

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

The Cultivated Heart

PRIVATE continuing education academies called “Cul-ture schools” are now all the rage. Culture in this sense indicates edification and refining oneself through contact with literature and the arts. This connotation of the word derives from its original meaning “to till” a plot of land. Someone whose mind is tilled pliant and flexible is one who can truly be considered a cultured person.

Similar to well tilled land that will accept and nurture any crop planted in its soil, by equipping oneself with broad knowledge we free ourselves from bias and stereotypes, so that we become able to see things from many points of view. But there are those who, if careless, instead end up brandishing all that knowledge crammed into their heads like a weapon,

wielding it to belittle people, and develop a disinclination to listen to others.

There is a phrase in the Lotus Sutra that speaks of “those who perform virtuous deeds, who are gentle and of upright nature.” In order to become a truly cultured person it is necessary to practice serving others along with pursuing intellectual learning. This is what the sutra means by accumulating “virtuous deeds.”

Without ever doing a single thing to work for the happiness of others, studying only to make oneself look erudite is, far from tilling the heart and mind, just turning into a self-righteous person armed with extensive knowledge. This brings to mind a proverb: “Change is the proof of a lesson learned.”

From *Kaisozuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing Co.), pp. 42–43

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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

Moving Forward through Suffering and Hardship

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Suffering Is a Valuable Experience

No one wants to endure suffering or hardships. However, no matter how happy people may appear to be, though there may be some difference of degree, surely they have one or two worries.

I have often heard of cases in which someone has gone through many sufferings and hardships that later on became great spiritual assets. Founder Nikkyo Niwano, the anniversary of whose entrance into nirvana we will observe on the fourth of this month, became connected to religion through his worrying about a child's sickness, which led him to the Lotus Sutra, which would greatly transform his life. In this way of thinking, precisely because we suffer, we seek out various teachings and seriously consider what is most important in our lives. Frankly speaking, the more we suffer, the more we can grow, and, therefore, suffering is a valuable experience for human beings.

Even so, however, our human nature is to want to avoid suffering. Moreover, many people honestly feel that it is impossible to imagine saying such things as they are grateful for suffering.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with that. The Zen phrase *reidan jichi* (Cold or warm, you know for yourself) means that you will find out for yourself whether the water is cold or warm when you actually take a drink. As this phrase implies, it is only after first having had various experiences that we can begin to accept suffering and hardship as valuable experiences for which we should be grateful and see for ourselves that "Truly, it is only because there is suffering that there is joy."

Someone Who Has Seen the World

Shakyamuni teaches us that "All phenomena are characterized by suffering," which means that we find suffering in everything in this world. And Founder Niwano proclaimed that "The most important thing is that we look squarely at this truth and accept it with firm resolve," and "When we do so, we come to understand that suffering



is no longer something out of the ordinary; it is a completely normal part of life,” and that “Precisely because we think about suffering as something unusual, we only feel more pain and by anticipating it, we feel frightened and uneasy.”

However, even though we understand that there is nothing we can do to avoid life's suffering, we still worry and anguish not a little over what to do about it and pass our days in mental agony.

Yusai Sakai (1926–2013), a great teacher (*dai ajari*) of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, said about such times that “Instead of constantly using your head to think about things, it is better to intensely use your body to get something done.”

In a time of suffering, when we are constantly using our heads and worrying about something, our minds are in disarray and vexed and we feel as if a problem is stagnating in our minds, going round and round in circles. On the other hand, when we use our bodies to get something done, we may experience bone-breaking fatigue from working, but it includes the *action* that moves us one step forward in solving the problem. Is this not another example of hard-to-get experience, like “cold or warm, you know for yourself,” which I mentioned earlier?

The Japanese word *kuronin* means a person who has seen the world, that is, someone who has suffered many reverses, who is conversant in the conditions of society and able to turn those experiences into the nutrients of spiritual growth, and who is recognized as having achieved the greatness of the expanse and depth of the human heart. Shakyamuni, who was determined to bring liberation to all people and made great strides to disseminate the teaching, was a great exemplar of a man who has seen the world.

In this sense as well, when you are facing some suffering or hardship, why not put your body to work “getting something done?” Then, your mental distress will be transformed into sweat that achieves something. And such experiences will make your thinking more profound, broaden your perspective, make your mind more flexible, and deepen your consideration for others, all of which will give you greater human appeal.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we often say that when you are worried about something, you should listen to someone who has the same kind of worry. That is because being active and working for the sake of others is the key to turning “stagnation” into “action.” Furthermore, this leads to gratitude.

From *Kosei*, October 2017



Spiritual Journey

Living with Appreciation in This Moment

Mrs. Etsuko Kato
Kumamoto Dharma Center

This Dharma sharing (spiritual journey) was presented at the Ceremony for the First Day of the Month, Uposatha Day, at the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo on April 1, 2017.

GOOD morning, everyone. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the warmhearted support from President Niwano and all the sangha members in Japan when we were struck by the big earthquake in Kumamoto Prefecture last year.

I was born as the eldest daughter of the Nishiyama family in 1972 in the town of Mashiki in Kumamoto Prefecture. I grew up in comfort, receiving plenty of affection from my parents and grandparents, together with my brother, who is three years older than me. When my mother was pregnant with me, she was distressed by my father's affair with another woman. She cried every day in the hospital after she gave birth to me and kept thinking that she would go back to her parents' home with me. Around that time, she was invited to Rissho Kosei-kai by my father's aunt and became a member when I was five months old. I am the second generation in the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai.

When I was little, after she returned home from job and finished housework, my mother would visit members' houses in the neighborhood, bringing copies of the *Kosei* magazine. I went with my mother to members' houses, but as I often fell asleep while there, my mother would end up coming home

carrying me on her back. When my brother and I were school students we participated in Sunday schools and training seminars at the Kumamoto Dharma Center.

I began practicing the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai on my own after I got married. When I was a junior in university, I met a man who was seventeen years older than me and who was at the time my employer at my part-time job. We started seeing each other. He had lost his wife to disease and lived with his son, who was eleven years old. He also had a daughter who was born just before his wife passed away. His daughter was three years old at the time and lived with the parents of her deceased mother. I began to think about marrying him because he was a kind and reliable man and was dedicated both to his job and to his children. As I was anxious about becoming the mother of two small children, I talked to my parents about my intention to marry. They did not say a word of opposition against my marriage, and said, "You will be a good mother. We are always with you. Don't worry." They trusted me and gave me a push. However, having become a parent myself, I am now able to understand the agony that my parents must have felt about my marrying a widower with two small children, to which they actually wanted to oppose but suppressed their opposition out of their compassion for me. Their gentle and encouraging words were a tearful cry in disguise from my parents, who had raised me dreaming of a bright future for me. These words of my parents have always been my support. My parents always guided me with deep compassion. Mom and dad, thank you very much.

In 1995, soon after I graduated from university, we got married. I started living with my husband, the thirteen-year-old son, and the five-year-old daughter. The son seemed delighted with our marriage, because I had often met him before the marriage. The former



Mrs. Kato delivers her personal spiritual experience in the Great Sacred Hall.

wife of my husband, who had a chronic disease, was struck by a subarachnoid hemorrhage just before giving birth to her daughter. The baby was delivered by caesarean section, but as her mother passed away two weeks later, she had never been held in her mother's arms. She was raised by her maternal grandparents with warm care, and became a child with fine sensibility. On the occasion of our marriage, she came back home to live with us, saying delightedly, "I've got a mom!" She was an amiable child and came to love me immediately. However, it must be very hard for a little girl to live apart from her grandparents who had cared for her in place of her parents. She often cried in the night. I always hugged her, saying "Don't worry. You will be all right," but she did not stop crying. I thought that she would be happier if she went back to live with her grandparents, and sometimes tears came into my eyes.

I was blessed with two children of my own with my husband. After her younger brother and sister were born, our elder daughter, who had quickly become attached to me, started to pick on her younger siblings, as she now felt unable to depend on me. I consulted our chapter leader and members of the women's group at the Dharma center about the problem. I became invited to attend seminars about family education at the Dharma center. However, at first, I could not talk about my participation in Rissho Kosei-kai's activities to my husband as I knew that he did not like religion. When I was invited to participate in a group pilgrimage to the Tokyo headquarters with the women's group and in a training session at the Ome Retreat Center, I prepared his favorite foods for my husband and conducted Rissho Kosei-kai's three basic practices, namely exchanging morning greetings, responding clearly when someone calls us, and arranging our shoes and chairs neatly. Then gradually I began to be able to talk to him about my faith, and he came to understand me.

When our elder daughter became an adolescent, I began to suffer from her behavior. Meanwhile, I was

made the head of children's group at my chapter of the Dharma center, and then the head of women's group of my chapter. I had opportunities to participate in the first- to the third-level courses in the study of the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai for the women's group, where I shared my joys and my sorrows with other members of the women's group, and I became capable of considering that the Buddha must be teaching me something through the seemingly unpleasant phenomena. Whenever I had worries about the behavior of my elder daughter, I received guidance from our chapter and area leaders, and pulled myself together. Even though my suffering continued, I became capable of thinking that I was extremely blessed with the precious moments that I can use for my husband and children, and I began to cherish each and every member of my family. I came to have the mindset that I should repay the compassion of the parents of my husband's former wife, who had entrusted to me their beloved granddaughter, whom they had cared for as if she were a reincarnation of their deceased daughter. I determined that I would grow into a true mother for my step-children.

I had been in good health without any particular illnesses until March 2012, when I hemorrhaged profusely while I was taking a shower at home. The whole floor of the bathroom turned red. I was diagnosed to have cervical cancer by a gynecologist. As the cancer could spread to my womb, ovaries, and lymph glands, I needed to have surgery to remove the cancer as soon as possible. The prospect of death crossed my mind and I was shocked so deeply that I couldn't think of anything. If I died, what would happen to my family? I could not but think of the sorrow of my husband's former wife, who had died leaving her husband and two small children without being able to do anything for them. I was overwhelmed by anxiety until the date of surgery was fixed. I asked our chapter leader to listen to my worries. I realized that I could control nothing myself, neither my disease nor my family's future, and I

Spiritual Journey

determined to entrust everything to the Buddha. When I thought that way, I came to feel secure. I quit my job and tried to accumulate merit by practicing the teachings. I spent much peaceful time by cherishing my family until the day of the surgery, so that I would not regret anything afterward. My parents, with their warm affection, said that they wanted to take my place. My husband and children were totally overwhelmed by worrying about my disease. The only thing that I could do to make them feel secure was to live my days positively and cheerfully. Fortunately, so far, my cancer has never come back or spread after the surgery.

When I saw the statue of the Eternal Buddha in the Dharma center for the first time after being released from the hospital, I was deeply filled with gratitude for the life that was given to me by the Buddha, my ancestors, and many people around me, I could not stop the tears from welling up in my eyes. I realized that I had received plenty of happiness through the experience of the disease. In addition, I felt the deep compassion of the Buddha, who had given me the opportunity to cultivate the heart to sympathize with others who are suffering from diseases, and I was sure that it was my mission to use my life to help others.

In June 2014, our elder daughter was blessed with her second child. However, as her husband changed his job often and did not bring home a stable income, she had to work in order to support the family while taking care of two small children. That made her mentally unstable. At that time, I was serving as a Dharma instructor at the Dharma center, and helped my daughter to take care of her children. Our daughter's frustration continued to build up for a long time until one day she finally snapped. Her anger was directed toward me. She railed against me, and we got into a scuffle. She raged furiously and attacked me violently, even though her baby was in my arms. Even my husband could not stop her, and a neighbor called the police. A police officer was finally able to stop her.

I was shocked to hear her screaming, "I have never thought of you as my mother" and "Don't act like my mother! You're no relation of mine!" I thought, "What have I been doing to my daughter for the last twenty years to have made her feel that way? Was it impossible for me to be a true mother for her from the beginning?" I lost all confidence and was injured mentally more than physically. Tears welled up in my eyes when I thought about her, and I spent many sleepless nights. I had taken several days off from the Dharma center to rest until my injuries were healed, and my parents as well as the chapter leader and the head of educational affairs group of the Dharma center kindly visited my house to see me. I came to think that I should move forward somehow, and so I received guidance from the minister of the Dharma center. He said to me, "What happened to you took place not because your efforts were not satisfactory, but because the Buddha thought you have made such good efforts that you are able to accept it now." He showed warm concern over my suffering. He told me that even though I worried about my elder daughter I should leave the matter of her to her husband until I was healed spiritually. I felt relieved slightly to hear his words as I had thought I was responsible for the violent behavior of my daughter and my relationship with her. At that time, my heart palpitated whenever I even glimpsed a car of the same type as my daughter's while I was driving. It took almost a year before I was able to meet her and her children again. In the course of that period, my eighteen-year-old second son and sixteen-year-old second daughter discussed the problem of their elder sister and had opportunities to talk about the problems with her. They kept in touch with their sister and on occasion let me know how she was doing.

One day when I talked with my younger daughter about the elder daughter, she said, "If my sister had not been born to have to go through her hardship, my brother and I would not have been born." Her words grasped my heart. Our elder daughter lost her biologi-

Spiritual Journey

cal mother, yet she was born into this world, even though hardship and sadness might await her. The former wife of my husband gave birth to her daughter by sacrificing her life. Thanks to them, I was able to meet my husband and was blessed with four children and this worthwhile life. I was finally able to realize after twenty years after my marriage that the happiness of our elder daughter is my own happiness.

Now, our elder daughter is doing her best to raise her three children and she sometimes comes to visit our home. My husband and I feel great joy whenever we see our four children, who are now grown up and are supporting each other whenever problems arise.

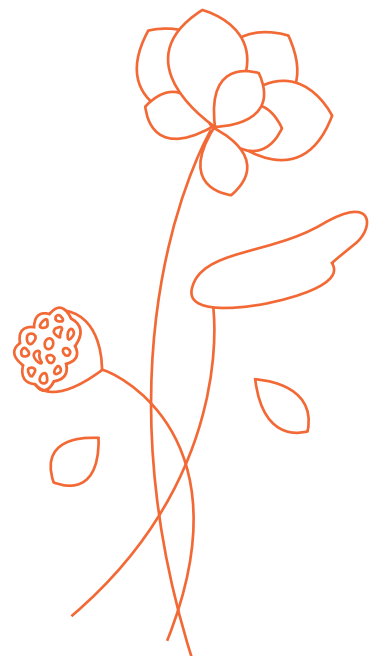
In November last year, the minister of our Dharma center asked me to serve as the head of the women's group of the Dharma center. I was very anxious because I was unsure if the unstable financial situation of our household would allow me to quit my job and concentrate on my role at the Dharma center and if I would be able to fulfill my responsibility. I spent many sleepless nights because of the anxiety. In the meantime, however, I began to realize that I was not feeling any joy for the happiness of the present moment from the bottom of my heart because I was obsessed with anxiety for the future. I realized that I would not be able to cherish the present moment if I kept worrying about the future that is yet to come. I decided to accept the role as the head of the women's

group, thinking that whenever any problems, which were too difficult to deal with, might arise, I would face them by receiving guidance from the leaders of the Dharma center.

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Kumamoto Dharma Center. I sense the deep compassion of the Buddha, who in this auspicious year, arranged for me to receive a role in the women's group that is crucial to bringing up the next generation of leaders. I pledge to practice the teachings myself by cherishing the present moment with other members of the women's group, by making it my goal to find many hearts of gratitude in the interactions in the sangha and to share them with other members. Thank you very much.



Mrs. Kato (second from left) makes paper flowers, which will be used in the Oeshiki One Vehicle Festival, with members of women's group at the Kumamoto Dharma Center.



Childcare lifeline

I Am Worried about My Son, Who Is Having Difficulty in Finding a Bride

Q My heart has been aching for my eldest son, who has still not gotten married, even though he is over forty years of age. My son and I live together in a farming village. Since many of the young people are working or have jobs in urban areas, there are very few chances for my son to get acquainted with young women who are looking for a spouse. My son is uncompromising in his wish to get married to the kind of woman who can live together with me (his mother) in the same household. Recently, the number of opportunities of *omiaï* (an arranged meeting with a woman with a view to marriage) brought to him is decreasing, and so, I'm becoming seriously anxious about my son's future.



A I understand very well about your sincere desire for your son to get married and gain real happiness as soon as possible. At the same time, I am convinced of your son's warmheartedness as an eldest son to always keep you in mind. In that sense, this kind of problem might have been generated due to the consideration you both have for each other. Therefore, why don't you discuss this matter with your son, heart to heart, in a more honest way?

It is crucial that both you and your son understand and recognize each other; that you know what's in his mind, and what wish you're holding in your mind. On that basis, you should trust in your son, and give him an affectionate push forward, saying "I'm quite all right, so you please walk your own way for yourself." When both of you create the groundwork of mutual trust, your son will be able to begin to take the first step as an adult with self-confidence.

Your son will also need to positively strive to take part in activities while searching for a spouse, such as going to class reunions or parties for marriage hunt. Although he may sometimes feel that things do not work out as intended, he will surely be able to attain his own spiritual and personal growth through encountering different kinds of new experiences.

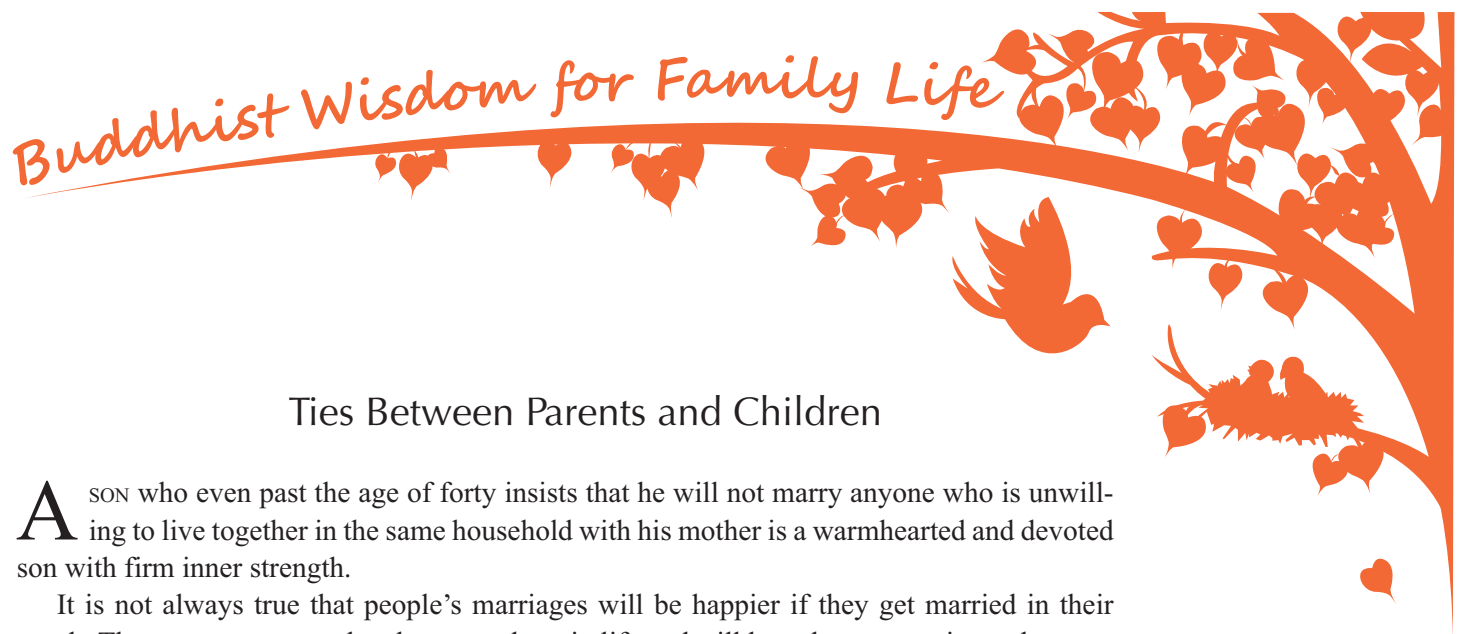
These days, there are increasingly more and more women who would like to be involved in agriculture, or to marry into a farming family. In the meanwhile, please understand that contrary to what people often believe, marriage may not be the happiest way of life for everyone.

What will precisely lead to parents' happiness is seeing their children living vivid, fresh, and cheerful lives, no matter what kind of circumstances or conditions they may be in; and it will lead to children's happiness as well.



(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.



Ties Between Parents and Children

A SON who even past the age of forty insists that he will not marry anyone who is unwilling to live together in the same household with his mother is a warmhearted and devoted son with firm inner strength.

It is not always true that people's marriages will be happier if they get married in their youth. There are many people who marry later in life and still have happy marriages, because their way of looking at things matures with age.

President Nichiko Niwano gives us his guidance relating to true happiness in his book *Kokoro no Manako o Hiraku* (Opening the mind's eye) as follows:

“Surrounded by your parents and children; and being able to work every day in good health, to enjoy good meals, to be of help to others even in a small way; and to be given the gift of life through the support of innumerable people: When you identify these things, one by one, take stock of them, and feel thankful for them, your enjoyment of your path in life increases, your laughter increases, and your happiness also increases.

“The realization that the things you are most thankful for are the things that you already have is the discovery of true happiness” (Kosei Publishing Co., 2013, p. 289).

It is important to talk about what your son really wants to do in the future while the both of you take stock once more of the happiness you already have.

(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*.

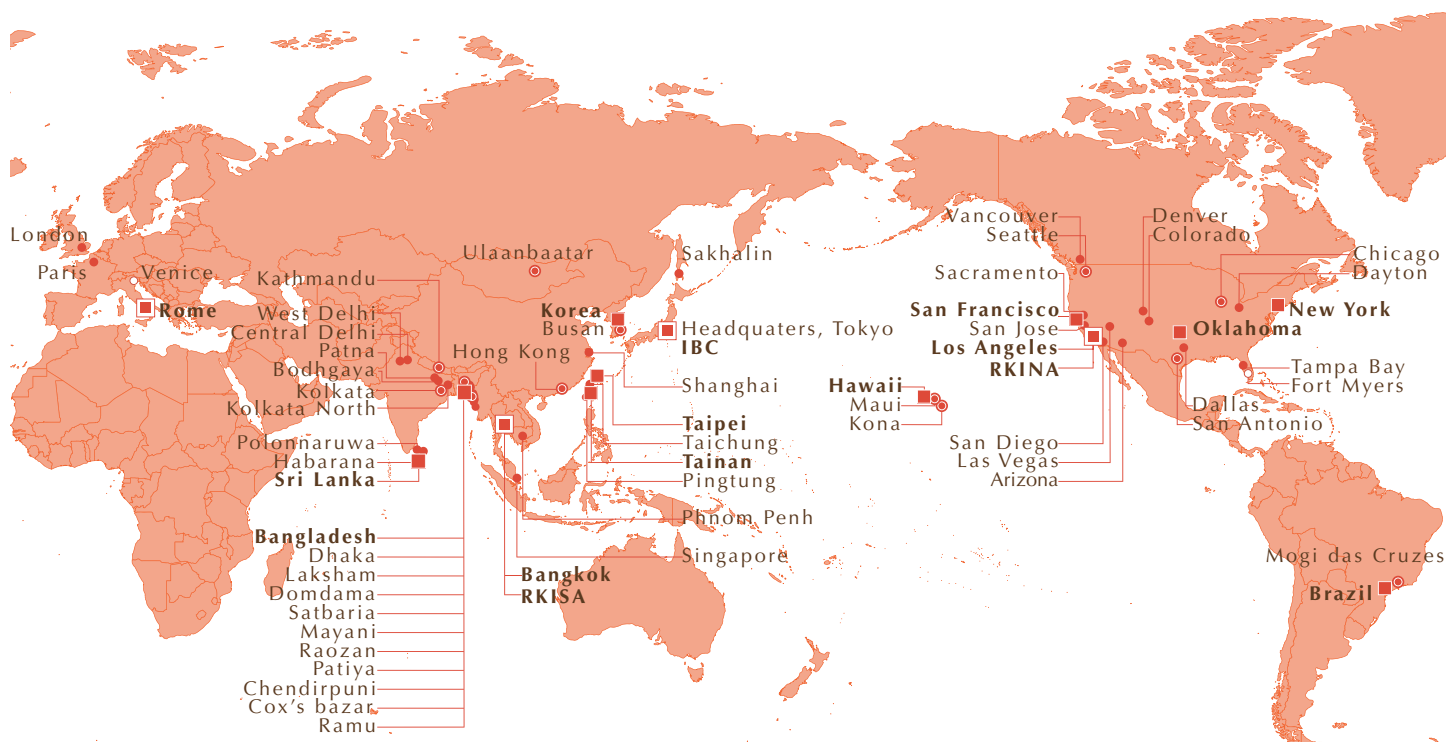
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Meeting Difficulties with Enthusiasm

THIS is a short story that I learned from a friend of mine in the United States. At a one-week Buddhist retreat, there was a very annoying guy among participants, and everyone disliked him. One day, because he could not stand being in retreat any longer, he suddenly ran away from the retreat site. Everyone shouted out with glee as he was gone. Then the priest in charge got in his car and drove off and fetched the man. Everyone was disappointed, and one boy asked the priest in a low voice, “Why did you bring him back?” The priest replied, “Oh, because I hired him.”

Truly, there is no end to worries and troubles in this life. I learned from President Niwano’s guidance of this month that whether we suffer from life’s experience or not are optional. To look at our mind as it is and recognize the true meaning and value of the situation and experience that bring us suffering is the practice of the Buddha Way. I learned that Founder Niwano used to meet difficult problems head-on and with great enthusiasm, saying “Now things are becoming interesting.” I would also like to meet difficulties with the spirit of excitement.

Rev. Shoko Mizutani
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International



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