

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Encountering Diversity

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

AT the office, it seems easier and more efficient to stick to familiar work with like-minded colleagues. But there is a pitfall here. As the Tang Dynasty Chinese monk and Chan master Nanquan Puyuan (748–835) said, “You ought to practice among the diverse living beings.”

By “diverse living beings,” Nanquan meant the nonhuman living beings of various forms that appear in Buddhist sutras. However, when we are always in the company of people like ourselves, we become bound to our habits, stuck within our own preferences, and unable to free ourselves of biases. In this way, we can understand Nanquan’s words to mean that to remedy this, we must have the courage to move into the unknown and seek new encounters.

Familiarity breeds indulgence, making us inclined to openly display our bad habits. This impedes our personal growth, making us petty and inflexible. New encounters are necessary to bring about the flowering of our latent potential.

In April, the new school term and the beginning of the financial year (and along with it, personnel transfers and hiring) are times for meeting new people. Although encountering “diverse living beings” can increase stress and can even be painful at times, with every new encounter a new happiness awaits. When you have absolute faith in this, happiness will find its way toward you.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 44–45

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

Living Together, Here and Now

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Because We Practice the Faith, We Are Buddhas

Soon, on April 8, we will celebrate the birth of Shakyamuni. According to one Buddhist legend, upon his birth, Shakyamuni proclaimed, "I alone am honored in heaven and on earth." This legend praises Shakyamuni, and I accept it as the foremost expression of the essence of Buddhism.

Some people have described Shakyamuni's proclamation upon being born as expressing that he is one of a kind in this world. But every person, not only Shakyamuni, has an irreplaceable, precious existence from the moment he or she is born. Therefore, Shakyamuni's proclamation conveys the core Buddhist teaching: to be aware of the preciousness of our own lives.

Buddhism also teaches people how to liberate others from suffering—from that point of view as well, this proclamation is imbued with profound meaning. Shakyamuni realized the true Dharma and, based on those teachings, we are liberated from suffering. In turn, we liberate those around us.

In light of the long history of Buddhism, I can't help but think about how many people have liberated themselves by liberating others since Shakyamuni's era. Human beings are really wonderful.

However, just as Shakyamuni also told us, "We are not born as saints—we become saints by our deeds." Our human dignity is refined by our daily deeds. Zen master Dogen (1200–53) used the phrase *shusho itto* ("practice is awakening") to say that training is not a method of awakening—instead, diligent practice proves that we have attained awakening. In other words, diligently applying the Buddha's teachings to how we lead our daily lives serves as proof that we are buddhas. Deepening our compassion through this practice is the Buddha Way.

Like a Spring Breeze

Chapter 23 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Former Deeds of the Bodhisattva Medicine King,” shows the importance of using one’s own body to practice the teachings of the Buddha and thereby cause many people’s minds to aspire to Supreme Perfect Awakening.

Plainly speaking, by putting others first, you transcend thoughts of self-interest. Then, when you use your entire mind and your words to show consideration for others, your practice of the faith becomes your own joy and happiness and you also become a bright light leading to the liberation of all living beings.

More specifically, some people have professed that serving people is their training in the Buddha Way. An eighth-century Indian monk named Shantideva said that diligence means manifesting, through action, the mind of compassion—and that doing so is none other than Buddhism. Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura (1912–99) said that “merely knowing religious teachings means nothing. They must be embodied somewhere in the actions taken by our physical bodies.”

Of course, knowing the teachings is not without meaning, but the concrete action of reaching out to someone in need is surely the best way to liberate them from suffering.

Furthermore, the joy of receiving this kind of warm thoughtfulness may be the catalyst that awakens someone to the preciousness of both their own life and others’ lives. Even a single compassionate act can become the means of turning someone’s mind toward the truth. Such compassionate skillful means may be the starting point of sharing the faith, which fulfills Shakyamuni’s wishes. In this terrible time of the coronavirus pandemic, above all else, this kind of compassion is especially needed.

However, in order to practice these compassionate skillful means, it’s important to “live our own lives as humbly as possible,” as Shantideva also said. In this sense, we must not forget to lead lives of simplicity by being satisfied with as few things as possible and being grateful for whatever comes.

To quote a poem, “Would that my body / Could become / A spring breeze / Blowing gently / At the gates of the sad” (Nobutsuna Sasaki, 1872–1963). Thinking about the suffering of all people who are living here and now, I am waiting for the day when, like a spring breeze, we can bring them refreshing compassion.

From *Kosei*, April 2021

Spiritual Journey

The Importance of “Under-standing”

Rev. Masahiro Nemoto

Executive Specialist, Secretarial Group, Rissho Kosei-kai

This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the ceremony for the anniversary of Shakyamuni’s attainment of buddhahood at the Great Sacred Hall on December 8, 2020.

I WAS born in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture on November 29, 1955, as the eldest son of the Nemoto family. My family consisted of five members: my maternal grandmother, my parents, my older sister, and myself. Through the encouragement of my mother’s elder brother, we joined Rissho Kosei-kai in 1960, at the Ibaraki Dharma Center.

My parents became involved members. My mother was the first leader of the young women’s group, and then a chapter leader, at the Dharma center until she retired at the age of sixty. She also served as an aide for Rev. Nozaki (Nobuyo Nozaki, a former minister of the Ibaraki Dharma Center and a former trustee of Rissho Kosei-kai). My father was also a devoted member who never failed to recite the Lotus Sutra in the mornings and evenings. In addition to his regular job, he served as an area leader for the chapter my mother led, he was a member of the Dharma center’s teaching staff, and he was also the leader of the men’s group.

Because my parents were so involved with the Dharma center, I started participating in the children’s group from around the time I was old enough to remember.

By the time I was a junior high school student, my dream was to become an engineer. I went on to major in engineering in college. However, while I was in college, I was given the role of leading the high school students’ group at the Dharma center, and I developed a desire to learn more about the Lotus Sutra. With the encouragement of my mother’s brother as well as Rev. Nozaki, who was then a trustee, I decided to enter Rissho Kosei-kai’s Gakurin Seminary.

During my third year at Gakurin Seminary, I spent six months at the Buddhist Society of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, as part of my dissemination

training. I found communicating in English very difficult at that time, and I felt that this caused trouble for the people there. I was disappointed in myself, but I used that experience to motivate myself, deciding to pursue overseas dissemination work. After graduation, I was assigned to the international affairs department at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters.

Shortly afterward, I married my wife, who I met at the Dharma center when I was a college student. Next, I was sent by Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters to the Frankfurt office of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) for two and a half years, where I was engaged in preparatory work for the IARF Congress, which was held in Tokyo in 1984.

Just as I was about to go back to Japan, the Japanese government decided to dispatch a public-private joint aid mission to several African countries where millions of people were dying of starvation due to the severe drought at that time. Before returning to Japan, I was given a chance to join the aid mission as a member, and I spent three weeks visiting the eight countries that were most severely affected.



Rev. Nemoto delivers his Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall in Tokyo.

My visit to Africa changed the course of my life completely. My eyes were opened to the “Third World,” which I had never been interested in. I was twenty-nine years old. During those three weeks I learned the importance of staying aware of the realities of the world. Ever since then, I’ve immersed myself in refugee issues and engaged in programs like the Japanese Blankets for Africa Campaign.

Thanks to the compassion of Founder Niwano, I was later assigned to work for three years at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) program in Geneva, engaging in activities to support refugees. Before departing, I received guidance from the Founder, who said, “Since you are going to the United Nations as a representative of Japan, have confidence as a bodhisattva and rest easy as you throw yourself into your role. Keep this verse from the *Kyoten* [Sutra Readings] in mind: ‘May you all be present among us and know our deep devotion.’ If, in any situation, you work diligently with sincerity, there will always be someone who will help you. So, please go with a sense of assurance.” He sent me off with a big smile on his face. These words were a gift that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

I learned so many things at the United Nations. My colleagues at the UNHCR called the refugees “our family” or “our friends”—no one called them “refugees.” So, even now, I always refer to them as “refugees-*san*,” adding the Japanese honorific.

My experience at the United Nations made me do some serious soul-searching about how to best understand others. The English word “understand” can be separated into two words: “under” and “stand.” Although this is not etymologically correct, I can’t help but feel that this word teaches me the importance of “standing under” someone, or “humbling oneself” as it’s expressed at Rissho Kosei-kai. In other words, respecting others and having a humble attitude that allows you to learn from them.

I returned to Rissho Kosei-kai at the end of 1989. For my next thirteen years at headquarters, I worked on many different aid programs, including ones for refugees-*san* from Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and other countries. I was also involved in the Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace program as well as working on international interfaith cooperation.

Ever since I was a child, I had heard so many times from my parents and also at the Dharma center about the importance of a “humble heart,” but my work experience caused me to realize that this was actually the most progressive teaching in the world. It was a great discovery for me. “Standing under” others and revering them—this is a vital and fundamental way of life for human beings. It is actually a difficult thing to do, but I continue to challenge myself to do so.

I will never forget the time I accompanied President Niwano to visit religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina in late 1997, shortly after the Bosnian War had ended. We met with the leaders of the four major religions in Bosnia. Just a few minutes after we exchanged greetings, they found themselves completely at ease and began to talk about their sorrows with tears in their eyes. The President listened to them from the depths of his heart and with his entire mind and body, which I think moved them to open up to him with a complete sense of relief. I was convinced that it was why the four leaders unlocked their minds and accepted the President’s invitation to visit Japan.

The following year, the President’s book *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart* was published. In it, I found the following words: “The true meaning of hearing is to efface oneself” (p. 150). Reading the President’s words brought me back to that moment in Sarajevo, and I was overcome with emotion.

On March 5, 1998, more than fifty religious leaders from around the world, including the Founder, the President, the President-designate, and the four religious leaders from Bosnia, gathered at the altar of

Spiritual Journey

the Great Sacred Hall to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai.

From 2002 to 2010, I served as minister for the Tsuchiura Dharma Center and the Kobe Dharma Center. When I was appointed the minister, I received these words from the President: “Being appointed to the role of minister means receiving the gift of practicing reverence for members’ buddha nature.” I vividly recall how all the members came together, connecting people with the Dharma and enhancing others’ connection with it by preparing for initiatives such as the “Arms Down!” petition, which called for the abolition of nuclear weapons. I also had the honor to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Tsuchiura Dharma Center with my fellow members, as well as the sixtieth anniversary of the Kobe Dharma Center.

In those days, senior ministers taught me expressions such as “the work of dissemination is not that different from doing door-to-door sales” and “suffering is a treasure trove for awakening to one’s own buddha nature.” I also learned many things from members and gained precious insights. I thank you very much. I hope that I served you well as minister.

Since returning to headquarters, I have been involved in activities such as interfaith cooperation, political activities for peace, and the Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace. Currently, I serve as a secretary for the President-designate and as secretary general of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP). Over the last ten years, the President-designate has taken over the responsibility for many of the President’s outreach activities and has been enthusiastically engaged in interfaith dialogue and cooperation as well as peace activities both in Japan and abroad.

I don’t have any experience in studying abroad, nor do I have a degree in English. I do have nearly seven years of experience using English at work, but it was in Germany or at the United Nations, an English-speaking environment where

people of many different nationalities worked together. So, I haven’t had much exposure to native speakers of English. On top of that, I still can’t lose the raised ending tone of my Iwaki accent. To be honest, I’m proud of my hometown dialect, so I don’t even try to fix it. Well, this is just my way of trying to grin and bear it. Admittedly, my English has a strong accent.

My former boss, Rev. Masuo Nezu, who served as the interpreter for the Founder, told me, “Look, Mr. Nemoto. We are not native speakers, so we don’t have to try to speak perfect English. But our English needs to be understandable. What’s important is to find a way to make ourselves understood.” His words still help me when I’m performing my duties. That said, I’m sure that my interpretation of English has sometimes caused inconvenience to the President and the President-designate, which I deeply regret. I will continue to do my best, occasionally getting help from younger people whose pronunciation is better.

Throughout my time serving as a secretary for the President-designate over the past ten years, I have received some precious words of wisdom. I would like to share them with you before I close my talk:

1. Appreciate the things you take for granted.
2. Live among the most vulnerable people whose voices are never heard.
3. Never be content to stay in your comfort zone: go out and find where the problems are.
4. Cherish your shared mission as a bodhisattva as well as your own individual mission in life.
5. There is no bodhisattva practice that does not involve risk or danger.
6. When things are tough, take on an extra challenge.

I wholeheartedly celebrate this auspicious day, the anniversary of Shakyamuni’s attainment of buddhahood, which brought (and brings) liberation to people

Spiritual Journey

around the world in the past, present, and future. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has guided me up to now: the Buddha, the Founder, the President, the President-designate, my parents, my family, my relatives, my friends, my colleagues, and each and every Rissho Kosei-kai member. I will continue to devote myself to bodhisattva practice, and I am determined to repay my debt of gratitude to everyone.

This year, my father and mother turned ninety-two and ninety-three, respectively. Even though I am their only son, my sister, her husband, and their family have been taking care of my parents for me, as they still live in Fukushima and I live in Tokyo to be near

Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters. Our mother has developed dementia and was admitted to a nursing home this year. Our father goes to the same facility several times a week for short stays, but when he's at home, my sister and her husband stay at my parents' house to take care of him.

Since I retired at the end of last month, I was planning to go back to Fukushima to take care of our parents myself. But my sister and her husband told me, "Don't worry about our parents. Devote yourself to your role at headquarters." Therefore, I will apply myself even more diligently to my work at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters.

Thank you very much for listening.



Rev. Nemoto delivers blankets to local people during the first Japanese Blankets for Africa Campaign in Mek'ele, Tigray Region, Ethiopia, in December 1984.

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 25

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as Universal Gateway

This chapter features Shakyamuni's explanation to the Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Mind as to why the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World has this name.

Being Liberated by the Wondrous Dharma and Liberating Others with Compassion

It is easy in reading the chapter to think of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as an object whose power, quite outside and apart from the bodhisattva as an individual, is something that's possible to rely on for liberation. It is of highest importance, however, to see that this is not so, but that in fact this bodhisattva is a symbol of true wisdom.

Precisely speaking, this true wisdom means realizing the truth of the Middle Way, or understanding all things as they really are. This means neither adhering only to the view of emptiness—seeing the fundamental sameness of all things—nor clinging to the differentiated state of things, but instead, realizing the harmonization of the two.

Applied to the human condition, this means the free and unhindered knowledge that makes it possible for someone to fit exactly into any situation while at the same time preserving his or her essential qualities and differences in appearance. The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World possessed this true wisdom. She also possessed a vast amount of compassion that allowed her to accept the sufferings of others by taking their place.

There is only one true way to be liberated: by knowing the wondrous Dharma, thinking on the wondrous Dharma, and acting in accordance with the wondrous Dharma. Further, to liberate others, we must, out of a spirit of compassion, be self-sacrificing in order to lead them onto the path of the wondrous Dharma. This is what is really taught in this chapter, in the detailed account of how the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World delivered people from seven misfortunes when they called her to mind.

People in olden times had difficulty grasping such an abstract idea, which is why the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World is presented in the Lotus Sutra as a beautiful, gentle being endowed with surpassing powers of perception such that she observes the sounds of the world: she knows every move and sees what everyone desires. Then, demonstrating great compassion, she appears in what are described as thirty-three embodiments to rescue people from their every pain. This chapter teaches that calling such a being to mind brings liberation, as the mind resonates with the wondrous Dharma.





Longing to Become Like the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World

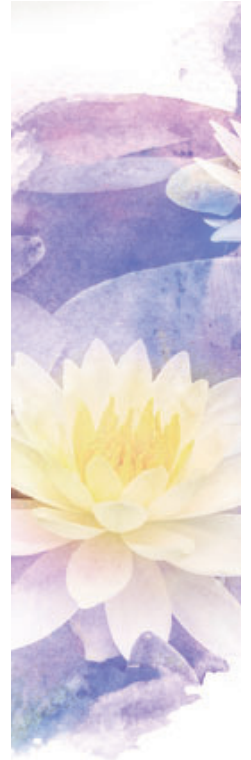
We should think about the superb character of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World and long to become someone like her. To emulate the bodhisattva passionately will see us through whatever troubles come to us and also prompt us to lend a helping hand whenever we see others in trouble.

Manifestation of the Universal Gateway

“Manifestation of the universal gateway” means that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World appears at will throughout this world, in every problem and situation (and in the appropriate form for each), in order to liberate people and guide them to the truth.

Longing to become like the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World is none other than the essence of the manifestation of the universal gateway. It means wanting to extend a helping hand to people who are suffering and in distress—our families, communities, countries, and even the world—and using a method appropriate to our position relative to them. These actions come from a mind of compassion great enough to be willing to make any self-sacrifice for others, which is the same mind that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World possesses.

If as many people as possible carry out these actions, however small, it will bring about not only peace in families and society, but also the world. In this sense, manifestation of the universal gateway is the most significant point of this chapter.





Virtue and Power Originate in the Wondrous Dharma and Its Practice

A further point not to be overlooked is the way in which the Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Mind is so moved by the great virtue and power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World that he offers up his necklace. Regarder of the Sounds, in accepting it, divides it into two parts, offering one part to Shakyamuni the World-Honored One and the other to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures.

This symbolizes the fact that the great virtue and power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World is due equally to the wondrous Dharma—the truth that the stupa represents—and to Shakyamuni, the one who explains and practices it. We may here see quite plainly that it is a great mistake to think we will be liberated merely by praying to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World.





The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 26

Dharanis

In this chapter, powerful living beings that deeply appreciate the Lotus Sutra are inspired to go before the Buddha and vow to protect both the teachings and Dharma teachers. They do this with dharanis: incantations with the ability to impede everything that is evil and advance everything that is good. The dharanis in this chapter are made up almost entirely of the names of deities or epithets for them—this is because they are used to invoke responses from the deities.

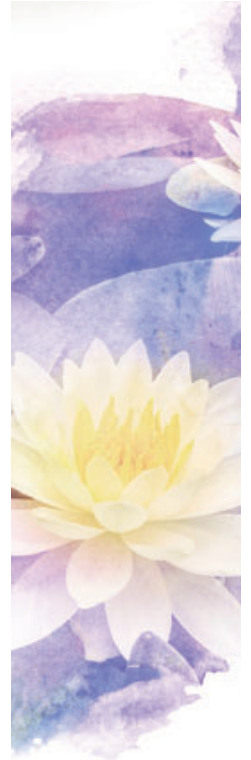
Five Kinds of Untranslated Words and Phrases

This chapter contains several dharani incantations that Kumarajiva, the lead translator, left untranslated and instead recorded as sound transliterations. Many of the ancient-scholar monks who translated the Buddhist sutras into Chinese—including Kumarajiva—judged that there were words and phrases that should not be translated, and instead rendered them in their original language by using Chinese characters of similar pronunciation to express the foreign sounds.

Dharanis were thought by many translators to fall within what were called the “five kinds of untranslated words and phrases,” which were:

- (1) terms for which Chinese equivalents did not exist, such as the names of Indian animals, plants, or mythical creatures and spirits;
- (2) those that possess multiple meanings that cannot all be sufficiently captured and translated by using a single term;
- (3) “mystical syllables,” otherwise known as “secret words,” the significance of whose esoteric meaning it was believed would diminish if translated;
- (4) those that were left untranslated according to long-established traditional precedents; and
- (5) those that were thought to lose something of the truth or impact of their meanings if translated.

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. 208–15.





Director's Column

Making the Most of Our Lives Is the Buddha Way

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

THIS month, as we celebrate Shakyamuni's birth, President Nichiko Niwano explains the meaning of Shakyamuni's proclamation upon being born and emphasizes how precious our lives are. He also teaches us that making the most of our lives is practicing the Buddha Way. Before hearing this, I couldn't have imagined that diligently applying the Buddha's teachings to how we lead our daily lives serves as proof that we are buddhas.

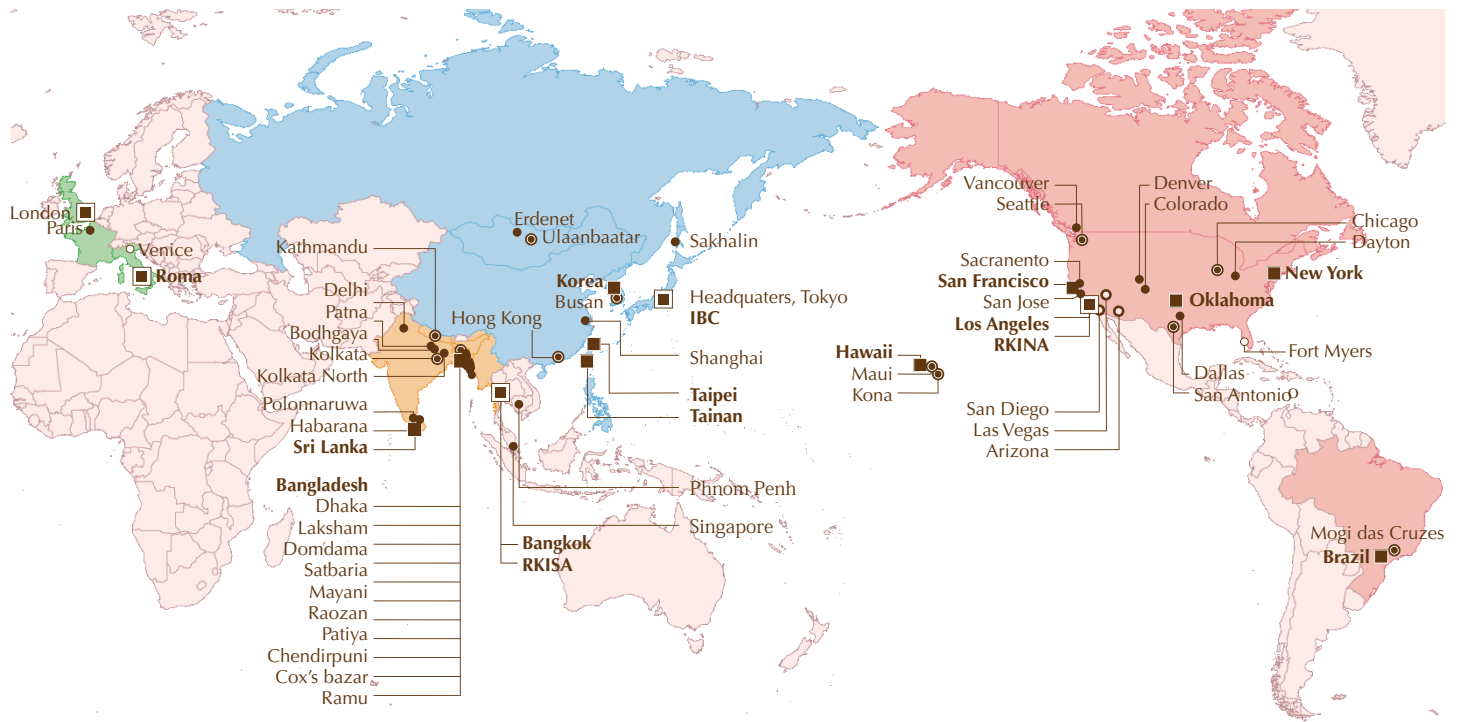
I would be happiest as a Buddhist if I could live a life of liberating myself by liberating others, which is the way of life Buddhists have practiced since Shakyamuni's time.

You may have heard phrases like "continue to practice good deeds wholeheartedly" and "make an effort, make an effort, until it becomes your joy and changes your way of life. When you are reborn, make an effort again." These are the words addressed to lay practitioners like us who apply the Buddhist teachings to our everyday lives. Effort, here, refers to the bodhisattva practice of using compassionate skillful means to bring happiness to both ourselves and others.

The COVID-19 pandemic will end someday, and I believe, just like the gentle spring breeze replaces the freezing winter wind every year, peace and comfort will return to the minds of people all over the world.



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