

Living the

LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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FOUNDER'S ESSAY

Out of Gratitude for the Gift of Life

THE most basic teaching of Buddhism is dependent origination—everything which exists does so through its relationships to everything else. I'm sure all members of Rissho Kosei-kai know this teaching very well. The question is how to actually put this teaching into practice.

First of all, ask yourself: Who makes it possible for you to make it through the day successfully? From just how many people do you receive help and support? Understanding these relationships is the starting point for the practice of expressing gratitude.

When things at work are going well, we arrogantly assume that it's entirely the result of our own abilities and efforts, and forget to be thankful. This is why it's important to get into the daily habit of reflecting on just how many people's support makes our day

possible. Our morning and evening offerings of sutra recitation are one of the practices by which we can express our gratitude to them.

There is a world of difference between a life of never forgetting to genuinely express your gratitude to those around you, and a life of smugly patting yourself on the back when things go well while holding grudges when your efforts are not rewarded.

Transferring merit to one's ancestors through sutra recitation, respecting one's parents and looking after them, and cultivating bodhisattva practices are all ways to repay the kindness of all the people who give us the gift of life by sustaining us with their support.

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Senior Editor: Shoko Mizutani
Editor: Eriko Kanao
Copy Editor: Allan Carpenter

Living the Lotus is published monthly by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan.
TEL: +81-3-5341-1124
FAX: +81-3-5341-1224
Email: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

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

Filial Piety and Bodhisattva Practice

by Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



It Is Never Too Late for Filial Piety

Respecting our parents and looking after them demonstrates our filial piety. And as we are told by the proverb, “When you feel like performing your filial duty, you may no longer have parents,” the general idea is that we should take care of them while they are still alive.

For many of us, however, it is quite difficult to take care of our parents while they are still in good health. That may be because we feel awkward or embarrassed about performing our filial duty, or because somewhere, in the back of our minds, there is something akin to the wishful thinking that our parents will always be in good health. As a consequence, many people only come to fully realize how great a debt of gratitude they owe to their parents after their parents have died and then regret not having performed their filial duty while their parents were still alive.

However, I believe that it is never too late to perform our filial duty toward our parents.

As I wrote before in the pages of this magazine, “Let us lead our lives in such a way that we give peace of mind to our parents and ancestors” (“Filial Respect and the Buddha Way,” July 2011). To describe that more concretely, we should be very attentive to every element of our lives. Each day should be spent cheerfully and joyfully. We should sincerely do things that bring happiness to other people. If daughters and sons are leading such lives, then their parents, even after they have passed away, will have peace of mind. Therefore, it is never too late for filial piety, and it goes without saying that for parents who are still active and well, nothing brings them greater joy than knowing that their children are living honestly and doing things that bring happiness to the people around them.

Of course, praying before your ancestors’ graves and your family Buddhist altar is, in and of itself, an act of filial piety. This is not simply because you are putting your hands together before your parents or your ancestors, but because those actions are themselves proof that you are evolving as a human being who can express gratitude toward the source of your own life.



“Filial Piety Is the Source of a Hundred Deeds”

Explaining the teachings expounded in the Lotus Sutra in terms of our everyday lives, Founder Nikkyo Niwano taught us the importance of three things—filial piety, revering our ancestors, and bodhisattva practice. According to this interpretation of filial piety, since it is directly linked to revering our ancestors, we could put these two together and even say that filial piety and bodhisattva practice constitute the whole of Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings.

What, then, is bodhisattva practice? It is following the Buddha's teachings, such as making donations, keeping the precepts, and forbearance; being considerate of other people; and doing things that bring happiness to the people around you. Changing perspective, people who find happiness in the happiness of others are called bodhisattvas, and the pillar supporting the heart and mind of a bodhisattva is gratitude for having been granted this precious life.

In light of this, let us revisit the discussion of how we approach filial piety. If we look at a concrete image of our filial piety, which is living our daily lives attentively and leading a lifestyle that sincerely brings happiness to others, through the context of bodhisattva practices, we come to understand that filial piety, revering ancestors, and bodhisattva practice are basically one and the same. And the common denominator of all three of these is being grateful for the life we are now living.

To quote a Chinese proverb, “Filial piety is the source of a hundred deeds.” This means that filial piety is the foundation of all good deeds. Gratitude toward the parents who gave us birth is the foundation of filial piety and therefore, the platform for all good deeds is gratitude for life itself. Indeed, this proverb teaches us that gratitude for life has the power to create a world of good.

Our custom in Rissho Kosei-kai is to start our year from December 1, and so we are about to begin the year that will mark the eightieth anniversary of our organization's founding. This month, I talked about the theme of “filial piety and bodhisattva practice,” which are important in our organization. I hope that through them, you can reevaluate the starting point of your own life and take a fresh look at the state of your own faith. With that in mind, I hope that you will think deeply about sharing the Buddha Dharma with as many people as possible, which is the basis of bodhisattva practice, and thereby experience, along with other people, the joy of being alive.

From *Kosei*, November 2017



Grateful Life

by Mr. Marcus Staff
Rissho Kosei-kai of the United Kingdom

*This Dharma Sharing (Spiritual Journey) was presented at
a ceremony celebrating the anniversary of Shakyamuni's birth in 2017.*

I HAVE been interested in Buddhism since I was a teenager. Buddhism appealed to me as it did not put faith and reliance solely in an external savior but also in yourself through following and applying the teachings. It was not until watching a movie about the life of Tina Turner that I first heard the *O-daimoku* being chanted, which then started my interest and journey with the Lotus Sutra and eventually led me to Rissho Kosei-kai.

I first read about Rissho Kosei-kai in a book about Nichiren Buddhism that I bought in 1999, and a few years later I found a copy of *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* published by Kosei Publishing in a book shop. I was interested in the Lotus Sutra and from what I had read about Rissho Kosei-kai I wanted to find out more about the organization and I was pleased to find that there was a group here in the United Kingdom. I sent an e-mail to ask if there was a group near Cardiff and soon had a reply from Rev. Megumi Hirota, informing me that at that time there was no group in Wales, but she invited me to visit Oxford to learn more.

After our initial meeting, I attended *hoza* sessions in Oxford and St Albans regularly and eventually had a Gohonzon enshrined at my home altar in 2004. Initially, I was painfully shy and would hardly say anything at *hoza*, but through the support and encouragement of the sangha I gradually grew in confidence and now, although still not a hundred percent comfortable and not a natural public speaker, I am able to go outside of my comfort zone and speak to groups and share the Dharma.

An important part of my journey has been how the Dharma has helped me with depression. I was diagnosed with clinical depression when I was seventeen and periods of depression would last from

several months to several years with a period of feeling OK in between. I was told that I would probably have depression for the rest of my life, although the periods of depression would gradually shorten and the periods of feeling OK in between would get gradually longer.

I was fortunate enough to be able to go to the third World Sangha Assembly at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo in 2006. It was there that I would hear the personal testimony of Ms. Yoshiko Fujita from the Los Angeles Dharma Center. Seeing Ms. Fujita in a wheelchair in the Great Sacred Hall and listening to her personal testimony of faith was deeply moving for me. Having been seriously ill with several brain tumors, undergoing many operations, going through hardships, and having to close her business, Ms. Fujita had found strength in the Dharma and was able to see things positively, despite her illness, and appreciate life. If Ms. Fujita could do this, I thought surely I could, too, and although I did



Mr. Staff gives an address during the Summer Retreat in the UK in 2017.

not get to meet Ms. Fujita in person, I am very grateful that she shared her personal testimony that day.

This encounter at the Great Sacred Hall did not make my depression magically disappear, but it helped me to live with it. Through teachings such as “All things are impermanent,” I was able to endure dark times, as I knew they would not last forever, and also cherish the good times, as these are also impermanent. I was able to appreciate the people who support me in life, my husband, my family, my friends, and the sangha.

Rissho Kosei-kai teachings have also helped to keep the memory alive of departed family members. After inviting my family to join me in observing the summer *o-bon* festival and *o-higan* on both the spring and autumn equinoxes, we talked about family members who have passed away, some who passed away before I was born or when I was very young, and we shared memories and stories that helped me feel like I knew them, and we also began to visit my grandparents’ grave to clean it and offer flowers, incense, and prayers. Through these encounters and sharing my faith, my mother also became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai.



Mr. Staff serves as a subleader of sutra recitation, sitting before the gong.

I was also helped to come to terms with my father’s side of the family. My parents divorced when I was twelve years old after a very difficult marriage, and both had had children from previous marriages. I was not close to my father and after the divorce I did not keep in contact with him or anyone on his side of the family, and I even changed my surname to my mother’s maiden name. After receiving the Gohonzon and Sokaimyo, I was encouraged to include my father’s family name on the blessing for the ancestors. Initially I was reluctant, but I was helped to see that without my parents I would not be here, so I should be grateful to them for that if nothing else. Due to my father’s family name being on my home altar, I found out that my brother, from my mother’s previous marriage, whom I had not seen since the divorce, was still in contact with one of my brothers from my father’s previous marriage. This led me to meeting with my brother and getting to know him again, and later meeting with my father. My meeting with my father did not lead to a reconciliation, but we did part on good terms and I would later request posthumous Dharma names for my paternal grandparents and include them and my father’s side of the family in memorial services.

I have been so fortunate in having encountered Rissho Kosei-kai. I have been able to take part in Rissho Kosei-kai’s international youth conferences, receive Dharma leader training in Japan, represent Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK at the Buddhist Council of Wales and interfaith events, and meet so many wonderful people and bodhisattvas that I now count as friends and my Dharma family. I am very grateful for all of the opportunities I have received with Rissho Kosei-kai and for the teachings and support of the sangha, which helped me to grow as a person.

I will continue to share the Dharma, and it is my dream that one day a Rissho Kosei-kai sangha will develop in Wales.

Childcare lifeline

I Want My Daughter to Stop Throwing Things

Q

I'm having difficulty with my nineteen-month-old daughter, who likes to throw anything she can get her hands on including her toys. I scold her every time she does it, but, I'm wondering whether it's not such a good idea to yell at her too much. On the other hand, I'm afraid that if I don't scold her so often, her behavior will only escalate. I don't have a good sense of how often I should reprimand her.



A

Toddlers become able to move their hands and feet easily from about the age of nineteen months, and they become more active. As to their behavior of throwing things, they never do that with a feeling of violence. They cannot help but be happy to discover that they can move their bodies freely. They simply have no sense of how to control strength when they throw things.

When your daughter throws something, it's important not to reprimand her by yelling at her, but to gently discipline her with warm motherly concern by saying to her, "This is important to us, so take good care of it, and treat it with love!" Around this period, children learn the difference between good and bad through pleasurable and unpleasant feelings. They will go ahead and do what feel pleasurable, but will come to refrain from things that feel unpleasant. (This is called the "Pleasure Principle.")

When your daughter has done something wrong, you should tell her, "I'm so unhappy you did that," and show a genuinely sad expression on your face. Or, with an extremely stern look you can say to her, "This is a no-no!" Instead of smacking or pinching her, it would also be better to tap her hand lightly as a signal to stop doing that behavior.

Conversely, when your daughter treats things with tender care, you should show great delight with a huge smile on your face and say, "How gentle you

are! I'm so happy and proud of you. I really mean it!" What matters is that rather than using such words for the purpose of disciplining her, you should wholeheartedly convey a mother's sentiment by showing her that you mean what you say, repeating it again and again with affectionate expressions and words. The key point for childrearing during early childhood is to patiently communicate what you genuinely feel in your heart, over and over again.

Also, in case you have something that you don't want her to touch, why not find a way of keeping it in a place that is out of her sight?



(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.

Accumulating Warmhearted Encounters

YOU are such a great mother, wholeheartedly trying to stay close to your daughter and warmly interacting with her every day, all for her spiritual growth.

Toddlers around the age of nineteen months cannot pronounce a word well, nor understand easily what mothers really intend to say to them. During those times, as described in the answer of “Childcare Lifeline,” the only way will be to repeatedly convey your maternal sentiment to your daughter, again and again, according to the basis of the “Pleasure Principle.” Then, at that time, what really matters is that you should strive to have genuinely good encounters with your daughter and develop strong ties with her.

The most basic of the Buddha’s teachings is *engi* (dependent origination), which can be defined as an encounter. Founder Nikkyo Niwano gives us his guidance related to *engi* in his book *Buddhism for Everyday Life* (Kosei Publishing, 2011, p. 165) as follows: “According to the concept of *engi*, everything arises because of everything else.”

Every moment is a connected chain of change in our living world. “When our encounter with *en* [conditions] goes well, change will be for the good. When the encounter goes badly, change will be for the worse. Change is regulated by the strict law of dependent origination” (*Buddhism for Everyday Life*, pp. 41–42).

Whenever your daughter throws something, you should communicate with her with all your heart by repeating, “This is important to us, so take good care of it, and treat it with love!,” and try to keep accumulating warmhearted encounters with her. For your daughter, her mother’s joyful face represents her own spiritual nutrition. When she can treat things with proper care, why don’t you convey full of your genuine joy to her?

(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*.

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

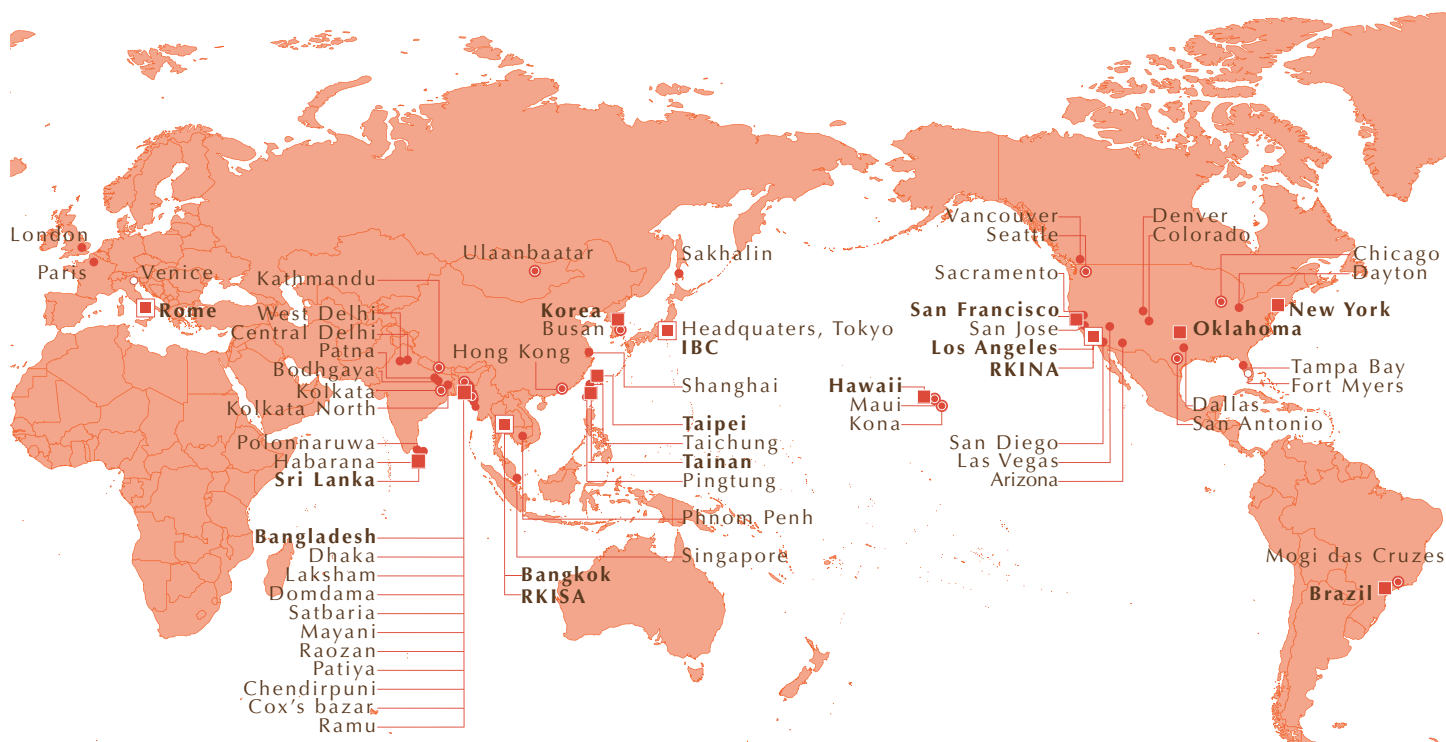
Practicing True Filial Piety

THE true performance of filial piety starts after the parents are gone. It involves practicing the bodhisattva way through the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and becoming a person who can make others happy.”

On November 1, on behalf of all overseas members of the sangha, Mrs. Song, a chapter leader of Rissho Kosei-kai Korea, shared her spiritual journey in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo. She lost her father when she was only one year old. As her mother went out to work in a large city to support the family, she was left with her grandparents. She began to live with her mother again when she was in her teens, but she was always rebellious against her mother. She got married at the age of twenty-seven and was guided to Rissho Kosei-kai in 1995. Her mother-in-law, whom Mrs. Song had cared for, passed away two years ago, and four months after that, her own mother died suddenly. Mrs. Song had deep regret and blamed herself, as it happened exactly as she came to the realization that the time had finally come for her to repay the kindness received from her mother, who had dedicated her whole life to her children. It was at that time that she found relief in the words of President Niwano cited above.

“Although I was blessed with precious life as a human being, I might have ruined my whole life if I had not encountered Rissho Kosei-kai. It enabled me to live a wonderful life of endeavoring to perfect myself through the practice of ‘putting others first.’” Mrs. Song shared her story with joy. I believe that her late parents would have had great peace of mind and would also have been very proud of their daughter. I hope that I might also live a life that can give my late parents great peace.

Rev. Shoko Mizutani
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International



Rissho Kosei-kai Overseas Dharma Centers

2017

Rissho Kosei-kai International

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1124 *Fax:* 81-3-5341-1224

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA)

2707 East First Street Suite #1 Los Angeles CA 90033 U.S.A.
Tel: 1-323-262-4430 *Fax:* 1-323-262-4437
e-mail: info@rkina.org <http://www.rkina.org>

Branch under RKINA

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

28621 Pacific Highway South, Federal Way,
WA 98003 U.S.A.
Tel: 1-253-945-0024 *Fax:* 1-253-945-0261
e-mail: rkseattlewashington@gmail.com
<http://buddhistlearningcenter.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

6083 Babcock Road, San Antonio, TX 78240, U.S.A.
P.O. Box 692148, San Antonio, TX 78269, USA
Tel: 1-210-561-7991 *Fax:* 1-210-696-7745
e-mail: dharmasanantonio@gmail.com
<http://www.rkina.org/sanantonio.html>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tampa Bay

2470 Nursery Road, Clearwater, FL 33764, U.S.A.
Tel: (727) 560-2927 *e-mail:* rktampabay@yahoo.com
<http://www.buddhismtampabay.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-808-455-3212 *Fax:* 1-808-455-4633
e-mail: info@rkhawaii.org <http://www.rkhawaii.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

1817 Nani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-808-242-6175 *Fax:* 1-808-244-4625

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua-Kona,
HI 96740 U.S.A.
Tel: 1-808-325-0015 *Fax:* 1-808-333-5537

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

2707 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-323-269-4741 *Fax:* 1-323-269-4567
e-mail: rk-la@sbcglobal.net <http://www.rkina.org/losangeles.html>

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Arizona

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Colorado
Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Diego
Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Las Vegas
Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Dallas

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, U.S.A.
Tel: 1-650-359-6951 *Fax:* 1-650-359-6437
e-mail: info@rksf.org <http://www.rksf.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sacramento
Rissho Kosei-kai of San Jose

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

320 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016 U.S.A.
Tel: 1-212-867-5677 *Fax:* 1-212-697-6499
e-mail: rkny39@gmail.com <http://rk-ny.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

1 West Euclid Ave., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056 U.S.A.
Tel: 1-773-842-5654 *e-mail:* murakami4838@aol.com
<http://home.earthlink.net/~rkchi/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

<http://www.rkftmyersbuddhism.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

2745 N.W. 40th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73112 U.S.A.
Tel & Fax: 1-405-943-5030
e-mail: rkokdc@gmail.com <http://www.rkok-dharmacenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai, Dharma Center of Denver

1255 Galapago Street, #809 Denver, CO 80204 U.S.A.
Tel: 1-303-446-0792

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

425 Patterson Road, Dayton, OH 45419 U.S.A.
<http://www.rkina-dayton.com/>

Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil

Rua Dr. José Estefno 40, Vila Mariana, São Paulo-SP,
CEP 04116-060 Brasil
Tel: 55-11-5549-4446 / 55-11-5573-8377
Fax: 55-11-5549-4304
e-mail: risho@terra.com.br <http://www.rkk.org.br>

Rissho Kosei-kai de Mogi das Cruzes

Av. Ipiranga 1575-Ap 1, Mogi das Cruzes-SP,
CEP 08730-000 Brasil
Tel: 55-11-5549-4446/55-11-5573-8377

Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei

4F, No. 10 Hengyang Road, Zhongzheng District,
Taipei City 100 Taiwan
Tel: 886-2-2381-1632 *Fax:* 886-2-2331-3433
<http://kosei-kai.blogspot.com/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Taichung

Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan

No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street, East District,
Tainan City 701 Taiwan
Tel: 886-6-289-1478 *Fax:* 886-6-289-1488

Rissho Kosei-kai of Pingtung

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai

6-3, 8 gil Hannamdaero Yongsan gu, Seoul, 04420, Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-2-796-5571 *Fax:* 82-2-796-1696
e-mail: krkk1125@hotmail.com

Korean Rissho Kosei-kai of Busan

3F, 174 Suyoung ro, Nam gu, Busan, 48460, Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-51-643-5571 *Fax:* 82-51-643-5572

Branches under the Headquarters

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong

Flat D, 5/F, Kiu Hing Mansion, 14 King's Road,
North Point, Hong Kong, Republic of China

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

15F Express tower, Peace avenue, khoroo-1, Chingeltei district,
Ulaanbaatar 15160, Mongolia
Tel: 976-70006960 *e-mail:* rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai of Sakhalin

4 Gruzinski Alley, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk
693005, Russian Federation
Tel & Fax: 7-4242-77-05-14

Rissho Kosei-kai di Roma

Via Torino, 29-00184 Roma, Italia
Tel & Fax : 39-06-48913949 *e-mail:* roma@rk-euro.org

Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK

Rissho Kosei-kai of Venezia

Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris

International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1230 *Fax:* 81-3-5341-1224
e-mail: ibcrk@kosei-kai.or.jp <http://www.ibc-rk.org/>

Rissho Kosei-kai of South Asia Division

Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Tel: 81-3-5341-1124 *Fax:* 81-3-5341-1224

Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia (RKISA)

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 *Fax:* 66-2-716-8218
e-mail: thairissho@csloxinfo.com

Branches under the South Asia Division

Rissho Kosei-kai of Central Delhi

224 Site No.1, Shankar Road, New Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi,
110060, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of West Delhi

66D, Sector-6, DDA-Flats, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata

E-243 B. P. Township, P. O. Panchasayar, Kolkata 700094, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata North

AE/D/12 Arjunpur East, Teghoria, Kolkata 700059,
West Bengal, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya Dharma Center

Ambedkar Nagar, West Police Line Road
Rumpur, Gaya-823001, Bihar, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu

Ward No. 3, Jhamsilhel, Sancepa-1, Lalitpur,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patna Dharma Center

Rissho Kosei-kai of Singapore

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation

201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang
Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel: 66-2-716-8141 *Fax:* 66-2-716-8218 *e-mail:* info.thairissho@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh
Tel & Fax: 880-31-626575

Rissho Kosei-kai of Dhaka

House#408/8, Road#7(West), D.O.H.S Baridhara,
Dhaka Cant.-1206, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-8413855

Rissho Kosei-kai of Mayani

Mayani(Barua Para), Post Office: Abutorab, Police Station: Mirshari,
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Ume Burmese Market, Main Road Teck Para, Cox'sbazar, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Satbaria

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Rissho Kosei-kai of Laksham

Dupchar (West Para), Bhora Jatgat pur, Laksham, Comilla,
Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Raozan

West Raozan, Ramjan Ali Hat, Raozan, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chendirpuni

Chendirpuni, Adhunagor, Lohagara, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ramu

Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation, Sri Lanka

No. 628-A, Station Road, Hunupitiya, Wattala, Sri Lanka
Tel: 94-11-2982406 *Fax:* 94-11-2982405

Rissho Kosei-kai of Habarana

151, Damulla Road, Habarana, Sri Lanka

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa

Other Groups

Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai