know what “the right direction” is. Simply stated, it is turning your mind toward the Buddha and the Truth, but I suppose that some people still might say that this is a bit difficult to understand. To explain how I understand it in my own terms, as I mentioned earlier, it is “a pleasant time, when your mind is at peace and free from attachments.” I think this is exactly the time when your mind is turned in the right direction.

However, to have your mind always turned toward the right direction, and not merely for a moment or a short while, is a more complicated matter.

Hoping Only to Be Able to Liberate Others

In the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom, one of the three sutras comprising the Threefold Lotus Sutra, the question that we really want to ask appears: What should one do if one desires to be, “Ever dwelling in the city of nirvana,

/ And to be at ease with mind tranquil” (that is, if you wish to be far removed from all doubts and delusions and keep your mind tranquil and steady)? The next lines of verse provide the answer.

“[One] should recite the Great Vehicle sutras / And reflect on the mother of bodhisattvas.” In other words, through our habitual practice of morning and evening sutra recitation, we hope to live our lives, more and more, through the mind of compassion and consideration for others. This is a valuable hint about how to always live joyfully and with our minds at ease. We wouldn’t have expected it, but for us, this is a very familiar practice, isn’t it? Moreover, this is not a command to “be considerate of others,” but an indication of how important it is that we aspire to live with greater consideration for others, which may be easier to accept.

Now and again, I hear someone lamenting that, “I just can’t master being compassionate.” However, it is precisely because that person wishes that he or she could live with more consideration for others or be capable of liberating someone else that he or she is worrying about it. In other words, that person already is mastering the mind of being considerate of others.

Nonetheless, when you find that your mind is agitated by distractions and far from being tranquil, a poem by Hosai Ozaki (1885–1926) may be a good reference.

“Cast away the mind / Of speaking ill of others, / And just peel the beans.” When such emotions as anger or greed seem to be gaining control over your mind, you should throw yourself into whatever task is before you—this is one method of returning to right mindfulness.

Furthermore, some people express right mindfulness as “caring” or “attentiveness.” As Soshitsu Sen XV (b. 1923), former headmaster (*iemoto*) of the Urasenke school of the Way of Tea, has said, “In serving someone, my only thought is, ‘May you be happy.’” Cast off distractions and concentrate on your own “here and now.” Moreover, while putting aside thoughts of yourself and hoping that other people experience joy and feel happy, your mind focuses on a single thing. This is another form of right mindfulness.

In our discussion of the Eightfold Path, we have already arrived at the crucial practice of right mindfulness. When you make your own mind the mind of joy and ease that comes from being considerate of others, you are truly bringing to life the virtues of practicing “right meditation,” which comes next.

From *Kosei*, November 2018

Spiritual Journey



The Teaching of Dependent Origination Which I Truly Realized through Relationship with My Son



by Ms. Boku Khva Sun
Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin

This Dharma Journey talk was presented on August 5, 2018, when the ceremony of the eightieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's foundation was held at Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin.

I was born in Dolinsk, the south area of Sakhalin, as the youngest daughter out of nine siblings—five brothers and four sisters. Currently, three brothers and the eldest sister have already passed away. I never helped with doing housework such as cleaning or cooking, and coaxed my parents into buying anything I wanted—I was such a selfish youngest child.

In 1978, when I was nineteen years old, I married a man whom I had met during the birthday party of one of my friends. After our marriage, I lived with my husband's family members. Since I could not do any housework, I was often complained about and scolded by my mother-in-law. I used to cry many times at night where nobody was around, burying my face in

my pillow. Ten years after I began to lead such life, my mother, who was worried about me, bought a house for my husband and me. Since then we lived separately from my mother-in-law. Since I had good relations with my husband—we were not specifically on bad terms with each other—I expected that our life would be a little bit comfortable.

My husband, however, had been messing with drugs from around 2001 on. I was greatly troubled by this. Although we had always gotten along, we now quarreled with each other. I was worried that this might exert a bad influence over our little children. In 2002, we ended up getting a divorce.

It was on September 15, 2001 that I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin, when I first became bothered over my husband's drug habit.

At that time, we didn't have our own Dharma center. So we would gather at members' houses for activities. Ms. Kim Don Sun, one of my elder sisters, was already a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. She was then doing her duty as staff member of the General Affairs of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin. Before I joined Rissho Kosei-kai, she often asked me to drive some of its members to a house where they were scheduled to gather. In those days I thought that my sister and her fellows may have been members of a suspicious group so that I used to drive them to their gathering place, jeering them behind their backs. Back then, I never expected that I would become a member of Rissho Kosei-kai one day in the future. But I was worried about my husband's troubles, and what was most crucial for me was something that



Ms. Boku delivers her personal spiritual experience at Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin.

happened one evening, when my late mother appeared in my dream, saying that she was hungry. This was why I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

My sister often told each of us, members of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin, that we could express our feeling of gratitude to our own ancestors when we offer food at the altar with our sincere hearts and minds. As we heard her words, we came to realize that we are “living in the present” thanks to our own ancestors. We could therefore believe that Rissho Kosei-kai is not a suspicious organization, precisely because this faith values our ancestors. Since then, I have paid careful attention to how she would guide others. What I found was that she was always so polite and kind to all members and was considerate of them equally, regardless of whether or not they were performing their duties. I came to feel that I wanted to follow her example.

I could learn many things since I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. Through my own practices of doing duties at Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin, of guiding others to the Dharma, and mentoring other members, I realized the importance of putting myself in the other’s place and conducting myself accordingly. Most importantly, I encountered people who suffered from more serious issues than I ever did, and this allowed me to become aware of the preciousness of happiness I was being given by the Buddha’s arrangement. I also studied the way of seeing things through *hoza* sessions.

At the time when I was living with my husband’s family members, I had trouble with my mother-in-law. But, thanks to her, I came to be able to do housework, cooking in particular. And also I became a mother of two lovely children through the encounter with my husband. I could realize the feeling of gratitude toward both of them.

Undoubtedly, I am caused to live thanks to our ancestors. Therefore, what I can do in return for them is that I offer foods to them without limit, so that they can “eat” them as much as they want. I came to have a grateful heart toward the innumerable ancestors of my parents’ families, as well as the late mother-in-law and former husband who died in a traffic accident after our divorce. Because of this, I started to practice the Rissho Kosei-kai teachings, making the home altar the center of my faith.

With the aspiration of sharing the wonderful teachings with as many people as possible and of becoming happy together with them, I strived for further efforts for the practice of guiding others to the Dharma and mentoring members. In 2008, I was given the Buddha’s arrangement to receive Gohonzon at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo, and I was so glad.

Now I have a married daughter and a son, Maksim. I live with him. Shortly after I became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai and the locally-bestowed Gohonzon was then enshrined at the home altar, the altar was seen by Maksim as a child as a “thing” that could make his dreams come true if he wished for something he wanted. Around that time, he wanted a personal computer, so he put his palms together in reverence in front of the altar. It was the first time for him to do so.

When Maksim had grown up, he asked me that for what purpose I set foods at the altar. I answered, saying, “It is to offer regular religious devotionals to our ancestors, including the late grandfather and grandmother, so that they would not suffer from being hungry. And, while I offer the sutra recitation to them, I can feel like I’m able to have a conversation with them. Especially, when I have some hardships, I can feel like our ancestors are hearing me.”

In 2011, Maksim was involved in an incident and

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would be sent to jail. I was so worried about him. For him, I devoted myself in offering the sutra recitation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra every morning and evening. And on the day before the court decision, the Sakhalin sangha members, too, held devotional services together with me. But he was sent to prison after all, and nothing changed for the better. I was disappointed that things were not going as expected. So, one day I decided to visit a Christian church, accepting the invitation of one of my friends, who is a Christian. At the church, I was told that if I prayed to God, my wish would come true and my son would be out of prison soon. I visited the church about for half a year to pray for my son. But I could not change reality. Then I thought over the things, and the teachings I learned through Rissho Kosei-kai came rushing back. I said to myself, “The matter of Maksim must be a message from the Buddha, wishing me to become happy. So I should strive for the Dharma again.” I determined to join the sangha of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin again.

At the Sakhalin Dharma center, there were sangha members there who accepted me, understanding the hardships I suffered. In fact I felt like I didn’t want to live anymore. But, my sister encouraged me by saying, “My son passed away by a traffic accident when he was sixteen years old. Your son is alive, isn’t he, and will come back to you in five years.” And the sangha members also said to me, “You should welcome Maksim brightly as his mother when he returns from the prison. Maksim would be delighted at seeing your healthy appearance.” They were worried about me and empathized with me and Maksim as well, as if our matters were their own. By their continued, kind support, I decided to further strive for the Dharma. Since then, I continued to practice the Dharma through guiding others to the teachings,

participating into training sessions and seminars held at the Hokkaido Division, and joining the group pilgrimage to the organization’s Tokyo headquarters.

As to Maksim, his questions of law for which he was sentenced at the court were commuted and, as the result of this, he came back home ahead of schedule. I greatly felt at ease seeing my son becoming gentle again.

Last year and this year, I participated in the seminar of the Hokkaido Division in April. Especially this year, a major change had happened in my mind. There were several reasons for it, but the most major reason was that I was moved by the attitude of the members of the Hokkaido Division. They were always polite and kind, and contacted others with a smile and compassionate mind. By their behavior, I thought that they may have had no troubles and sufferings in their lives. However, during my participation in the practice of mentoring other members and *hoza* sessions, I came to understand that my thought was wrong. I realized that they are striving for the practice with kindness, warmheartedness, cheerfulness, mutual support and cooperation, despite their own sad experiences. At Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin, I had few chances to have a Dharma connection between my suffering and the teaching, by expressing my true feelings. Because sometimes, when my experience would spread as a rumor, I could not share more at the *hoza* sessions. Some different stories that spread behind my back hurt me deeply. But through this practice of the *hoza* sessions at the Hokkaido Division, I could share my feelings without hesitation toward my son for the first time.

“My son has changed a great deal and I feel at ease now, but I am dissatisfied with my son’s girlfriend. This is my greatest problem. As for me, I wish he

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could have a Korean woman for his girlfriend who would take good care of him." I talked about my worries. Ms. Tsubouch, a chapter head of the Sapporo Dharma Center, gave me her guidance, saying, "If everything worked out as you expected, you would miss out the good chance to practice. The current situation is necessary for you as your practice. Please share your unpleasant feelings at the *hoza* session. You will not accept her, but please welcome her with a smile for considering your son's happiness."

When I returned home after the seminar at Hokkaido, surprisingly, my son had offered water and sweets at the altar on his own, though he paid no notice to the matter of Rissho Kosei-kai until then! One of my wishes came true. But, I was so embarrassed that I appreciated him without letting my delight show. Anyway, I was glad in the depth of my mind. It was the first step for him to walk the way of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Moreover, my son invited his girlfriend and another friend to become members of Rissho Kosei-kai. To tell the truth, today the three of them are going to enroll Rissho Kosei-kai all together. I cannot tell you how happy I am. When my son decided to enroll Rissho Kosei-kai, he told me, saying, "When I was in trouble, you offered the sutra recitation of the Three-fold Lotus Sutra for me every morning and evening with tears in your eyes. I had brought much trouble to you, and now I feel ashamed of my harassment. From now on, I would like to continue to learn the teachings more."

Later I heard that Maksim wished to make me glad when I returned home from the seminar at Hokkaido, and wondered how he could give delight to me. Then he remembered that I always place importance on the altar, so he decided to make offerings to the altar.

For drafting this, my Dharma Journey talk, Ms.

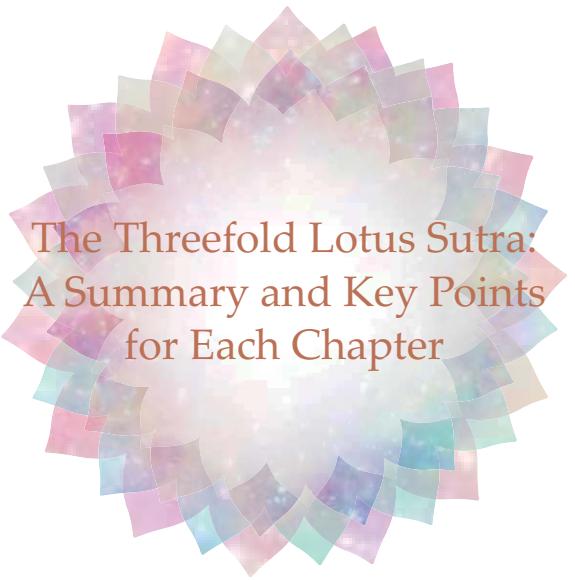
Boku Aiko, the area leader of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin, was so committed to me. My parent in faith is my sister and her parent in faith is Ms. Boku Aiko. Therefore, I deeply feel gratitude for Ms. Boku Aiko.

Fortunately, I will have an opportunity to accept the certification of Dharma Teacher this October at the headquarters in Tokyo. I would like to vow to strive for further effort to the practice of mentoring members in order to share the joy of faith and the teaching of the Buddha, to increase the number of new members, and encouraging members who are unwilling to come to the Dharma center to visit. Recently, youth members are coming to the Dharma center. I would like to develop warmhearted relationship among the sangha members, while supporting and encouraging the activities by the youth members, and bring the teaching of learning and practice which I learned at Hokkaido into my daily life.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.



Ms. Boku (front row, center) poses for a group photo with members of the Hokkaido Division and Sakhalin.



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

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of
the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 3, A Parable (1)

Beginning with this chapter, the Lotus Sutra becomes much easier. The Buddha's teaching so far has been theoretical and philosophical, but here, with the introduction of a parable, there is an abrupt change to a style readily understood by ordinary people.

Giving Assurance of Buddhahood

The second chapter of the sutra closed with Shakyamuni's statement that all would become buddhas, and now Shariputra, his face lit with joy, rises to salute Shakyamuni and announce his ecstasy at the understanding just granted to him.

Now Shariputra's joy stems directly from the Buddha's statement that all will become buddhas, but he is made even more joyous to have his own Buddhahood specifically predicted. Until now he has believed that he was only a *shravaka*, clearly below a bodhisattva, and it had hardly occurred to him that he could reach that highest state of being, becoming a buddha himself.

In the chapter on skillful means it is stated that "there is no other vehicle, but only the One Buddha Vehicle," which makes it plain that the way to Buddhahood is but one and that there are no second or third vehicles. Then farther on, toward the end of the same chapter, Shakyamuni states that he is here to teach the bodhisattvas and that he has no *shravaka* disciples, which means that all the disciples are bodhisattvas and none are to be called *shravakas*.

And then, at the end, he says, "Rejoice heartily and know that you, too, will become buddhas." And so, hearing this, those who had thought of themselves as mere students in the "high school" of the *shravakas* realized that their school was the "college" of bodhisattvas, to borrow our contemporary language, and that while they had thought they were mere high-school students, they were in fact already in college. Moreover, since the college of bodhisattvas is the course to Buddhahood, if they continued to accumulate practice, they would become buddhas, and this truth they perceived clearly at the bottom of their hearts. How could they not rejoice?

Therefore, Shariputra explains his gratitude but at the same time honestly acknowledges his past failings and expresses remorse for them. In turn, the Buddha confirms Shariputra's enlightenment and announces to him in particular that he is to become a buddha. This is the first of a number of assurances to *shravaka* disciples of their coming Buddhahood, and the close disciples later all have their Buddhahood assured. In this sense, the Lotus Sutra may be regarded as the Sutra of Giving Assurance of Buddhahood—a major distinction—for it is the sutra that bestows upon all people the assurance that they may become buddhas.

Now, to return to the text, we read Shariputra's assertion first in prose, then in verse, that upon attaining the enlightenment of a buddha, he will teach the supreme doctrine and transform many. Shariputra is content for himself, but he is worried over the twelve hundred others who are puzzled by the depth of the Buddha's teaching, and he pleads for a clearing up of this difficulty.

The World-Honored One, Shakyamuni, then tells the parable of the burning house.

The Parable of the Burning House

In a city in a certain country there was a great wealthy elder. His house was enormous but was provided with only a single narrow door. This house was terribly dilapidated, and suddenly one day a fire broke out and began to spread rapidly. The elder's numerous children were all inside. He begged them to come out, but they were all busy at play. Though it seemed

certain that they would be burned, they took no notice and had no urge to escape.

The elder thought for a moment. He was very strong and might load them all into some kind of box and bring them out at once. But then he thought that if he did this some might fall out and be burned. So he decided to warn them of the fearsomeness of the fire so that they might come out by themselves.

In a loud voice he called to them to come out at once to escape being burned alive, but the children merely glanced up and paid no heed to his warning.

The elder then remembered that his children all wanted carts, and so he called to them to come out at once because he had the goat carts, deer carts, and ox carts that they were always wanting.

When the children heard this, they finally paid attention and fell all over each other in their rush to get out, and thus they were able to escape from the burning house. The elder was relieved at their safe delivery from harm, and as they began to ask for their carts, he gave each of them not the ordinary carts they wanted but carts splendidly decorated with precious things and drawn by great white oxen.

Though the reader has perhaps already seen the meaning of this parable, we may explain it further by pointing out that the father stands for the Buddha. The children are no other than ourselves, ordinary people, while the dilapidated house is our plain human society, and the fire is our physical and mental delusion. This delusion is the cause of human suffering. Because we are totally taken up with material things and our physical bodies, we lose our spiritual liberty and suffer. Moreover, foolish living beings are not even aware that they have no spiritual liberty, and so on this account they do not understand that they are about to be consumed by the fires of their delusion. Their minds are entirely taken up with their daily lives.

In order to relieve human misery, Shakyamuni presented various teachings. Human beings are of various kinds, and even among the seekers of the Way to liberation there are the *shravakas*, who have listened to the good teaching and are striving to dispel their delusions; the *pratyekabuddhas*, who by themselves in meditation and thought seek to attain

the Way; and the bodhisattvas, who as they seek supreme enlightenment at the same time devote themselves to the liberation of all beings. When people find in the Buddha's teaching anything that exactly fits their own liking, they are unconsciously drawn into that teaching. This is the meaning in the parable of getting the children to come outside by offering each of them the carts they wanted.



The Teaching of the Buddha Is Only One

So it is that although the teaching of the Buddha is at the end only the one Way to buddhahood, in the preparatory stages different artful and skillful means of teaching are employed. People then strive, each in accord with the individual lesson, to cultivate themselves, but as they practice and advance to higher levels, they discover that far ahead all the ways become one. This is the Way to buddhahood. The discovery that the way one has trod, which one had thought was only a second- or third-class road, actually turns out to be that supremely true Way is cause for great peace, hope, and joy. This is what is said when the children, who thought only that they would get goat carts, deer carts, and ox carts, were all alike given the unexpected pleasure of a great white ox cart, the best possible gift: the Way to buddhahood itself.

In reading this way, as if it were, between the lines, one may find still other important lessons besides the principal one I have just outlined within this parable.

This is an English translation of text originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 42–49).





Always Cultivating Compassion for Others

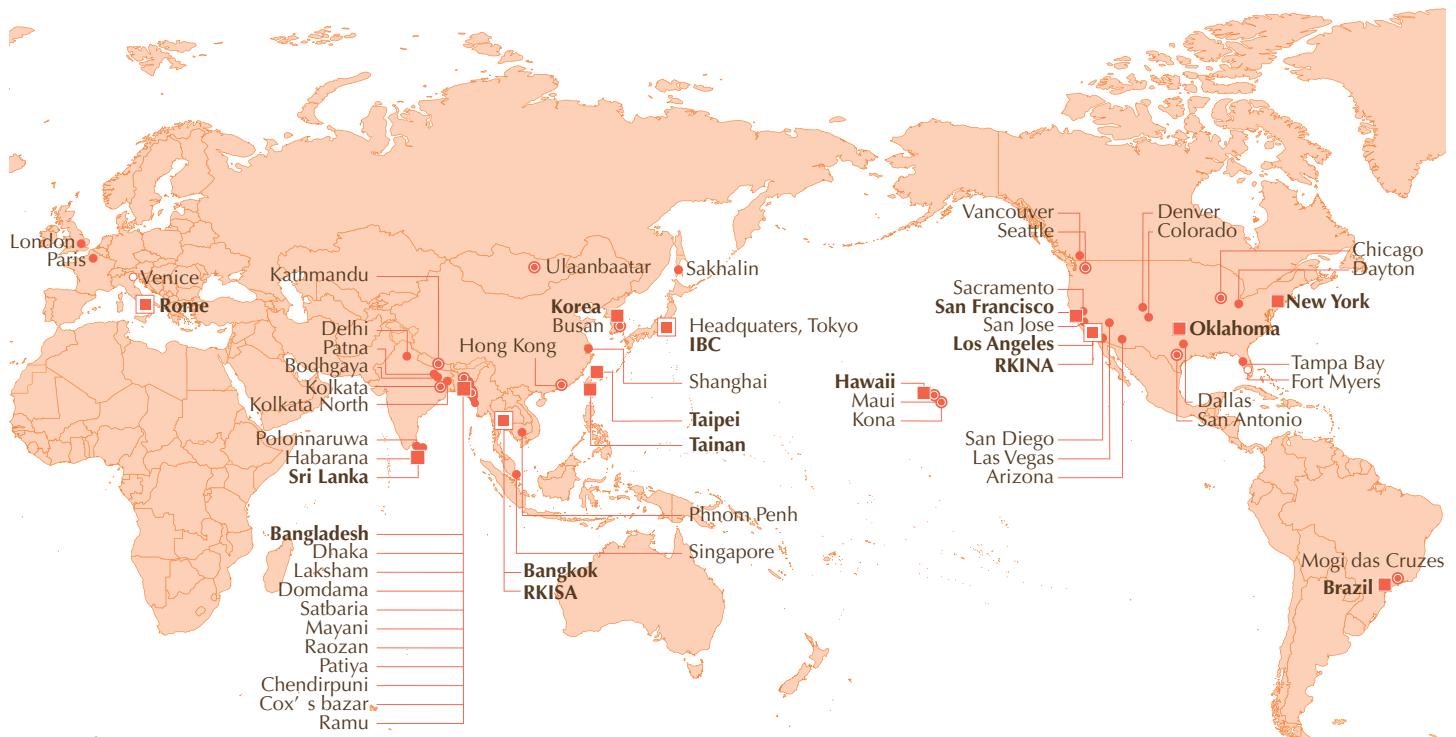
In November, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrates the anniversary of the birth of Founder Nikkyo Niwano. November is one of the most gratifying months of the year for us. It is also the right time to rededicate ourselves to the bodhisattva practice of repaying our debt of gratitude to the Founder, and making a pledge to apply ourselves with renewed diligence.

The most important bodhisattva practice is donation. I hope that on this occasion we would make a monetary donation, as an expression of our gratitude for the fact that we owe our present happiness to the Founder and the teachings. Wouldn't it be nice to make a donation as a token of our gratitude for the guidance and support we have received this year, and as an expression of our congratulations on the eightieth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai?

To practice dissemination, connecting others to the Dharma with the mind that as many people as possible would achieve happiness just as ourselves through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, is itself the practice of donation, and that is the most valuable bodhisattva practice to repay our gratitude.

Following in the footsteps of the Founder, who devoted his whole life for the sake of people and the world, let us keep cultivating compassion for others and strive diligently in the bodhisattva practice, giving our best to the things right in front of our eyes!

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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