

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

8
2017

VOL. 143

FOUNDER'S ESSAY

Attitude More than Words

IT is said that the flavor sensed by our tongues actually makes up less than 20 percent of the taste of delicious food. The other 80 percent comes from a dish's aroma, its temperature and other factors that we sense overall. With lectures and the like as well, research shows that listeners apprehend only about 7 percent of a talk's content, and more than anything, what notably remains with listeners are things like the speaker's personality and attitude, impressions of their manner of speaking and so forth.

When listeners feel confident that the person speaking to them is trustworthy, they lean in towards the speaker and nod in agreement while listening. But when for some reason or another they get a sense that the speaker can't be trusted, no matter how good the message of the talk, listeners' hearts will not accept it.

Whenever I share the Buddha's teachings, I watch listeners' faces to see whether my words are reaching their hearts, but although I remain attentive to the expressions on people's faces as I talk, I think honesty is the clincher.

When you speak the truth in your own words with no pretension, you will definitely persuade everyone listening to you, and it will show on their faces. But if you try to be emphatic about something you've never attempted or accomplished yourself—simply as a line for public consumption—your words will never be genuine. That's because you speak without confidence. Listeners have keen ears for this difference.

From *Kaisozuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing Co.), pp. 102–103

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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 GUIDANCE

Becoming Aware of Invisible Workings

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Faith Permits Becoming Aware

Although what follows is not an example of the brain training that is so popular in Japan these days, I would like to start this month's guidance with a riddle.

Air, mind, and encounter. What do these three things have in common?

At first glance, there may seem to be no connection between them, but they do have something in common, which I will explain in this way: Although we cannot actually touch or see them, they are all so important that we cannot live without them.

That is the answer. Despite the fact that we seldom pay much attention to them, once we realize how important they are, we cannot help but feel grateful for them.

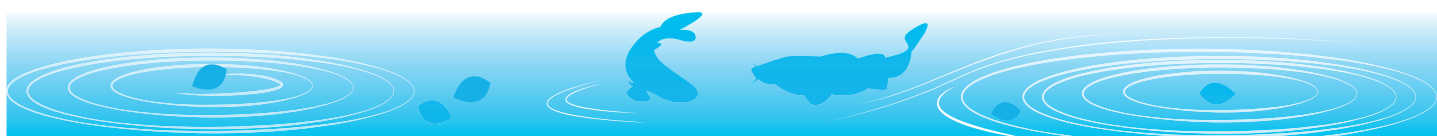
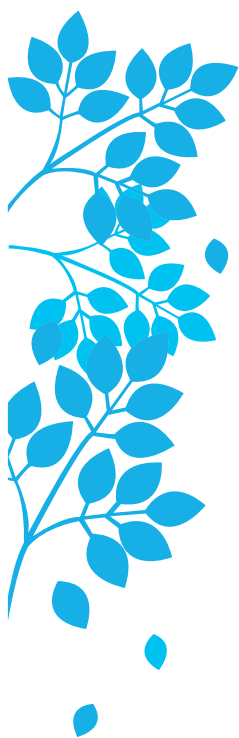
Thinking in concrete terms about the state of our mind and our relationships with others, such as the kind care demonstrated by our parents, the benefits received from our ancestors, the consideration shown by our family members, and the thoughtfulness expressed by our friends, we become aware that they are invisible, important things for which we are apt to forget to express gratitude. Of course, there are many other things to which the same logic applies. In your case, what comes to mind?

The Swiss painter Paul Klee (1879–1940) once said something to the effect that art enables us to see what is invisible, and it also can be said of religion and faith that they make visible what we cannot see. Properly speaking, religion and faith give us the opportunity to become aware of what is truly important for living as a human being, such as our own state of mind, the wonder and the miracle of life, and the sanctity of all life, which are invisible to our eyes.

Now, let us consider what this means in terms of the reality of our daily lives.

Accepting Things Honestly

Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "Revelation of the [Eternal] Life of the Tathagata," contains the verse, "I always abide here teaching the Dharma." In other words, the Buddha is always right by our side, continuing to teach us the Dharma.



However, the verse goes on to say, “Indeed, I am always dwelling in this world. However, using my transcendent powers, I cause living beings with distorted minds to be unable to see me, although I am near.” In other words, to us, the Buddha’s teaching of the Dharma is invisible, we cannot hear it, or apprehend it visually.

The reason for this, according to the sutra, is “living beings with distorted minds.” That is, we are apt to misinterpret things, or to see things from our own self-centered, biased point of view.

Well, then, what should you do to become aware of the Buddha’s message to you? The simplest method is to be accepting. If you are accepting, then you will be able to clearly see important things that cannot be seen with the naked eye and feel as if you are grasping the Buddha’s teaching. Is it not true that evidence of this can be found in the “Spiritual Journey” featured regularly in this online journal, as well as in the members’ testimonies given at the Great Sacred Hall and at your local Dharma center?

No matter how painful the reality may be, by accepting it honestly, each and every person will realize something important—some people may realize how many other people are supporting them, some people may experience the preciousness of life, and some people may keenly feel how considerate their friends and family are.

In all of those cases, the awareness of people is transformed into thankfulness that has never occurred to them before that time, and they may even bow their heads in gratitude before the harsh reality that served as the opportunity to gain that important awareness. Looking at the situation objectively, their predicament had not changed at all, but when they realize something important that is invisible to the eye, many people are filled with a sense of security, as if a great weight had been lifted from their shoulders. I think that is liberation. Becoming aware of the working of invisible forces and hearing the voice of the Buddha is, in a manner of speaking, a shortcut to happiness.

This is the season when in Japan many people gather for the Bon holidays and summer vacation, during which they return to their hometowns for a family reunion, and celebrate the ancestors’ memory, so it may be a good opportunity to give some thought to the important things that cannot be seen with the eyes.

From *Kosei*, August 2017



Spiritual Journey

Appreciating Every Encounter

Rev. Takayuki Nagashima
Minister of the San Francisco Dharma Center

*This Dharma Sharing (Spiritual Journey) was presented
at the ceremony for Founder's memorial day, held at the Great Sacred Hall on March 4, 2017.*

GOOD morning, everyone. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to share my Dharma experience on this meaningful day.

I was born as the first son of the Nagashima family at Yokosuka City in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. I am now sixty-four years old, and I have a younger brother and a sister. At age fifty-two, I was appointed as minister at the Brazil Dharma Center, and then at age sixty, as minister at the San Francisco Dharma Center. A little while after I started ministry at San Francisco, I was aware that no new members joined the Dharma center, and I felt embarrassed with it. That was because in Brazil many people were guided as new members to the Dharma center. So I compared the two Dharma centers and could not see any strong points of the San Francisco Dharma Center, although the center had many. However, as I practice the teachings with members of the San Francisco Dharma Center year after year, I became aware of their strong points. Now I feel that I am sustained by the Buddha, and every day, I am happy to practice the Dharma with a sense of gratitude.

Last year, in his first Dharma talk President Niwano explained about the term *onshu*, which means “to review past events.” This year, for his new year’s guidance he referred to “the preciousness of life and our

gratitude to it.” In that guidance of the *Kosei Shimbun* newspaper dated January 1, 2017, the President says, “It is precisely because they have bitter and sorrowful memories that they can understand the suffering of others and be considerate.” My heart and soul was shaken when I read that because it reminded me of my father and Mr. Minami, who I met in boyhood, then a staff member who was assigned to the Kanagawa area from the headquarters’ youth division.

In my childhood I was completely overwhelmed with an inferiority complex and overall gloomy character. My family was poor and my parents always had quarrels. An electric welder, my father had a short temper. He often slapped my mother, me, and my younger brother. I kept hating him as far back in the past as I can remember. I always thought over four desires: killing my father, leaving home, setting my house afire, and killing myself.

When I was two years old, my father’s colleague named Ota guided my parents to the teaching of Rishso Kosei-kai. Even though my parents became members, they continued quarrelling with each other. But my mother kept paying a visit to the Dharma Center every day. I still remember vaguely that she took me to the center.

When I was a fifth grader in elementary school, my father forced me to participate in a Dharma training session for junior high school students at the Yokosuka Dharma Center. As I could not reject his order, I joined it grudgingly. When I was chanting the mantra *odaikoku* repeatedly as I was told, Mr. Minami whispered me at my ear, “Thank you very much for your participation.” The words were so unexpected that I was greatly surprised and tears welled up in my eyes at the moment. I clung onto him and cried. I felt I was being treated as a human being for the first time in my life. I was very happy. Then I decided to follow him.

From that time, I came to accept assignments by the



Rev. Nagashima delivers his personal spiritual experience in the Great Sacred Hall.

Dharma center in a positive manner, although I had always taken negative attitude. I played various roles at school as well as at the center, because I want Mr. Minami be happy and praise me. In this way I could take a step forward, but I was still frightened when my father was close to me. I underwent surgery for a duodenal ulcer at age twenty-one. I thought that my hatred against my father appeared in the form of ulcer, but in fact, this unfortunate event was the working of the Buddha's compassion. When the surgery was successful, my father rejoiced with a boyish grin. I had never seen such an expression on his face. Lying on bed in the hospital, I thought he was worried about me. When I really understood his feelings, my scary feeling toward him, which lasted for twenty years, gradually changed to affection. Then I reflected on the past, and realized it was my father that brought me an encounter with Mr. Minami. Now I believe that his words at the training session spiritually transformed me only thanks to my father's harshness. My father passed away at such an earlier age, just sixty-four years. Just before the last moment, he gazed at me with full trust and asked me to take care of my mother. I answered him, "Leave it to me."

When I was young, my mother was crying every evening. However, now I think she might be stronger than my father. She continued to visit Rissho Kosei-kai even though he shouted and slapped her. In tears she went back and forth to the Dharma center. When my mother shared her reminiscences, she told me, "At night my husband made me cry, and in the daytime a *hoza* facilitator made me cry" as her reminiscences. When I passed over the age of ten, peace and comfort was brought to my home little by little. My family became harmonious even though we were not well off. I couldn't describe how hard my mother worked for the Dharma practice until my family attained happiness.

In my twenties, I once asked to my mother, "Why are you devoted to the faith so earnestly?" Then she answered, "I am afraid that something bad will happen as a lesson from the Buddha." Precisely because I was

then expecting to receive a little bit more reasonable and persuasive answer, I was disappointed. And what she said to me remained in my mind later for a long time. When I told this story to my wife in my fifties, she responded to me by saying, "Your mother might have been afraid that bad things would happen to you, not to her." I was so much surprised and felt like I had been hit in the head. I remembered that, actually, she was once told in a *hoza* session that her first son would die young. At the moment I recognized that she had devoted her whole life to me, a deep sense of appreciation came out from the bottom of my heart. It was she who was most delighted to hear that I was assigned minister at the Brazil Dharma Center. It was also she who was so sad since she had to live separately from me. Every November, however, I was allowed to come back to Japan and I was able to spend almost two weeks. In her later years, she always told me, "I may not see you again next year." I thought she was lonely. When I heard the news of her critical condition in August, 2009, thanks to President Niwano's thoughtful arrangement, I was allowed to return to Japan temporarily. When I visited the hospital where she was being treated, she suddenly sat straight on the bed, saying, "Reverend, you've come to me." My younger brother and his wife, who were taking care of her, were also so surprised. Since then, I could spend time with her for about one month. She passed away at the age of eighty-three, leaving her last words, "I am grateful. I'm grateful." I saw her off with all my family members.

Thanks to my parents and Mr. Minami, I could have a variety of experiences. I felt resentment and fear, but also I was able to taste the feeling of being full of joy when I was praised. Those experiences are now my priceless treasures. Thank very much.

I would like to share another experience that I had when I was starting to find the strong points of the San Francisco Dharma Center. There is a sixteen-year-old girl, whom I will tentatively call Mary. When I first met her about four years ago, she always seemed in a bad mood. Whenever she visited the center for attending

Spiritual Journey

ceremonies or receiving seminars, she always did her homework sitting at the back rows in the room. Honestly speaking, I had a bitter feeling against her. I could not see the buddha-nature within herself. But, on the other hand, she seemed to be similar to me at that age, and therefore I hoped that she could attain happiness. Communication and interaction with such a sensitive teenage girl is very difficult. So whenever I saw her, I greeted her cheerfully from me, with best wishes. After a while, I found out how smart and clever she is, and she could speak both English and Japanese fluently, because her father is American and her mother is Japanese.

In the Dharma center, both Japanese and English are used at seminars, testimonies, and my Dharma talk. One day, I asked Mary, “Do you understand my English?” She answered, “Yes. Your talk is interesting.” I was so happy to hear this. For me, it was a twofold joy. The first joy was that my poor English was accepted and the second was that I could reach out to her heart and mind. I found that she always did her homework at the center but also listened to my talks.

Mary’s parents were divorced so she stayed at her father’s home on Thursdays and Fridays and at her mother’s home on the other days. That’s why her mother took her to the center every Sunday. I thought she was a good girl. I thought her facial expression became gentle and bright since my perspective of her had changed.

One day, my wife said to me, “Mary was worried about you because you didn’t seem to be doing well today.” I was so moved. I thought I was always worried about her, but in reality she was watching over me. Now I was aware that she was an emissary from the Buddha to manifest my own buddha-nature. When I realized this, I thanked her from the bottom of my heart and mind. Further, it was not only her but all members in the Dharma center who worried about me. How precious it was for me.

In the new year’s guidance President Niwano teaches us, “Becoming human beings who are capable of gratitude—don’t you think we can say that this is,

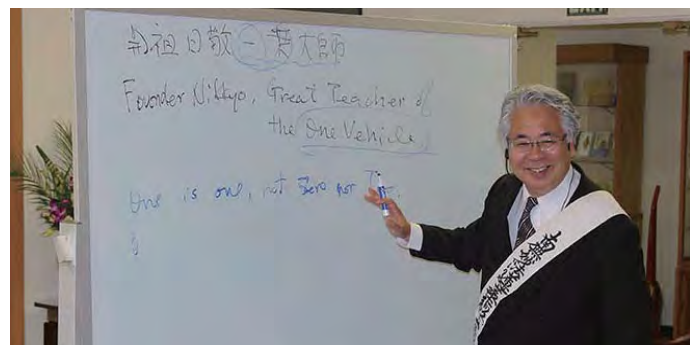
after all, the aim of our faith?” And he also describes what we should practice in the concrete way by saying that “Something you particularly must not forget is to express your thankfulness and gratitude precisely in words.”

“Four Words for Happiness” are a set of watchwords for members of the San Francisco Dharma Center. They are: “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” “I’m grateful,” and “It’s wonderful.” I always told members to speak these watchwords but actually, it was I who should have said them first.

Further, I wish to be a person who is able to accept everything, whether it may be convenient or inconvenient to me, with gratitude. Like Mr. Minami, I also wish to be someone who can remind suffering people of a sense of gratitude, hope, peace, and forgiveness. I believe that these wishes are what my parents wanted me to attain.

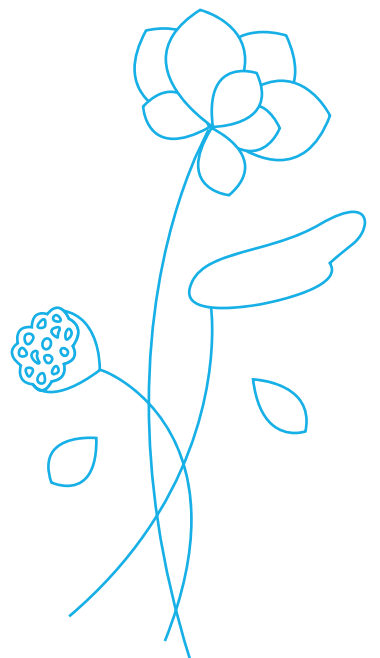
Thanks to Founder Niwano I was liberated. Thanks to my wife, my younger brother and his wife, and the members, I’ve been walking the path leading to buddhahood this far.

Now people say that the world where we are living is challenged by global divisions. The Founder taught us the One Vehicle: “All sentient beings aboard the same vehicle are sustained to live by great life.” I believe that we have to communicate this teaching to people all over the world, and make it a common aspiration for humankind. I must realize that I was born to achieve this goal, and I wish to make a vow to devote myself to global Dharma dissemination. Thank you very much.



Rev. Nagashima gives a lecture at the San Francisco Dharma Center.

Living the **LOTUS**

A cluster of light blue lotus leaves, partially overlapping the word "LOTUS".

Childcare lifeline

I'm worried about my daughter, 17-year-old high school student, who cannot put aside her smartphone.



My daughter is using her smartphone all the time, never putting it aside, continually looking at and checking social networking services (SNS), on which she exchanges messages with her friends, after she comes back to home from school every day. Whenever I ask her to let go of her smartphone, because I'm worried and concerned about such a daily situation of hers, she will answer, "No, because I won't be able to follow conversations with my friends about popular topics." She seems to be pushing herself more than she can manage. How should I deal with my daughter, and what sort of approach should I take?



You are such a wonderful mother who can communicate your concerns and worries directly to your daughter as you carefully watch over her.

Your daughter's words that "I cannot follow my friends' conversations about popular topics" reflect her true feelings, typical of high school students, to place the highest value on their ties and connections with their close friends, rather than their parents or other family members. As a mother, you would probably like to say, "You are overdoing it, aren't you?" or "Don't you have anything else to do except checking your phone?" However, this persistence to stay connected with friends is characteristic of children of high school age who have a genuine, pure mind that cannot admit easy compromises. Your daughter is actually learning many things while gaining a sense of her own individuality through the joyful interactions with her friends, such as the difficulty to adequately express consideration and kindness, even though she is aware that she may overtax herself.

Parents may feel anxiety about today's Internet-based society which can look rather complicated to them. But, as a parent at such times, why don't you learn about smartphone and SNS yourself and discuss how to make appropriate use of them with your daughter. You'll receive and learn more from your child than she'll learn from a parent. But she will

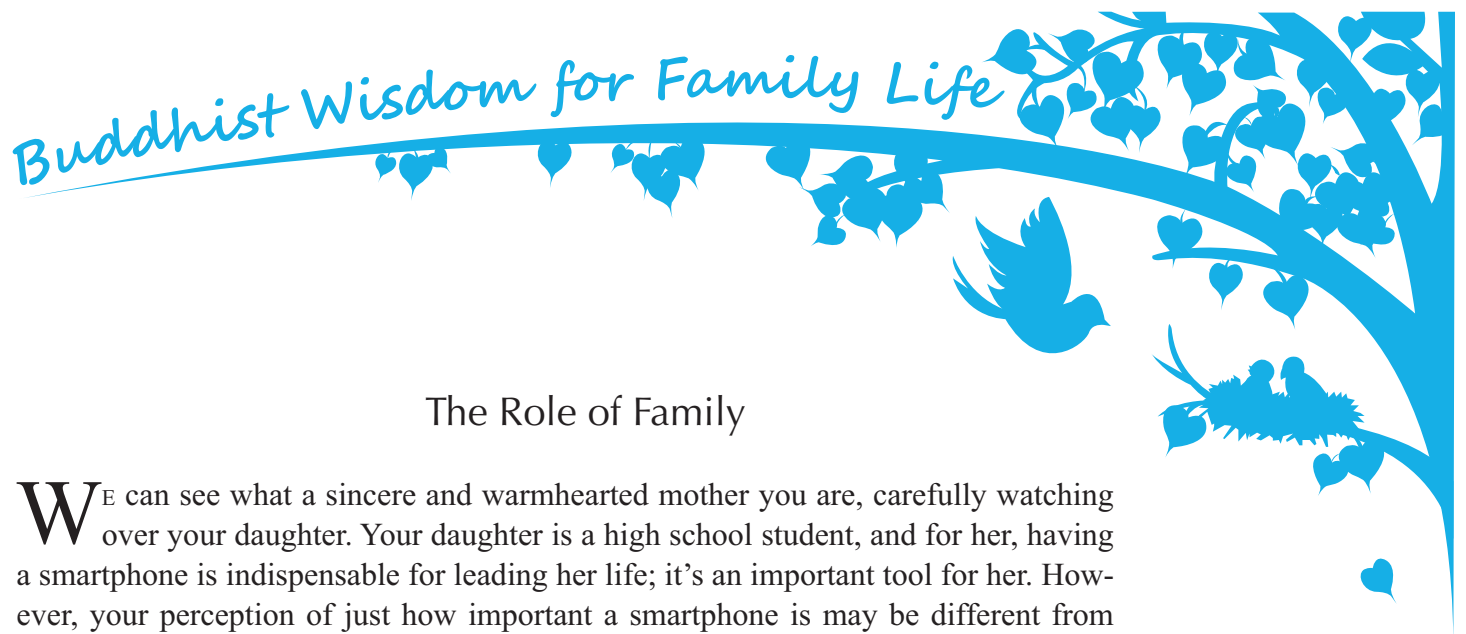
come to gain more self-confidence by her sense of affirmation that she is counted on by her mother, and so your family ties and the relationship of trust between a parent and a child will become much deeper. People usually don't want to betray those who sincerely trust them, or make them sad.

As a way of improving communication with your daughter, while regarding the smartphone and SNS as one of the means to lead a life in today's society, you should justly recognize your daughter's attitude as that of a person who has been striving to study at class and to perform club activity after school, or to help at events of the community and so forth. What really matters is that a home should be a place of relief with peace and comfort for a child, as you express the words of praise to your daughter and exchange pleasant, light conversations between a mother and a child. Please trust your daughter wholeheartedly, watching over her gently with such great consideration.



(Answers 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.



The Role of Family

WE can see what a sincere and warmhearted mother you are, carefully watching over your daughter. Your daughter is a high school student, and for her, having a smartphone is indispensable for leading her life; it's an important tool for her. However, your perception of just how important a smartphone is may be different from hers. That's why your daughter may not recognize just how concerned and worried about her you are. What really matters is how well the family unit is functioning and working at home, so a mother's compassion and care for her daughter can best be expressed and put into action.

Our Founder teaches us in regard to the role of family as follows: "There is no doubt that family should be a harbor in the storm, which can be compared to our social life with its struggles" (*Yakushin*, February, 1969).

A port is supposed to be the kind of place where repairs can be made to damaged sails on the ship, its engine can be adjusted, water and food can be provided to the ship, the ship can be stocked, and it can be made ready for departure. A ship and its crew can take a rest at a port; it is a place of relief and peace. Likewise, what kind of supplies does your daughter need in order to rest with peace and comfort, and to gain vigorous energy for tomorrow? Why don't you carefully review the role of family once again? You'll be able to work out the kind of heartwarming, touching interconnections with your daughter that only a mother can provide.

(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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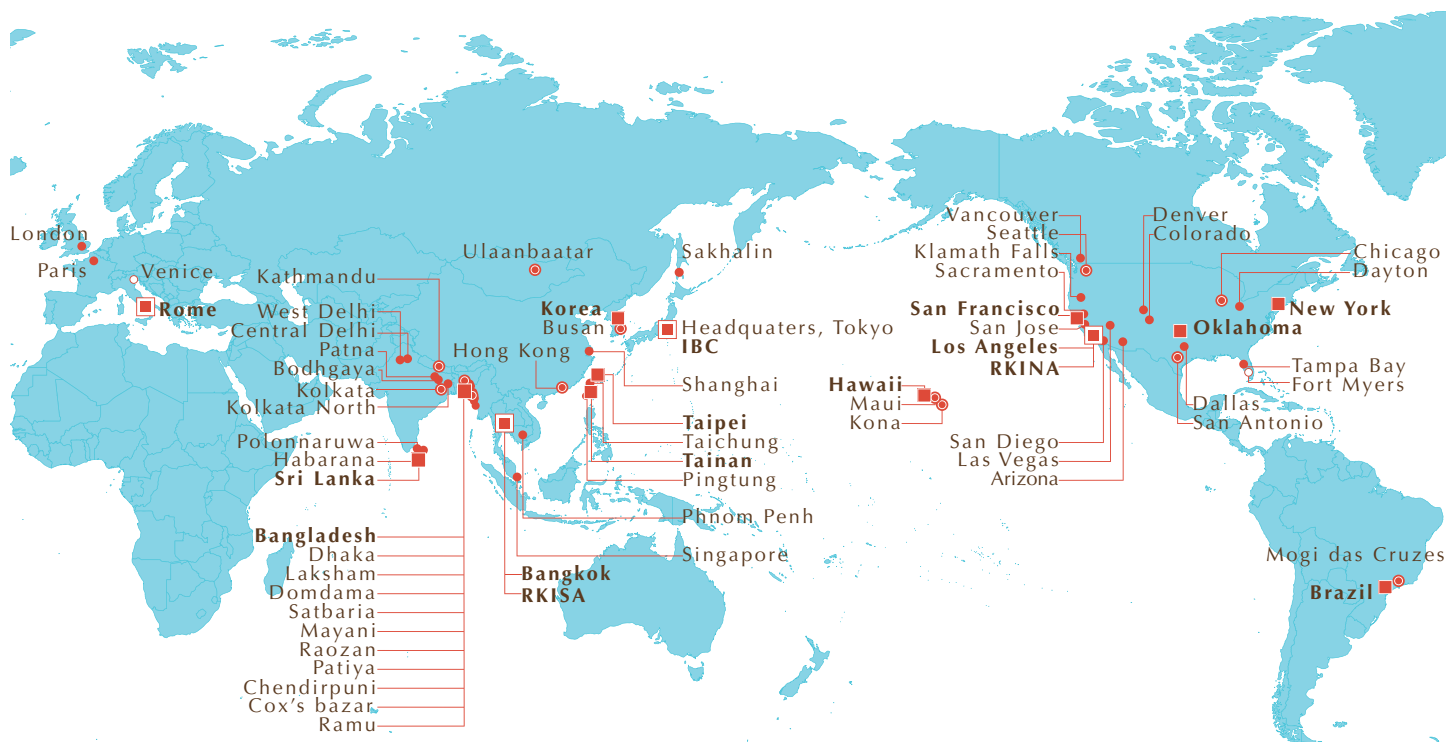
Living with Happiness

MY father, who is going to be 95 years old this year, was hospitalized recently because of his poor physical condition. Now my father, and we as his family, are facing together the reality of aging and illness every day.

My father has been diligently walking the Way of the Buddha Dharma since he joined Rissho Kosei-kai in his 30s. It is because my father let me know the preciousness of the Dharma through his way of life that I joined Rissho Kosei-kai when I was a youth. I was studying hard to become an agriculture scientist with a desire to contribute to an increase of the world's food production. But my mind was always disturbed by some sort of dissatisfaction and irritation. When I started to study and practice the Buddha's teachings, however, I gradually became able to see the world, which in fact was always embracing me with innumerable blessings, and I found my mind filled with gratitude and peace.

I spoke to my father on his bed: "You have given me life, the Dharma, and true happiness. Thank you, Dad." Looking at the gentle smile on his face, I was reminded of the happiness of having encountered the teachings, thanks to my father who had guided me by example.

Rev. Shoko Mizutani
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