

# Living the

# LOTUS

## *Buddhism in Everyday Life*

3  
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VOL. 138

### FOUNDER'S ESSAY

## A Comment from a Person We Admire

PEOPLE say that the greatest happiness in life is having a person you can truly admire, whom you can point to and say, "this person most of all." I quite agree.

"That's right!" we respond to every word that person utters, which make us nod our heads in agreement. Just seeing their face and hearing their voice delights us, and suddenly we have a zest for life. "I want to be just like that person," we feel, and before we know it, our ways of speaking and thinking come to resemble that person.

Our religious faith is the same. While the doctrines of Buddhism of course appealed to us, many of us were attracted by the appearance and demeanor of our "parents in the faith," or perhaps a chapter leader or Dharma center director, and that led us to the Dharma, did it not? We were able to listen with open

hearts precisely because it was what that person explained to us, and little by little we were drawn to the profound teachings of Buddhism.

At companies too, they say that the first prerequisite for being a supervisor is to be loved by your workers. When we are truly taken with our supervisor, that person can make us happy by just saying a few words to us. When we make a mistake and they point it out to us, it inspires us to say to ourselves, "I can't let them down!" We can't help but work willingly without having to wait for instructions on everything.

When you become someone who is able to endear yourself to others, you can even help people while remaining silent.

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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 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 GUIDANCE

### Do You Think Positively or Negatively?

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



#### The Power to Move Forward

As people age, their bodies develop problems in one place or another. I, too, have experienced physical pain and the slight inconvenience that comes with it. No matter how much we want to escape from such reality, it is inevitable. At these times, what comes to mind are complaints about pain, suffering, inconvenience, and the desire to be healed and return to normal. In other words, we have negative thoughts toward our current state of affairs.

In addition to such physical problems, we tend to feel disappointed when things do not happen as we wish, and view situations negatively. For instance, rainfall is welcomed as a blessing by vegetable farmers, but the same rain is a cause of resentment by people who want to put their laundry out to dry or who want to enjoy outdoor activities. In other words, the functioning of our minds often reflects our personal circumstances.

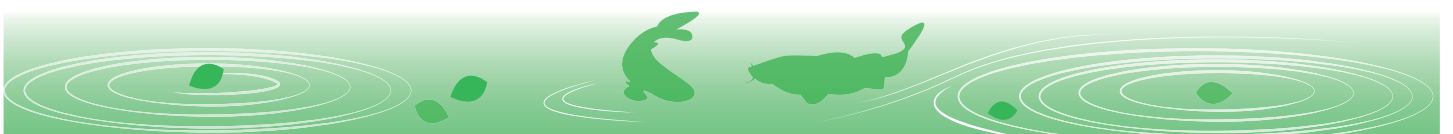
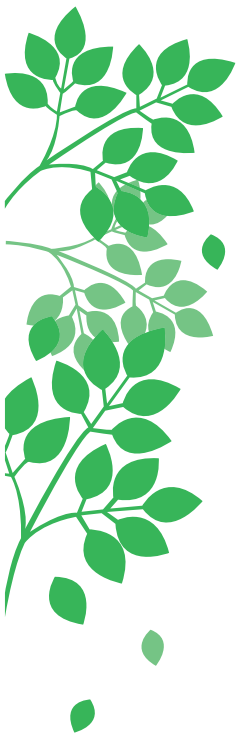
However, such thoughts of dissatisfaction as “I don’t like that thing” or “Why has this happened to me?” have no bearing on reality. Why not distance yourself for a while from the emotional reaction of disliking something and try to look at it objectively, and then observe it positively? By broadening your thinking, you enrich your mind.

I have decided to accept my physical pain as a good experience that helps me become more considerate toward people who are similarly suffering. And if I am eventually cured, I will be able to feel more grateful than ever for leading a normal life without such pain. That is what I anticipate.

Sickness and injuries can be painful, and at times we may think they are unjust experiences. By accepting them positively, however, from the moment we do so we not only lessen the suffering and pain of the here and now, but also start to build up the energy to lead the rest of our lives to the fullest.

#### Living Broadmindedly

I mentioned above that rain may be seen as a blessing or may be the cause of resentment. This is an example of how we may view rainfall, which is a natural phenomenon,



and it teaches us that when we look at something from different perspectives, we certainly can find an element that makes us feel grateful, no matter how trying or painful the situation may be. The reason we can do so is that nothing in the world is without purpose.

On the basis of the teaching of the reality of all existence, that is, that phenomena and all things are manifestations of the truth, the Buddhist scholar Kazuyoshi Kino (1922–2013) said, “We must positively accept that each and every thing itself embodies ultimate truth, whether it is the fact that people are born and that they die, or any other thing that happens in this world.”

In other words, there is nothing to do but accept that everything that we see, that we hear, and that we experience is, to refer to the expression of Mr. Kino, “positive, positive, absolutely positive.”

I said above that we certainly can find an element that makes us feel grateful, no matter how trying or painful the situation may be. And in this sense, not only are we able to find that element, but in fact, everything we experience is a gift that, no matter how difficult it may be to accept, enriches our lives and is therefore nothing else but something for which we should feel grateful and receive positively. It is only natural, of course, that depending on the individual and on the situation, a person may not be able to immediately accept what happens with gratitude.

This is similar to some people being able to show gratitude toward their parents from early on, while others only become aware of their parents’ feelings when they themselves become parents. So from one person to another, the time of gaining of awareness and the level of understanding can differ.

When we cannot accept something positively, let us try to concentrate on the point of self-reflection. When we cannot suppress the feeling of wanting to find faults with someone, we should ask ourselves, “Aren’t we forgetting about kindness?” When we cannot accept reality positively, then we should ask ourselves, “Aren’t we forgetting about honesty?” These are two important points, because when people look at things from the viewpoint of their own wishes, that is, their ego, they are apt to lose sight of kindness and honesty.

By looking at things positively, we can live broadmindedly and without unnecessary cares. And from that fact, it is clear which viewpoint, positive or negative, will bring us happiness.

From *Kosei*, March 2017



# Spiritual Journey

## Accepting Life's Mission

by Rev. Nicholas Ozuna  
Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America

*This testimony was delivered at the Los Angeles Dharma Center during the ceremony of the Founder's Birthday on October 30, 2016.*

GOOD morning, everyone, and Happy 110th Birthday to the Founder. Though I never met the Founder, he has shaped my life in many ways. I joined Rissho Kosei-kai just around this time twenty years ago, so I haven't always had this faith. As a child growing up in San Antonio, Texas, I went to Sunday school at a Baptist Church. However, as my parents could not be accused of being devout followers, it was only a matter of time before I lost interest in it altogether and became non-religious. At twelve, I was already becoming a skeptic of faith, finding it all outrageous and superstitious. I relied on the facts, on scientific and empirical evidence. I believed in textbooks.

As a result, I was not spiritually prepared that one August afternoon when my brother revealed that he had been living a lie, and that he was really a female beneath the shell of his male body. Needless to say, this was a shock that resounded throughout the household. He wanted to change his appearance, his name, and everything else about him that resembled masculinity. My father was a very manly man. He couldn't believe or accept the fact that his first son would turn out this way and was utterly disgusted at even looking at him. The only talking they ever did involved yelling.

My mother, on the other hand, was very concerned

about my brother's well-being. She was also in denial, blaming herself for this transformation. No one could accept what was happening, including me. I was incredibly embarrassed to be around him and didn't want any association with him at all. I would always keep a good distance from him while at school, so people wouldn't think I knew him. By this time he had long hair, would wear feminine/androgynous clothing, and had an affinity for dolls and makeup. He tried so hard to gain acceptance, but all we could think was that he had some kind of mental problem. My mother thought she might be able to change him back to his old self and took him to see a psychiatrist. There was not much they could do for him mainly because my brother did not believe there was anything wrong with his lifestyle and had no desire to change himself, so things persisted.

The harmony which once existed in the family was in shambles. Arguing and conflict were an everyday occurrence and it had begun to take its toll on all of us. My mother started to look elsewhere, particularly towards Eastern philosophy to find a way to rekindle this harmony, but everything she found seemed superficial to her and did not make any lasting changes. At this time I was going through my own questioning of why my brother was the way he was and hoping that the fighting in the family would just stop.

Ultimately, I found the answer I sought in what I could truly believe in—a textbook. It was for a class on world history, in a brief section on Eastern religions and Buddhism, where a short outline, only a few sentences, denoted “the Four Noble Truths.” It taught that “life is suffering, there is a cause of this suffering, and there is a way out of the suffering by following a path.” Upon reading it, I was moved by its undeniable simplicity and profundity. These were called “Truths” after all, and they made sense rationally. They stayed in my



*Rev. Ozuna delivers his spiritual experience at the Los Angeles Dharma Center.*



my consciousness as I thought about the various forms of suffering in the world, as well as that which was pervading my family. I was compelled to find out more about Buddhism.

Subsequently, I read a few books about Buddhist thought which highlighted the themes of transforming suffering into learning experiences, and ultimately happiness. As wonderful as the study on Buddhism was, there still existed a void, which was my desire to practice in a Buddhist community. I convinced my mother, who was still in a spiritual-seeking stage, to come along with me to a small Japanese Buddhist center nearby called Rissho Kosei-kai. At that time, almost all the members were Japanese and there were absolutely no other youths at the church. The service was in English though, so I could follow along, however, I still really couldn't understand anything. It didn't matter though, because I felt a great sense of peace in the atmosphere, as well as the warmth and compassion from the community who welcomed us in and guided us so kindly. I was only fifteen years old, and had been there but just a couple of hours, but I knew I had found what I had been seeking.

One of the first things I remember the minister of the church, Rev. Nakamura, say was "being able to accept things as they are will surely lead to happiness." He then went on to explain that we are all interconnected, and therefore equal in the eyes of the Buddha, since we all have buddha-nature. I took this as a message directly to me as a means to reflect upon my relationship with my brother. This was a big revelation for me. Even though I could not understand the teachings but superficially, I was amazed at how rationally sound faith could be. I realized that belief in reason alone can only take one so far spiritually and from there, if one really seeks to transform themselves, faith must take over.

In retrospect, I always find it so mysterious that as a Mexican-American boy I would end up at this small Japanese Buddhist center, but I now firmly believe that I was called there by the Buddha because I was ready to receive his teachings. Rev. Nakamura would always say that "there is no such thing as coincidence." Everything

is based upon the law of cause and effect, and all things are exactly as they should be. From this I came to know that my brother's situation and the friction in the household had meaning. It was also necessary that I came to read the section in the world history textbook on "The Four Noble Truths" as well as to find an ad for Rissho Kosei-kai in the newspaper. These were not coincidences; rather I was being constantly guided to the Buddha-wisdom unbeknownst to me.

My mother was the first to show a big spiritual change through her practice. One day as I went to talk to her in her room, I happened to notice that she was there with my brother. I peeked in through the open door silently and noticed her standing behind him at a mirror. She had bought him a new dress and shoes for his orchestra recital that evening and was combing his long hair as they both smiled in the mirror. I was absolutely speechless as I looked on at my mother's inspirational act of genuine acceptance. She had taken to heart the teaching of accepting things as they are and had seen my brother's buddha-nature. She had let go of her attachment to what she thought was socially correct and had taken a step to listen to and understand my brother's feelings. I could tell that he was truly at peace in that moment. I know that she did this not only for my brother's sake or for her own sanity, rather for creating harmony in the family as a whole. This selfless act brought me to tears and I felt so ashamed for the way I had been treating my brother. I resolved that day to change my view towards him and accept him as he was.

The transformation of my father's ego took a much longer time to become realized. But, even he was able to eventually be guided to the teaching of compassion through observing my mother's selfless actions. He came to embrace my brother with compassion, even if he didn't condone his lifestyle. This spirit was nothing other than the product of the practice of the Buddha's teachings. Once we could show my brother unconditional love, and not seek to change him, he didn't feel he needed to hide anymore and he was happy with who he was. What's more, one day out of the blue he decided to accept his original body, thereby reverting back to his

masculine self and reclaiming his name and characteristics, all on his own accord.

Had he never changed back, it would have been of no concern. For us, the real change would have remained within us, within our hearts. The transformation in the whole family was utterly amazing, and I became aware of the power of the Dharma. The Dharma was not just words written within sutras. If practiced diligently, the teachings could genuinely change people's lives and create harmony here and now. This was something I could believe in, because I saw its effects firsthand.

In 1999, just two months before the passing of the Founder, I visited Japan for the first time in a program called Global Youth Gathering. It was only a two-week visit, but it was incredibly rich in content and I came to witness true Buddhist living through the many Rissho Kosei-kai members and staff I met along the way. I wanted to visit the Founder and share my appreciation as well as receive his guidance, but we were not allowed to see him as he was sick at the Kosei General Hospital. The hospital was only a couple of blocks from where I was staying, so I just walked to the front entrance and put my palms together. As I stood there, and reflected on the many stories I had heard about the Founder, I resolved that the Founder was the kind of person that I wanted to be.

The following four years as I went to university, I served as a leader of Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio, taking on many roles and sharing the Dharma with whomever I met. I firmly believed, as taught in chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra, that I was born into this world to serve as an emissary of the Buddha for the purpose of guiding others to awaken to their buddha-nature. It was my life mission. I had been studying zoology at the University of Texas and working in the veterinary field. However, it had always been clear to me that I was going to ultimately enter Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary in Tokyo in hopes of becoming a Buddhist minister.

Just a few months after graduating from university, I

entered Gakurin. I went on to study in Japan for four years, truly immersing myself in the heart and soul of the Lotus Sutra. As the first American to join the seminary's graduate course, I met many challenges from language, culture, and the demanding lifestyle. However, through the Buddha's teachings as well as the guidance of my many teachers, I came to understand that creating a new path always requires great effort. By engaging in this effort, I could begin to see a bigger picture unfold before me. I could see that everything was the compassion of the Buddha.

After I had completed the four-year intensive training, I was given a two-part assignment. I was to serve as an intern minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Clearwater, Florida, and in its campus, I was to create a new Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma center and serve as its minister. Working with the Unitarians was an enriching experience, as I learned how to "do church" from an American perspective, something I couldn't really learn just within Rissho Kosei-kai. It was the first of this kind of relationship between Rissho Kosei-kai and the Unitarian Universalists and proved to be highly rewarding as I learned more about what Americans were seeking in religion.

With the newly formed Tampa Bay sangha, we were small as we started with just one member, myself, but we grew in many ways, especially by trying a new model of English-speaking services, somewhat adapted from the Unitarian Universalists. We grew quickly, but it wasn't quick enough for me. During my second year, one day following a service, I had a panic attack that arose from my frustration of not reaching the high membership goal I had set for myself and also from losing two of our strongest leaders who moved away. I knew I had to be patient, but some part of me needed results to let me know I was progressing.

The anxiety stayed with me, though I concealed it well. Then I remembered my practice of sutra recitation. I had always encouraged people to practice, but I myself only did sporadically. I knew this had to change and I decided to recite the *Kyoten* very slowly and

# Spiritual Journey

intentionally each day. After weeks of this regular practice, I noticed my anxiety gradually dissipate. One evening while reciting I also came to the realization that the members didn't really have to come at all. The fact that even those ten or so members came meant that I needed to really appreciate each one of them more and commit myself to helping them along their spiritual path. Each step of the way in trying to develop a sangha over my four years in Florida was an immeasurable learning experience of trial and error. By the time I felt I finally got the hang of things, I was sent to Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America here in Los Angeles.

I didn't really know my role here at first, but I knew I wanted to support the budding English sangha. My wife and I were quickly befriended and accepted into the sangha as if we had been here for years. I felt renewed with energy as I watched the sangha grow and try new things and I was inspired to see the activity of the youth group, something I had never been a part of before. My wife, Chika, endured many struggles while in Florida and transitioning to life in Los Angeles, but she never complained and she was always my greatest teacher when I was trying to find my way. She always inspires me by her joy in the Dharma. I think it's because of her great effort behind the scenes and her acceptance of things as they are that she has had enormous opportunities to live her dream of being a Japanese pop singer in the U.S.

As much joy as I have had spiritually practicing the Dharma with you in Los Angeles, physically I have had a number of hardships. From early last year [2015], I had a roller coaster of ailments and disorders plague me. The worst was a condition that made it difficult for me to swallow, and therefore I couldn't eat well. My stomach was very sensitive as well and I had to limit many things from my diet.

It was about that time that Chika and I decided to follow in the footsteps of Chika's mother, and conduct monthly memorial services at our home. Chika's mother had been doing this practice every month for

twenty years and during that time she has been in good health and happiness. It has been challenging at times to continue as we find ourselves often busy, but through this practice I have deepened my faith in the unseen world. By having difficulty swallowing, I realized I wasn't metaphorically chewing my experiences well enough, that is, fully appreciating each encounter and the many people that were supporting me. Around the time I came to that realization, I became able to eat normally again. The first tacos I ate were amazing!

Mysteriously, some of the symptoms I went through would equate with symptoms my ancestors suffered in their lives. I believe that by going through them, I was able to feel a stronger sense of connection and appreciation for them. Then my symptoms would simply vanish. Such symptoms would come and go over the last couple of years as we have been doing this practice, but I feel they were all important for me to experience so that I may be more compassionate to others who are going through similar sufferings. I know I couldn't have this kind of perspective if it wasn't for Rissho Kosei-kai.

I truly feel blessed to be a part of this sangha. Starting with Ms. Fukushima, an area leader, I am especially grateful to the members of South Bay who have always offered so much support and attended our memorial services diligently, sharing their wise guidance. This Los Angeles sangha is my family and it's no coincidence that I was led here. I know there are many great things to come. Thank you very much!



*Rev. Ozuna (second from left) is with the youth members of Los Angeles Dharma Center.*

# Childcare lifeline

My first daughter began to seek a lot of affection from me after the second daughter was born.

Q

Right after my second daughter was born, the first daughter, who is four years old, just wanted to take care of her little sister. But recently she suddenly began to seek a lot of affection from me.



A

You are a wonderful mother who always thinks about the healthy growth of your two children.

When a younger sister or brother is born, most of the older children could go into infantile regression. Elder children are worried about whether their mother's affection for them might turn to their younger sister or brother. For this reason, older children sometimes want the breast like a baby, as if they are saying, "Look at me!" Or they sometimes cannot pee until they go back to wearing a diaper again.


This is a sign that they feel a lack of their mothers' affection. Please try to make physical contact with your elder daughter and recharge her with your affection. Also, in your daily conversation, don't you often say things like, "Please wait because you are the older" or "Be patient because you are the older"? Because you should be busy in taking care of two children, you might unintentionally tend to say, "Because you are the older." Instead, please try to say to your first daughter, "It is exactly what the older does!" when she helps you or does something good.

It would be also helpful to have her take care of the baby together with you. For example, it is quite enough to have her help you change diapers even a little, or watch you breast-feeding the baby. And when you are doing these, please try to say, for example, "Your little sister is thanking you! When you were a baby, you also suckled like this. I love you very much!" and to warmly hug her.

Children only want to feel their mothers' affection. So when they are content, they will naturally make an effort to be the kind of elder sister or brother that the mothers wish.

Children are doing their best in their own way. Sometimes it would be helpful for you to play with your elder daughter with an attitude of "Now is the time just for you." Only a short period of time would be enough. When you play with her wholeheartedly, her mind and heart would be filled, because children love their mothers best.



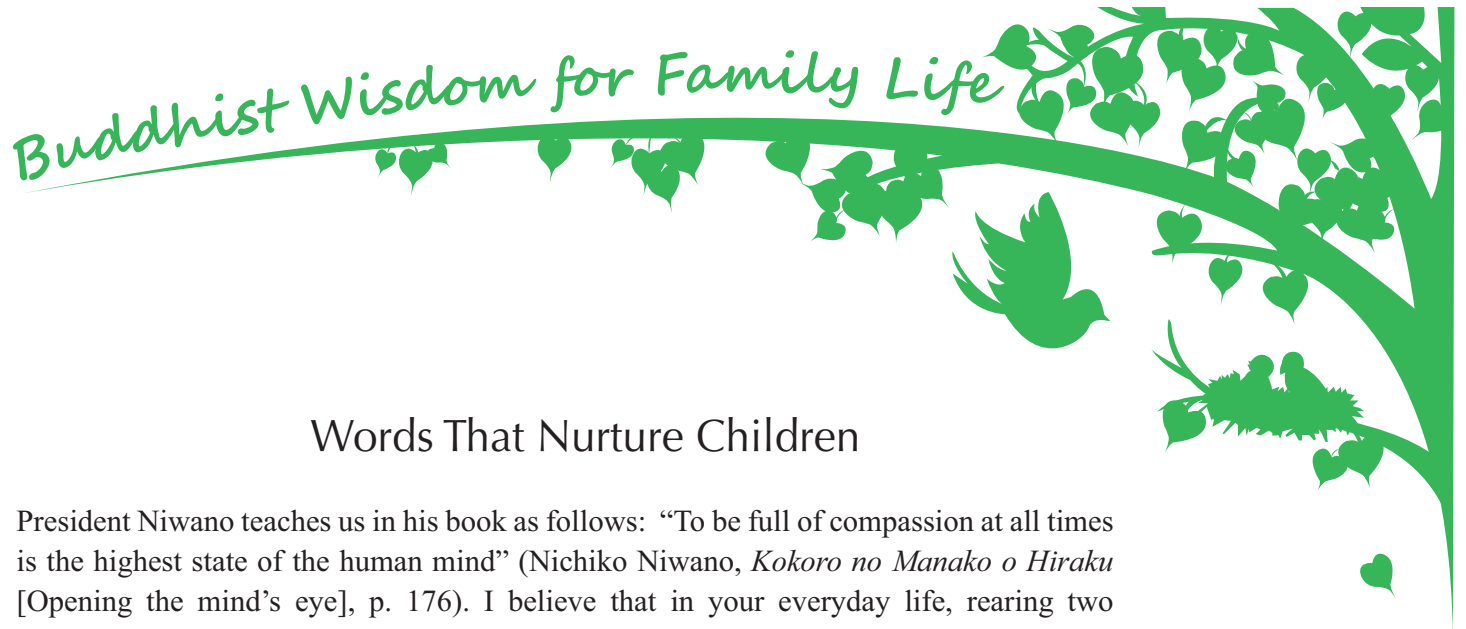
 **Point** You should try to make physical contact with your elder child.

When a younger child is born, the mother tends to treat her elder child as being old enough to have a little emotional independence. However, the older child still wants to be close to the mother. Let's try to make time to spend with your elder child alone.

(Answers in this series are provided by the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education.)

"Childcare Lifeline" is produced every month with the cooperation of the Tokyo Research Institute for Family Education. The institute believes that changes for the better in parents' thinking and behavior will also bring about changes in their children. The institute holds lectures and seminars for parents throughout Japan and in other countries and also offers parents personal counseling on childrearing. Since its foundation in 1975, the institute's programs have helped parents and children grow spiritually together to create harmonious, happy homes.





## Words That Nurture Children

President Niwano teaches us in his book as follows: “To be full of compassion at all times is the highest state of the human mind” (Nichiko Niwano, *Kokoro no Manako o Hiraku* [Opening the mind’s eye], p. 176). I believe that in your everyday life, rearing two children, you must be filled with such a considerate and compassionate mind. Your elder daughter would very much like to be assured of her mother’s affection. Now is the right time for you to abundantly express your affection to her.

In Buddhism, there is a term *wagen aigo* (a gentle face and loving words), which means to have a smile on one’s face, and speak warmhearted and loving words to other people. Please speak to your elder daughter in a kind way, using many warmhearted words, and more than ever, give her your big smile. Your smile and the power of your words will allow her to really feel that she is loved by her mother, and will give her strength for sure. She will also show her brilliant character as an older daughter.

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



Please give us your comments!



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

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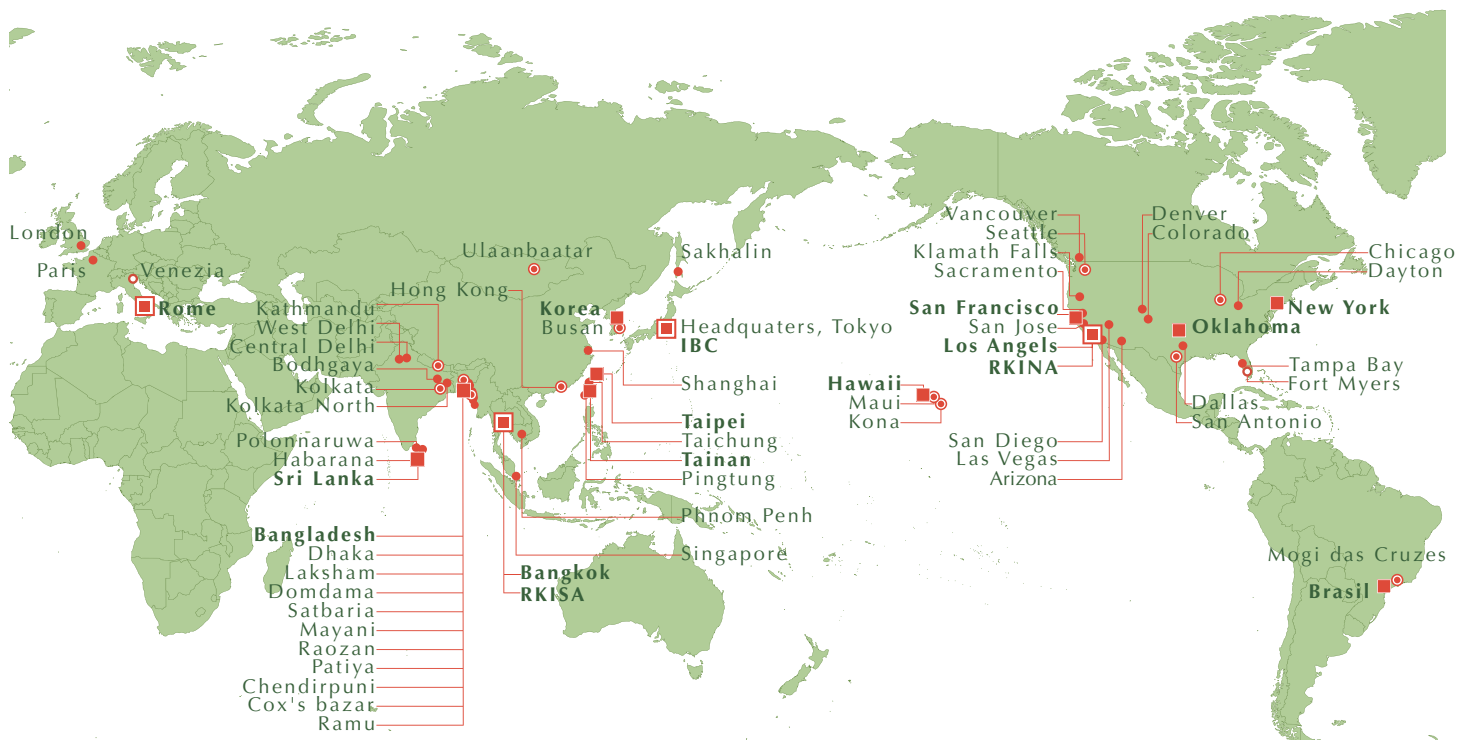
## The Guy Sitting in Front of Me Was a Buddha

**T**HIS happened recently on a flight to Bangkok: Soon after the airplane took off, a middle-aged man sitting right in front of me suddenly reclined his seat back all the way. I thought, "Oh, this is dangerous. What a rude guy!" Since I was so upset, I thought I should let him know how troubled I was by his inconsiderate behavior. The seat next to me was vacant, though, so I decided to move to that seat and started reflecting about what had just happened.

Then many thoughts arose. "Just like this man, I must have troubled many people innocently, without realizing it." "I should be more cautious about the effects of my own behavior." "How grateful I am, that I, who used to lose my temper over things other people did, have learned how to find a cause for happiness in any incident." I then realized that the guy sleeping peacefully in the row ahead of me was a buddha.

We will celebrate Rissho Kosei-kai's anniversary on March 5. I would like to express my deepest gratitude on this occasion, because I have attained the greatest happiness in Rissho Kosei-kai.

Rev. Shoko Mizutani  
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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# 2017

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