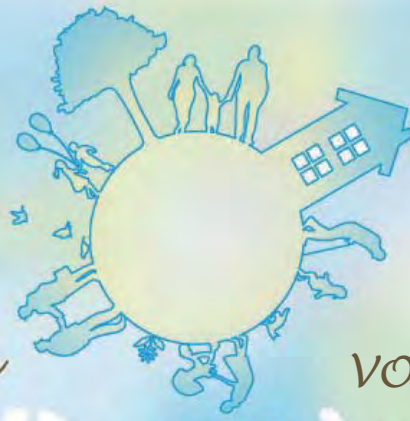


# Living the LOTUS

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*



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2020

VOL. 178

Founder's Essay

## Transferring Merit to My Late Mother

THE annual memorial day for my late mother is June 22, and I observe a monthly memorial day on the 22nd of each month for both her and the Niwano family ancestors. When I was doing dissemination work while still holding down my job selling milk for the dairy store, every 22nd of the month, I would say to myself, “Today I’ll do an especially good job of reciting the sutra to transfer merit.” But on this day of all days, I would always receive calls from this or that member and end up running around visiting members’ homes until the middle of the night.

When I told my teacher, Sukenobu Arai, about this,

he said, “Niwano, transferring merit is not limited to just reciting the sutra—transferring merit by running around the city bringing relief to suffering people is even more precious. How much peace and joy this must bring your mother and ancestors!”

With these words, my teacher taught me that relieving the suffering of others is transferring merit by reciting the Lotus Sutra through one’s actions. After hearing this, I felt like I could see my mother’s smiling face appearing before me every day as I happily ran around working for the benefit of others.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 224–25

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Senior Editor: Koichi Saito  
Editor: Kensuke Osada  
Copy Editors: Molly McCowan, Naoki Taketani,  
Kazumasa Osaka, Katsuyuki Kikuchi

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

## What You Can Do Now

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



### As a Bodhisattva, What Do You Hope for and Vow to Do?

The poet Dakotsu Iida (1885–1962) wrote this haiku: “Obeying my pious mother, the Ullambana ceremony.” In Japan, we Buddhists usually observe the Ullambana ceremony (Jpn., *obon*) in July, but in the present circumstances, it may be somewhat difficult for the whole family to visit a Dharma center or Buddhist temple to do so.

Since we are taught that the Buddha’s mind is “the mind of liberating all living beings,” we can only let our hearts go out to those suffering from the disease that is spreading all over the world and pray that the situation will end as soon as possible. I hope that each and every one of us will think about what we can do and steadfastly put it into practice every day.

This reminds me of the innumerable bodhisattvas in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, “Springing Up Out of the Earth,” who emerge from the ground and vow to spread the Buddha’s teachings in this *saha* world and, through their practice of the faith, liberate all people.

These bodhisattvas are represented by four bodhisattvas named Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and Steadfast Practice, symbolizing the Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva that are made when one who is walking the Buddhist Way first aspires to become like the Buddha—in other words, when one first aspires to attain supreme awakening. Each bodhisattva aligns with one of the Four Great Vows:

Superior Practice: the Buddha Way is supreme, and I will definitely accomplish it (the vow to attain the supreme Buddha Way).

Boundless Practice: the Buddha’s teachings are inexhaustible, and I will definitely learn them all (the vow to pursue the inexhaustible gateways of the Dharma).

Pure Practice: although my delusions may be innumerable, I will definitely remove them all (the vow to remove innumerable delusions).

Steadfast Practice: although living beings may be innumerable, I will definitely liberate them all (the vow to liberate innumerable living beings).

However, it seems that some people are unclear about how to best align their





lifestyle with each of these four vows, and how to put them into practice on a daily basis. The Zen master Taido Matsubara (1907–2009), who explained Buddhism in easily understandable terms, used the following expressions to explain the Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva as lessons for a life of practicing the faith:

The vow to liberate innumerable living beings: let's serve (make donations to) the people around us.

The vow to remove innumerable delusions: let's pick up one piece of garbage at our feet.

The vow to pursue the inexhaustible gateways of the Dharma: let's learn one teaching a day.

The vow to attain the supreme Buddha Way: let's walk the eternal path, step by step.

Right now, what are you hoping for? What are you vowing to do every day as a bodhisattva who is walking the Buddhist Way?

### Now Is the Chance to Study and Practice

People who refer to the Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva as a way to think about what they themselves can do now are, needless to say, those who have faith in the teachings of the Buddha and the determination to put them into practice. Therefore, they have the same mind as the Buddha.

There may be some people who say, "So I'm told, but . . ." and feel discouraged. However, when we make contact with the teaching and start to feel that we want to become like the Buddha, we are already united with the mind of the Buddha.

The Buddha and us are said to be "one and the same." There is also the saying that "ordinary people and sages are the same in essence." We understand that the Buddha's teachings are sacred because they are informed by his sacred desire to liberate all people—a desire we also possess.

Receiving life as human beings means that we possess the same things as the Buddha. Believing this is faith, which we could also say is the mind of devotion.

In this sense, this time of global crisis may be a good opportunity to reflect on the state of our own faith and, through repetition of the study and practice of the teachings in our daily lives, raise our bodhisattva awareness.

Incidentally, in "Springing Up Out of the Earth," people who are like the aforementioned four bodhisattvas are described as those who "living beings would rejoice to see." In other words, they are those who all people long to see.

For me, too, among my seniors in Rissho Kosei-kai and people of other religious organizations, there are those who make me feel that I "long to see them again." What do these people have in common? They firmly respect and revere God, the Buddha, or other deities while remaining full of loving-kindness and consideration for people who are sinking in the depths of suffering and sadness.

As we aspire for supreme awakening and the liberation of all people, let's continue to be diligent every day.

From *Kosei*, July 2020





## Serving Others without Expecting Anything in Return



Ms. Prakobkaew Senapeng  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

*This Dharma Journey talk was presented at “Welcome to Rissho Kosei-kai,” a ceremony that took place at the Bangkok Dharma Center on October 6, 2019.*

**G**OOD morning to all my wonderful Dharma friends here. My name is Prakobkaew Senapeng. Here at the Bangkok Dharma Center, people call me Prim.

It’s a great pleasure to have the opportunity to share my Dharma Journey in front of all of you today. I would like to say thank you to Rev. Mizutani and everyone at Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Sriubon for connecting me with the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. She guided me to the Bangkok Dharma Center, saying, “This is a place where you can learn how to put the Buddha’s teachings into immediate practice in your daily life.” She has since invited me to various Rissho Kosei-kai events and activities. It’s been ten years since I first visited the Dharma center, and there have been many positive changes in my life during these years.

I’m a hairdresser, and I work for a salon and spa. I used to be a self-centered, quick-tempered person. I always thought I was the best of all the hairdressers in my workplace. I neither cared for nor helped my coworkers; even worse, I made harsh comments to them and had no regard for their feelings.

Nevertheless, my bosses and customers appreciated my good service and entrusted me with a lot of work. Sometimes I had more work than I could handle, but I never thought about asking my colleagues for help as I didn’t trust them. When I was overloaded and exhausted with work, I would become upset easily over trivial things. I blamed everyone else.

In October 2009, on the invitation of Ms. Sriubon, I participated in a group pilgrimage to Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. There, I saw one of the Founder’s video messages and was deeply moved by his words, “Let us serve others without expecting

anything in return.” A strong desire welled up in me to change my short temper and become a better person.

“I will change,” I promised myself. I decided to follow the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. Since that moment, the Founder has been my role model.

Around the time I began practicing the teachings, I had to be hospitalized for an infection caused by a virus that affects facial nerves—it permanently deformed my face. One day, my concerned colleagues came to visit me in the hospital. I couldn’t have been a good colleague as I’d been speaking meanly to them in the workplace, but they still cared about me despite my actions. I felt deeply sorry for my colleagues and couldn’t hold back my tears of regret. I apologized to them and thanked them for their kindness, which made me feel at peace.

One of my colleagues told me, “We’ve been waiting for the time when you would regain a warm heart and apologize to everyone.”

Since that day, my colleagues have become fond of me, and the atmosphere in our workplace has become very cheerful as well. I changed my abusive language and tried to use polite and kind words. By always asking my colleagues for their input, caring about



*Ms. Prim delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the Bangkok Dharma Center.*

others, valuing mutual understanding, and acting in the spirit of sharing and forgiveness, my life has transformed tremendously. One of my customers noticed my change and commended me.

Learning the Founder's teachings has not only changed the way I interact with my colleagues, but also the way I do business. I used to use flowery language to recommend spa treatments and sell cosmetics to customers in order to increase my sales. I sometimes even gossiped about customers to others in hopes of getting something in return. But after I learned the teachings, I stopped my superficial chitchat and tried to converse with my customers with sincerity. As a result, I gained the trust of many more customers and began to receive more work.

There are various activities at Rissho Kosei-kai, like the Buddhist and Lotus Sutra seminars, as well as member roles such as leading sutra recitations and serving at the Dharma center. My favorite is serving at the Dharma center. As a way to practice the teachings of "let us serve others without expecting anything in return" and "let us do whatever we can for whomever we meet," I've made it my role to clean the toilets at the Dharma center.

The reason for this is that when I was on a trip once, the toilet I used was filthy. I realized that the reason I encountered that dirty toilet was that my mind was also stained. Since then, I've made a point of cleaning up every dirty toilet I come across.

When I visited Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters during the group pilgrimage, I had an opportunity to clean toilets in one of the headquarters facilities as part of the program. The staff member said to us, "Let us clean our minds by cleaning the toilets."

These words impressed me so much. I thought, *That really makes sense! It's important to begin with cleansing your own mind.*

When someone who'd used the toilet I'd cleaned

said, "It was so clean," I was very happy to have been of service to others.

As my understanding of the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai deepened, my language and behavior changed further. My best friend of twenty-five years—who knows me inside out—noticed my transformation. One day, she asked me, "What in the world has changed you in such a big way?"

I told her about Rissho Kosei-kai, and how it explains the Buddha's teachings in an easily understandable way so we can apply them in our daily lives. I also told her how I'd learned the importance of words of gratitude, such as "thank you," as well as serving others without expecting anything in return.

Perhaps inspired by my words, my friend also began to practice generosity. She runs a traditional Thai costume rental shop, and whenever the Bangkok Dharma Center needs traditional Thai costumes for ceremonies and events, she rents out the costumes for free. She doesn't even ask us to pay a cleaning fee. She says, "I just want to practice generosity like you do."

Several years ago, members of the Bangkok Dharma Center participated in the Mando Parade during the Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival held at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters. The costumes they wore were from my friend's shop. We at the Bangkok Dharma Center were all very grateful to her, but the practice of generosity has also changed her life in a fulfilling way.

My feelings about being a member of Rissho Kosei-kai can be described in a word: thankful. I love everything about the Bangkok Dharma Center. Now I am able to keep walking the right path, which makes me very happy. Although I've gone through a lot in my life, I've become more considerate of others and have learned to be patient. I can say "I'm sorry" and "thank you" now. My life has changed a lot. I am truly grateful to have encountered the teachings of the Founder.

I will pass on the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, which are easy to understand and practice, to the many people around me, including my family, nieces, and friends. In particular, I would like to convey to as many young people as possible the importance of “serving others without expecting anything in return.”

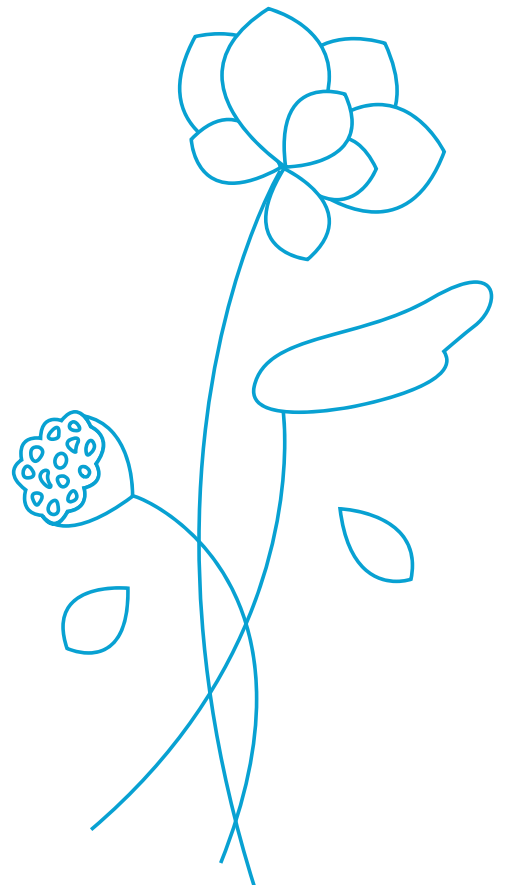
Thank you very much for today. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Rissho Kosei-kai, to Rev. Mizutani and all the Dharma center ministers, and to the staff of the Bangkok Dharma Center as well as that of headquarters, for always welcoming me with warmth.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my dear Dharma friends, the wonderful sangha of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok.

Thank you for your kind attention.



*Ms. Prim serves as a sub-leader in sutra recitation at the Bangkok Dharma Center.*



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

## The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma Chapter 16

### The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata (2)

#### The Buddha Exists Forever and Is Imperishable

In the parable of the good physician that appeared in the previous installment, the knowledgeable physician capable of curing any disease is Shakyamuni, and his children—who unintentionally took poison and were groaning in agony while their father was away on business—represent ordinary human beings. As the parable shows, so long as the superb leader Shakyamuni was constantly present to teach and instruct, all was well with those he led. But it is a melancholy fact that when a leader is gone, many ordinary followers will, bit by bit, revert to how they were before.

The average person, who believes only what he or she can see, was all too likely to stray from the path once Shakyamuni entered nirvana (died as a physical body), even though Shakyamuni as the Eternal Original Buddha was and is always at hand. Shakyamuni was concerned about this, and through the parable of the good physician, he clarifies the truth that the Buddha exists forever and is imperishable. Although the leader may pass on, if the truth he taught remains, human beings can be liberated by it.

Just as the children in the parable did as they pleased and brought pain on themselves by inadvertently taking poison during their father's absence, so have other living beings, in the absence of the Buddha in person, brought suffering on themselves by living as they please.

When the father in the parable came home, even the children who—like people swayed by various earthly desires—had lost their senses from the poison were overjoyed to see him again. However far one may stray from the path, one's buddha-nature remains intact.

#### The Psychology of Feeling Uncomfortable about Religion

The Buddha, like the physician-father, compounded a variety of precious medicines—one to put aside delusion, one for gaining true wisdom, one to awaken a spirit of dedication to others—into a medicine palatable to ordinary people.

Some people accepted the Buddha's medicine at once and were thereby liberated, but numerous others paid no attention and would not touch the medicine left for them. Being out of their senses, they found no virtue in it, mistaking its fragrance for stench and its color and taste for something foul.

Like the children in the parable who were deeply affected by the poison and yet would not touch the medicine, these people did not pay attention to the teachings of the Buddha because they were infatuated with the pleasures of various earthly desires. To them, the teachings of the Buddha seemed constraining, and they had no wish to listen to them.

This is shallow humankind's way. The Buddha, then, resorted to an extraordinary device to open people's eyes: like the father in the parable, he hid himself where he could not be seen for a while.





## Longing and Thirsting for the Buddha

When Shakyamuni entered nirvana, which is to say that his physical body died, people suddenly felt left alone, and in their hearts there arose a fierce sense of devotion to a great leader lost. As powerful as a thirsty person's want for water, an urge to seek the Buddha welled up in them.

In the verse passages of the sutra, this thought is expressed as longing and thirsting. The people recover their senses as soon as this intense feeling of longing, or thirsting, fills their hearts. They awaken, and at this moment, they realize that they must do something. This is when they leap to the teaching left for them (the medicine) and willingly take it.

This longing and thirsting is not just for the visible Buddha; it has a more general or abstract sense. It often happens that people who have never been interested in gods or buddhas, who are always intent on the affairs of daily life, suddenly face some crisis. At this point, many of them feel in need of something to lean on. There might be people, too, who have enough material things yet feel unfulfilled; they wonder if there isn't something that can give satisfaction to the spirit.

What such people are looking for, whether they know it or not, is some god or buddha: something to lean on, or something that can give satisfaction to the spirit. This is why either the historical Buddha or the Buddha whose being is abstract will serve. The important thing, if one's spirit is to be cleansed, if one is to be delivered, is to long for what can truly bring deliverance, and to long for it with the intensity of a person perishing from thirst.

In this one point, religion differs from the teachings of philosophy and ethics. The fine teachings of philosophy and ethics are easy enough to grasp with the mind, or at least the surface of the mind. And if everyone understood them in this way and acted accordingly, there would be no problem. But even though much may be known at the surface of the mind, the things hidden in the mind's recesses are not so easily dealt with. People are unwittingly led astray

by these things and, as a result, act badly. This is why the hidden mind also must be cleansed, for without such cleansing there can be no deliverance. Religion and faith enable us to change our mind from its depths. This is one of the lessons in this chapter.

## We Can Only See the Buddha If We Are Awakened

In the parable, the children were awakened when they were overtaken by longing and thirsting for their father. When they recovered their senses, their father returned home. In general terms, this means that all beings may, if only they are alert, know that the Buddha is always there.

The Buddha is ever-abiding and everlasting, and never for an instant is he not at our sides. No, not at our sides, for it is a mistake to think of him as beside us—rather, the Buddha abounds within and around us. We are one with the Buddha.

Thus, if the Buddha seems not to be present, it's merely because we have forgotten or lost sight of his presence. Human beings have little lasting interest in what we can't actually feel with our five senses; we're barely even conscious of what we *can* feel with our five senses, such as air, the sun, or water. Only when a crisis happens, particularly when there is a desire for something to lean on, do we remember how precious these things are.

We commit the same error with the Buddha. The







ultimate substance of the Buddha that sustains all things. Living in accordance with the Buddha, therefore, means being free in the mind and always happy. But we often forget this and act contrarily, only to bring suffering upon ourselves.

### Awareness That We Are Sustained by the Buddha

If we have a deep awareness that we are sustained by the Eternal Original Buddha, then the right way to live is in accordance with the teachings of Shakyamuni, which are grounded in the mind of the Eternal Original Buddha. And if our lives are in accordance with the teachings of Shakyamuni, whatever trials we may go through, it will be as though they did not exist, and we will live with the greatest confidence. This is the true way to live as a human being, and it's the great lesson of this chapter.

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. 163–70).



## Doing What We Can

THE COVID-19 pandemic, a situation that hardly any of us ever imagined, brings us to an age when we must adopt a new lifestyle—a new norm.

In these trying times, what we have in common as followers of the Lotus Sutra is a desire to share its teachings with as many people as possible. In response to our wish, President Nichiko Niwano gives us his message for this month, titled “What You Can Do Now.”

President Niwano references passages from chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, “Springing Up Out of the Earth,” and asks us what we’re praying for, what we vow to do, and how we’re leading our lives in a way that puts into practice the bodhisattva way described in the Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva.

I pray with you that this pandemic will end as quickly as possible, and that all people in the world will be liberated and find happiness and peace. With this prayer in mind, I hope that each one of us will continue our study of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, put the teachings into practice in our everyday lives, and raise our awareness of being bodhisattvas.

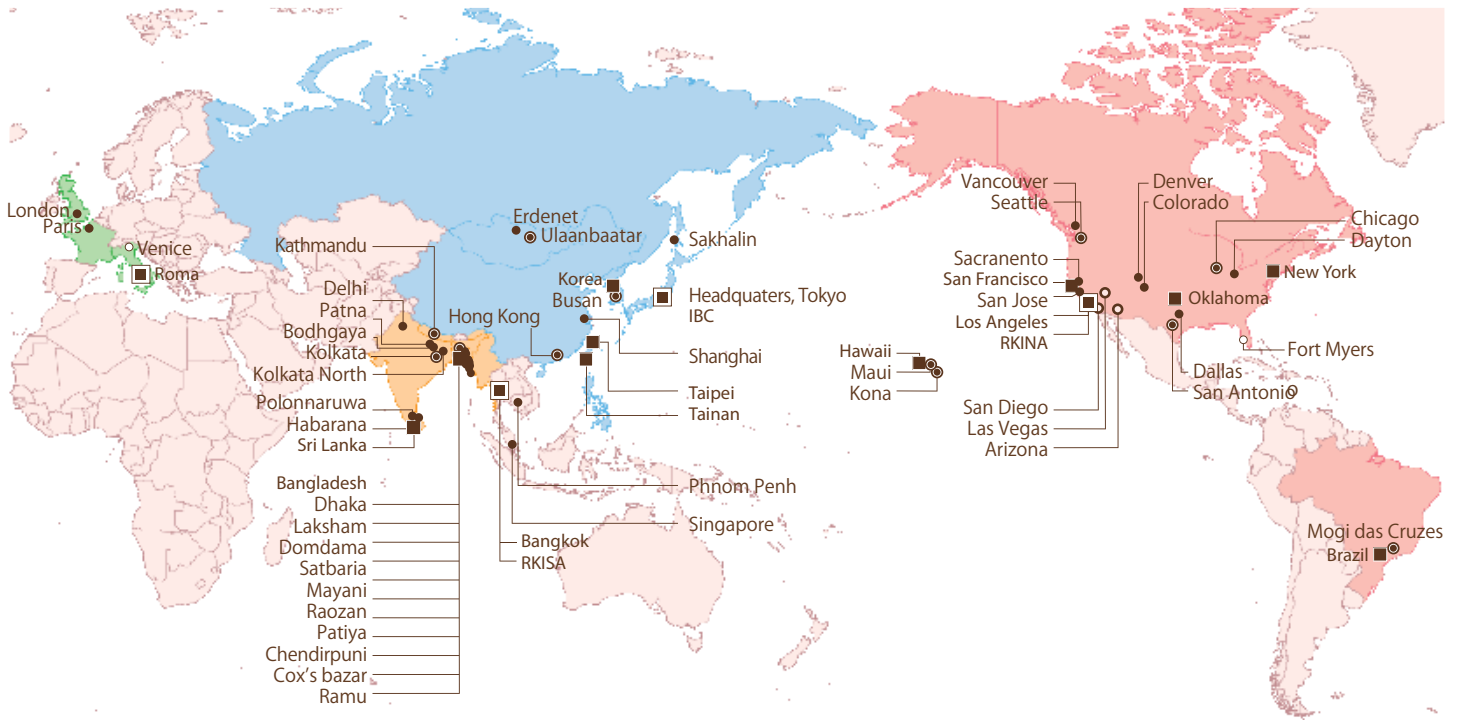
Rev. Koichi Saito  
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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



# Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



## Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740, USA  
TEL: 1-808-325-0015 FAX: 1-808-333-5537

## Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

2707 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033, USA  
POBox 33636, CA 90033, USA  
TEL: 1-323-269-4741 FAX: 1-323-269-4567  
Email: rk-la@sbcglobal.net URL: <http://www.rkina.org/losangeles.html>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, USA  
POBox 778, Pacifica, CA 94044, USA  
TEL: 1-650-359-6951 Email: [info@rksf.org](mailto:info@rksf.org)  
URL: <http://www.rksf.org>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

320 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016, USA  
TEL: 1-212-867-5677 Email: [rkny39@gmail.com](mailto:rkny39@gmail.com) URL: <http://rk-ny.org>

## Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Denver

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

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

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

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

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

## Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Please contact RKINA

## Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil

Rua Dr. José Estefno 40, Vila Mariana, São Paulo-SP, CEP 04116-060, Brasil  
TEL: 55-11-5549-4446, 55-11-5573-8377  
Email: [risho@rkk.org.br](mailto:risho@rkk.org.br) URL: <http://www.rkk.org.br>

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

### Risho Kosei-kai de Mogi das Cruzes

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

### 在家佛教韓國立正佼成會

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

### 在家佛教韓國立正佼成會釜山支部

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

### 社團法人在家佛教立正佼成會

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

### 台南市在家佛教立正佼成會

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

### Risho Kosei-kai South Asia Division

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Kolkata

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Kolkata North

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya Dharma Center

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Patna Dharma Center

### Risho Kosei-kai of Central Delhi

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Singapore

### Risho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

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

### RKISA Risho Kosei-kai International of South Asia

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

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

### Risho Kosei Dhamma Foundation

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa

### Risho Kosei-kai Bangladesh

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

### Risho Kosei-kai Mayani

Mayani Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

### Risho Kosei-kai Damdama

Damdama Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

### Risho Kosei-kai Patiya

China Clinic, Patiya Sadar, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh

### Risho Kosei-kai Satbaria

Village: Satbaria Bepari Para, Chandanaih, Chittagong, Bangladesh

### Risho Kosei-kai Chendhirpuni,

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

### Risho Kosei-kai Dhaka

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

### Risho Kosei-kai Laksham

Village: Dhupchor, Laksham, Comilla, Bangladesh

### Risho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar

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

### Risho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar, Ramu Shibu

### Risho Kosei-kai Raozan

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

### Buddiyskiy khram "Lotos"

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

### Risho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong

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

### Risho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai

### Risho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

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

(Mail) POBox 1364, Ulaanbaatar-15160, Mongolia  
TEL: 976-70006960 Email: rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

### Risho Kosei-kai of Erdenet

### Risho Kosei-kai di Roma

Via Torino, 29, 00184 Roma, Italia  
TEL/FAX: 39-06-48913949 Email: roma@rk-euro.org

### Risho Kosei-kai of the UK

### Risho Kosei-kai of Paris

### Risho Kosei-kai of Venezia

### Risho Kosei-kai International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

166-8537 東京都杉並区和田 2-7-1 普門メディアセンター 3F  
Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan  
TEL: 03-5341-1230 FAX: 03-5341-1224 URL: <http://www.ibt-rk.org>