

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Even Adversities Are Blessings from the Buddha

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

SOME people have a habit of saying, “Oh, darn it!” whenever something happens. I do the opposite. Whenever I encounter a problem, I tell myself, “Now things have gotten interesting!” I think the difference between these two responses is very important.

When you think, “Oh, darn it,” you shrink from facing the problem. If, on the other hand, you make up your mind by telling yourself, “Let’s do this!” you will be able to take action immediately. And once you jump into action you will always find a way. This, in turn, helps you gain self-confidence.

As we celebrate the anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai’s founding, I think back to when I learned from my teacher, Sukenobu Arai, that Buddhism is the Way that extinguishes suffering. I leapt with the excitement of having found the teaching that could relieve all suffering. The key to this is regarding inauspicious conditions—situations that are unfavorable to you—as blessings from the Buddha, and learning to accept them as auspicious conditions.

I’ve approached everything from this point of view. If you can’t look at things this way, I don’t think you can truly consider yourself a person of faith. I would like leaders in Rissho Kosei-kai, in particular, to engrave this deeply onto their hearts.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 26–27

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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Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa
Editor: Kensuke Osada
Copy Editor: Molly McCowan

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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

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

The Mind of Belief and Trust

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Seeing People from the Buddha's Standpoint

To quote a poem by the eighteenth-century poet Matsuoka Seira (1740–91), “With change / Comes laughter / Mixed with tears.” The fact that change produces both sadness and joy has remained a constant from the Edo era to the present day. This is perhaps particularly true in early spring, when many organizations and businesses in Japan go through personnel changes.

Rissho Kosei-kai also undergoes regular personnel changes, albeit at a different time of the year. In our organization, these changes are determined by a personnel committee—like those seen in governmental agencies—that completes an annual staffing analysis. This is because if any particular person, such as myself, were solely responsible for overseeing human resources, personal feelings might come into play.

We all have the minds of ordinary human beings, which means we tend to be swayed by whether we like or dislike someone. We also tend to evaluate others by using labels based on rumors or prejudices. Of course, this is not seeing people from the Buddha's standpoint. Although we learn that “everyone possesses buddha nature,” meaning that all living things, without exception, have the same essence as the Buddha, if our faith has not reached that higher level, we get stuck in the perspective of ordinary human beings.

Furthermore, we possess the same characteristics that we see in others: we are the same as them on the inside. It is important to reflect on this before we attach biased labels to people. In other words, if we look at someone and think, “What a nasty person,” this means that we ourselves have a nasty streak.

In chapter 22 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Entrustment,” the Buddha asks the bodhisattvas to share the Lotus Sutra with all living beings so they will be able to have happiness. Then he entrusts the bodhisattvas with it. If we can see and trust people like the Buddha saw and trusted the bodhisattvas, we will have peace of mind—not only when personnel changes occur in the workplace, but in any circumstance. Indeed, being able to look at people with belief and trust, just as the Buddha did, is in itself an attainment of great merit.

Shakyamuni's Entrustment and the Wish Upon Which Risshō Kōsei-kai Was Founded

In an era like this in which incidents such as fraudsters targeting the elderly cause public uproar, it may seem impossible to trust anyone just because “everyone possesses buddha nature.” In this sense, I hope that at least we ourselves will not lie to people or speak ill of them, and continue to build trust.

The Chinese character for “trust” (信) is written by combining the characters for “person” (人) and “word” (言). Therefore, a person's words, which are the expression of his or her mind, should be sincere. The character for “word” also means “life,” signifying both the manifestation of the universe, the gods, and the buddhas as well as the fact that when we trust one another, we are able to exchange words that are filled with life.

Speaking with sincerity is important, as it leads to our trusting other people and their trusting us. No matter how obvious this may seem for we ordinary human beings who cannot trust so easily, it serves as an important reminder to pay attention to what we say.

Speaking of belief and trust, we members of Risshō Kōsei-kai chant the daimoku, the title of the Lotus Sutra, every day. This is exactly the same as taking a vow that we believe all people will become buddhas and can have happiness, and that we place trust in the workings of the gods and the buddhas. Rev. Jitsuo Fujii (1898–1992), a head priest of the Jōdo sect, said, “My body, which I have entrusted to Amida, is calm and strong. So again today, I will live brightly with Amida.” Overlaying Rev. Fujii's words onto the meaning of the daimoku, I think that no matter what time period or circumstances we are in, the spirit of living brightly comes springing forth.

Since the founding of Risshō Kōsei-kai, one of the principles of our faith is that as soon as new members join us, they are disseminators of the faith. After all, sharing the faith is what we were entrusted with by Shakyamuni—whose wish is for everyone's happiness—and Founder Niwano, who said that whatever we members might do, he had complete trust in us. So, above all else, let's make sure we maintain a positive frame of mind and deepen the ties of trust that connect us to the gods, the buddhas, and other people.

From *Kōsei*, March 2021

Spiritual Journey

Living with the Heart of Gratitude: What I Learned in the Gakurin Overseas Students Course

Kasthuri Arachchilage Rajitha Maduranga Sriyananda
Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka

MY name is Kasthuri Arachchilage Rajitha, and I'm a member of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka. I was born in Polonnaruwa, in North Central Province, Sri Lanka, on November 27, 1992, as the eldest son of my family. We are a family of five: my parents, my two younger brothers, and myself. My parents raised me until I was two years old, but then they had to move to a conflict zone (my country was experiencing a civil war at that time) because my father worked for the military. My parents prioritized my safety and left me with my aunt, who raised me until I was sixteen. At that point, my family was able to live together again. My two younger brothers were born while I lived with my aunt.

Our happy life didn't last long, however. When I was eighteen, on the day of my college entrance exam, my mother suddenly left home. After my exam, my father and I began searching for her. We finally found her and asked her to come back, but she didn't want to return because she had all kinds of complaints about our family life. In spite of our repeated entreaties—we even asked the police to mediate—my mother didn't come back, and my family had to adjust to life without her.

Amid the loneliness of no longer having my mother at home, I found spiritual support in Rissho Kosei-kai's sangha and began visiting the Dharma center. My aunt was a member and she had taken me to the Dharma center when I was a small child, but I didn't yet know what kind of place Rissho Kosei-kai was. I only remembered that the members had prayer beads, wore sashes, and read some kind of book, and that it had been a pleasant place for me as a child.

As I understood more about Rissho Kosei-kai, I began to join the Dharma circle sessions and seminars on Buddhism as part of the youth activities. I found

the time I spent with my fellow sangha members very valuable, and I began to visit the Dharma center more often. As I continued to learn the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, I began to appreciate their meanings, and receiving Dharma guidance on the various problems in daily life made my interest in learning the teachings grow stronger. There was a college for car mechanics next to the Dharma center where I studied on weekdays, and I visited the Dharma center every weekend.

As I met youth members who had graduated from Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary, my longing to someday go to Japan and study in the seminary began to grow. Rev. Yoshiaki Yamamoto, then minister of the Dharma center, must have been aware of this, as he suggested that I study at Gakurin. I was very happy when he recommended this, as it felt like a direct message from the Buddha. Even now, I can't forget the joy I felt at that moment. I told my wish to my father, and, with his consent, took the entry exam for the Gakurin Overseas Students Course and was accepted.



Mr. Kasthuri Arachchilage (center) participates in a family hoza—when members in the neighborhood study and learn Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings together—at a member's house.

Living in Japan was hard for me—I couldn't speak Japanese at all. But I gradually got used to life in Gakurin thanks to the support of my seminary teachers and the upperclassmen in the dormitory.

One day, after the evening sutra recitation at the Akita Dharma Center in northern Japan, I had a talk with a member, Mrs. A. Mrs. A said that when she saw me recite the sutra, she remembered a child she had miscarried years before. Because this was the first time I'd ever met her, I wondered why she told me about it, as it was a sad thing to talk about. The next day I talked to the Dharma center's minister, Rev. Ichiro Takahashi, about it, and he suggested I ask Mrs. A directly. I did, and Mrs. A said, "If the baby had been born, it would be as old as you are now. For these twenty-six years I haven't gone a single day without thinking of the child. Even now, whenever I think of the child, tears come to my eyes."

I was impressed by how Mrs. A cherished the memory of her miscarried baby. At the same time, I thought about my mother, whom I had been hating because I believed she had discarded us due to her self-centeredness. When I looked back on my childhood, however, I remembered that my mother came to see me at my aunt's house every week, bought me what I wanted, and took me out to play. When I was hospitalized once, she stayed beside my bed for many nights and took care of me.

As I recalled these things, I became able to think that she must have endured all kinds of pain in order to raise us. As I remembered the happiness I felt when my entire family was living together, I realized that my mother always loved us. I suddenly felt that I was willing to forgive her, and gratitude to her for raising us welled up in me. In that moment, for the first time, I wanted to apologize to her.

Thanks to my studies at Gakurin and my encounter with Mrs. A, I became better able to control my self-centered mind and become more considerate of

others' feelings. I used to get irritated easily, but after my view of my mother changed, I became a kinder person. I'd always liked helping others, but I became even more eager to practice generosity and make others happy with all my heart.

Last March, I completed the two-year curriculum of Gakurin's Overseas Students Course and returned to Sri Lanka. Because of the spread of COVID-19 in my country, I couldn't meet with my mother in person right away, but I was able to talk to her on the phone. She was delighted that I called.

In July of last year, when the spread of the virus slowed slightly, I met with her for the first time in two and a half years. We were overjoyed to see each other, and we talked for hours and poured our hearts out so that we could remove the misunderstandings between us. We have since talked on the phone almost every day. I feel that she deeply cares about me. I believe that as long as I keep in touch with both my mother and father, there might be a chance that they will make up with each other someday.

After my view of my mother changed, I became able to say thank you to everyone, everywhere, for everything.

Although I graduated and returned to Sri Lanka in March, as a measure to prevent the spread of the virus, I stayed with my father and brothers for three months and did not visit the Dharma center during that time. I began my practice of the teachings by returning to the Dharma center in July.

The most important lesson I learned at Gakurin is to be grateful to our ancestors. We have been given life in this world thanks to our ancestors, the significance of which we should recognize deep in our hearts. I'd like to convey this awareness and the importance of the practice of ancestor appreciation to as many people as possible. When I first had this realization, the first thing I thought I should do was to express my gratitude to my parents, who are the closest

Spiritual Journey

to me, for bringing me life and raising me. I hope that my experience with my parents will help me communicate to other people the importance of being thankful to their parents.

I hope I can share with many people what I learned during my two years at Gakurin and my joy of being liberated through the teachings. I will continue my practice of the Dharma so I can become a person who makes others happy. I wish that as many people as possible will feel the joy of liberation, and for that to happen I will convey—through my own practice—the importance of practicing generosity and the merits we can receive from it.

I'm happy to announce that I will be getting married this April. I am looking forward to beginning my joyful practice of the teachings with my wife. I am grateful for my parents, my ancestors, and many other people who have supported me up until today. I will continue my diligence, always with the heart of gratitude, in order to become a person who can bring joy to others.



Mr. Kasthuri Arachchilage (second from left) with his teachers and fellow students at the Gakurin Overseas Students Course.



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 24

The Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound

The Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound's Visit to the Saha World

This chapter begins with Shakyamuni emitting a ray of light—the light of wisdom—from the protuberance atop his head and also from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows. This light penetrates distances far to the east, to a domain called Adorned with Pure Light, where there is a buddha called Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation King. A disciple, the Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound, addresses this buddha, announcing that he wishes to go to the saha world to worship Shakyamuni Buddha and talk with the great bodhisattvas there.

The Buddha Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation King assents, but warns Wondrous Sound not to view the saha world as inferior or to treat it lightly. He adds that, compared to his and Wondrous Sound's bodies, the bodies of the Buddha and all his bodhisattvas are so small that it might be tempting to take them lightly, and that since this would be a serious mistake, Wondrous Sound should take care not to make light of them. By way of illustration, he points out that his and Wondrous Sound's enormous height, together with Wondrous Sound's body of resplendent gold, are going to make the earthly Buddha and bodhisattvas look small and insignificant indeed.

Wondrous Sound assures Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation King that he will not take the saha world lightly, and, after various preliminaries, he arrives at Divine Eagle Peak where he prostrates himself before Shakyamuni and greets him respectfully. He then asks if the World-Honored One will allow him to see the Tathagata Abundant Treasures. Immediately after Shakyamuni relays this request, Abundant Treasures appears and praises Wondrous Sound for coming to pay homage to Shakyamuni.

At this, the Bodhisattva Virtue of the Flower questions Shakyamuni about this odd occurrence. Shakyamuni responds that in a past time, Wondrous Sound paid homage to a buddha named King Thundering Cloud with a hundred thousand kinds of music and offerings of eighty-four thousand bowls made of the precious seven. He explains that Wondrous Sound did this for twelve thousand years, and that he acquired these unusual transcendent powers from the merit of those offerings. Moreover, Shakyamuni explains, Wondrous Sound's present body is by no means his only body—he has appeared in many forms in countless places to expound the teaching to living beings.

All are profoundly impressed, and Wondrous Sound, having accomplished his mission, returns with his entourage to his own domain, where the chapter ends.



The Endeavor to Bring the Ideal to Reality

The domain of Adorned with Pure Light in this chapter represents an ideal world. The ideal, of course, is a creation of the mind, a place of shining light with a buddha and bodhisattvas of gigantic proportions and surpassing beauty. The actual world, the saha world, is hardly comparable, being a foul place where the Buddha and his bodhisattvas are pitifully small in body.

However, mindful of the advice of the Buddha Wisdom of the Pure Flower Constellation King, Wondrous Sound paid heartfelt homage to Shakyamuni in the saha world. The meaning of this is that Shakyamuni's effort to build an ideal world on earth was far worthier than the mere ideal itself. As long as the ideal is only something plotted out in the mind, it is only a dream. Its worth comes in its realization; in the endeavor to bring the ideal to reality. This is the first major lesson of this chapter.

Transmit the Wondrous Dharma to the People of the World

In this chapter, Shakyamuni explains that Wondrous Sound played music and made an offering of eighty-four thousand bowls made of the precious seven in a past time. Both these actions have meaning: making music represents causing the wondrous Dharma to sound in people's hearts, while the offering of so vast a quantity of





treasure symbolizes the transmission of the Buddha’s countless teachings to the people of the world. Disseminating the wondrous Dharma is certainly the greatest offering we can make to the Buddha. Shakyamuni demonstrates this here, and it is the second major lesson of this chapter.

We Are the Manifestations of the Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound

There are countless Bodhisattvas Wondrous Sound in our midst. In fact, we ourselves—if we expound the Dharma based on the teaching of the Lotus Sutra—are none other than manifestations of the Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound. If we understand this, the meaning of Wondrous Sound’s being in many bodies and expounding the Dharma everywhere also becomes clear. And isn’t this awareness a powerful impetus and inspiration to spread the True Dharma! This, then, is the third great lesson of this chapter.

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. 204–8.





Director's Column

The Joy of Bringing Happiness to Others

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

ON March 5, Rissho Kosei-kai will observe the eighty-third anniversary of its founding. I remember how disappointed I was last year when we decided to cancel our anniversary events because of the spread of COVID-19.

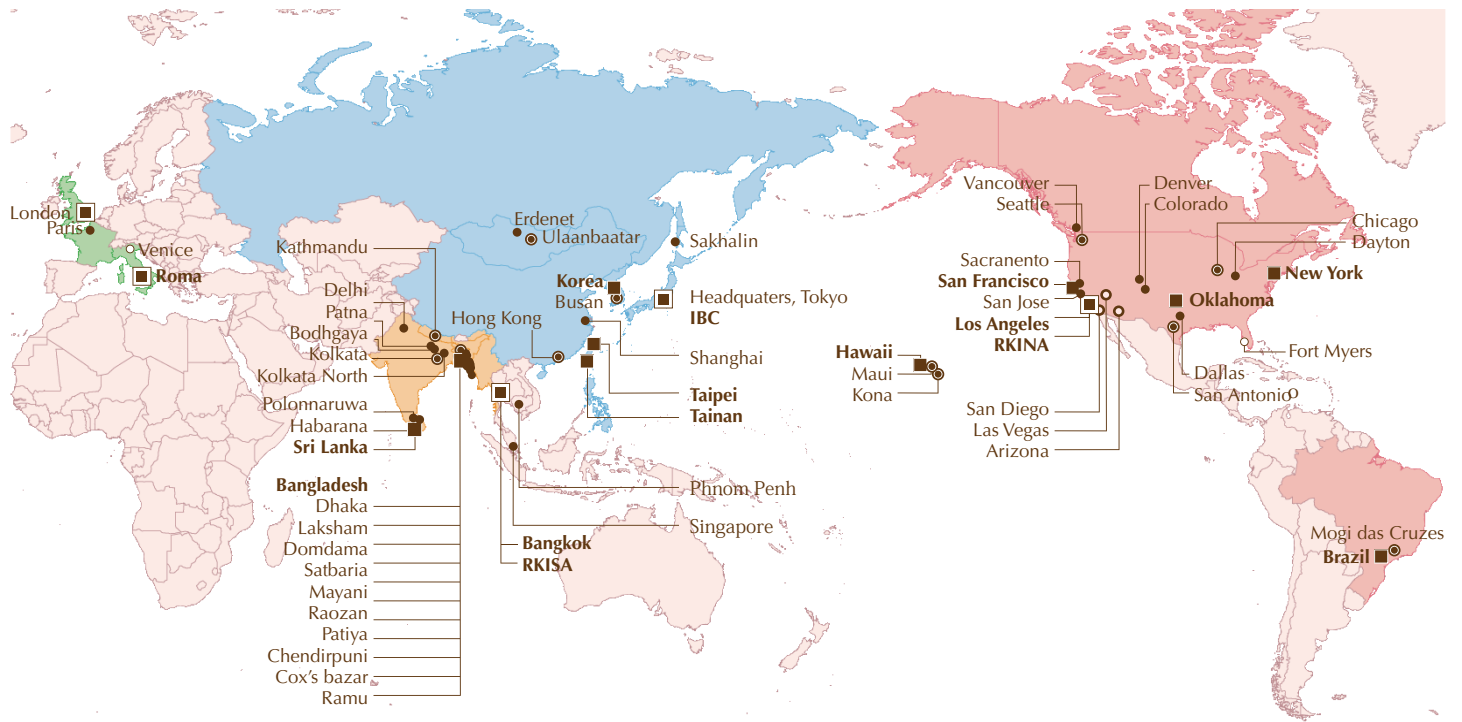
This year, we may have no choice but to hold the anniversary events online unless we see a rapid decrease in the number of infections. I pray with you that the day will come soon when we can exchange heartfelt congratulations in person. Until then, I hope we will keep up with our practice of “this place is indeed the place of the Way” reflectively and creatively, while also maintaining our efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha encourages us to raise our bodhisattva awareness. He firmly believes in and puts trust in us even though we still possess the minds of ordinary human beings and are not yet free of delusions. We are even more likely to slip into these ordinary minds in trying times such as now, when many people are weary of the repeated waves—the third in Japan—of COVID-19 infections. I believe, however, that difficult situations give us the opportunity to further cultivate our minds of devotion.

As we go through this pandemic that causes the whole world to suffer, remember that the Buddha watches over us and always hopes that we will reflect upon our self-centered minds, cultivate the minds of “putting others first,” and be diligent in the bodhisattva practice in our everyday lives. Keeping the Buddha’s wish in mind, let us pursue the bodhisattva way. The Buddha will definitely reward us with an invaluable gift: the joy of bringing happiness to others.



Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782, USA
 TEL: 1-808-455-3212 FAX: 1-808-455-4633
 Email: sangha@rkhawaii.org URL: <http://www.rkhawaii.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

1809 Nani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793, USA
 TEL: 1-808-242-6175 FAX: 1-808-244-4625

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740, USA
 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, USA
 POBox 33636, CA 90033, USA
 TEL: 1-323-269-4741 FAX: 1-323-269-4567
 Email: rk-la@sbcglobal.net URL: <http://www.rkina.org/losangeles.html>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

- 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, USA
 POBox 778, Pacifica, CA 94044, USA
 TEL: 1-650-359-6951 Email: info@rksf.org URL: <http://www.rksf.org>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

- 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, USA
 TEL: 1-212-867-5677 Email: rkny39@gmail.com URL: <http://rk-ny.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

1 West Euclid Ave., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056, USA
 TEL: 1-773-842-5654
 Email: murakami4838@aol.com URL: <http://rkchi.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

2745 N.W. 40th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73112, USA
 POBox 57138, Oklahoma City, OK 73157, USA
 TEL: 1-405-943-5030 FAX: 1-405-943-5303
 Email: rkokdc@gmail.com URL: <http://www.rkok-dharmacenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Denver

1255 Galapago St. #809 Denver, CO 80204, USA
 TEL: 1-303-446-0792

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

617 Kling Drive, Dayton, OH 45419, USA
 URL: <http://www.rkina-dayton.com>

The Buddhist Center Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA)

2707 East First St., Suite #1, Los Angeles, CA 90033, USA
 TEL: 1-323-262-4430 FAX: 1-323-269-4567
 Email: dharmasa@rksabuddhistcenter.org
 URL: <http://rksabuddhistcenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

(Address) 6083 Babcock Road, San Antonio, TX 78240, USA
 (Mail) POBox 692148, San Antonio, TX 78249, USA
 TEL: 1-210-558-4430 FAX: 1-210-696-7745
 Email: dharmasanantonio@gmail.com
 URL: <http://www.rkina.org/sanantonio.html>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

28621 Pacific Highway South, Federal Way, WA 98003, USA
 TEL: 1-253-945-0024 Email: rkseattlewashington@gmail.com
 URL: <http://buddhistlearningcenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Please contact RKINA

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
 Email: risho@rkk.org.br URL: <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

在家佛教韓國立正佼成會

〒 04420 大韓民國 SEOUL 特別市龍山區漢南大路 8 路 6-3
6-3, 8 gil Hannamdaero Yongsan gu, Seoul, 04420, Republic of Korea
TEL: 82-2-796-5571 FAX: 82-2-796-1696

在家佛教韓國立正佼成會釜山支部

〒 48460 大韓民國釜山廣域市南區水營路 174, 3F
3F, 174 Suyoung ro, Nam gu, Busan, 48460, Republic of Korea
TEL: 82-51-643-5571 FAX: 82-51-643-5572

社團法人在家佛教立正佼成會

台灣台北市中正區衡陽路 10 號富群資訊大廈 4 樓
4F, No. 10, Hengyang Road, Jhongheng District, Taipei City 100, Taiwan
TEL: 886-2-2381-1632, 886-2-2381-1633 FAX: 886-2-2331-3433

台南市在家佛教立正佼成會

台灣台南市崇明 23 街 45 號
No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street, East District, Tainan City 701, Taiwan
TEL: 886-6-289-1478 FAX: 886-6-289-1488
Email: koseikaitainan@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai South Asia Division

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu

Ward No. 3, Jhamsikhel, Sanepa-1, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal

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 Patna Dharma Center

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata

Rissho Kosei-kai of Central Delhi

77 Basement D.D.A. Site No. 1, New Rajinder Nagar,
New Delhi 110060, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Singapore

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai International

Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh

W.C. 73, Toul Sampaov Village, Sangkat Toul Sangke, Khan Reouseykeo,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

RKISA Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia

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

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkapi, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8216 FAX: 66-2-716-8218 Email: info.thairissho@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation

No. 628-A, Station Road, Hunupitiya, Wattala, Sri Lanka
TEL: 94-11-2982406 FAX: 94-11-2982405

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa

Please contact Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation

Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh

85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh
TEL/FAX: 880-31-626575

Rissho Kosei-kai Mayani

Mayani Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Damdama

Damdama Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Satbaria

Village: Satbaria Bepari Para, Chandanaih, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Chendhirpuni

Village: Chendhirpuni, P.O.: Adhunogar, P.S.: Lohagara, Chittagong,
Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Raozan

Dakkhin Para, Ramzan Ali Hat, Raozan, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Laksham

Village: Dhupchor, Laksham, Comilla, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Dhaka

408/8 DOSH, Road No 7 (West), Baridhara, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar

Ume Burmize Market, Tekpara, Sadar, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Patiya**Rissho Kosei-kai Ramu****Rissho Kosei-kai Aburkhiln****Buddiyskiy khram "Lotos"**

4 Gruzinski Alley, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk 693005, Russia
TEL: 7-4242-77-05-14

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai**Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar**

(Address) 15F Express Tower, Peace avenue, khoro-1, Chingeltei district,
Ulaanbaatar 15160, Mongolia
(Mail) POBox 1364, Ulaanbaatar-15160, Mongolia
TEL: 976-70006960 Email: rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai of Erdenet

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai International

Rissho Kosei-kai di Roma

Via Torino, 29, 00184 Roma, Italia
TEL/FAX: 39-06-48913949 Email: roma@rk-euro.org

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai di Rome

Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris**Rissho Kosei-kai of Venezia****Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK**

29 Ashbourne Road, London W5 3ED, UK
TEL: 44-20-8933-3247 Email: info@rkuk.org URL: <https://www.rkuk.org>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/rkuk.official>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/rkuk_official
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/rkuk_official

Rissho Kosei-kai International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)

166-8537 東京都杉並区和田 2-7-1 普門メディアセンター 3F
Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan
TEL: 03-5341-1230 FAX: 03-5341-1224 URL: <http://www.abc-rk.org>