

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

2
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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

We Only Make Ourselves Miserable by Complaining

AS the saying goes, “The tongue wounds more than a lance”; a careless slip of the tongue can be the cause of misfortune. The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, also called the Sutra of Repentance, explains that “the tongue produces the unwholesome karma of the five kinds of improper speech,” and the Eightfold Path’s injunction of right speech cautions us that lying, being “double tongued,” or duplicitous, slandering others, and speaking frivolously can all become causes of self-inflicted woes. But isn’t it habitual complaining that obstructs our practice most of all?

The thing about complaints is that once we start grumbling, the intensity of our discontent can double or even triple. What’s more, our carping about things also has a negative effect on the people around us. We

spoil everything with just our own mouths alone. This is “bitter speech” by which we ourselves create suffering.

I know a person that is the exact opposite of this, who finds satisfaction in everything, and always expresses this contentment in words. This person says that when you praise something unremarkable, such as your partner’s everyday cooking, by remarking, “It’s delicious, it’s delicious!” amazingly it really does become delicious.

Whether words of discontent or words of gratitude issue from the very same lips is the difference that utterly transforms human relationships as well as the environment.

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement especially cherishing the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the Buddhist sacred books. It was established by Revs. Nikkyo Niwano, Founder, and Myoko Naganuma, Cofounder, in 1938. This movement is composed of people who strive to apply Buddha's teachings to their daily lives and contribute to more peaceful world. With Rev. Nichiko Niwano, President, we are active in spreading the Dharma and peace activities in cooperation with people from other backgrounds at both local and international levels.

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. This newsletter aims to make Buddhism more practicable in the daily lives of people around the world.

GUIDANCE BY PRESIDENT NIWANO

Becoming Free of Worry

by Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



All Is the Buddha's Working

Most of us worry about a variety of things as we lead our lives. It seems that we are often swayed by things we need not worry about or things there is no use to worry about, letting ourselves experience anxiety and suffering. In your daily life, do you sometimes feel irritated to be twisted around by other people's opinions of you or by their gossiping, or is your mind clouded by worrying about things that have not yet come to pass?

In any case, there are some people who seem to be completely indifferent to such concerns. For example, there are the carefree, generous images of Ikkyu Sojun (1394–1481) and Ryokan (1758–1831), who were Japanese Zen priests well known for their antics and profound poetry. As far as we know from anecdotes about them, they never cared about or fretted over people speaking ill of them, and they are thought to have led an enviable lifestyle, free from worrying.

Let us consider where the difference lies between us and these two men. What first comes to mind is that they were not preoccupied with worldly values, such as fame and fortune. We, however, end up comparing our reputations with those of other people in terms of status and worldly values, and are even apt to make decisions based on what we suppose we will lose or gain in those regards.

Buddhism, however, teaches us that everyone we encounter and everything that happens around us has been brought to us by the Buddha in order to teach us something important. When we accept ordinary situations as they are, there is no longer a question of superiority or inferiority, no thought of rank, and no further worry about loss or gain. Therefore, we should not overly concern ourselves about such things.

After all, in the eyes of Ikkyu and Ryokan, everything is something to be grateful for, isn't that the case?

No Need for Worries

Furthermore, we suffer from worrying about things that we ourselves cannot change. For instance, I mentioned above the gossip of others and feelings of uncertainty about



the future, but no matter how much you worry about such things, there is nothing you can do about them. In other words, it is no use in engaging in such worries. Even though we may understand this, however, we still suffer from worrying about many things, and as a result, we take on anxiety and dissatisfaction and suffer even more.

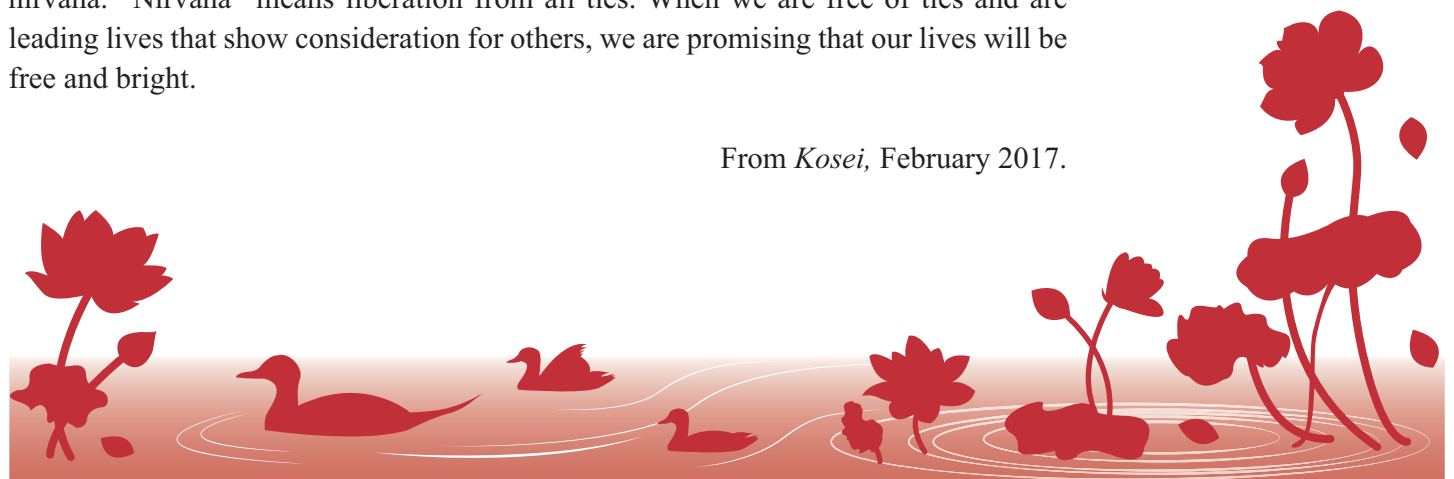
In the old Japanese television animation series *Ikkyu-san*, the main character Ikkyu (inspired by Ikkyu Sojun as a boy novice at a Zen temple), would always say, when some problem occurred around him, “Don’t worry about it, don’t worry about it,” or “Don’t panic, don’t panic; take it easy, take it easy.” In doing this, he tactfully switched his frame of mind. I have already introduced you, in one of the earlier installments in this series, to one method of calming down rising anger by chanting a phrase emulating a Shingon-style dharani, *Om nikoniko haratatsumaizoya svaha*, which means “Smile and do not lose your temper. May it be so.” So when you feel a mounting sense of anxiety or dissatisfaction, why not try making up your own chant, like the animation character Ikkyu did? That will help to blow away the clouds of anxiety and dissatisfaction that are rising up in your mind. Another way to change your mood is to take a walk. By simply going for a leisurely stroll, you can distance yourself from needless worry.

While temporarily switching your frame of mind in these ways, if you can change fundamentally and become someone who does not needlessly worry about things, just like Ikkyu and Ryokan, then you will be able to lead your life with peace of mind. Fortunately, all of you who are reading this article have a connection to the same teaching of the Buddha that these two men pursued. You will naturally become a person who never worries unnecessarily about things by studying repeatedly the basics of Buddhism—“all things are impermanent,” “all things are devoid of a separate self,” “all phenomena are characterized by suffering”—while also learning repeatedly to see things from the perspective that everything is the working of the Buddha and to perform sincere self-reflection.

Incidentally, although we do worry about things there is no use to worry about, we tend to forget about the things that we should always be keeping in mind. One of those things is the present moment. Instead of brooding over the past or the future, we should be living by treasuring the moment. Then, I hope, we will continue our practice, every day, of being considerate of other people.

On the fifteenth of this month we observe the anniversary of Shakyamuni’s entering nirvana. “Nirvana” means liberation from all ties. When we are free of ties and are leading lives that show consideration for others, we are promising that our lives will be free and bright.

From *Kosei*, February 2017.



Accepting Whatever Happens to Me as the Manifestation of the Buddha's Great Mercy

by Mrs. Yoshie Tsubouchi
Sapporo Dharma Center

This testimony was delivered at a ceremony of our Sakhalin Hoza in Russia on August 8, 2016.

I JOINED Rissho Kosei-kai to hold a memorial service for my stillborn baby.

When I had been in a hospital for the delivery of my first child, a nurse came to me to listen to the heartbeat of the fetus, and suddenly the atmosphere grew tense. An oxygen mask was quickly put on my face, and I had a medical examination. After that, I came back to my hospital room and was desperately praying for the safety of my baby.

My husband went to the doctor to hear the results of the medical examination and the doctor told him, "I'm sorry to say this, but your baby is dead." The baby died of suffocation because the umbilical cord was twined around the baby's neck. I could see all this in his face when he entered the room. We wept all night together.

Later, the ashes of our baby came to our home. Even after leaving the hospital, my breasts felt swollen with milk, although there was no baby to drink it. Each time my breasts began to lactate, I had to squeeze my breast milk, crying. I was filled with grief, and I spent days as if I were just a lifeless shell of a person.

My kind husband tenderly watched over me, since I could not recover from the loss of the baby. We spent many days in this state of disappointment, but we were eventually blessed with our first daughter in 1976. As I saw our new daughter growing strong and healthy, however, I felt more pity for the stillborn baby. Then I began to wonder whether there was something I could do for that baby.

My mother and elder brother introduced me to Rissho Kosei-kai. I visited its Sapporo Dharma Center during the New Year of 1978 to buy a copy of *Kyoten: Sutra Readings* so that I could hold a memorial service for the baby, and I encountered the teaching of the Buddha. Then I started to chant the sutra every morning and evening for the repose of the baby's soul. Then I

gradually was able to feel ease and my daily life began to be fulfilled. My husband said, "Human life will be either happy or unhappy depending on one's mental attitude. This teaching is wonderful," and he began to join the activities of the Youth Group. I also began to visit the Dharma center and was assigned the role of an area leader.

My daughter suffered from inflammation of the middle ear when she was three years old. I talked about her in the *hoza* (Dharma circle) and asked for a Dharma guidance from the *hoza* facilitator. The facilitator said to me, "It is because you do not listen to others' opinions. This is a sign that you are being protected by the



Mrs. Tsubouchi delivers her testimony at the Sakhalin Dharma Center.

Buddha.” I could not understand why her sickness was a sign that I was being protected by the Buddha. Even though I was not quite satisfied with the facilitator’s guidance, I went to a neighborhood group leader’s house to do the *tedori* (visiting members’ home to share the teaching) after the *hoza*. Without any particular reason, I visited her house, but when I saw her, her face was very pale.

She said to me, “Mrs. Tsubouchi, I had an abortion today.” Her husband said to her, “One child is enough.” This was due to economic reasons. I talked to her about my past painful experience of the stillbirth. After that, I had a wish that she would give birth if she were to become pregnant next time, so I visited her every day. Then I talked about the Buddha’s teachings. Little by little she came to understand the Buddha’s wishes. She joined a voluntary service in the Dharma center and guided her friends to the Way. She was able to have a memorial service for the unborn child, express her remorse, and pray for the child’s soul. Later she was blessed with a son. She said to me, “Thank to Mrs. Tsubouchi, my son was born.” I was so pleased that even someone like me could be useful to others. I found that my daughter had completely recovered from the inflammation of the middle ear and that it would not recur anymore. Through this event, I realized that because I could not listen to others’ words respectfully, I made my daughter feel pain. I have the kind of personality that clearly determines whether something is right or wrong. I don’t forgive an unreasonable thing, and I express my opinion in a straightforward way. Now I can imagine how many times people around me might have felt uneasy, seeing the kind of person I am. Finally I could understand the meaning of the *hoza* facilitator’s words, “Everything is the manifestation of your heart

and mind.” The experience of the *tedori* activity for the neighborhood group leader motivated me to learn and practice the teachings more deeply than before. Then I strongly felt a desire to be helpful to others. In 1999, I was made a chapter leader. On the inauguration day, the minister said to me, “It’ll be nice to acquire good merits through this role, and to be diligent in your practice, so that the members naturally yearn for and respect you as a chapter leader.”

However, the role of a chapter leader made me busy every day, and I wasn’t able to feel at ease. When a member came to me for Dharma guidance, I talked with them, seriously wishing for their happiness, but many of them opposed me, feeling like I was giving them a lecture. I felt that no one understood me even though I made every effort, so I was filled with loneliness. Six months after I became a chapter leader, the minister said to me, “You are sustained to live by the Buddha, and are fulfilling your role out of your earnest desire. You should take it easy more often.” I realized that by having my own narrow ideas of how a chapter leader should be, I was overwhelming myself mentally. Since then, I have been practicing the teachings, wishing for good relationships with the members while maintaining an open mind.

My area of responsibility was changed to the Shiroishi, the first chapter, three years ago. One day, I had a phone call from an unknown lady when I was performing voluntary service at the Dharma center. She didn’t say her name, but complained, “It makes me uncomfortable that my seventy-year-old mother has gone to Rissho Kosei-kai from the early morning hours, leaving me alone at home. Something is wrong with it.” I sincerely listened to her. After the call, I discussed the complaint call with the members in the *hoza* and asked them

Spiritual Journey

whether anyone knew who the caller was. I couldn't imagine her family was in my chapter. A member in the *hoza* told me that she must be a daughter of Mrs. A, a neighborhood group leader. Her daughter had mental illness and tried to make her mother act as she wished. And the daughter had gotten tattooed and needed to apply ointment. However, Mrs. A did not approve of her tattoo and she didn't want to help apply the ointment. And their relationship was getting worse. The members told me all about their relationship. Listening to the discussion, I felt the loneliness of Mrs. A's daughter as well as the pain of Mrs. A, who is elderly. I began to see that her call of complaint was an opportunity given by the Buddha for the family's liberation from suffering. In the *hoza*, I told the members that I would like to help Mrs. A and her daughter attain their liberation by bringing together the chapter members' efforts.

I immediately visited Mrs. A's house along with the area leader to hold an annual memorial service. From that day on, Mrs. A made a vow to accept her daughter as she is during her morning and evening sutra recitation before her family altar. She also made a determination to accumulate good merits and began to practice the teaching along with the area leader. After a while, Mrs. A started to look better. The area leader told me that their relationship was getting better gradually. Recently, I heard from the area leader that Mrs. A said, "I am grateful to be able to apply ointment to my daughter's body." Hearing her report, I shared the joy of Mrs. A's change of mind.

Since I was assigned the role of chapter leader, I have accepted each encounter with a member and every event as good opportunities to open my buddha-nature. I think those encounters and events are what make me conscious of the fact that deep in my mind I have

always had a wish to be helpful to others and help me perform my mission as a chapter leader.

The founder had a wish that all the members would become the kind of people who can realize that all encounters with people and events are brought by the Buddha and expressions of the Buddha's compassion. Taking the founder's wish as my own, I ardently wish all the members in my chapter would be the kind of people that the founder envisioned.

Like the area leader who stays close to Mrs. A, I wish that all the members in my chapter would come in contact with other members as the cheerful, tender, and warmhearted sangha and cultivate the fields of their hearts and minds. I would like to be diligent in practice with a goal that every member will become a parent in the Dharma.

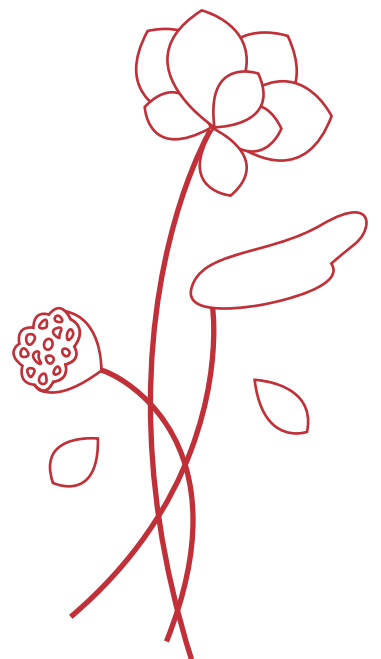


Walking to do the tedoru activity with the Sakhalin members brought forth the strong.



Living the

LOTUS



Child Care lifeline

Why does my son always do the opposite of what I say?



Q

I have a three-year-old son and a six-month-old girl. Recently, I've had trouble with my three-year-old son because he does the opposite of what I say. How can I deal with this?

A

You are a wonderful mother who are attentive and are making an effort to communicate with your son.

When children reach the age of three or so, they come to think that everything in the world revolves around them, which is called the "instinctive self." It is the time when children develop kind of self-image that will make them want to think and do as they please. It is called "innocent egocentrism."

You may regard your child as troublesome, doing the opposite of what you ask of him. But please understand his actions as a sign of your child's growth, and watch him develop fondly. And when your child does the opposite of what you say, please hold back your anger and ask him gently, "What's happened? Why do you want to do this? Please let me know."

When you usually talk to your children, do you take a one-sided attitude, ordering them to do something in a way that was convenient only to yourself?

I heard a story that deals with this kind of situation. Mrs. A told me that one day at mealtime, she told her daughter, "Put on your apron." Then, her daughter said "no," and wouldn't listen to her. At the time, her grandmother, watching them, immediately said to her granddaughter, "Can I see you wearing the apron?" Then she said "yes" and brought the apron and put it on. She was happy because she was asked to show the apron, rather than being ordered to put it on. In addition to that, in childhood, an action will be repeated over and over again until it becomes a habit. So, this is the time when you need to spend more time and make a special effort.

Also, you care for your six-month-old daughter so well that perhaps your son feels a little lack of love. Your child's frustration stemming from the feeling that "my mother's affection toward me has been taken by my little sister" sometimes appears in the form "I do not want to listen to my mother." Even little children are sensitive enough to perceive what parents are thinking in the hearts.

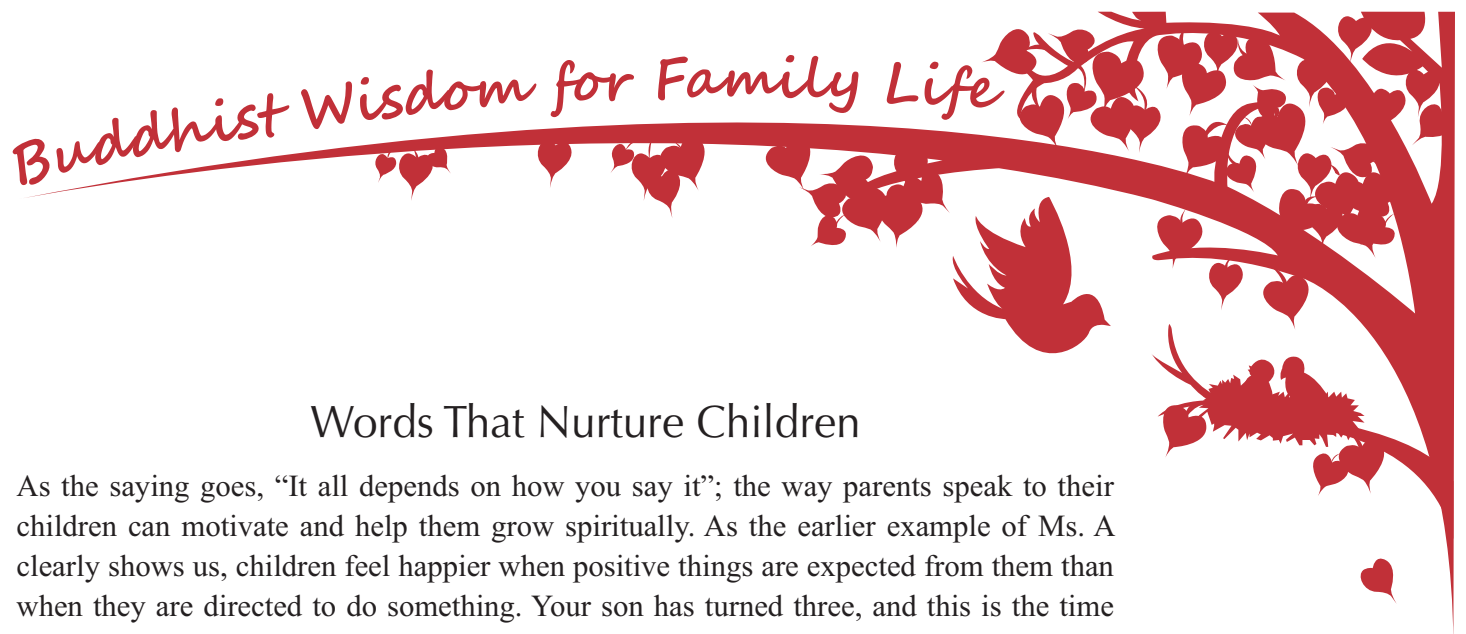
Please stay close to your child's heart and maintain close contact with him. Also, if his self-assertion does not cause people any trouble, please learn to value it and help to cultivate it. It will create the seed of independence and activeness that will blossom someday.



Point The awakening of his self is "a sign of a child's growth."
.....
It should be a pleasure to see that the child has grown up enough to be able to insist on his own thoughts. Those children who do not always act as their mothers say are not necessarily bad children.

(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.



Words That Nurture Children

As the saying goes, “It all depends on how you say it”; the way parents speak to their children can motivate and help them grow spiritually. As the earlier example of Ms. A clearly shows us, children feel happier when positive things are expected from them than when they are directed to do something. Your son has turned three, and this is the time when his own way of thinking is beginning to develop. From now on, the words you speak to your son will influence his heart and mind more than before.

As to what kinds of words we should say to children, Founder Nikkyo Niwano gives us the following guidance:

“The child who is regularly praised and reassured that she/he will certainly grow up into a fine adult, with such expressions that ‘What a nice boy/girl you are! You’ll be able to become a great grown-up person for sure,’ little by little makes those words come true. Words have a spirit of their own. Ryokan (1758–1831), the Zen priest, poet and calligrapher, said that all words should be spoken with feeling. The right words to make another person happy will not come to our lips unless we regularly endeavor to see only the good in others.” (Nikkyo Niwano, *Buddhism for Everyday Life*, p. 113).

Concerning your child taking the opposite course from what you say, please do not regard him as a troublesome child. Instead, see him as a son in the process of growing, saying such gentle words as “You’re really a good boy. How wonderful!” in everyday life. Having these expectations for him, your warmhearted words will deeply touch him and help him grow spiritually.

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



Please give us your comments!



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

Please send us your comments to: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

Director's Column

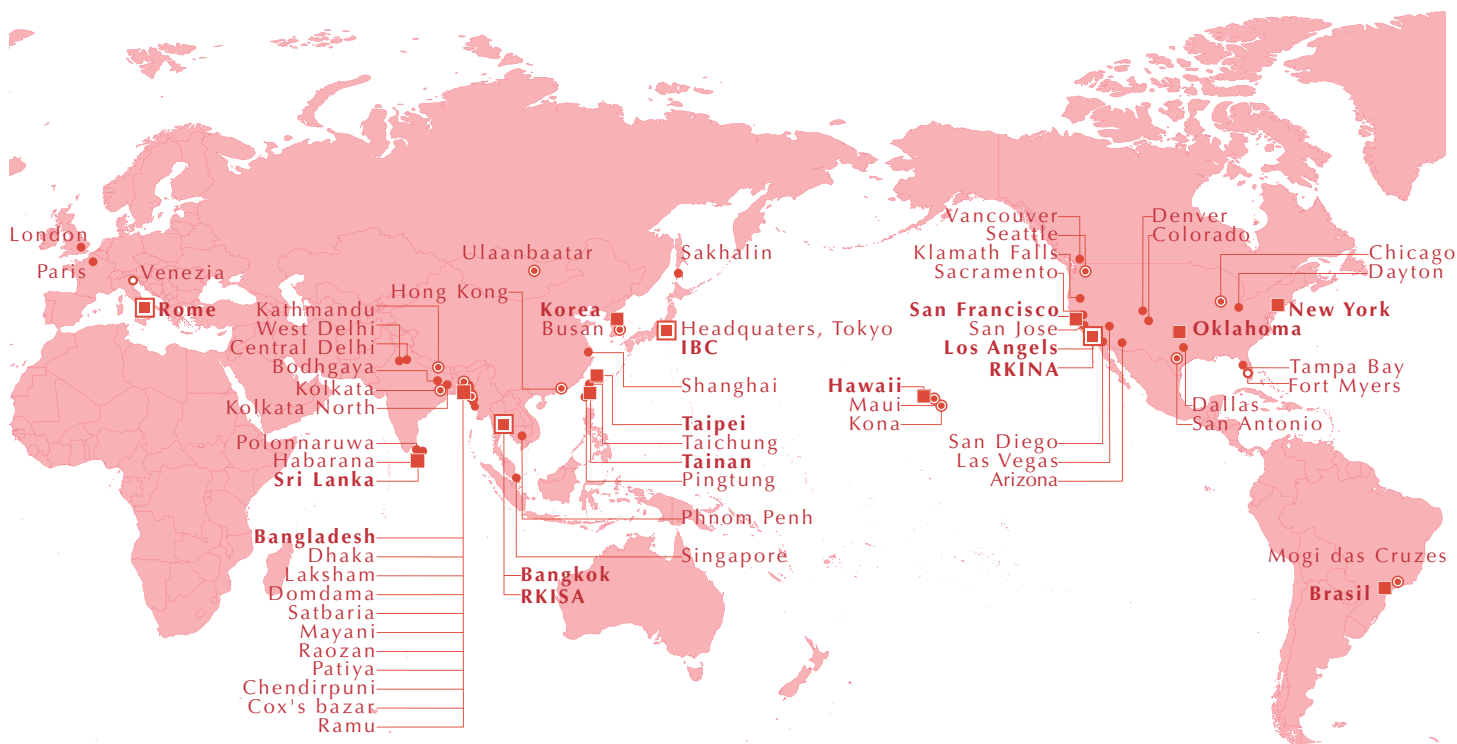
‘Being Thankful’ Which I Learned Through Caring for a Young Man

WHEN I read the President's New Year's Guidance for 2017, I recall an experience from around 40 years ago. It was soon after I had joined RK that I learned at a Buddhist seminar that since we are caused to live by all other beings, we need to be thankful to everything around us. However I was not able to understand the sense of gratitude for the fact that I was being supported by others.

Around that time, I started caring for a middle school student, who in some ways was a rebellious young man. I would often invite him to my boardroom, where I taught him math and cooked something for him. One day, I was informed that he had disappeared from home. So I sat in front of a small Buddhist altar in my room to offer my sincerest recitation of the Lotus Sutra to the Buddha, with a wish that he was all right. When the room was getting dark, I intuitively came to realize that I have been always embraced in my parents' loving care, which must be far greater than my prayer and care for this young man. I am supported by many people. I cried with gratitude at this realization. I will never forget my thankfulness to him.

“Difficult it is to be born human.” By becoming able to realize precious things as precious, I truly became a man of happiness.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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