

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



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Founder's Essay

It All Depends on How You Ask

No matter how talented a person may be, there are limits on the capabilities of any one individual. You can't accomplish a big project, for instance, without enlisting the cooperation of ten or even a hundred companions. But despite knowing this, many people still find it difficult to entrust tasks to others or ask for help.

These people may think that doing everything themselves is much less stressful than getting nasty looks or walking on eggshells when asking others to do something for them. But in fact, they end up struggling to keep their heads above water, bearing the brunt of the job alone. What do their coworkers make of such a person? They can only conclude that so-and-so is never satisfied unless they do everything themselves.

When you enlist the aid of another, it's an opportunity to give them the joy that comes from being trusted and useful. What's important is how you ask for their help. Just by the

way you ask, your request can either be an encouragement that inspires people or a demand that demoralizes them by making them feel coerced.

Konosuke Matsushita (1894–1989), the founder of Panasonic, wrote in his book *Not for Bread Alone: A Business Ethos, A Management Ethic*, “Perhaps because I had very little formal education, I am prone to admire others for their achievements and skills. I trust my employees for what they know and what they have. So when I want to get something done, I tell one of them, ‘I can’t do it but I know you can.’ Someone who knows he is trusted tries to do his best and eventually succeeds.”

Trusting someone and enlisting their help is also a way to practice revering others' buddha-nature.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 256–57

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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.



President's Message

The Mind of Being Sad Together

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Feeling Others' Sadness as Your Own

Let me begin by sharing some lines from the poem "Together" by Ryoichi Wago, a poet and teacher of Japanese language at a high school in Fukushima Prefecture: "Your tears / Teach me / Things, / People are weak, / People are sad, / People are hurting. / However, / There is warmth: / People think of people, / People love people, / People cry for people. / Both you / And me / Are lonely. / But / Both you / And me / Are living / Together."

When we encounter someone who has had a painful experience and is grieving, we should, just as described in this poem, think of that person, weep together with him or her, or hold his or her hand while offering encouraging words such as, "Any time you need me, I'm here for you." We are capable of empathizing with other people's suffering because we are born with a tender and considerate heart that does not exist in other animals.

I think that this empathy develops further as we experience the painful, sad feelings that come along with living, aging, being ill, and facing death. If you are a person with faith, you may be able to understand other people's sufferings and sadness so well that you feel like they were your own. This is because, to borrow the words of the mathematician Kiyoshi Oka (1901–78), "The essence of religion is to understand the sadness of others and to yourself feel that sadness as well."

This essence is revealed to us in the closing lines of chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata": "How can I cause living beings to / Embark upon the unsurpassable Way / And quickly accomplish embodiment as buddhas?"

Drawing Out the Buddha-Nature in Yourself and Others

Every year around September 7 or 8 comes the day called *Hakuro* (literally, "white dew"), which takes its name from the morning dew that forms on flowers and plants. The dew glistens in the sunlight, but it also has the impression of the ephemeral, as is evident in the Japanese saying, "this world is but dew."

However, the lines from chapter 16 above convey to us the Buddha's earnest desire and hope that, although we live in an impermanent world that we think is as





ephemeral as dew, no one stays lost in grief and everyone will awaken to their buddha-nature and be liberated from suffering. Furthermore, this shows us, who are bodhisattvas, a way of life that helps people.

A good example of helping someone in a painful predicament is found within the well-known legend of Shakyamuni and Shuddhipanthaka.

Shuddhipanthaka, who had an extremely poor memory, was unable to recall a single line of the teaching, even after three months as a monk. His older brother, who had already become a disciple of Shakyamuni, rebuked him, telling him that he should leave and go away. However, Shakyamuni saw that Shuddhipanthaka was lost in grief and lamenting his own foolishness, so he handed Shuddhipanthaka a broom and told him to clean the surrounding area every day while chanting, “Sweep away the dust, sweep away the defilements.”

Over time, as Shuddhipanthaka could remember these words, he realized and was impressed by the importance of cleansing the mind. He ended up becoming an esteemed disciple of Shakyamuni.

Shuddhipanthaka’s mind was liberated and his grief and despair turned into joy due to the great compassion and empathy of Shakyamuni, who helped Shuddhipanthaka by believing single-mindedly in his buddha-nature.

Earlier, I mentioned the “impermanent” world, but we have continually received life and died again, and as part of this cycle of birth and death, we are alive here and now. This means that while our past experiences include both positive and negative things, we are living the same eternal life as the Buddha.

What is universal to us all—who contain both good and bad qualities—is the same unshakable essence: buddha-nature. Therefore, it is important that we interact with each other in ways that bring forth our buddha-nature and that of others, especially so our practices may provide joy to those suffering from sadness.

From *Kosei*, September 2020





Using My Life for the Happiness of Others



Ms. Eiko Naito
Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at Rissho Kosei-kai of New York on October 15, 2017, during the ceremony celebrating its thirty-fifth anniversary.

CONGRATULATIONS, everyone! Today, we celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of New York. I'm glad to have the opportunity to share my Dharma Journey talk on this significant day. Today has become a meaningful day for me to stand at the starting line of my new life and celebrate taking the first step to move forward.

I was born in 1963 in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture. When I was three years old and my older sister was in the first grade, my family moved to Tokyo where my parents had no one to look to for help. My parents made every effort to find a nursery school to take care of me so my mother could work during the day to help support the family income, but they were refused by more than ten schools. Just when they were about to give up, they finally found a school that gladly accepted me.

At six o'clock the next morning, I was dropped off



Ms. Naito delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the New York Dharma Center.

at the nursery-school director's home; my mother came to pick me up at nine o'clock that night.

In the evenings, before my mother would pick me up, the director, whose name was Ms. Akiko Nakamura, would sit in front of the home altar and recite a sutra. She was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. I always sat behind her and listened to her recite.

Ms. Nakamura was like the Bodhisattva Kannon—the affectionate mother—to me. I vividly remember her always watching over me and affectionately taking care of me as if I were her own child. I have no recollection of experiencing loneliness as a young child. For me, my time with Ms. Nakamura is an unforgettable event for which I can never be grateful enough.

Meeting Ms. Nakamura also led my mother to Rissho Kosei-kai, who diligently went to the Dharma center for visits on the memorial days and participated in center duties and *hoza* sessions. Throughout her life, my mother relied on Ms. Nakamura as if she were her older sister, approaching her and asking her for advice whenever she was suffering.

Thanks to my father's job as a craftsman who paints designs on kimonos, by the time I was in second grade, my family was able to live in a single-family house. However, in less than two years, my father's business soured. Our happy life did not last long, and my mother started working again.

This was around the time that I started fifth grade and my elder sister moved away from home and into the high school dormitory. My mother stopped coming home, saying she was very busy at work. I would make dinner for my father and wait for mother, who did not come home. As the days passed, my father started acting strange and things became a mess in our house. I felt lonely every day.

When I was sixteen years old, I wanted to get my license to drive a motorcycle. I got a copy of my family register, which designated the person I thought was my father as an “adoptive father.” To make things worse, I then found out that my mother had been living with someone other than my father.

My mother’s betrayal shocked me and deepened my sense of loneliness. I told myself, “I will try to regard my mother as simply a woman, and not my mom.” This was a way to avoid feeling sad, mortified, and lonely. Yet, in spite of everything, I loved my mother.

My mother divorced my father and married the person she was living with. Yet, when I turned twenty, my mother—who was having marital trouble with her new husband—suddenly came to me and said, “I want you to run a café to support me.” I thought it was an unreasonable request, but I wanted to live with my mother once again. I sacrificed everything and finally opened a café.

However, shortly after the shop’s opening, my mother decided to reconcile with her estranged husband and left me to run the business on my own. At that time, I truly felt like I was cursed to be lonely. Yet I received unexpected support from many people around me, and six months later, my café became the most prosperous shop in the town.

When I was twenty-two years old, I suddenly became ill and was diagnosed with pyelitis. The doctor told me that I was working too hard and needed complete bed rest. I was hospitalized for two months.

When I left the hospital, my mother and her husband took me on my first overseas trip. We went to Hawaii, and it sparked an instant liking for America. I wanted to be liberated from all the sorrow, anger, fear, and pain I’d experienced until then. My dream of living in open-minded America, with no constraints or limitations, began to grow.

At the age of twenty-five, I closed the café and, against everyone’s wishes, moved to New York. My chest was inflated with a false sense of confidence, however, and actual life in the city was not as easy as I’d thought. The savings I’d brought with me quickly ran out, so I had to work to live. After starting and leaving various jobs, I was able to get a job at a Japanese

trading company. There, I was able to receive the support I needed to obtain a green card.

When I was twenty-six, I married a man I met in New York. But my married life turned out to be a somewhat lonely and empty one. I’d been attracted to my husband, who often spoke about spirituality, but after getting married, I became overly attentive and concerned about him and I felt like I was putting forth a false “me” every day.

Knowing this, my mother in Japan was worried about me. Whenever I called her, she said, “There is a Dharma center of Rissho Kosei-kai in New York. Try to go there.” It was ten years after I got married when I finally visited the Dharma center. However, as I was thinking more about my road to future independence rather than normalizing the relationship with my husband, I was not receptive to the teaching.

In 2001, I made a career change to a moving company, where I was the president’s partner in opening up a Japanese market for the firm. Meanwhile, my relationship with my husband was deteriorating because of the differences in our ways of thinking. In 2005, my mother passed away from a stroke. In November of the same year, I decided to end my sixteen-year marriage and got divorced. I had lost the most important people in my life—I was lonely once again. I was becoming depressed and I condemned myself, thinking that I was worthless.

It was around this time that a member of the New York Dharma Center befriended me. At first, I was defiant against Rissho Kosei-kai’s teachings. “If you recite the sutra, do you really think the Buddha will do something for me?” I thought. The teachings did not resonate in my heart, and I didn’t listen to them. After a while, however, thanks to the perseverance of the member who kept drawing close to me, her warmth started to penetrate into my stubborn heart that was unwilling to be open to the consideration of others. I felt that my heart was gradually healing, and I found myself willing to listen to what people talked to me about with an open and flexible mind.

I had suffered from the false assumption that I was fated to be lonely, but through the warmth of the sangha, I learned that my life was supported by many people. It was an important thing for me to learn.

Spiritual Journey

Because Ms. Nakamura led my mother to the faith when I was a child, I'd actually been connected with Buddhism, Rissho Kosei-kai, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, and President Nichiko Niwano for a long time. I felt that over that length of time, the karmic ties with all of them had been firmly rooted in my soul.

In 2009, my doctor told me that my renal function had deteriorated and my kidneys were only working at 30 percent. In 2011, I suffered from high blood pressure caused by work stress and was told to receive treatment, but since I had no insurance, I didn't go to the hospital and instead left the disease untreated. This caused my kidney failure to progress, and in 2013, I was finally told that I need dialysis. I still continued to work without going to the hospital, turning my face away from the reality of the situation.

In 2014, I left the moving firm and started my own moving company as an independent proprietor, which imposed both mental and physical burdens on me. In the end, my kidneys were seriously damaged and lost most of their function. Finally, in August of that year, I went to the dialysis center. The doctor told me that I should continue to receive dialysis until I had the chance to have a kidney transplant. I was filled with numerous anxieties, but I began to live each day with a hope that I could have a kidney transplant someday.

When I talked to my sangha members about challenges in my work, they always listened to me attentively. One day, a member said to me, "Eiko-san, you can't change other people, so why don't you try changing your way of seeing things—even slightly?" I was strangely receptive and thought, "Okay!" I immediately put her advice into practice. Just by changing my way of seeing things, the feeling that I could accept the person who had made me suffer arose within me, and I had a mysterious experience in which things I couldn't stand before changed into things I was grateful for. I learned that practice sometimes brings fast results.

Although I had a major illness, I was very happy and cheerful because I felt that my mind was changing for the better. As I changed, people around me began to trust me and share their worries with me. I was pleased to know that people were opening their hearts to me. When I was convinced that anyone

would be liberated like me if they studied and practiced the teaching, my hope that all my friends would also be liberated began to grow.

Ms. A was a friend of mine for ten years, and I strongly wished for her to be liberated through the teaching. At first I was too pushy and intrusive, trying to give her advice and share my experiences. I ended up causing her to have a sense of rejection.

Around that time, I started to participate in evening Buddhist study-group sessions held at the New York Dharma Center. There I learned the Three Seals of the Dharma, the doctrine of Dependent Origination, and the Ten Suchnesses. While I was studying them, common phrases I'd been taught in the sangha, like "we can't change others" and "change your own viewpoint," began to make perfect sense to me. I found that these phrases were firmly grounded in Buddhist truth, which deeply moved and impressed me. It was then that I decided to invite Ms. A so we could learn the teachings together.

Soon after this, Ms. A gave me a call. She said, "I don't know what to do anymore. I want to die." I thought I'd fully understood her pain, but I hadn't. I apologized for not having been able to do anything for her. Then she said, "I would like to go to Rissho Kosei-kai." Exerting all her strength, she came to the Dharma center.

When she arrived, Ms. A looked totally worn out and was crying. When Ms. A started to talk about her suffering, the minister of the New York Dharma Center, Rev. Etsuko Fujita, listened to her attentively and drew close to her as if she were gently holding her. Rev. Fujita praised Ms. A, saying, "Your children have grown up to be honest and receptive. They are wonderful. You're the one who raised them, right? I know you've been doing your best." Then, as if a dark veil fell off, Ms. A's face, which had looked totally despondent until then, suddenly lightened.

"This is how people become liberated!" I thought. I was astonished and deeply impressed by what had happened before my eyes. Rev. Fujita must have struck a chord in the depth of Ms. A's heart, but at that moment it looked to me as though Rev. Fujita had performed magic.

Then I thought, from the bottom of my heart, "I

want to be a person like Rev. Fujita who can liberate a person in such a way!” I was also filled with gratitude for Ms. A—she made me realize the joy of liberating people. Ms. A decided to join Rissho Kosei-kai of her own accord, and she and I started to practice the teaching that brings happiness to all people.

Through this opportunity of connecting Ms. A to the faith, my mind changed completely and I started to think seriously about using the life I’d been given for the sake of others.

When I began receiving dialysis in August 2014, I was told that I would likely need to wait eight or nine years for a donor kidney. I added my name to the waiting list, and the possibility of receiving a transplant gave me hope and lifted me up spiritually.

On July 12, 2017, I visited the New York Dharma Center to receive guidance from Rev. Fujita about my future. Rev. Fujita encouraged me, saying, “Now there is an Eiko-san who would like to be helpful to others. That’s wonderful! When that kind of decision is made, the Buddha will protect your work as well. As the proprietor of your company, this is the beginning of your practice to cultivate the mind and heart so you can garner complete trust from everyone.” She then told me with a clear voice, “From now on, you should leave everything up to the Buddha and devote yourself to becoming a person who can be of service to others.”

To tell the truth, I was filled with anxiety about the future direction of my company and how I could build a stable foundation for the rest of my life. Furthermore, I had a constant fear of the kidney transplant surgery I would need. It was as if thin clouds were constantly covering my mind and heart. But when Rev. Fujita told me clearly and strongly that I must leave everything up to the Buddha and be diligent, I was able to accept her guidance without hesitation, and I found that my anxiety instantly disappeared.

At that moment, I experienced a strange and powerful sensation, like something had started to move within me. It was as if gearwheels started to rotate, with their cogs biting into each other tightly. That day, I offered gratitude to the statue of the Eternal Buddha in the Dharma center and went home.

Early the following morning, I received a call from

the hospital telling me that they’d located a donor. They’d originally told me that I would need to wait eight or nine years for the transplant; it had only been three. Since this happened so soon after I made up my mind to dedicate myself to the practice of the faith, I felt that this was a blessing that the Buddha extended to me.

The next day, on July 14, I received the kidney transplant. The donor was a three-month-old baby. The doctor told me that although the small kidney would grow large in my body and eventually function properly, I would still need dialysis for the first three months after the transplant. But the kidney started to function properly very soon, and I didn’t need the planned dialysis.

I was given this life through many miraculous encounters. I’m hoping now, from the bottom of my heart, that I will use the rest of my life for the happiness of others by becoming a kindhearted person and improving myself spiritually as a human being.

Thank you, everyone, for your kind attention.



Ms. Naito (rear, fourth from left) with other sangha members at the New York 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 17

Specification of Merits (2)

The Four Stages of Faith and the Five Stages of Practice

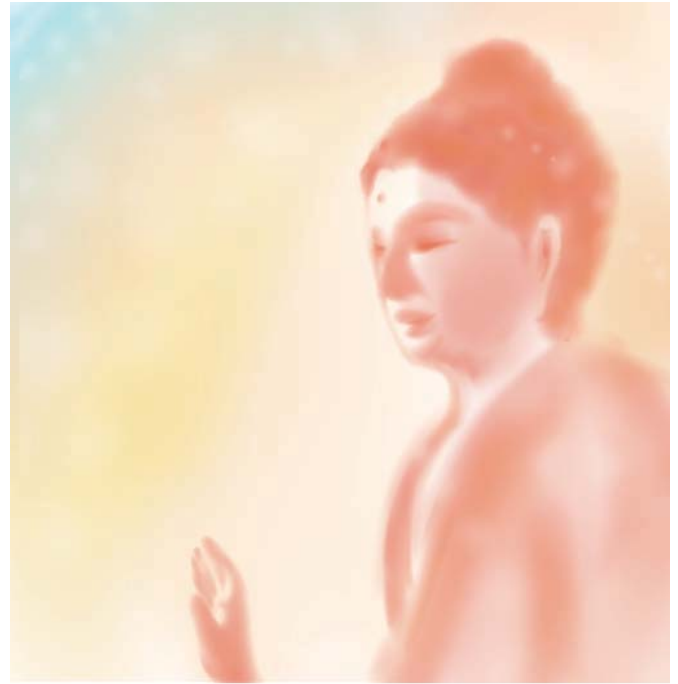
The Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi (538–97) of China, also known as the “Great Teacher of Mount Tiantai,” distilled the essence of this chapter into an easily understood and memorable form: the four stages of faith and the five stages of practice. Both describe the mental preparation of the believer.

The four stages of faith, or, more accurately, the four ways of practicing the faith of the Lotus Sutra during the lifetime of the Buddha, derives from the thinking that the ideal practice of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra can be divided into four stages. Although these stages were originally intended for those living in the Buddha’s lifetime, they apply equally today.

The first stage of faith is generating but one thought of faith and discernment. It is important to believe in and understand, even for a single moment, the infinite life span of the Buddha, for this also means understanding the ultimate reality of all things. It is the great leap of the spirit.

The second stage is generally comprehending the implications of the Buddha’s words concerning his infinite life. Here we take a step beyond momentary faith in and understanding of the immeasurable life of the Buddha to a broader appreciation of the great meaning contained in the teaching. Just as the life of the Buddha is eternal and imperishable, so are our own lives in that they are one with the Buddha’s. It’s only because we’re lost in the clouds of illusion that we do not see this. If we dispel these clouds one by one, we will perceive that we are entirely one with the Buddha.

The third stage is broadly expounding the sutra to others. This is the stage of a believer who has gone a step further than a general comprehension of the infinity of the Buddha’s life. Here we learn the broad teaching of the Lotus Sutra, plant it firmly in our



minds, and express devotion and gratitude for the teaching. It’s especially important during this stage to encourage many people to hear the teachings and guide them toward the Buddha Way.

The fourth stage is profound faith and the perfection of meditative discernment. This means that with deepening faith in and understanding of the immeasurable life of the Buddha, the believer gains the certainty of the Buddha’s constant presence. With this comes a view of life and the world as existing perfectly in accord with the teaching of the Buddha, and the believer now has the capacity to live in a state of joy in this teaching.

The five stages of practice, also referred to as the five grades, came about after the Buddha’s passing, and describe the proper conduct of the believer and the five merits related to this conduct.

The first stage of practice is initial rejoicing over the sutra. This means experiencing a spiritual rejoicing upon learning the immeasurable life of the Buddha, instead of only having an intellectual under-



standing of it. This is faith, and it is explained in detail in the following chapter, “The Merits of Rejoicing.”

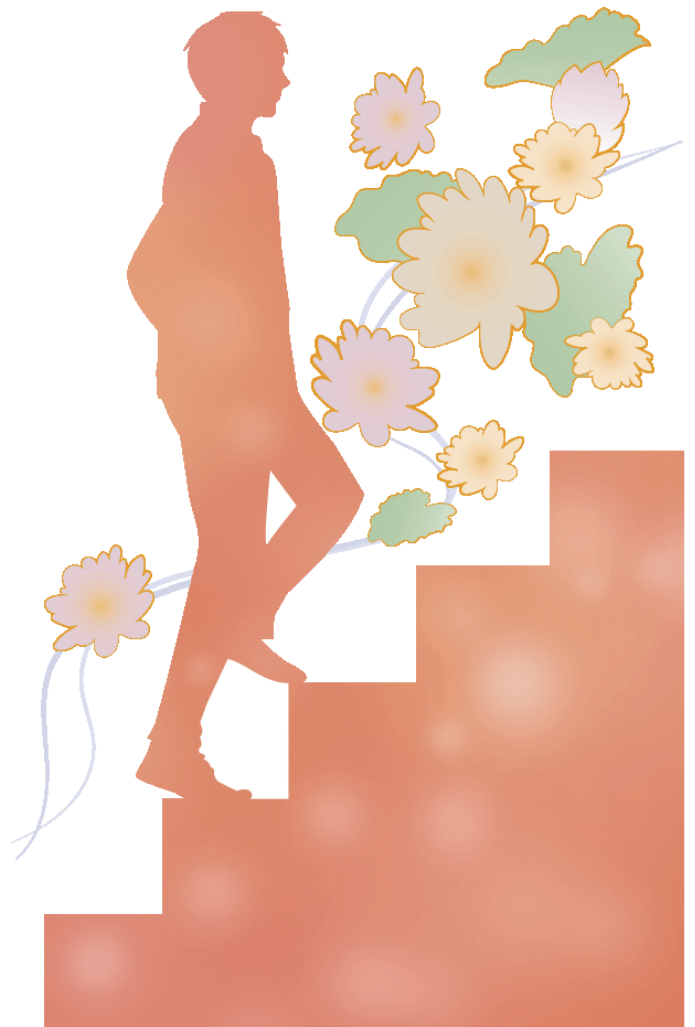
Next comes reading and reciting the sutra. By merely having the initial rejoicing over the sutra, one can be said to have attained true faith, and the believer advances a step further by studying the teaching single-mindedly and reading and reciting the sutra.

The third stage is expounding the Dharma to others. As the believer begins to truly understand the value of the Buddha’s teaching through reading and reciting the sutra, it may be natural that he or she feels a strong urge to tell others about it. In telling others, the believer improves themselves, and their merit grows as they teach and transform others for the better.

The fourth stage is practicing the six perfections—donation, keeping the precepts, forbearance, diligence, meditation, and wisdom—at the same time as receiving and keeping, reading and reciting, and expounding the Dharma. In doing these practices concurrently, the believer’s state of mind of being a bodhisattva moves to yet a higher level.

Finally, the fifth stage is the *primary* practice of the six perfections, putting emphasis on elevating and refining them. With the attainment of this stage of complete practice, the believer is close to achieving the enlightenment of the Buddha.

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. 176–80).



Bringing Out Compassion with Our Belief in Buddha-Nature

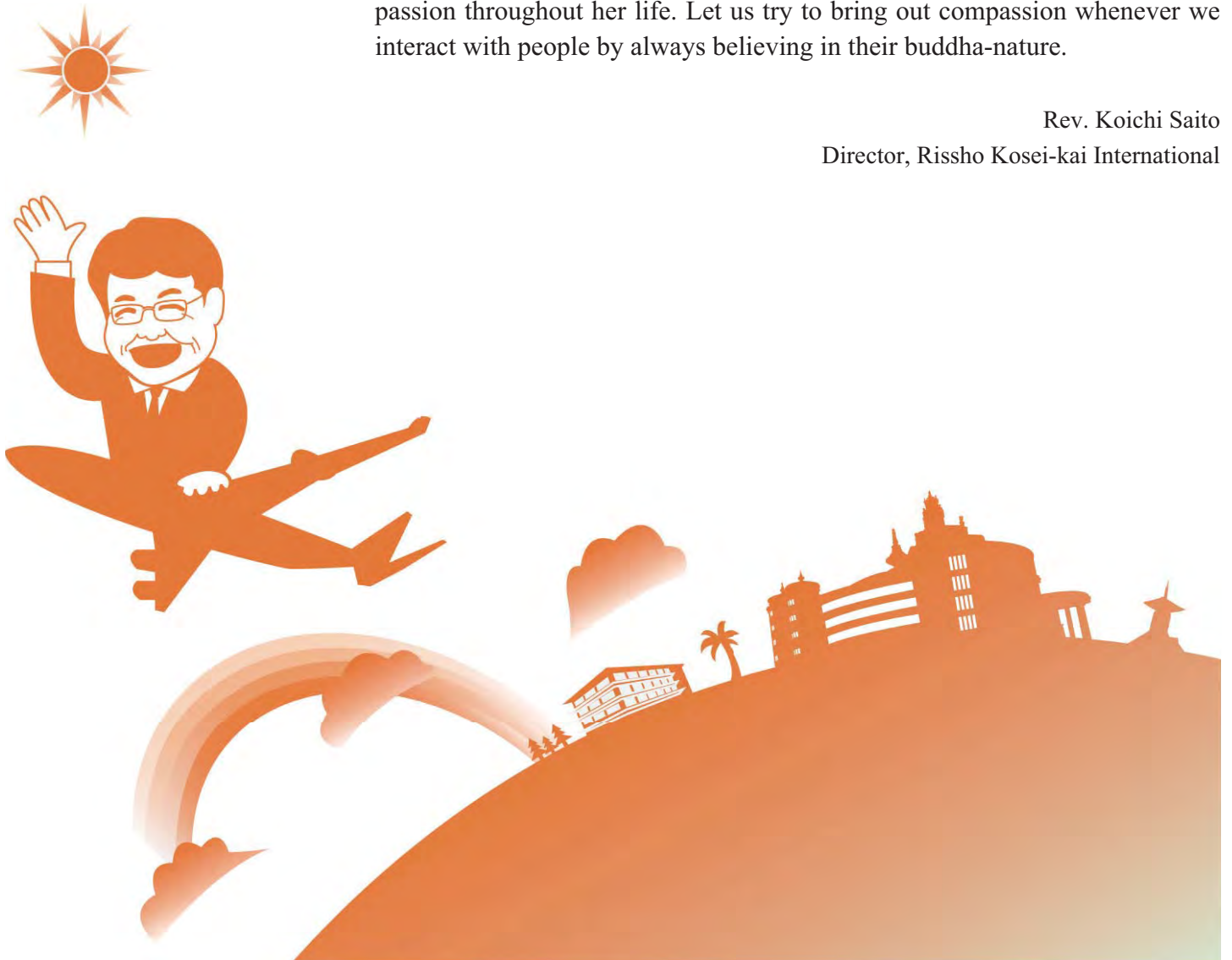
ON September 10, Rissho Kosei-kai will commemorate the annual memorial day for Cofounder Myoko Naganuma. On this day, we will remember the great virtues of Rev. Naganuma, who cofounded Rissho Kosei-kai with Founder Nikkyo Niwano and served as a witness to his mission. This is also the day we will make a vow to practice compassion ourselves.

In his book *My Father, My Teacher*, President Nichiko Niwano writes, "Throughout her whole life, Myoko Sensei was a woman of great compassion."

In his message for this month, "The Mind of Being Sad Together," President Niwano shares a story about Shakyamuni Buddha approaching Shuddhipanthaka, a disciple of his who was lamenting his own foolishness, and helping him by firmly believing in his buddha-nature. President Niwano teaches us the importance of praying that everyone will awaken to their buddha-nature and be liberated from suffering while serving as the support needed to bring them to the spiritual state of a buddha.

This month is a time to emulate Cofounder Naganuma, who practiced compassion throughout her life. Let us try to bring out compassion whenever we interact with people by always believing in their buddha-nature.

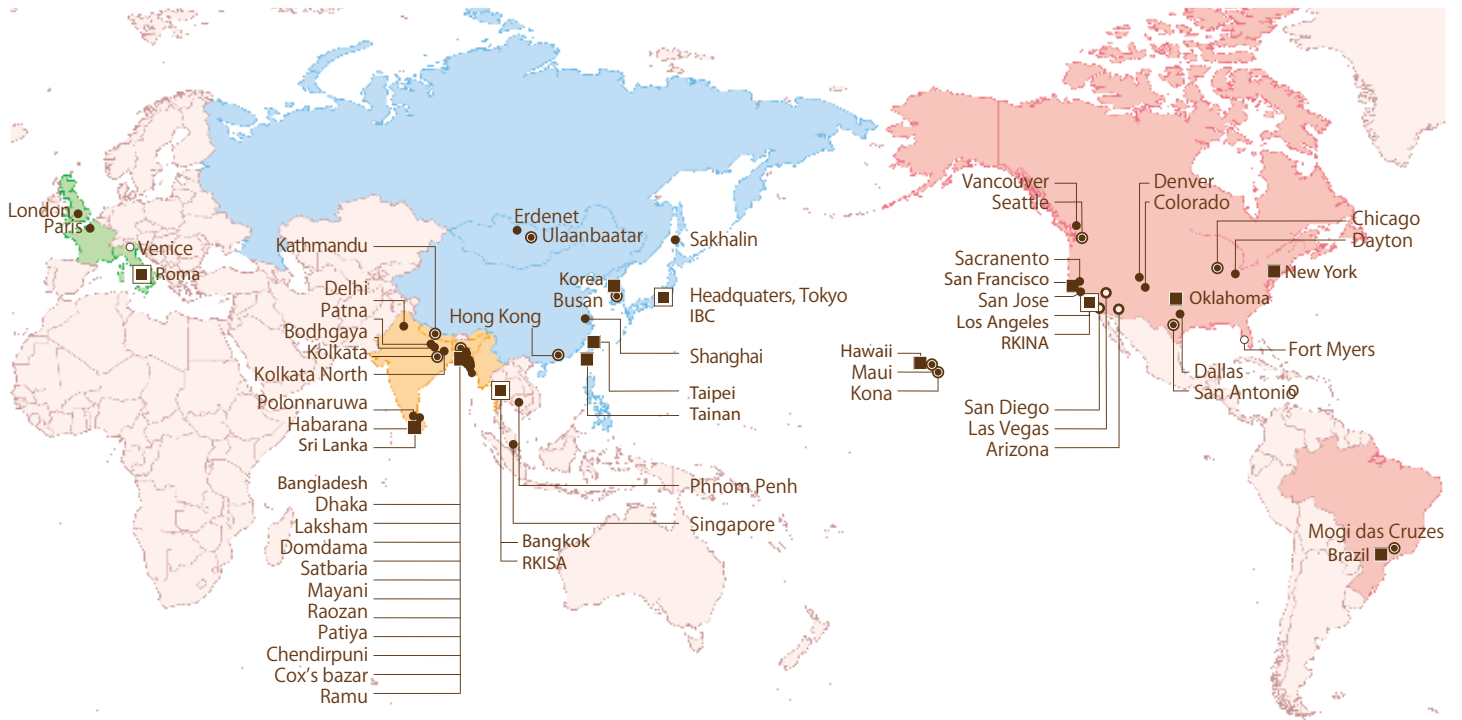
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