

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Nurturing the Mind That Shares the Joys and Sorrows of Others

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

No matter how many sutras we read, we can't really understand Buddhism by this alone. It isn't until we connect people with the Dharma or work to enhance their connection with it that we truly comprehend the Buddha's teachings. Similarly, if we don't understand people's hearts and share in their feelings, we can't fathom the depths of the Buddha's compassion.

This is especially true for those who have accepted responsibilities at Dharma centers to look after the spiritual well-being of fellow members. Even though you may want to help people by encouraging them to do this or that, they won't always do what you hope.

During these times when you are troubled and distraught over how to get through to them, you may be tempted to walk away—you may also be forced to recognize the limits of your abilities. But these experiences are the schooling that makes you grow.

It's only through this inner struggle that you'll gradually become able to discern the minds of others. And when you can, the depths of the Buddha's compassion will sink in because you'll know how the Buddha feels as he waits for each and every one of us to awaken. The more you understand the Buddha's thoughts, the more you will attain his mind of compassion.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 128–29

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

Sealing the Cracks in Your Mind

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Our Minds Have Both Demons and Buddhas

Buddhism teaches us that greed, anger, and ignorance are the basic delusions that poison people's minds. The mind that wants more than is necessary in any situation and doesn't know how to be satisfied (the greedy mind), the angry mind, and the mind that doesn't understand the truth about reality and only considers the immediate future (the ignorant mind) bring about jealousy, hatred, and discord and cause us to suffer.

To be human is to have these delusions, often called "the three poisons," so of course they existed in the Buddha as well. However, the difference between us and the Buddha is our difficulty reining in our desires and anger. When we're unable to exercise firm control of our greed or anger, we unintentionally act rashly or do something bad, which adds extra suffering to our load.

At such times, we often say things like, "I was tempted by a demon." In Buddhist terms, this "demon" is a *māra* that does harm to others or distracts and disturbs our minds, hindering our practice of the teaching.

However, demons don't invade our minds from the outside. Just as the gods and the buddhas are projections of our own minds, demons are also products of our own minds.

Fortunately, chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra, "Dharanis," tells us that when we receive protection in the form of a dharani, even if demons probe for our weaknesses, they will be unable to take advantage of them. Therefore, even if your mind gives rise to "hungry spirits" full of greedy desire and you start to crave one thing or another, as long as you have a dharani, you can rein in your mind before it runs wild.

Words That Encourage Us to Always Be Diligent

But what exactly are dharanis? And how do we attain them? Rissho Kosei-kai defines a dharani as something with the power to stop all forms of evil and promote all forms of good. It also explains that dharanis are mysterious words that, through their recitation, allow you to directly enter the realm of the buddhas.

To rephrase this a little more simply, a dharani is an incantation that has the power, when recited, to suppress greedy, angry, and self-centered thoughts and activate your inner buddha mind.

In a previous issue, I mentioned a phrase, *atomiyo sowaka* (“review what you’ve done, *svāhā*”), which comes from the early eighteenth-century Bushido text *Hagakure* (Eng. “hidden by the leaves”). This phrase reminds us to look and see if we’ve forgotten something, or to double-check our work. In other words, it’s a dharani urging us to review our actions.

As *svāhā* is a word invoking buddhas that also has the meaning of “completely accomplishing a goal,” it calls forth our inner buddha and turns on the switch that returns us to our buddha minds.

When I feel the blood about to rise to my head, in my mind I chant, *on nikoniko hara tatsumaizoya sowaka* (“smile, don’t lose your temper, *svāhā*”). By doing so, the wave of emotion calms down and I can refrain from saying or doing something regrettable.

No matter how strong-willed you may be, it’s difficult to overcome the temptations of greed, anger, and ignorance that are likened to demons. However, as long as you have a “dharani” switch that turns on self-reflection whenever cracks seem to be forming in your mind, you can seal the cracks and change your frame of mind before the demon springs into action. In my understanding, the “Dharanis” chapter teaches us how to do this because, although we’ve vowed to pursue the bodhisattva way, we often become confused or worried.

While the traditional usage of dharanis focuses on fulfilling a wish by chanting difficult words without understanding their meaning or logic, all dharanis have the power to always bring us back to the path of diligent practice and inspire us.

What, then, is your own personal dharani? It’s something you devise and master that helps you seal any cracks that form in your mind.

From *Kosei*, August 2021

Spiritual Journey

Serving Others Through Work

Mr. Masashi Nakayama
Takaoka Dharma Center

This Dharma Journey talk originally appeared in Japanese in the February 2021 issue of Kosei, a monthly magazine published by Kosei Publishing.

It has been eighteen years since I started my present company, handling the production and sales of textile goods. Before that, I worked for twenty-six years in sales for a wholesale company handling textile products. Before I realized it, forty-four years had passed since I placed myself in this area of business.

My former company distributed garment products such as zip fasteners, sewing threads, and buttons to apparel manufacturers. It was a small company with fifteen employees. My various jobs were challenging and I enjoyed working in a vibrant work environment.

When I was forty-one years old, seventeen years after joining the company, I became a sales manager who supervised the company's employees as well as our products' wholesalers and retailers. Soon after that, at the suggestion of my wife, Etsuko, I began to take part in men's group activities at Rissho Kosei-kai's Takaoka Dharma Center.

I joined *hoza* (the Dharma circle in which we share our experiences in everyday life and learn from each other in light of the Buddha's teachings) and *tedori* (visiting other members' homes to enhance their connection with the Dharma). While joining such activities and seeing sangha members intently listening to other members' talks, I began to look back on my attitudes toward my fellow workers.

Later, following the collapse of Japan's bubble economy and the subsequent recession, our client companies in the apparel industry went bankrupt one after another. Orders for our products gradually decreased.

When our company's sales deteriorated, the president, who had always had a gentle and calm demeanor,

suddenly changed. He stopped greeting anyone in the office, and instead of speaking directly to his employees, he handed them notes containing his instructions. In addition, he rebuked employees harshly when they made a mistake, but stopped giving words of praise when someone achieved a good result. The employees grew distrustful of him and there was a heavy atmosphere in the office.

What was going on in the office was hard for me to bear, so I shared it with Rev. Yuji Numata (the minister of our Dharma center who is now Rissho Kosei-kai's advisor on Dharma dissemination) during a *hoza* session for men's group one evening.

Rev. Numata told me, "Someone always places flowers in my room of the Dharma center. Every morning, I greet the flowers, even though I know they won't respond. Similarly, you can greet your president on your own initiative. Your company's president passes notes to his employees—it's hard to find such a



Mr. Nakayama serves as facilitator of Rikka no kai, a sangha of business owners, in his local Hokuriku area.

kind and careful president. Every person has his or her own concerns or ways of dealing with things. Mr. Nakayama, you'd be able to serve as lubricant between your president and the employees, wouldn't you?"

Rev. Numata's advice was eye-opening for me, as I believed the president to be wholly responsible for the company's financial situation and the heavy atmosphere in the workplace. I put the blame on him. Rev. Numata suggested, however, that I should try a different way of looking at him: seeing him as a kind and careful person.

Beginning the next day, I made it a habit to greet the president cheerfully. Even though he didn't respond, being able to say hello to him from my heart gradually became a joy for me. Moreover, when I looked at him without a prejudiced eye, I remembered that he always came to work earlier than everyone else to clean the office. I realized that the president was hoping to make the company a comfortable place for his employees to work—this is why he tirelessly did the morning cleaning all by himself.

So, I began going to the office early to clean the office with him. When the president thanked me, I felt the spiritual distance between us begin to disappear. During an employees' morning meeting, I expressed my gratitude for the president for cleaning the office every morning because I hoped that, as Rev. Numata had told me, I could serve as the lubricant between the president and the employees. Everyone there looked surprised to learn that the president, who was so stern and harsh, was cleaning the office every morning.

Through the men's group activities, I learned that "if I change, others will change." By seeing what happened in our workplace, I was convinced that this teaching was true. From that point on, the company's heavy atmosphere began to regain its former brightness.

On the other hand, however, the company's financial status was growing worse. One morning in late September 2002, I went in to the office to find a

notice on the entrance door saying the company had gone bankrupt. In a corner of my mind, I'd expected that this might happen someday, but it still felt so sudden that I could only stand there, motionless, for a while. Soon after, I began to receive a rush of calls on my cell phone from clients and creditors asking the whereabouts of the president. My entire morning was totally occupied with answering these calls.

The company's bankruptcy caused concern to many creditors and customers. As the sales manager, I made up my mind to visit them one by one to make apologies. I thought it was my duty.

That afternoon, I visited the Dharma center and told Rev. Numata what was on my mind. He listened to me and gave me a supportive push, saying I should visit them with a sincere heart. As the proverb goes, "there is no time like the present," so, soon after I left the Dharma center, I started to visit some three hundred creditors and customers all over Toyama Prefecture.

"I am very sorry for the trouble we have caused you," I said to each of them, looking into their eyes and apologizing to them from my heart. Also, hoping that I could help ease the negative effects that our bankruptcy had on them, I listened intently to what they had to say. Some said they needed materials for their products, which our company had supplied, so I helped them get the same materials from other companies in the city. I tried my best to be responsive to every request.

To my surprise, few clients complained—on the contrary, many people were kindly concerned about my future employment. One even offered to support me in starting my own company. I was filled with gratitude.

As I looked back on the years before the bankruptcy, I realized that I had rested safely in my position as sales manager and dealt with every day's work through the force of habit. Buddhism teaches the Six Perfections as the ways of serving others, but I was

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doing the opposite. I thought, conceitedly, that I was helping our clients by doing business with them, and eventually I came to have little respect toward them. I was also one of the employees who held anger toward the president.

With this awareness, I came to accept that the bankruptcy and my subsequent visits to the clients to apologize, which lasted a month, were lessons that the Buddha arranged for me so I could reflect on my way of living and my attitude toward work.

When my visits to the clients were over, I thought, *I hope to repay the kind concern for my future that I received from many people.*

My desire to start my own company grew strong, and I had my wish heard by Rev. Numata, who gave me all sorts of advice, including practical suggestions about budgeting and renting an office.

As I was also in charge of purchasing sewing threads and buttons in my former job, I visited one of the companies with which I did business and asked to wholesale their products. My request was not accepted as I didn't have enough funds, but they kindly introduced me to their subsidiary company in Kanazawa City, with which I was able to make a contract to use their products to produce and retail textile goods as a sole proprietor.

Also, the president of another company with which I'd done business before said to me, "You can use our warehouse as you please—we aren't using it right now," and leased their warehouse to me. I decided to use it as an office and storage facility. Thanks to these kind offers and arrangements, I was able to establish my own company.

Two months after the bankruptcy, I started my business handling the wholesale and retailing of textile goods, including sewing threads and buttons, and the production and sales of pillow cases, waterproof sheets for hospitals, and napkins for hotels. At that time, I promised myself two things: *I will make*

myself available for my customers' needs as best as I can, and I will never miss a delivery date.

I made it a rule to positively communicate with my customers. I talked with them not only about business but also about life in general, and I listened to their problems. When I heard that someone's old sewing machine broke, I found a dealer who could repair it. When I was asked if we could make children's clothes, I introduced a manufacturer of children's clothes.

I also volunteered to help my customers change light bulbs in their offices and change the layout of the workplace. I was happy to be able to please my customers, and to my further joy, the customers sometimes introduced me to other clients. I soon realized the importance of building ties with other people.

In December 2018, when my business was starting to take off, I had an opportunity to study the principles for being a good business owner and having a proper work style. This was during the first meeting of the Gathering for Business Owners to Study the Spirit of Buddhism, held in the Great Sacred Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo.

Under the impactful theme "Be Earnest to Change the Future," Rissho Kosei-kai's sangha members across the country who were running businesses gathered for the meeting. The participants studied the essentials of business management by hearing from a member who rehabilitated a company after financial difficulties. We also learned from one another in group discussions.

I participated in the gathering without expecting anything in particular from it, but I felt my eyes open as I learned of other participants' aspirations to apply Buddhism to management and contribute to society. I had thought vaguely that I would like to help others through my business, but hearing others talk, I keenly recognized the importance of donation, the practice of giving, which is the first element of the Six Perfections.

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I also remembered Founder Nikkyo Niwano's words from *Buddhism for Everyday Life*, which I always tried to keep in mind: "Sincerity and kindness are two forces that will always win recognition in the long run and wield great influence."

I recognized anew the importance of practicing donation with a sincere and kind heart.

In order to put what I'd learned at the gathering into practice, I made three resolutions to myself. First, I would recite the sutra every morning and evening. Second, I would practice the Six Perfections (donation in particular). And third, as a business owner, I would control my selfishness and cultivate the mind of serving others.

I think my mind has become organized through the practice of sutra recitation, and by always being conscious of practicing donation, I've also become able to interact with my customers more sincerely than before.

Because of the coronavirus catastrophe, a part of my job is temporarily lost, but I've begun receiving orders from new customers, which keep me busy every day. I've become keenly aware that any part of my work cannot be done by me alone. My work is possible thanks to the support of all the people who

purchase the materials and textile goods my company produces, who use the material to manufacture textile products such as bed sheets for hospitals, and who purchase the products and use them.

I pledge to always be conscious of serving others and continue to be diligent in the bodhisattva practice, making it the basis of my work.



Mr. Nakayama carries bed sheets for hospitals, one of his company's products.



An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Starting with this issue of Living the Lotus, we will use comics to introduce Rissho Kosei-kai in an easy-to-understand, fun format. Each month's installment will teach something new and share stories about the Founder's life, Shakyamuni's life and the teachings of Buddhism, and Rissho Kosei-kai's history, events, practices, and peace activities. Please enjoy the first installment.

The Founder's Life and the History of Rissho Kosei-kai

What Kind of Person Was the Founder?

The Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, always talked to members with a smile and expounded the Lotus Sutra in ways that were easy to understand.

The Founder was born in 1906 in Suganuma, Tokamachi City, in Niigata Prefecture. Right after graduating from elementary school, he began to work. A few years later, he left his hometown for Tokyo.

In Tokyo, while working hard, he tried out various religions to achieve his wish to liberate many people from suffering. When he encountered the Lotus Sutra, he was convinced that it is the teaching that liberates

all people. He established Rissho Kosei-kai in 1938.

From that point forward, the Founder expounded the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to many people and guided them to attain happiness.

Founder Niwano also advocated for the Brighter Society Movement, which aims to contribute to Japanese society as a whole by expanding goodwill through the cooperation of people at the community level. He addressed world religious leaders and promoted interreligious dialogue to realize world peace.

In 1999, he passed away at the age of 92.





The Grandpa's Teaching

When the Founder (born Shikazo Niwano) was a child, he was close to his grandpa, Jutaro Niwano. His grandpa warmly watched over the Founder as he played around actively every day.

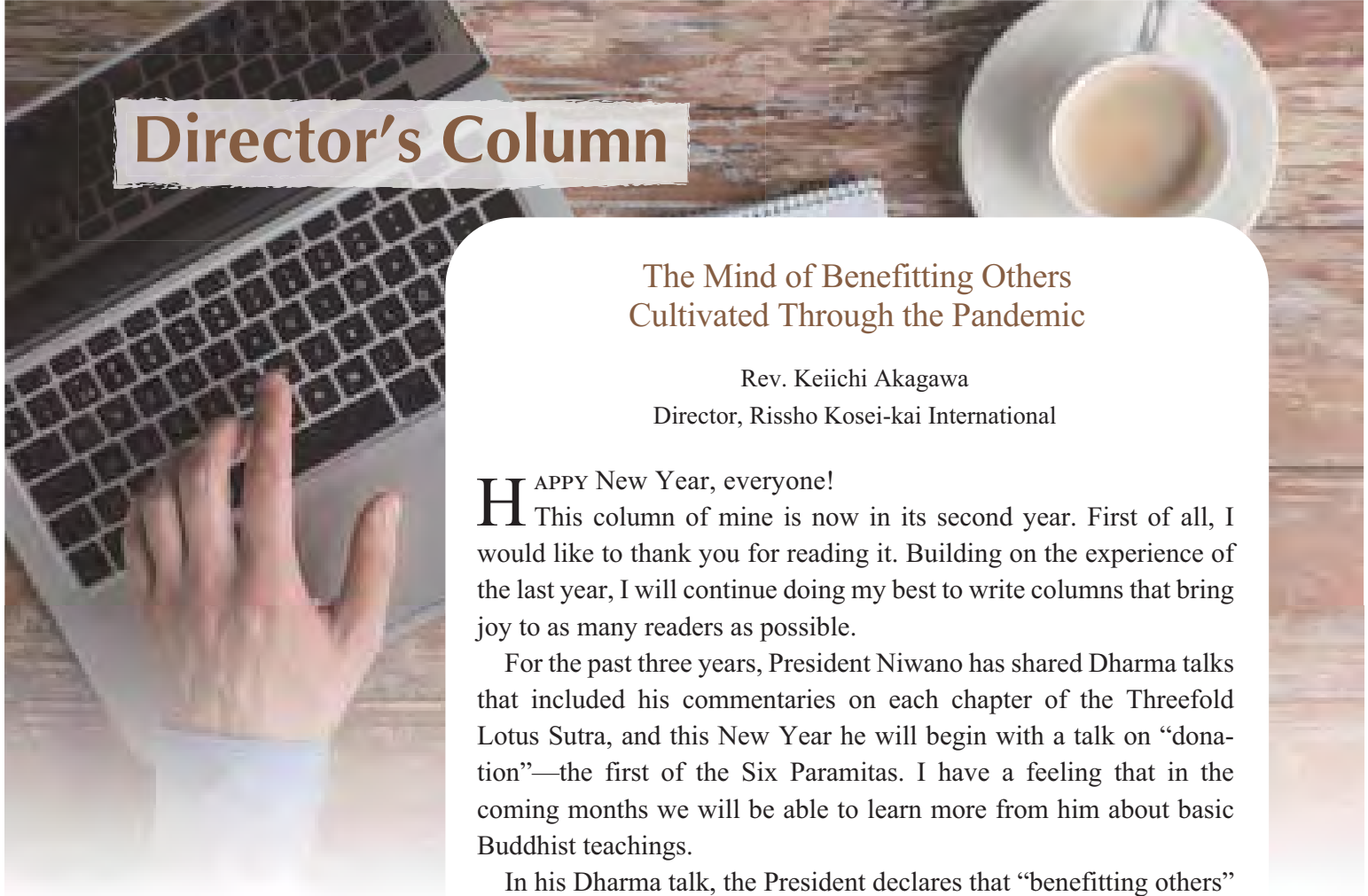
On winter days, the Founder would often get cold after playing in the snow and came home. His grandpa would take off the Founder's cold, wet clothes and carry him on his back to warm the Founder with the warmth of his skin. Every time, the grandpa would kindly tell him, "Grow up to be a man who does good for others."

Later in his life, the Founder often told this story, saying that his grandfather's words were one of the main reasons he became a person who teaches others the Buddha Way.



Did You Know?

The Founder's grandfather was an indispensable person in the village, where there were no doctors. When there was a medical emergency, he would immediately rush to the sick person and provide treatment, which often included moxibustion (a type of traditional Chinese medicine that involves burning dried mugwort on particular points of the body).



Director's Column

The Wonder Received from Dharanis

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

IN his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano discusses chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra, "Dharanis." In relation to this, I would like to share a personal experience that my wife and I went through. It made us feel that, like the President says in his message, dharanis are mysterious words that allow you to directly enter the realm of buddhas.

Eighteen years ago, our family moved to our current house. In our neighborhood, there is an intersection of main streets where traffic is heavy. Although there are traffic lights on all four corners and visibility is good, when we first moved here, collision accidents took place frequently. My wife and I were frightened every time we heard the loud noise of a car crash and then the siren of an ambulance.

With the desire to pray for the safety of passing cars, my wife assigned herself the practice of chanting dharanis ten times every morning and evening as part of her sutra recitation. She still does this every day. Within a year of her starting this practice, to our surprise, the accidents stopped completely.

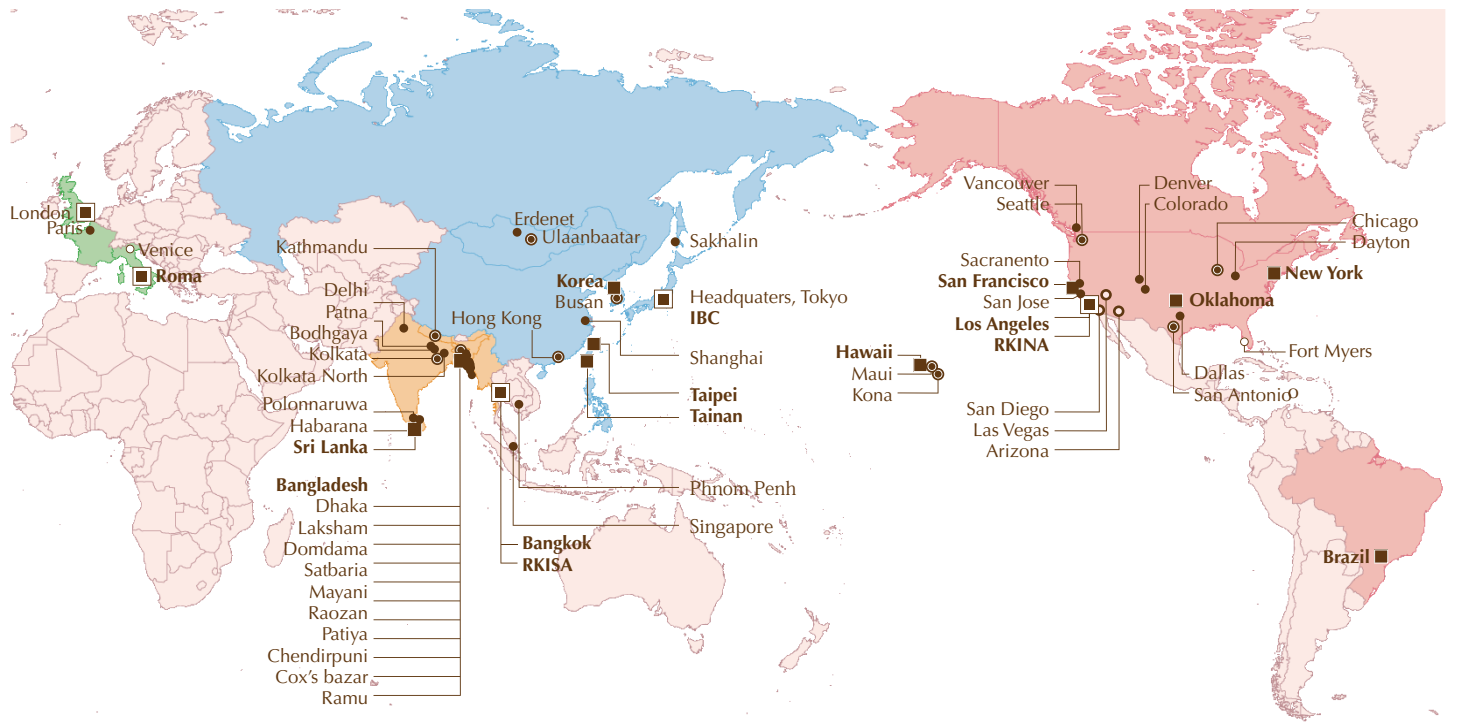
I don't know how the chanting of dharanis brought about the elimination of collision accidents, but it may have been my wife's earnest prayers that brought about the wonder.

However, what's mystical to us above all else is that the collisions between husband and wife have ceased to occur as well, which we now believe is thanks to the dharanis' mysterious power to enable us to reflect on our minds more often.





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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 North

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Rissho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar

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