

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

1
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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

The Person Who Continually Reveres Others

ONCE the Buddhist faith becomes second nature to people, there is a tendency for their practice to turn into a formality that, while outwardly impressive, no longer comes from their hearts and minds.

Though placing one's palms together is a gesture that expresses reverence for others, if you do so while harboring negative thoughts about them, for instance thinking, "This person is a pain in the neck who contradicts everything they are told!" then that person will never open their hearts to you.

The Lotus Sutra tells the story of Bodhisattva Never Despise. Bodhisattva Never Despise continually practiced reverence toward whatever sort of person he would meet, with nothing in mind but an absolute faith in the thought "This person possesses buddha-nature, and they will certainly become a buddha!"

This is why even when people pelted him with rocks and struck him with their staffs, Never Despise continued showing reverence, saying, "No matter what you may do to me, I will continue to have faith in your potential without any doubt, because you are a person destined to become a buddha!" He was never bothered by whatever nonsense people would say to him. Just as his name implies, he revered them with every fiber of his being.

When people meet someone like Bodhisattva Never Despise, they cannot help but be disarmed and won over, because the encounter causes an outpouring of the unblemished, pure mind that lies dormant in the deepest recesses of their hearts.

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Published by Rissho Kosei-kai International,
Fumonkan, 2-6-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo,
166-8537 Japan

TEL: +81-3-5341-1124

FAX: +81-3-5341-1224

Email: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

Senior Editor: Shoko Mizutani

Editor: Eriko Kanao

Copy Editor: Allan Carpenter

Editorial Staff of RK International

Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization whose holy scripture is the Threefold Lotus Sutra. It was established by Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Cofounder Myoko Naganuma in 1938. This organization is composed of ordinary men and women who have faith in the Buddha and strive to enrich their spirituality by applying his teachings to their daily lives. At both the local community and international levels, we, under the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, are very active in promoting peace and well-being through altruistic activities and cooperation with other organizations.

The title, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, is meant to convey our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life, to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. The online edition aims to make Buddhism more practicable in the daily lives of people around the world.



GUIDANCE BY PRESIDENT NIWANO

A Steadfast, Simple Manner

by Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Learn from Nature

It is often said that planning for the coming year starts on New Year's Day. If you begin the year by anticipating what sort of year this should be for yourself, you will feel braced for it and prepared for a fresh start in the new year.

Incidentally, even if you make important resolutions on New Year's Day, after just a few days, you will often forget them in the hustle and bustle of holiday activity. This might be because your mind attaches importance to results, rather than on making a continual effort, and because your mind may not be free and open to taking on new challenges.

Just as we are shown by the following haiku poem by Hakkotsu Hironaka, "Even on New Year's Day, / The snow must be cleared away," I think that what we need at this time is to return to the settled state of mind that acts in the appropriate way and does what must be done, regardless of the circumstances. Instead of feeling pressed for time and letting ourselves be run ragged by aiming for efficiency and results, we should behave in a steadfast, simple manner. In doing so, we can lead a lifestyle of kindness and caring. Therein lies true happiness.

No matter what we are doing, if we neither rush nor dawdle but conduct our affairs in an orderly manner, we develop our humanity.

"Slowly, slowly, / The persimmons become dried persimmons" is a poem by Shun Iwasaki that makes us think about our way of life by combining it with the working of nature. Truly mature human sentiments are developed through steadfast daily behavior that does not neglect even minor details.

With January in mind, I think of the delicate amur adonis flowers that are used as New Year's decorations in Japan. In this essay, I have already cited a few poems, and I will now quote one more, about the amur adonis: "When heaven and earth unite, / A flower of the amur adonis blooms. / May the flowers bloom / No matter how many ages pass by." The poem by Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856) suggests that nature simply marks the passage of time, and when the workings of the truth are in harmony, the flowers bloom of their own accord. Therein lies a lesson for all of us, indicating the importance of leading lives that are steadfast and simple.



Raising Your Aspiration

Unswayed by the successes or failures we may witness, we should calmly and unaffectedly do what is expected of us. If we can conduct our lives in this way, our minds will be tranquil and we can expect to improve ourselves as human beings. However, the reality may be that we find it quite difficult to continue to do even one thing on which we have our hearts set. In the fact that we want to lead our lives in a steadfast, simple manner, we may think of Shakyamuni as one of our role models, but that might lead us to conclude that only those people who possess exceptional talents and abilities can do so.

When Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) was asked about what was important in practicing the Buddha Way, he replied, “No special talent is required in order to study the Buddha Way. When you raise your aspiration and make the effort to learn the Way according to your own ability you definitely will be able to attain the Buddha Dharma.” However, Dogen reminded us that the aspiration for this must be earnest. In other words, it is important that you continually and repeatedly sustain the feeling of pursuing the Way. Even if you have the wholehearted intention to do a certain thing or another, without a firm resolve you probably will not keep to it for very long.

From a different perspective, when you follow your aspiration and turn your full attention to all that is before your eyes, even if your progress may be slow you will definitely achieve results. Furthermore, if you develop your aspiration, you can experience being open-minded so as not to swing between joy and sorrow, which will help lead to a calm, simple lifestyle.

However, as the practice of faith based on one’s aspiration differs from one person to another, it is certainly all right to seek one’s own practice in accordance with one’s own abilities.

For example, it is enough to simply pick up roadside litter, to put into practice the mind of knowing satisfaction, or to perform the three basic practices that I frequently mention—greeting others in the morning, replying positively to a request or inquiry, and maintaining one’s personal possessions with neatness and care. This is one meaning of steadfast practice of the faith, when you are unflaggingly diligent about the things closest to you, and are as prudent as possible about doing them.

Together, let’s make the most of each day so that when this year ends, we will have enjoyed a year full of satisfaction and happiness.

From *Kosei*, January 2017. Translated by Kosei Publishing Co.



My Once-Hated Mother-in-Law Turns Me into a Bodhisattva

by Mrs. Ji Ok Bun
Korea Dharma Center

This testimony was delivered at the Korea Dharma Center on August 23, 2016.

I currently serve as an area leader. I was born in 1949, as the third of seven siblings. After I got married, I was blessed with two sons. The second son has already married and has become independent, so I live with my husband and our older son. My husband, who became seventy-six years old this year, works as the superintendent of an apartment house and serves as a village chief at a community center. He is healthy, but I suffer from headaches. My first encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai was because of my intolerable headaches.

One day, I had a headache due to an unknown cause and the pain was getting more severe day by day. I suffered from such severe pain that I couldn't sit still, and the pain could not be cured, even though I saw

several doctors. I changed from one hospital to another, searching for medical treatments. Because I had used Western medicine and the Chinese herbal medicine at the same time, however, I became jaundiced and I hovered between life and death because of liver disease. Someone told me that the site of my house was bad, so I moved.

In the fall of 1993, while dealing with that situation, I visited Korean Rissho Kosei-kai for the first time guided by my neighbor Ms. Lee, who was an area leader. But, the impression of the center wasn't very positive to me at the time. The building and its atmosphere were so different from the traditional Korean temples that I couldn't feel that I could believe in this faith, so I threw away the prayer beads into a trash box when I was on my way back to my home.

Thereafter, however, the chapter leader visited my house many times to lead me to a religious life. The former minister told me that if I would believe in and practice the teaching, I would surely receive a good result. So I decided to perform a special prayer and practice the *hoza* activities for a hundred days. Out of an ardent desire to cure my headache, I visited the Korea Dharma Center every day, but I didn't want to listen to someone talk about his or her trouble that was not related to me. I was able to complete my hundred-day practice of the Dharma without missing a single day.

I also visited the Dharma center on the first day of the month as well as on the Uposatha Day Ceremony and would hold the devotional services for ancestors. As a result, even though my headache did not disappear, I came to feel appreciation for being alive now. One day, in the *hoza*, the former minister's Dharma guidance gradually penetrated through my ears into my heart, and I realized my physical condition was getting better.

Thanks to my headaches, I had the opportunity to



Mrs. Ji Ok Bun delivers her spiritual experiences at the Korea Dharma Center.

Spiritual Journey

Before learning the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I was selfish and strongly believed I was right. I got mad when things did not go as I wished, although I wanted to have everything my own way. Because I had the headaches, my husband and children were always concerned about me and tried to fit in with my needs. However I had been living without realizing my family's consideration for me. If I hadn't been able to encounter Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings, I would have lived without knowing this deep appreciation to my family.

encounter Rissho Kosei-kai, and what I had learned in *hoza* became my treasure. The former minister told us, "We are most grateful that we are sustained to live and we are alive now in impermanence," "Everything is within ourselves," and "If we change, others will change accordingly." She taught us sometimes kindly and sometimes strictly, so that we could put into practice what we learned in our daily lives.

Before learning the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I was selfish and strongly believed I was right. I got mad when things did not go as I wished, although I wanted to have everything my own way. Because I had the headaches, my husband and children were always concerned about me and tried to fit in with my needs. However I had been living without realizing my family's consideration for me. If I hadn't been able to encounter Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings, I would have lived without feeling this deep appreciation for my family.

When I was twenty-three years old, I married my husband, who is eight years older than me. As soon as I got married, I began to live with my mother-in-law, and my conflict with her also began. She was strong-minded and hated being bested by others. She argued with others about something she didn't like, and when an argument occurred in the neighborhood, she was always there. When quarrels and dissension arose within our family, her anger sometimes didn't recede until my husband and I went down on our hands and knees and apologized to her.

Furthermore, she handed out kimchi I had pickled to neighbors without my permission, and she invited them to our home and had a drinking party. If at that time I was the person I am now, I could have expressed my appreciation for her kindness to neighbors, "You are so nice to the neighbors. Thank you very much." But in those days, I couldn't stand her, no matter what she did.

Also she always ran up tabs on the things she

shopped for, so I used to go to the shops to pay off her tabs at the end of each month. My husband loved and cared for her. Every day he bought some sweets for her, and every time she ate a fish, he would bone it and put its meat on the rice so that she could eat it easily.

When I complained to my husband that I couldn't put up with her attitude anymore, he rejected what I had to say and said, "If you find it so hard, why don't you start a new life by divorcing me?" When I had a talk with my own mother, she said to me, "You have to be patient." I heard later that actually she had been very worried about me and hoped I would come back home.

When I became pregnant with my first child, I had toxemia of pregnancy due to stress, and my family members gathered in the hospital. Then a doctor said to us, "I can save only one life, the baby or the mother. Which one do you choose?" My mother-in-law said, "I'll give up the life of the daughter-in-law," and it ended up in a big argument with my own mother. I heard about this later. The doctor said to me, "You cannot have another child," but I was able to give birth to my second son safely.

When my first son was five years old and second son was three years old, I started to work because my husband's business was not doing well. Even after I started working, I did housework well and prepared the afternoon snacks for the children, so I was proud that I was not dependent on my mother-in-law.

However, she became bedridden because of geriatric diseases when she turned eighty-three. My husband did his best to care for her. I also devoted myself to doing so, but I was only acting from the feeling that I should perform this duty as her daughter-in-law. Honestly, I thought I had shown enough devotion to her and I would be able to be free when she passed away. However, after I learned the Buddha's teachings, I realized that I had never tried to understand what she felt.

Spiritual Journey

She lost her husband at the age of thirty-nine and fled from North Korea to South Korea with three children. She had to have a violent temper in the cruel situation of war so that she could survive with her three children. I understood her feeling a little bit. My husband was the oldest son, and his mother was blessed with him as a result of her prayer to the Buddha. He told me that his father passed away when he was seven years old. He had taken good care of his mother, because from his childhood he saw her go through many hardships to protect the children. His devotion to her was famous in the neighborhood.

Just as he showed devotion to her mother, he has taken good care of me now. I had been filled with anger before, so I did not go so far as to notice his kindness. I think I must have been jealous of her. I take this occasion to repent for my deeds toward her. And I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my own mother, who has always been concerned about and supported me; I apologize to her for making her worry.

In April 2016, President Niwano paid a visit to the Korea Dharma Center. Thanks to his virtue, ten families in the area for which I am responsible have newly entered Rissho Kosei-kai. They have various religious backgrounds, but most of their sufferings concerned their children. After they became members and the posthumous name for all the spirits of ancestors were installed in the Dharma center, the Buddha showed them positive phenomena in their lives, as skillful means.

A certain member's son found a good job, another member's son was promoted in a company, and still another was able to obtain repayment for money he had lent. Almost every day I received many such welcome reports from the members. And they were pleased that Kosei-kai members warmly stayed close to them like a family.

The members are obediently practicing the teaching of the Buddha. Seeing them reminded me that I had unconsciously forgotten obedience. I reflected on that. My children in the Dharma teach me the importance of giving thanks to the teachings and firmly recognizing the Truth. Now I see each of them as venerable and precious. I am living in the same town with them, so they are always watching me. Here, I vow to show them how I practice the teachings in my daily life.

In May 2016, the World Sangha Assembly 2016 was held at the headquarters in Tokyo. We received warm-hearted hospitality, and I deemed my exchanges with many people, as the same sangha walking together a path of the Buddha's teachings beyond such differences as nationalities. This still remains within my heart as grateful experience.

I devote myself to fully conveying this wonderful teaching to many people and to being diligent in the practice so that we may become happy together with them.

Thank you very much.

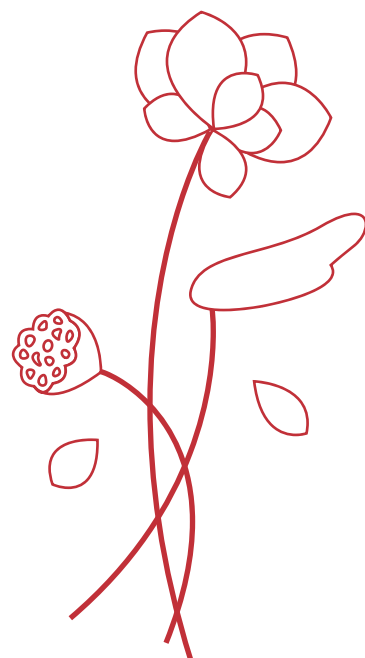


Now Mrs. Ji Ok Bun, an area leader, fulfills the role of chanting leader during sutra recitation.



Living the

LOTUS



Child Care lifeline

Talking to My Daughter about Death

Q

Recently, many savage things have been happening in the world. My ten-year-old daughter, who has become a fourth grader, asks me many questions like, “What happens after death?” or “Why does a person kill someone else?” Her questions probably arise as she hears about these cases at school or on the TV news. I always say to her, “Children do not need to worry about such things.” But what should I say to her in this case?



A

This could be a good occasion for the parent and child to talk about one’s life and death. Please do not miss out on this great opportunity. It would be better to say, “You make some good points! What is it to die? Why do people kill others? Let’s think about these things together.”

It is difficult to talk about the essential answers to these questions. Regardless of the questions, consider talking about your joy when your daughter was born, and about your happiness of living together. Or you can talk about your grief at the loss of people close to you, and about how your ancestors are always watching over your family.

I think the most important thing is to take this opportunity to convey messages like “the preciousness of life,” “feeling grateful for being alive now,” and “how much you love your daughter.” Even telling her about these things will help your daughter to understand that one’s life is precious. In addition, it would be better if you can say, “Because life is precious, get along with your friends as much as you can every day” and “It is important to be the kind of person that helps people and serves society.” In these ways, it would be good to talk to your daughter about the mind and heart of harmony with people, and of service to society.

If possible, when you have an opportunity to visit your ancestors’ graves or pay the first visit to a shrine or temple during the New Year holidays, how about

saying something like this to your daughter, “Although invisible, our ancestors and the Buddha are protecting our family.” It is very important for a child to hold the invisible in awe. I think it is a major duty of parents to tell these things to their children.



Point Talking about the preciousness of life

Only that which touches the minds and hearts of people will stay with them. The conversation between you and your daughter at her young age will spontaneously occur to your daughter when she grows up and will serve as a spiritual support for her. Please talk wholeheartedly to your daughter about the preciousness of life and your joy at your daughter’s birth.

(Answers provided by the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education)

The Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education cooperates with us in producing this regular column. The institute believes that if parents change their thinking and behavior for the better, so will their children. The institute offers lectures and seminars for parents in various areas of Japan and in other countries, as well as giving personal advice to parents on childrearing. For decades, the institute’s programs have helped parents with childrearing problems grow spiritually with their children to create harmonious, happy homes.

The Wonders of Life

Your daughter asks some wonderful questions, doesn't she? The best opportunities for learning and growth arise when your daughter holds such questions in her mind. At the same time, it's also a very important time for parents themselves to learn about the preciousness of life.

As President Niwano teaches us in his book *Kokoro no Manako o Hiraku* [Opening the Mind's Eye], pp. 93–94:

“The artist Katsuhiko Satō has written the following poem: ‘Wondrous, wondrous! To be alive here and breathe and move my hands and think and cry and laugh—what a wondrous life I have been given.’ . . .

“If you really think about it, human life truly is a wondrous thing. We have our parents, who gave us life in this world. We were not born into this world through the efforts of our parents alone, however, but also through an invisible great force. Even that one fact is nothing short of wondrous.

“As this poem does, it is important to find and list the wondrous things in your daily life, the things for which you are thankful. You can be thankful that you are living, breathing without having to think about it, feeling concern for others regarding one thing or another, holding each other's hands, and crying or laughing. All of this is wondrous.”

So first, why don't you begin with the talk with your daughter about the wonders of life? You'll be able to acquire the kind of spiritual awakening that will be deeply impressed by your daughter's sensibility.

(Editorial Supervision by Department of Dharma Education & Human Resources Development, Rissho Kosei-kai)



Please give us your comments!



We welcome comments on our e-newsletter *Living the Lotus*.

Please send us your comments to the following e-mail address.

E-mail: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

My New Year's Aspiration

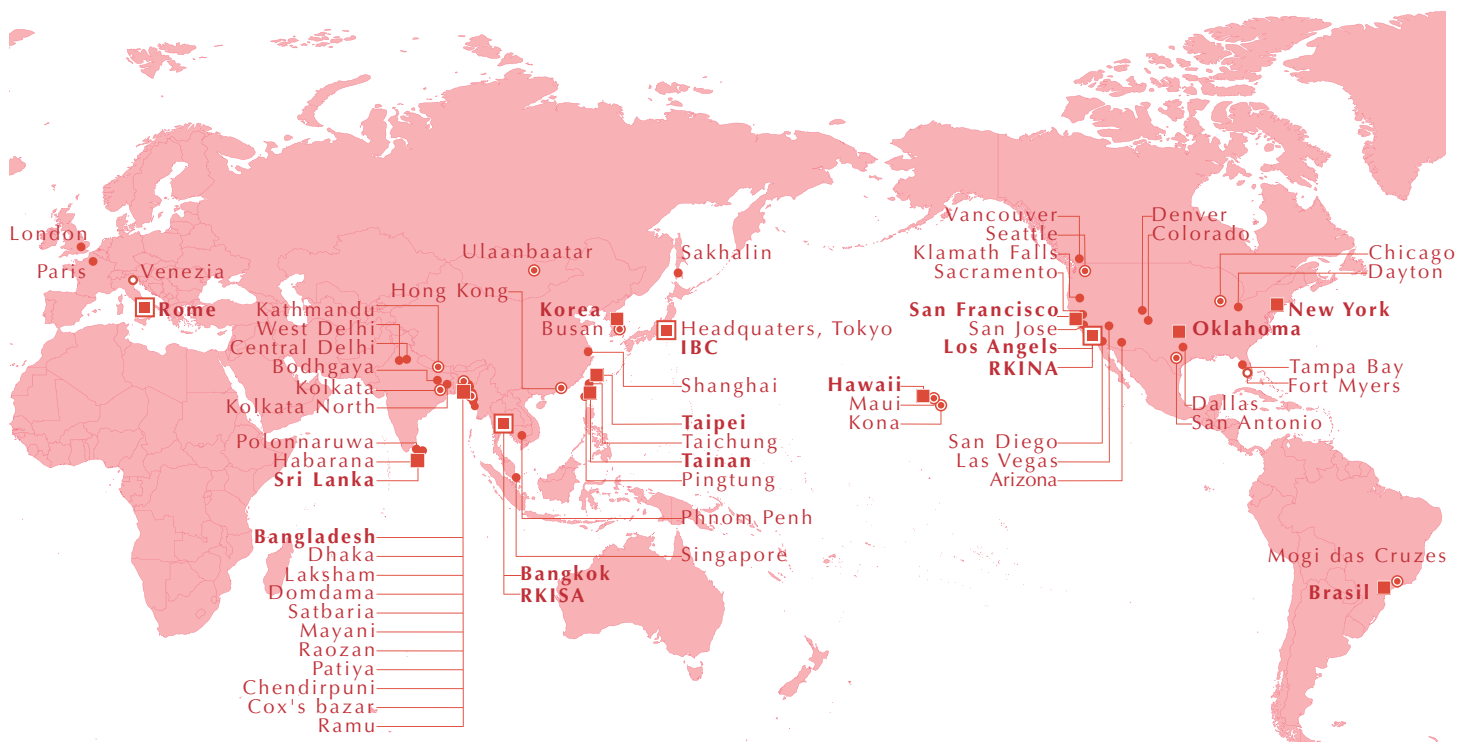
HAPPY New Year, everyone! A new year has started. When a new year comes, just as we begin with a fresh schedule book and calendar, we feel that our hearts and minds are also refreshed. What kind of life do you want to live? In order to accomplish a goal in your life, what is your aim in this year? And then what will you do this year? A new year is a wonderful opportunity to reflect and think thoroughly about all these important questions.

All occurrences are the Buddha's precious messages to myself; this is how we see the world according to the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The tears and blood being shed on this beautiful planet earth, even in this exact moment wake me up from the mind of laziness. Popular support for politicians who advocate "My Nation First" overlaps my own ignorance in not recognizing the interdependency of the reality of the world.

At the beginning of the new year, I would like to renew my commitment to my three life themes: 1) Sharing the Buddha Dharma on the global level, 2) Promoting my country, Japan, to become a true bodhisattva nation, and 3) Walking the Way of the Buddha myself. Through pursuing these goals, I wish to see that all people in the world live in peace and happiness. I would like to walk the Way together with you all this year too!

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI

Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International



Rissho Kosei-kai Overseas Dharma Centers

2017

Rissho Kosei-kai International

5F Fumon Hall, 2-6-1 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: rkseattle@juno.com
http://www.buddhistLearningCenter.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio
6083 Babcock Road, San Antonio, TX 78240, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-210-561-7991 Fax: 1-210-696-7745
e-mail: dharmanasanantonio@gmail.com
http://www.rkina.org/sanantonio.html

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay
2470 Nursery Rd. Clearwater, FL 33764, USA
Tel: (727) 560-2927
e-mail: rktampabay@yahoo.com
http://www.buddhismtampabay.org/

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 Buddhist Center of Klamath Falls

1660 Portland St. Klamath Falls, OR 97601, U.S.A.

Rissho Kosei-kai, Dharma Center of Denver

1571 Race Street, Denver, Colorado 80206, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-303-810-3638

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

635 Kling Dr, 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

No. 19, Lane 260, Dongying 15th St., East Dist.,
Taichung City 401, Taiwan
Tel: 886-4-2215-4832/886-4-2215-4937 Fax: 886-4-2215-0647

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,

Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China
Tel & Fax: 852-2-369-1836

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

Castello-2229 30122-Venezia Ve Italy

Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris

86 AV Jean Jaures 93500 Tentin Paris, France

International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

5F Fumon Hall, 2-6-1 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

5F Fumon Hall, 2-6-1 Wada, Suginami, Tokyo, 166-8537, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1124 *Fax:* 81-3-5341-1224

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,
West Bengal, India

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,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Rissho Kosei-kai of Singapore

Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

#201E2, St 128, Sangkat Mittapheap, Khan 7 Makara,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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#07(West), D.O.H.S Baridhara,
Dhaka Cant.-1206, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-8413855

Rissho Kosei-kai of Mayani

Maitree Sangha, Mayani Bazar, Mayani Barua Para, Mirsarai,
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patiya

Patiya, sadar, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh

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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

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Dupchar (West Para), Bhora Jatgat pur, Laksham, Comilla,
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Chendirpuni, Adhunagor, Lohagara, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ramu

Rissho Kosei-kai Dhamma Foundation, Sri Lanka

382/17, N.A.S. Silva Mawatha, Pepiliyana, Boralessgamuwa, Sri Lanka
Tel & Fax: 94-11-2826367

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa

Rissho Kosei-kai of Habarana

151, Damulla Road, Habarana, Sri Lanka

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Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai