

# Living the Lotus



*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

## Founder's Reflections

### Revering the Buddha Right in Front of Us

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

**I**N the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha gives everyone an assurance of buddhahood.

He describes the conditions for becoming a buddha when he gives Shariputra his assurance of buddhahood, saying, “Shariputra, in an age to come after the passing of infinite, boundless, and inconceivable kalpas, after you have paid homage to thousands of ten thousands of millions of buddhas, honored and received the true Dharma, and completely attained the bodhisattva way, you will become a buddha named Radiant Blossom Tathagata.”

Because paying homage to “thousands of ten thousands of millions of buddhas” is the condition for attaining buddhahood, we may feel like we’re a long way from becoming buddhas.

However, Shakyamuni Buddha gives us a concrete model to follow: the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect’s practice of revering everyone’s buddha nature. Never Unworthy of Respect sincerely revered every single person he met, seeing even those who threatened or verbally abused him as buddhas.

We meet countless people in our families, at our jobs, and in society. The buddha resides in the hearts of each and every one of them. Revering the buddha within all of them pays homage to the thousands of ten thousands of millions of buddhas.

Instead of being narrowly focused on looking after yourself, why not resolve to become the kind of person who brings joy to everyone you meet? To become a shining light for others? If you make this your New Year’s resolution, this will be a wonderful year for you.

*Kaiso zuikan* 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 108–109

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.

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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 Message*

### Like the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

#### The Spirit of Placing Your Palms Together and Revering Everyone Happy new year to you!

I hope that together we will repeatedly perform good deeds and make this a beautiful, prosperous year. In order to do so, let's consider anew what good deeds are.

This year marks what would be the eight hundredth birthday of Nichiren (1222–82), according to the traditional Japanese method of determining age. He once wrote this in a letter to a disciple: “The heart of the Buddha’s teaching is the Lotus Sutra, and the study and practice of the Lotus Sutra is explained in the chapter ‘The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.’ You should think very, very carefully about the reason that the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect revered people. It is because Shakyamuni’s original vow, his long-cherished desire, is to teach people how to behave and have the right attitude—the Way of humanity.”

Therefore, we can interpret chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra as showing all of us who study and practice the Buddha’s teachings the basis of our way of life and what constitutes good deeds in the context of our daily lives.

As you know, the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect placed his palms together respectfully before everyone he met. Then he praised them, saying, “I deeply revere you. I could never find you unworthy of respect or put myself above you. For all of you are practicing the bodhisattva way and all of you will become buddhas.” No matter how terribly he was mistreated for doing this, he endured it without looking down on, becoming angry at, or hating people. Even as he retreated to safety from people’s scorn and violence, he devoted himself to the practice of revering them.

This chapter explains teachings that are centered on heightening our awareness of buddha nature and practicing bodhisattva deeds, while Never Unworthy of Respect’s actions of placing his palms together respectfully and revering everyone can be called a model for all who have faith in the teachings of the Buddha. However, we should not get stuck on the superficial action of placing our palms together respectfully. I think that looking very, very carefully at what the

Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect really did, deeply pondering the spirit infused in the phrase “he merely practiced bowing respectfully to people,” experiencing it, and performing that flesh-and-blood action naturally leads to good deeds.

### Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect and the Poem “Undefeated by the Rain”

Obviously, we cannot live without the sun, water, and air. Broadly speaking, expressing gratitude for such things is, for us, an important practice of expressing reverence. One way of expressing reverence is to not complain about the weather, and one method of placing your palms together respectfully is to use water carefully and not waste it. We could even say that not complaining to other people, not expressing displeasure or dissatisfaction, and not speaking ill of or getting angry at others are also the practice of placing your palms together respectfully and expressing reverence—and that to do so is to revere and believe in the buddha nature of other people, which is our duty as human beings.

In other words, each of our familiar patterns of action, behavior, and speech is a practice that expresses our personal way of placing our palms together respectfully and expressing reverence. Through them, not only do we heighten our awareness of our own buddha nature, but we also help those we interact with raise their awareness of their buddha nature.

Japanese children's writer Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933) wrote a poem called “Undefeated by the Rain.” Here is an excerpt: “Called useless by all / Neither lauded / Nor a burden— / Such is the person / I want to be.”

This passage expresses how Miyazawa, who was influenced by the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect, wanted to live his life. Rereading this poem alongside the teachings of chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, I am even more impressed. I feel that in his poem, Miyazawa—who lived his faith in the Lotus Sutra—has put the essence of this chapter into simple language, and therefore, even if his poem is read by people who have no connection to the Lotus Sutra, they can readily understand the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect's way of living—in other words, the actions and attitude of a bodhisattva.

The poem also includes the lines “Free of desire / Never angry,” which need no explanation, and “Observing all things / Dispassionately,” which demonstrates the mindset of putting other people first. The line “Shedding tears in time of drought” is none other than a prayer for compassion to comfort those facing sufferings or hardships that are beyond human power to help.

I would like all of us to make an opportunity to thoroughly experience this poem.

From *Kosei*, January 2021

# Spiritual Journey

## Use Everything as an Opportunity for Growth

Amit Kumar Ray  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered at Rissho Kosei-kai's Ome Retreat Center in Tokyo on August 8, 2020, during a ceremony called Zenyukai ("All Good Friends Gathering") held by Gakurin Seminary.*

**G**OOD morning, everyone. I'm Amit Kumar Ray. Today, I'd like to reflect on how I felt about and what I learned from reading the President's Message for August, "Nothing Is without Purpose."

When I first saw the title of this message, I was perplexed. I couldn't quite understand what the President meant because I thought the world was full of pointless things. I began reading and was confused again when he said, "We are already awakened." I thought to myself, "If everyone is already awakened, then we no longer need the teachings!"

He went on to write that "when we believe in our own awakened selves and those of other people . . . and are diligent together, this world in its present form becomes the Realm of Tranquil Light. Only by encountering such teachings of the Buddha and thereby becoming aware of the preciousness of life can we spend each and every day grateful. Unfortunately, however, we sometimes forget our happy selves and suffer."

After reading this passage, I reflected on what had been on my mind when I entered the Gakurin overseas students course last year. At that time, I had no idea about life in Gakurin, and my heart was filled with anxiety. I wanted the upperclassman with whom I shared a room to understand my feelings, but instead, he lectured me for not following the rules of the dormitory. As a result, I avoided him because it was painful to be around him. As the days went by, my dislike for my roommate grew stronger.

A year later, the room assignments in the dormitory changed. I felt extremely relieved since I no longer needed to share a room with him. A few days later,

however, when the overseas students course welcomed new students and I was given the role of guiding them, I began to understand—little by little—the attitude of my former roommate. As I explained the rules of the dormitory to an incoming student who became my new roommate, I recalled myself from the year before.

When I joined Gakurin, I was exactly the same as the new student in front of me: I didn't understand Japanese or know much about Japanese culture. As a result, I was often cautioned by my roommate about breaking the rules of the dorm. Everyday life was a painful experience for me.

It was only after receiving my new roommate that I realized that my former roommate cautioned me because he was worried about me—I had no clue about anything. He was trying to teach me what he knew so I could get used to Japanese culture as fast as possible. But my dislike for my former roommate had overcome me, and I couldn't accept that his words were meant to help me grow. After reflecting deeply on my state of mind in those days, I expressed



*Mr. Ray (second from right) with his fellow students at the Gakurin overseas students course.*

# Spiritual Journey

my gratitude to him, and we started to talk to each other. Gradually, we grew closer.

In his message, the President wrote that “all the different events that happen in the world . . . become hints, causes, or conditions that help us return to our true selves and experience happiness.”

By looking back on my relationship with my former roommate, I realized that all experiences, even painful ones, are necessary for me to grow spiritually, and that “nothing is without purpose.” I was reminded how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to study at Gakurin.

None of us can live in isolation; we can only live by supporting each other. And our greatest happiness is to be of service to others. Like my former roommate, who supported me, I will work hard to try to see things from others’ perspectives and get close to their hearts so I can convey the Buddha’s teachings to them.

Now that the new coronavirus is spreading around the world, I think it’s a good thing that people are spending more time with their families as they stay

home longer and refrain from going out in order to prevent infection. But I am very worried about my home country, India, where my family lives and the virus continues to spread rapidly. Therefore, while reciting the sutra and even in my daily life, I will remember to pray for my family’s safety and for a quick end to the spread of the virus in India.

India is experiencing political instability, and people’s lives have been disrupted. I became frustrated with myself because, as I live in Japan, I’ve been unable to do anything about it. However, after reading the President’s Message, I have become convinced that the most important thing for me to do right now is to study hard so I can accurately pass on to others the teachings of the Lotus Sutra—as well as those of the Founder—when I return to India.

I believe that a bright future is waiting for India, and I vow to always show empathy to others so I’ll be able to share the merits I receive with many people.

Thank you very much for listening.



*The 2017 Youth Leaders Training Program at Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok, which was organized by the South Asia division. Mr. Ray participated from Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya.*

# The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

## Chapter 21

### The Transcendent Powers of the Tathagata

In this chapter, the transcendent powers of Shakyamuni Buddha and multitudes of other buddhas are displayed, and the point is made and impressed upon the assembled hearers that even though the explanations of the teachings in the Lotus Sutra have been various, there is just one single truth: the One Buddha Vehicle.

#### The Ten Transcendent Powers

The chapter opens as the assembled bodhisattvas express reverence and assure the World-Honored One that after his passing they will expound the Lotus Sutra widely and perform the necessary acts of devotion. At this point, Shakyamuni extends his long, broad tongue until it reaches upward to the Brahma heavens, and every pore of his skin radiates the light of infinite and innumerable colors, illuminating every world in all ten directions. This is the Buddha's first display of his transcendent powers.

Here, the extended tongue symbolizes that everything expounded by the Buddha is true and infinite. Later interpreters of the sutra understood the Buddha's mysterious extension of his long, broad tongue to signify that the two dimensions of the sutra—the manifest dimension, or the first half of the Lotus Sutra, and the original dimension, which comprises the latter half of the sutra—are essentially one.

As a fellow resident of saha, Shakyamuni first taught people the ideal way for human beings to live in this world, in practice employing various teachings. However, later he reveals himself to be the Eternal Original Buddha, who is without beginning nor end, awakening us to the fact that true liberation is our awareness that we are given the gift of life and sustained by the Original Buddha. There would appear to be a considerable divide between these two teachings, and since there are certainly people who will ask about this, it behooves us to explore it in greater depth.

We can best understand the historical Buddha Shakyamuni as a manifestation of the Eternal Original Buddha that appeared in our world, emanating from the Original Buddha's mind of great compassion that compels his activity to liberate all living beings. This is why we cannot separate the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, who was born in our world as a human being, and the Original Buddha. Moreover, if Shakyamuni Buddha had not appeared in the world, we would have never become aware of the existence of the Original Buddha. Thus, we cannot establish a distinction between the manifest and original Buddha according to which is superior or inferior. They are, in essence, one, and it is this integral focus of devotion that unites the Lotus Sutra in its entirety. For this reason it is said that the "two dimen-



sions are essentially one in devotion.” This is the profound significance of the Buddha extending his long, broad tongue up to the Brahma heavens.

The light that radiated from each pore of the Buddha’s skin and shone into every corner of the universe symbolizes that although the light of truth may appear in different hues, it dispels the darkness of delusion. This also teaches us that both the manifest and original dimensions of the Lotus Sutra are based on the same principle—“the two dimensions are essentially one in principle.” This is the underlying meaning of the Buddha’s mysterious manifestation of light that radiates from his entire body and dispels all darkness throughout the universe.

Shakyamuni Buddha and all the other buddhas then cleared their throat in unison. The sound of clearing their throats signifies the exposition of the teaching, and by doing so in unison, Shakyamuni and the other buddhas demonstrate that the teachings of all buddhas are one. Accordingly, clearing their throats in unison means that in terms of the teachings throughout Shakyamuni’s lifetime, the three vehicles (that is, *shravaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva*) are the One Buddha Vehicle. Or, in terms of the Lotus Sutra, the teaching of skillful means in the first half of the Lotus Sutra, and the absolute truth that comes in the second half of the sutra, ultimately arrive at the same liberation, and in this sense, the two dimensions are essentially one from the standpoint of their teaching.

Shakyamuni and all the other buddhas then snap their fingers in unison. This action, in Indian custom, means understanding, agreement or commitment, and mutual assurance. Therefore, the buddhas commit themselves to and assure each other that they will spread the teaching far and wide. Their commitment stems from a sense of boundless compassion for living beings, or, in terms more easily understood today, a full sense of being one with others.

If we think closely on the teaching of the Lotus Sutra from beginning to end, its object is to awaken and solidify a sense of being one with others. The philosophy of the manifest dimension—that the real aspect of existence is emptiness, in effect—also teaches that any self is one with all others. The teaching of the original dimension, that all people are brought into being by the Original Buddha that is without beginning or end, similarly teaches oneness with others in the deepest sense.

If all people attained this realization—that individual human beings do not subsist separately but are fundamentally one substance—and made it part of their lives, affection would overspread human relations and we would have a truly peaceful world.

The ultimate aim of the Lotus Sutra is to teach that self and others are one substance, and when all the buddhas snapped their fingers, it meant that they committed themselves to spread through the saha world the spirit that the two dimensions are essentially one: the oneness of self and others.

After the buddhas clear their throats and snap their fingers, heaven and earth respond by shaking in six ways. The meaning of this is that as the buddhas were profoundly moved, they could not help but transform their feelings into action.

Practical application is found in *bodhisattva* practice because it gives full expression to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in their entirety. Ultimately, the teachings of the manifest dimension of the Lotus Sutra are a call to undertake *bodhisattva* practice, but so are the teachings of the original dimension. Realizing our oneness with the Original Buddha is tantamount to awakening to the oneness of ourselves and





others. This consciousness naturally and spontaneously manifests itself in bodhisattva practice designed to assist the liberation of others. This is articulated in the phrase “the two dimensions are essentially one in practice” and expressed by the “shaking of the land in six ways.”

Next, by the transcendent power of the Buddha, the entire throng of all living beings throughout the universe is given the infinite vision not only of Shakyamuni Buddha and all the other buddhas but also of innumerable bodhisattvas. This is seen in the somewhat technical phrase “the great assembly visible throughout the universe.” If we translate this occurrence into the language of today, we may see it as symbolizing the idea that although each individual’s capacity to accept the teachings differs greatly, the time will come when surely all alike will attain the same enlightenment. This idea is expressed by the phrase “future oneness of living beings’ capacity to understand the teachings.”

As all the living creatures are given this infinite vision and look upon the figures of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, their ears are filled with the voices of heavenly beings singing forth from the skies. These voices symbolize that the teaching of the Lotus Sutra can liberate all living beings and sustain them. If we translate this sense of awakening into contemporary language, we may understand it to mean that all the religions in the world will unite to achieve one common goal: the happiness of all living beings. This idea is described by the phrase “future oneness of the teachings.” This should be the ultimate goal of interreligious cooperation.

As all living beings hear these voices from the skies, they place their palms together, turn toward the saha world, and intone, “I take refuge in Shakyamuni Buddha!” This symbolizes that although there are many types of people and various classes in human society today, the time will surely come in the future when all people entrust themselves to the Buddha. When this day comes, there will no longer be errant or foolish people in the world because all will have perfected their characters. This state of future human development is termed the “future oneness of humanity,” which the living beings in the sutra proclaim by invoking the words, “I take refuge in Shakyamuni Buddha.” This is known by the phrase “all will take refuge in the Buddha.”

Next, precious offerings are strewn from all ten directions upon the saha world like gathering clouds, transforming into a jeweled canopy that completely covers the place where the buddhas are. This occurrence signifies the act of expressing devotion and sincere gratitude to the Buddha in the form of offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha from all living beings in the universe. Offerings of veneration take different forms—material, laudatory, and practical—and the highest is that in which every act accords with the Buddha’s intention. No other act of veneration expresses higher appreciation of the Buddha or gives the Buddha greater joy. This is what the lovely canopy formed by all these precious things signifies.

In our world today, daily life varies from person to person, but a day will come when every act conforms to the intention of the Buddha. The “future oneness of people’s undertakings” is indicated by this manifestation of the Buddha’s transcendent powers.

In the final scene of the chapter, the worlds of the ten directions became interconnected as one buddha land, with no obstructions between them. As truth is ultimately







one, in the future, all things will eventually shift toward this one truth, culminating in the realization of a world of perfect harmony. This idea is summed up in the phrase “future oneness of truth.”

All the mysterious happenings in this chapter symbolize the characteristics of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra from various angles. It is important for us to pay close attention to the principle of oneness that pervades all—the ultimate ideal of what this world should be.

### The Four Phrases That Summarize the Merits of the Lotus Sutra

After showing his ten transcendent powers, Shakyamuni Buddha addresses the assembly as follows: “Essentially speaking, all of the truths belonging to the Tathagata, all of the free and unhindered transcendent powers of the Tathagata, all of the innermost essentials in the treasury of the Tathagata, and all of the extremely profound deeds of the Tathagata are, in their totality, proclaimed and revealed in this sutra.”

This passage represents the four synoptic, or overarching, phrases that summarize the merits of the Lotus Sutra. In other words, the infinite value of the Lotus Sutra and its absolute perfection as a teaching are reaffirmed in the words of Shakyamuni himself.

### Limited Entrustment and “This Place Is Indeed the Place of the Way”

Here, we have to keep in mind that Shakyamuni showed and expounded his ten transcendent powers and summarized the merits of the Lotus Sutra in order to entrust the Four Great Bodhisattvas—Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and Steadfast Practice—and other bodhisattvas who had sprung up out of the earth to disseminate the Lotus Sutra. Since ancient times, this has been expressed by the phrase “bequeathing and entrusting the core and culmination of the most essential.” It is also called the “limited entrustment,” compared with the “general entrustment” that appears in chapter 22, “The Entrustment,” which is regarded as the truly significant part of the sutra.

Shakyamuni repeatedly expounded the five practices of the teachers of the Dharma as the bodhisattva practice, and taught that the place where we practice the bodhisattva way—in response to the entrustment of Shakyamuni—is the place of the Way (“This place is indeed the place of the Way”).

The point is that holiness lives both within the teachings of the Lotus Sutra themselves and the actual practice of those teachings. We must inscribe this deeply and strongly in our minds because it is so important for us—as the bodhisattvas who have sprung from the earth—that it forms the foundation of our religious life.

This is an English translation of text that originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016]), pp. 192–97.



# Director's Column

## My New Year's Resolution

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

I WOULD like to wish you a happy new year.

I am Keiichi Akagawa. I succeeded Rev. Koichi Saito as director of Rissho Kosei-kai International (RKI) on December 1. While I'm still overwhelmed by the importance and magnitude of the roles RKI has been playing, I was able to make a good start thanks to the support of the skilled and experienced staff members around the world who are dedicated to international Dharma dissemination.

As the unusual circumstances due to COVID-19 continue, I would like to join all of you in the pursuit of our religious mission, while hoping that the pandemic will end as soon as possible.

In his message for this month, "Like the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect," President Nichiko Niwano explains that there are many ways to express reverence in daily life. He acquaints us with the spirit infused in the story of the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect by quoting the poem "Undeclared by the Rain" by Kenji Miyazawa, a famous Japanese children's book writer.

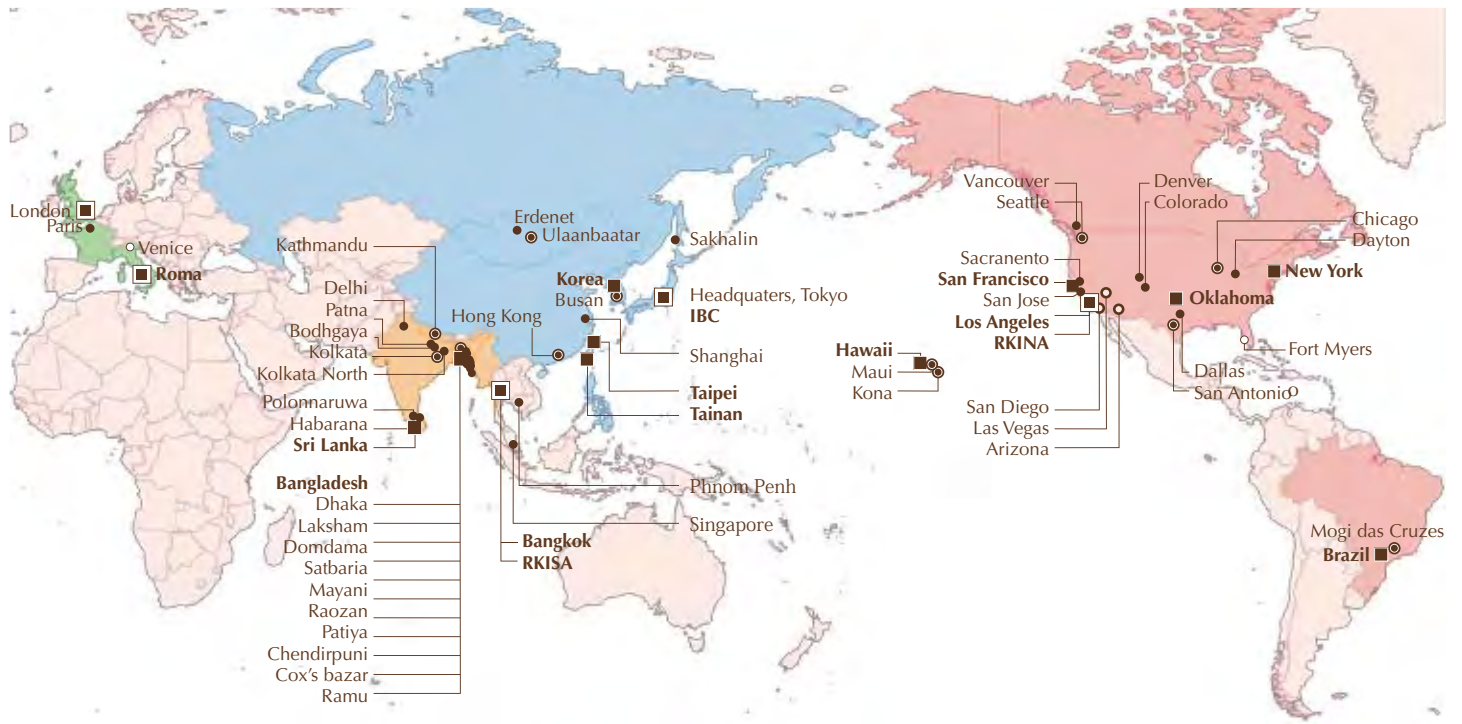
I learned recently that the Chinese character for "listening" (聽) also means "accepting." I'm glad to think that the dual meaning of the character resonates with the spirit of Miyazawa's poem, which includes the lines, "Free of desire / Never angry / Observing all things / Dispassionately."

Last but not least, I would like to express my season's greetings once again by making a New Year's resolution to strive to remove my self-centered mind and accept things as they are.

A brief biography: Rev. Keiichi Akagawa was born in 1960 in Akita Prefecture. He joined Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary in 1986. After graduating, he worked for the External Relations department of Rissho Kosei-kai and Religions for Peace Japan, where he engaged in interreligious cooperation and peace activities for many years. He also lived in Geneva, Switzerland, for three years. He then served as deputy director of the External Relations department (2007–15) and as minister of the Meguro Dharma Center in Tokyo (2015–20). On December 1, 2020, he was appointed director of Rissho Kosei-kai International.



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