

# Living the Lotus

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*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

## Founder's Reflections

### The Complementary Paths of Learning and Practice

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

**I**N today's society, there are plenty of people whose wealth of knowledge is something to marvel at. But many intelligent people become confused by life's problems and end up emotionally unstable or paralyzed by indecision. In today's world of "information overload," the more talented you are, the greater your worries tend to be.

We hear and learn so many interesting things in our day-to-day lives that we think of ourselves as quite enlightened. However, just because we know something intellectually doesn't mean we've really made that knowledge our own. When we hear something interesting, we don't truly understand it until we put it into practice.

As soon as I've heard something I think is useful, I try it out in just the way I was told. When I do this, I understand it better. It becomes part of me. Practicing Buddhism means to "have faith in the teaching as you've heard it and practice it as taught."

The more we become an information society, the more important it is to remember what we believe, keeping this firmly within our mind. To do this, the complementary paths of learning and practice are absolutely essential.

*Kaiso zuikan* 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 86–87

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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TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 / FAX: +81-3-5341-1224  
Email: [living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp](mailto: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*

### Calling to Mind the Regarder of the Sounds

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

#### Becoming Aware of Your Own Abilities

Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World” (sometimes called the Regarder of Sounds Sutra), is popular with many people in East Asia. We draw strength from the teaching that when we are suffering, if we sincerely call to mind the Regarder of Sounds, she immediately responds to our voice and liberates us from suffering.

This is why the Regarder of Sounds has many followers. However, hearing only this, it may seem like following her is merely the belief that we can ask for and receive divine benefits. But I think that if calling her to mind can serve as the catalyst to seriously turning toward the teachings of the Buddha, doing so should be respected as a gateway to the faith.

This said, I also believe that the Regarder of Sounds Sutra is not merely the teaching that all we have to do is call her to mind and she will liberate or help us, because it is included in and infused with the spirit of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

One of these teachings is the importance of being aware of your own abilities. Every day, when we perform sutra recitation, we recite this verse: “The wondrous wisdom power of the Regarder of Sounds / Can free them from the sufferings of the world.” Regarding the meaning of these words, Founder Niwano said, “When you are facing some hardship, the strength to turn the situation around actually comes from within. It is the incredible spiritual power that develops by taking nourishment from that hardship.”

This means that our inherent power to rise from the depths of suffering and grow by turning suffering into nourishment is, in fact, “the wondrous wisdom power of the Regarder of Sounds.”

The poet Sansei Yamao (1938–2001) said that when we call to mind the Regarder of Sounds, we call to mind the dynamic power to live that we have inside us. In other words, we ourselves are the Regarder of Sounds, and when we believe in our own abilities—and earnestly call to mind the power of our inner Regarder of Sounds—our hearts will be filled with feelings of reassurance and our minds energized, both of which signify liberation from suffering.

### The Desire to Liberate All People

When we are in the midst of suffering and about to give up hope, if we suddenly realize that no suffering lasts forever, we gain courage and hold firm. When we are tormented by feelings of loneliness and the impulse to die presses upon us, we can regain the power to live by remembering someone who watched over us with loving-kindness.

This is the moment when we awaken to the truths that all things are impermanent and all things are without self—the moment when our new lives begin. Even if at the time you didn't recognize it as the Buddha's teaching, there is no doubt that you were able to lift yourself up through the wisdom power (that is, the wondrous wisdom power) that you yourself possess.

When some people are really suffering, they may implore, "Regarder of Sounds, please help me." Of course, this is all right. Even if such an invocation is for earthly benefits, as long as those in suffering are sincere in calling to mind the Regarder of Sounds, when they become one with their inner Regarder of Sounds, it is their own inherent power at work.

In this sense, just like the aphorism "skillful means are truth" indicates, the Regarder of Sounds Sutra teaches us that anyone who can become aware of their buddha nature through skillful means (calling to mind the powers of the Regarder of Sounds) is liberated and opened up to the realm of complete freedom.

Furthermore, the Regarder of Sounds Sutra repeatedly explains how the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World employs various methods to liberate people from suffering. And isn't this yet another form of skillful means that makes us realize we have the same desire as the Regarder of Sounds to liberate all people? By calling her to mind, if you realize you want to bring people happiness and peace of mind like the Thousand-Armed Regarder of Sounds who extends one thousand arms to do so, you take a step forward in the practice that makes you a bodhisattva. The Regarder of Sounds Sutra teaches us the importance of this.

We all have a bodhisattva we aim to emulate, whether the Regarder of Sounds, Ksitigarba, Never Unworthy of Respect, or another. We also all have our own way of walking as a bodhisattva. I will explore this in the next issue, where I will discuss bodhisattva practices.

From *Kosei*, June 2021

# Spiritual Journey

## Other People Are Mirrors Reflecting My Mind

Mrs. Park Gyeongjin  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered at Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea on December 13, 2020, during a memorial service for unborn children.*

**H**ELLO, everyone. My name is Park Gyeongjin. I belong to Rissho Kosei-kai's Seongbuk chapter, in Seoul. I was born in February, 1978, as the second daughter of my parents' five children: one son and four daughters. I'm now married and live in Seoul with my husband, Kim Seongjin, my daughter, Jiyu, and my son, Yungeon. My husband runs an optical shop in Seoul.

Long ago, my mother became the guarantor for an acquaintance's loan. The acquaintance couldn't repay the debt, and our family's household possessions were seized. Amid that difficult time, my mother joined Rissho Kosei-kai, guided by Mrs. Park Jongrim, who was our neighbor and a Rissho Kosei-kai chapter head. My mother joined on May 25, 1985, when I was seven years old. From then on, I always went to the Dharma center with her when big events were held because I was able to play with new friends and eat yummy snacks.

When I entered junior high school, I stopped visiting the Dharma center as often in order to concentrate on my studies. Since I wanted to go to college to study physical education, in addition to attending normal school, I also went to a sports school to prepare for skills tests that would be in the college entrance exam. It wasn't easy to do both academic work and sports, but when I graduated from high school, I was admitted to the sports education department of the college I'd most hoped to attend.

In college, the students majoring in sports education needed to learn about various kinds of sports, and each time we signed up for a new course, we needed to pay tuition. I felt guilty about having to rely on my parents to pay my tuition. In order to show that I was

doing my best, I often studied all night and worked part-time on my days off to earn money for necessary equipment and help pay for practical training.

One day during this time, I visited my friend's house. She lived in a high-rise condominium, and her large room was equipped with many kinds of electrical appliances. I was surprised to learn that she received one million won (about \$900) a month from her parents as an allowance. Her living environment was totally different from mine. I grew dissatisfied with my parents and my living situation, and I became weary of my life.

At college, I also felt I was made light of by my classmates: one time during examination period, they took my notebook and demanded that I give them my other notebooks as well. I couldn't speak out and express my feelings because I was afraid it would make them dislike me. This, in turn, made me feel ashamed of myself.



*Mrs. Park presents her Dharma Journey talk at Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea.*

Even with these challenges, I was eventually able to get good grades and receive a scholarship. However, an assistant professor in my department told me that I owed him money as a reward for helping me get the scholarship. I was so shocked by his claim that I immediately submitted a note of absence to the school. I hated everyone in the world and didn't want to see anyone. I ran away from home because I wanted to be alone.

A week later, I received a pager message from my mother—she was worried about me, so I returned home. I closed my mind completely and kept my loneliness to myself. I stayed indoors and continued my unhealthy, excessive eating and drinking. After a while, my weight increased to eighty kilograms (about 176 pounds) and I began to feel pains all over my body.

Around that time, I happened to get in touch with Mrs. Mun Hyeyeong, who I'd first met at the Dharma center when I was a child. We arranged to meet outside several times. Because I worried about how I looked to other people, I would only meet her in the evenings. Mrs. Mun listened to me attentively and said, "Oh, you had terrible classmates! You got a scholarship. Amazing! Isn't it great that you worked two part-time jobs at the same time?" She understood me, praised me for my effort, and comforted me. She said that social withdrawal wasn't rare in Korea or Japan, and she assured me that I wasn't unusual at all. She encouraged me to get outside more.

Thanks to her encouragement, I returned to college and managed to graduate, but I failed in a teacher recruitment exam I took soon after that. I wanted to wait and try again the following year, but my family wanted me to find employment as soon as possible. So, I found a job, but I soon found out that the company I was employed with was a so-called pyramid scheme. Fortunately, I was able to quit without trouble, but my next job was at a call center with a difficult work environment. As a result, I completely lost my confidence.

Around that time, Mrs. Mun gave me advice on job hunting. She said, "You shouldn't seek a job for money. Try to find a job that excites you, and you'll be able to enjoy your wok for a long time. Trust your heart." Following her advice, I decided to go back to school to become a practical nurse. Working part-time, I continued my studies, got my license, and started working at a hospital. I became able to save money little by little.

Meanwhile, the members of the Dharma center listened to my experiences and praised my effort, saying, "That's wonderful! I could never do that." They comforted me when I was tired, both physically and mentally, from work. They always listened to me, stood by my side, and guided me to reflect on my mindset in light of the teachings so I would become able to realize my mistakes by myself. I learned that if you have someone who listens to your heart, you can come back to your normal life even from the depths of despair.

Thanks to this opportunity of presenting a Dharma Journey talk, I realized the importance of appreciating the support of my family. They are so close to me that I wasn't even aware that I owed them so much. Even though I am the only child in my family who was allowed to go to college, my younger brother and sisters were not jealous of me. Instead, they backed me up. Moreover, when I got married and became busy raising children, my siblings helped me, as their own children had already grown up. My daughter, Jiyu, willingly adapted herself to the new environments of both nursery and kindergarten. My son, Yungeon, sometimes says selfish things, but when I carry him on my back, he asks me with an air of maturity, "Are you all right? Do you hurt anywhere? I'm heavy, so you can put me down." I think he has grown to be a kind boy because he has heard the teachings of Risho Kosei-kai since he was in my belly.

And, my husband, Kim Seongjin. He isn't a very

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outgoing person, but he is my dearest husband. He is tall and thin, so he was not my type, but I was attracted by his simple smile and his pure, kind, and honest personality, and I fell in love with him. I'm thankful to him for marrying an extroverted and stubborn woman like me. Every time I ask him to take me out, he accepts it without showing an unhappy face, even though he always ends up getting exhausted and going to bed as soon as we come home. While many stores are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, he is working hard at his optical shop.

And, more than anyone else, it is my parents who I am most grateful to in this world, for always supporting me. My father has worked hard to raise his five children. My mother has supported him and endured every hardship. When I think about what my mother's life has been like, and the fact that she gave me life and connected me with the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, my heart fills with gratitude for her. Whenever I ask her for advice on childrearing and family budgeting, she listens to me with all her heart and guides me to the right path in light of the teachings.

After I got married and gave birth to our daughter, I often quarreled with my husband due to my hatred for my mother-in-law, who favored my sister-in-law because she'd given birth to a son. Later, when I had my son, Yungeon, I was surprised and angered by my mother-in-law's reaction, which was different from when my daughter was born. I remembered, however, that my own mother, who had four daughters and later a son, had told me about her special feelings for her son. I realized that there is a gap between my in-laws' generation—which values a son as the family's heir—and my own, but I didn't accept these differences and got frustrated easily, reacting every time my mother-in-law's words or actions went against my values.

I'm currently working as a home-care worker for elderly people. Listening to their life stories and the

spiritual pains they found difficult to tell their children, I realized that I haven't thanked my own parents or my in-laws often enough. I regret this, and now I try to call and visit both sets of parents as much as possible. I feel sad to see my own parents getting smaller and weaker as they get older; I feel the same for my in-laws now that I've become closer to them spiritually. The main topic of my conversations with my mother-in-law used to be the children (their health and grades), but lately we talk more about her health. Since my attitude toward my husband's parents has changed, when I'm talking with them on the phone, my children often come and talk with them, too, and a pleasant conversation ensues. I realized that my children's attitudes reflect mine like a mirror. Through my experiences, I now understand the significance of a phrase we often say in Rissho Kosei-kai: "The root cause of everything is in myself and other people are mirrors that reflect our minds."

Now I can say to my mother-in-law, "Thank you for giving birth to my husband, who is pure and kind and who gives me this happiness of living with lovely children." I've learned that when I change my way of thinking according to the teachings, my relationships with the people around me change and become harmonious.

Back in 2004, when I was going through a difficult time, my parents were worried about me and let me attend the youth pilgrimage to the Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo. In the large Great Sacred Hall, I was impressed to see members recite the sutra single-mindedly while keeping good manners. In the dining room, I was strongly impressed to see members take only the necessary amount of food on their plates, in order not to waste it. They always behaved calmly and gently. By following their example, I hope I will also grow to be a calm, gentle woman. For this to happen, I will continue to practice the teachings of the Founder, who taught us that "we can't change

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others, everything is transient, we can't live alone, we should make the Dharma our light, and we shouldn't blame others for our failures.”

For the sake of my children, who grow up watching me, I pledge to strive to become a wise mother and wife, a kind daughter, and a considerate daughter-in-law by practicing filial piety, so I can make a happy family and contribute to the happiness of Korean society.

The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, thank you very much. Our minister, Rev. Lee, and my fellow sangha members, thank you very much.



*Mrs. Park participates in a Dharma circle.*



# 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 28 Encouragement from the Bodhisattva Universal Sage

In this closing chapter, we learn how the Bodhisattva Universal Sage travels from far in the east—all the way from the domain of the Buddha Superior King Dignified Virtue of Jewels—to hear the Lotus Sutra. He is so moved by what he hears that he tells Shakyamuni Buddha in great detail how he will guard and protect future generations who receive and embrace the teachings.

In turn, the Buddha extols the Bodhisattva Universal Sage and says that he will likewise guard and protect any who practice the same deeds as Universal Sage. Thus, this chapter encourages and extends support to practitioners of the Lotus Sutra far in the future, in the age of the decline of the Dharma.

### The Significance of Practicing the Wondrous Dharma

There is deep meaning in the appearance of the Bodhisattva Universal Sage in this final chapter. Universal Sage is the bodhisattva of the virtues of truth, concentration, and practice. He rides a magnificent white elephant that symbolizes dedicated, unfaltering practice, given the fact that nothing is able to hinder an elephant's progress as its massive body steadily advances, or prevent its feet from firmly touching bottom when it walks across a river.

In the early part of the Lotus Sutra, the principal bodhisattva was Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom. Midway through, notably in chapter 16, "The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata," Maitreya, the bodhisattva of compassion, played the principal role. The appearance of Universal Sage, the bodhisattva of practice, here in the closing chapter of the sutra is thus significant. The meaning of this is as follows.

In the Manifest Dimension of the Lotus Sutra, those who hear the teaching of the sutra gain knowledge of the ultimate reality of all things. Then, in the Original Dimension of the sutra, they are awakened to the truth that all living beings are given the gift of life and sustained by the compassion of the Eternal Original Buddha. Finally, they realize that unless they put these teachings into practice, their learning becomes meaningless. If we understand this, then we have already grasped the meaning of this chapter.





## Practicing the Four Requirements in Everyday Life

There is, however, one extremely important statement made by Shakyamuni in this chapter that must not be overlooked. After greeting the Buddha, the Bodhisattva Universal Sage asks how good men and women are able to obtain the true merits and virtues of the Lotus Sutra after the Tathagata's passing.

Shakyamuni answers that there are four requirements: "The first . . . is to be safeguarded by the buddhas, the second is planting many roots of virtue, the third is joining the assembly of those resolved to become awakened, and the fourth is aspiring to liberate all living beings."

In plainer language, we may understand here that we must: have absolute faith that we are under the protection of the buddhas, practice good deeds and foster virtue and goodness in ourselves in our daily lives, associate with a community of people who have faith in the teachings, and be animated by a desire to liberate all people with the understanding that true liberation means liberation along with everyone else.

Shakyamuni's statement sums up the essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra concisely, in a way anyone can understand. In this chapter, even people who may have been put off by the profundity of the teachings may get the feeling that they too can make it. In this sense, this is a most appropriate conclusion to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma.

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. 221–24.





## Director's Column

### Making the Most of the Life I Was Given

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

**C**HAPTER 25 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as Universal Gateway” (also known as the Regarder of Sounds Sutra), is the chapter for which I feel a special affinity—because it’s related to how I was born.

In 1960, my mother was barely strong enough to safely give birth to me, her third child. So, she imploringly asked for the power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of Sounds to help her. She often told me that she was reciting the Regarder of Sounds Sutra at the top of her voice when her labor started. As was usually the case in the countryside of Tohoku in northeastern Japan more than a half century ago, my mother gave birth at home with the help of a midwife.

I was born in a state of neonatal asphyxia and didn’t give a first cry. I was pale and didn’t seem to be moving. A village doctor was immediately called in, and he gave me treatment even though he saw little hope that I would survive.

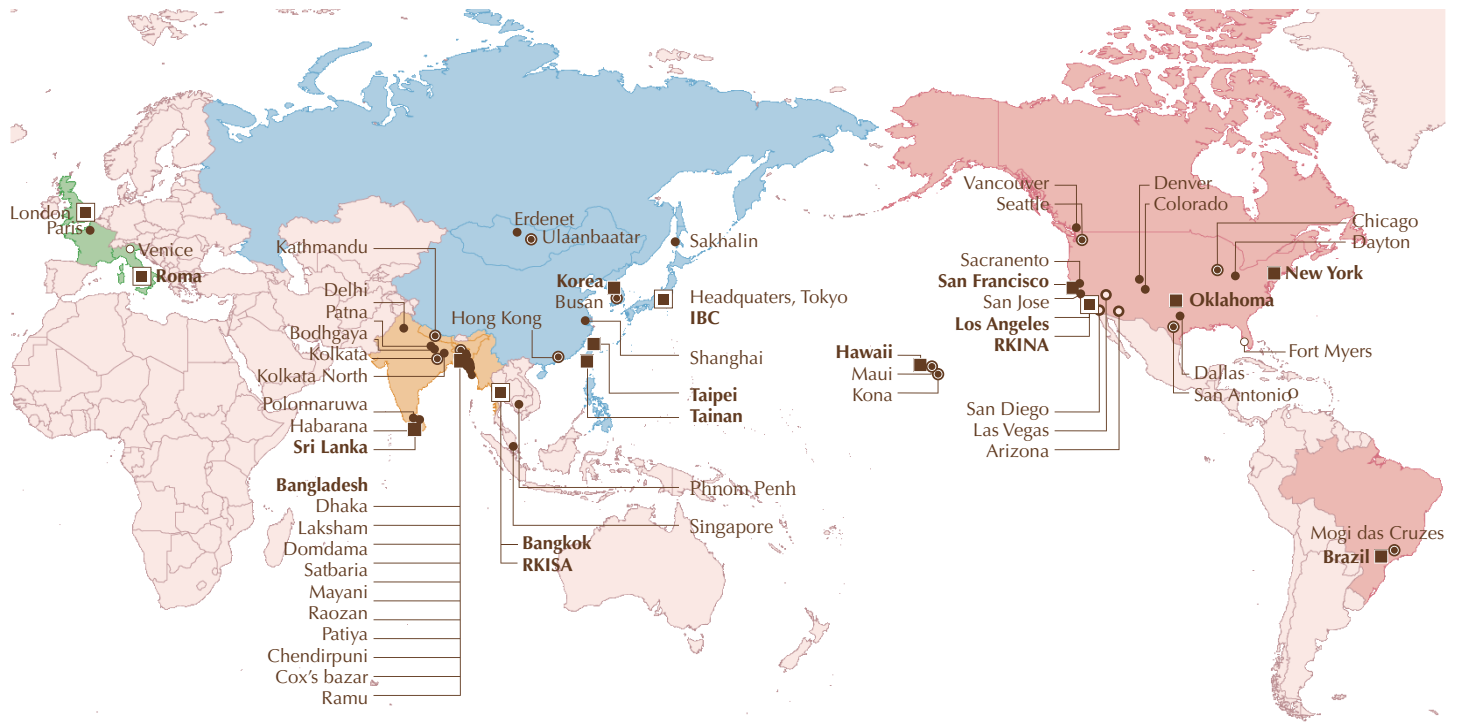
Thanks to the all-out treatment by the doctor and the midwife, however, I miraculously began to breathe, and I survived without any negative aftereffects.

Whenever I recite the Regarder of Sounds Sutra, I’m reminded of my debt of gratitude to my mother, who risked her life to give birth to me, and the many people who did their best to save my life and pray for my survival. I believe the best way for me to repay this debt of gratitude is to dedicate myself to the bodhisattva practice and share the teachings of the Lotus Sutra with more people in the world.



✉ We welcome comments on our newsletter *Living the Lotus*: [living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp](mailto:living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp).

# 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**
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## 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](mailto:info@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: [rky39@gmail.com](mailto:rky39@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](mailto: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

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 POBox 57138, Oklahoma City, OK 73157, USA  
 TEL: 1-405-943-5030 FAX: 1-405-943-5303  
 Email: [rkokdc@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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**

台灣台南市東區崇明 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: kosekaitainan@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: 880-2-41360470

**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](https://twitter.com/rkuk_official)  
Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/rkuk\\_official](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>