

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life



Founder's Reflections

Mobilizing the Power to Believe in People

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

MORE than anything, my greatest joy of the past year was attending the opening ceremony of the Sixth World Assembly of Religions for Peace, which was held in November 1994 at the Vatican and other locations in Italy.

Seeing his Holiness Pope John Paul II and the other world religious leaders gathered in the Vatican's Synod Hall declare their determination to respond to the world's challenges was an experience that overwhelmed me with emotion.

Whether it be learning, the performing arts, martial arts, or sports, if you plumb the depths of things through the pursuit of a single practice and ponder what it means to be human until you understand human nature, you will discover the truth that applies to all things. Your rigidity will disappear when you realize this truth, and you will acquire an open-mindedness that allows you to accept any situation by making the best of it.

It is the same with the path of religious practice. When you delve deep enough into the teachings of your faith to arrive at their core, that truth will make it possible for you to believe in people from the bottom of your heart and cooperate with anyone without hesitation. If we can mobilize this power to believe in people, we will surely be able to realize a peaceful world without war in the twenty-first century. We must do everything within our power to achieve this.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 104–5

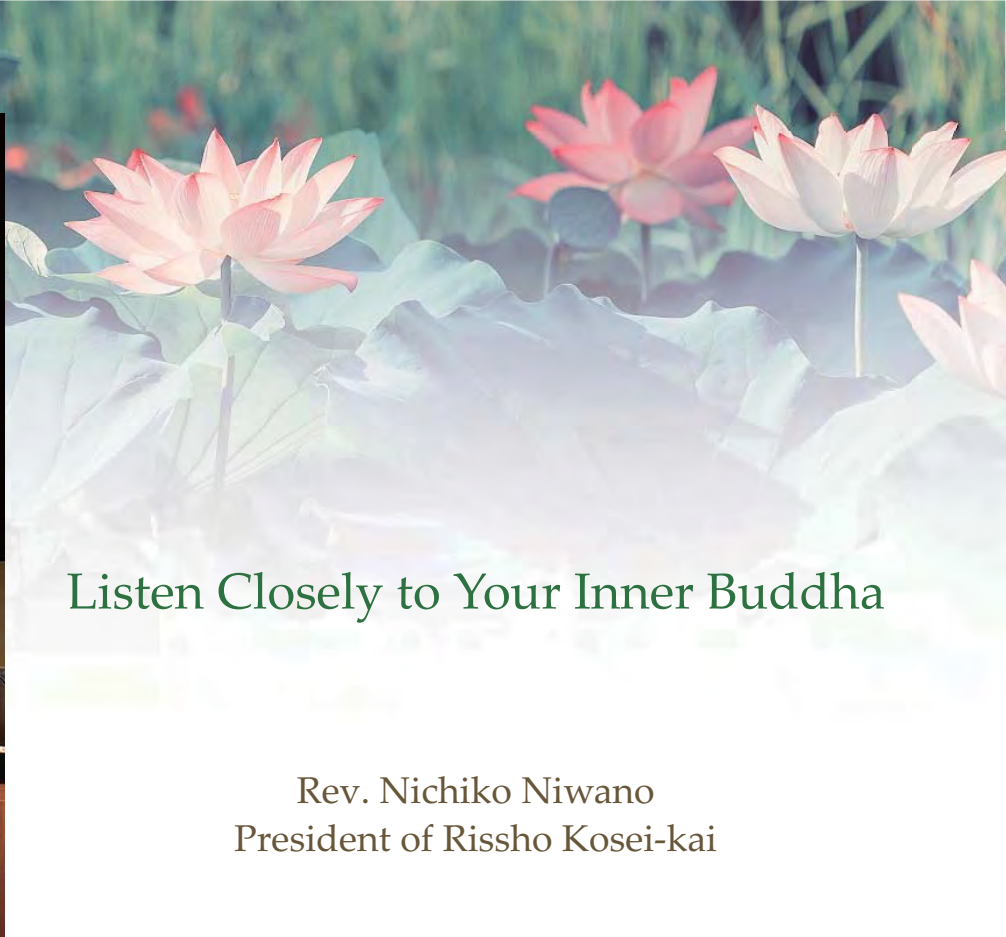
Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). 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.



Listen Closely to Your Inner Buddha

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Acknowledgment and Remorse Are the Same as Awakening

The Threefold Lotus Sutra concludes with the Sutra of the Method for Contemplating the Bodhisattva Universal Sage (The Sutra for Contemplating the Universal Sage, for short), which says, “Those who practice . . . acknowledgment and remorse become pure in body and mind and do not become stuck on things, just like flowing water.” In other words, if you remember to perform acknowledgment and remorse in any situation, you will be able to live your life with a free, pure feeling, like rippling, flowing water. The sutra goes on to say that acknowledgment and remorse ultimately lead to deep contemplation of the true aspect of all things—that is, being free from delusions and attachments and seeing things as they really are. However, how does acknowledgment and remorse lead there? I feel that this point is a bit difficult to understand.

That is why I want to tell you about an almanac, published by JT Biohistory Research, that I always carry in my bag and frequently consult.

This small almanac concisely shows the origins and history of the universe, Earth, life forms, and human beings. To quote from the opening section of this almanac, entitled *Watashi no ima iru tokoro, soshite kore kara* (My whereabouts and future):

“Modern science has proven that Earth came into being as one of the many stars created by the universe, with life forms emerging from the seas that formed on Earth and human beings born out of the evolution of a great variety of these life forms. The history of the universe, Earth, and the emergence of life are commingled inside us.”

Every time I look at this almanac, I tell myself that we are here right now because of this history and marvel at the existence and lives of human beings. At the same time, I think of this magnificent history, in which all forms of existence have together nurtured one great life force and passed it down over immeasurably vast eons. Especially when I am struggling to mentally process something, I remind myself that I am just one human being in this great life force, and suddenly my horizons expand and I feel better.

In everyday life, we see that people and phenomena are all different, but a world exists in which absolute truth is universally equal and without discrimination—so grasping that truth, reflecting upon ourselves, and performing acknowledgment and remorse seem to be the very awakening that purifies our bodies and minds.

The True Spirit of the Lotus Sutra and Rissho Kosei-kai

Up to this point I have been discussing acknowledgment and remorse as a single package. Some people may think that spiritual realization and performing acknowledgment and remorse mean something different from the popular idea of showing remorse. Of course, the acknowledgment and remorse practiced by religious people may be a stronger force because of the perseverance and stoicism that lead to diligence, but I think that the popular idea of showing remorse is also a form of improving and moving forward. Therefore, I consider showing remorse to be essentially the same as our practice of acknowledgment and remorse.

Speaking in terms of religious practice, however, we can interpret the feeling of acknowledgment and remorse stirring in our hearts as a wake-up call from our inner buddha. A line from the Sutra for Contemplating the Universal Sage that urges acknowledgment and remorse, "Focus your minds on the Buddha," also teaches us that when we are about to give in to anger or greed, we should listen to the voice of our inner buddha telling us to focus on the buddha inside and return to our true self. At times, just let your mind wander through the vast expanse of the universe and think about the history of Earth and life. Think about what it means for human beings and you yourself to exist amid this vast expanse of the universe and history. Then, if you turn toward your inner buddha and listen carefully to what that voice tells you, I think you will make up your mind to live a better life. After that, you only need to put that mind into practice.

Nichiren (1222–82) said, "The core of Shakyamuni's lifetime teachings is the Lotus Sutra and the core of practicing the Lotus Sutra is found in chapter 20, 'The Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect.'" In Rissho Kosei-kai, the scripture in which we place our faith is the Threefold Lotus Sutra, and the reason why Founder Niwano led us toward valuing the practice of placing our hands together reverently before others is that he himself took the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect's attitude as a model for human behavior. We could even say this is the most familiar practice of demonstrating through our own physical actions that the practice of acknowledgment and remorse is itself an awakening.

In my home, each day the Founder revered an image of the Buddha depicted with palms pressed reverently together. That Buddha is still there today, praying for the happiness of people everywhere.

From *Kosei*, December 2021

Spiritual Journey

Gratitude for My Mother and My Mission in Life

Mr. Koichi Shida, Head of the General Affairs Group
Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered on August 22, 2021,
during the ceremony marking the fiftieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil.*

ETERNAL Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, please guide me. President Nichiko Niwano, please guide me. Everyone, please guide me.

I'm Koichi Shida. I have two younger brothers, Yujiro and Mitsuo. I also have an older brother and a younger sister who are the children of my stepmother, Martha. My family members are Brazilians of Japanese descent. My grandparents on my biological mother's side immigrated to Sao Miguel in Sao Paulo State from Fukui Prefecture in 1962. My father immigrated from Niigata Prefecture. My parents met in Sao Paulo and got married in 1976. I was born soon after their marriage.

My family's faith in Rissho Kosei-kai started with my grandparents. I spent my childhood in the early days of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil and I still remember and miss members in those days—the first minister, Rev. Kimie Takeuchi, who was strict about manners; Ms. Akiko Hasegawa, a graceful chapter leader; Ms. Ikuyo Muramatsu, a gentle lady; Ms. Ikuyo Sato, a dependable woman; Ms. Mitsue Ono, a modest lady;

and Mr. Kozo Abe and Mrs. Eri Abe, the couple who were kind to everyone. There were many members and the atmosphere of the Dharma center was very friendly.

Because of my mother's illness, however, my family kept our distance from the Dharma center for nearly ten years. We suffered a lot because of this. Especially, my father became the target of attacks from my mother, who had developed a mental disorder, and he suffered tremendously. At such times, the sangha of the Dharma center accepted him warmly and eased his suffering.

My parents divorced due to my mother's strong desire. My father had wished he could start leading a peaceful life with her again, but this ray of hope disappeared in the end. Later, my father met Martha, who is a Brazilian of Japanese descent from Parana State. They've been married for twenty-three years. In addition to my father's job, they engaged in a project to provide free treatment for children with asthma with support from many people. Recently my father retired, and now Martha and my father enjoy a peaceful life while we children support their living.

On the other hand, my mother's illness became worse. Martha worried about her very much, but sadly, after being in and out of psychiatric hospitals and clinics, my mother took her own life in 1998.

I have mixed feelings toward my mother—gratitude for raising us with love, regret for not fully taking care of her after she became ill, pity for her early death, and a grudge for causing us to suffer.

When I was a child, my mother was abnormally possessive about her children and strongly believed that children were a mother's possessions. As her



Mr. Koichi Shida shares his Dharma Journey talk at the Brazil Dharma Center.

disease progressed, she also suffered from depression. Saying that the whole world was hostile to us, she shut us away in the house under the pretext of protecting us from the evil of the outside world. She became aggressive and caused a lot of trouble to our neighbors as well as the sangha of Rissho Kosei-kai. Later, when I watched an American movie titled *The Beautiful Mind*, I came to know that she suffered from schizophrenia.

After my mother's death, I began to suffer from nightmares about her. When I woke up, I often found myself sweating profusely and with tears flowing. Strangely, however, I began to have nightmares less often when I made it a habit to recite the sutra before our family's Buddhist altar in the morning.

As a matter of fact, thanks to Yujiro and Mitsuo's diligent practice of the teachings, we were conferred from Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters the Gohonzon—the statue of the Original Buddha—as the focus of devotion. After the Gohonzon was enshrined, our family Buddhist altar became a more sacred place for us and this motivated me to recite the sutra every morning.

I also held memorial services for my mother. Wondrously, my grudge against my mother softened and I began to be able to express gratitude for my mother through the practice of the sutra recitation. On behalf of my brothers, on this occasion I would like to say heartfelt thanks to my mother for giving birth to us, raising us, and letting us receive an education. Thank you, Mother. Even now I often dream about my mother. They are no longer nightmares but the pleasant dreams of chatting with her.

My brothers and I started to visit the Dharma center again during the time of the second minister, Rev. Hiroo Mori. In those days, I was in charge of audio for Dharma center ceremonies together with Mr. Kozaburo Matsumura. I learned from Mr. Matsumura the importance of concentrating on ceremony procedures and the timing for starting the background music.

The present building of the Brazil Dharma Center in Sao Paulo was built when Rev. Mori (presently the consultant to Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil) was the

minister. In the new Dharma center, I played the *taiko* drum, which we didn't have in the former Dharma center. I also had the opportunity of participating in the Global Youth Gathering held in the Tokyo headquarters in 2002. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Rev. Mori for allowing me to have these precious opportunities. Thank you very much.

The third minister, Rev. Takayuki Nagashima, was a dynamic and charismatic person and was very much loved by local Brazilians. During his time, recitation of the sutra in Portuguese started and the number of local Brazilian members increased explosively. Rev. Nagashima also started seminars on Buddhism and, with his rich experience in management and administration, carried out a reform of the Brazil Dharma Center's management.

Following Rev. Nagashima, in 2012, Rev. Kazuyoshi Nakahara was assigned as the minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil. Under him, my life has undergone two big changes. First, I assumed the position of head of the general affairs group of Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil. When I was asked by Rev. Nakahara to accept the role, I was surprised and began to worry. The head of the general affairs group is a responsible role and I wondered if I was truly qualified, as I knew I had a tendency to speak about what comes to my mind without deliberation. I kept thinking about the role every day until I made up my mind. Although I was not confident and felt very nervous, I decided to accept it as I thought it may help my growth as a human being. Second, I was hired as an international staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai. As I would receive a salary from the headquarters, I quit my job at Eletro Salvador, the company where I had worked for twenty years. It was not an easy decision. However, as I learned that Buddhism teaches that everyone is born in this world with a mission to fulfill, I believe that I answered the Buddha's call and made the right decision.

Even after leaving Eletro Salvador, I maintain a friendship with the company's president, Mr. Akira Gunji, and his family, and I continued to visit the office regularly. I started working as an international

Spiritual Journey

staff member in January 2021. I am still an apprentice, but I am happily serving the Buddha, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, President Nichiko Niwano, and the sangha.

Through working as an international staff member, I have learned the importance of interaction with others. My main jobs at Eletro Salvador were making sales statistics for electric components, carrying out cost analysis for products, and presenting reports about that work. Interacting with others had not been an important part in my life. I'm an introverted person and prefer to be alone; but at the Dharma center, I have to step out of my own comfortable place and voluntarily talk to others. I have to make a special effort to talk to someone who visits the Dharma center for the first time. Ms. Hiromi Sasaki, who is the head of the Dharma dissemination group, always seems to enjoy conversations with members, an approach from which I've learned a lot. I also learned from Rev. Nakahara the importance of praising the buddha nature of every member and understanding their thoughts and feelings. My way of thinking has been theory and analysis-oriented, but I'm hoping to shift to a way that puts more importance on friendly interactions with others.

I've had opportunities to enhance a few members' connections with the Dharma. One of them is Mr. Thiago Braga, who lives in Barcarena City in Parana State, located 2,800 kilometers (about 1,750 miles) away from Sao Paulo State. Mr. Braga is an enthusiastic member and deeply interested in the teachings. He started joining the activities of Rishso Kosei-kai as an Amigo member (those who participate in activities of the Brazil Dharma Center while maintaining their original religious affiliations) and later became a regular member. The enshrinement ceremony of a locally bestowed Gohonzon at his family altar was held online, a first for Rishso Kosei-kai of Brazil. Mr. Braga and his friend, Mr. Pedro Henrique da Silva Albuquerque, joined an online seminar on the Three-fold Lotus Sutra and learned a lot about the teaching. Mr. Braga introduced Ms. Sarah Rodrigues Maio to Rishso Kosei-kai, who was interested in the teachings

and became an Amigo member. Ms. Maio studied Buddhism in another Buddhist organization in the past. In addition to these three members, I have interacted with several new people.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, it became impossible to hold face-to-face activities such as the seminars on Buddhism, the lectures on Basic Buddhism, and sutra recitations. Instead, we started online activities as a new way of sharing the teachings. I met Mr. Braga and others through these online activities. As described above, I am learning each day how to build relationships with others through Rishso Kosei-kai activities. The encounters with Mr. Braga and others is my treasure. The encounters with all the sangha is also an invaluable treasure for me.

Making use of my experiences during the past two decades, I pledge myself to contribute to sharing Rishso Kosei-kai's teachings in the coming two decades.

Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, thank you very much. President Nichiko Niwano, thank you very much. Everyone, thank you very much.



Mr. Shida serves as an interpreter for Rev. Kazuyoshi Nakahara.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

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

Encounter with the Cofounder

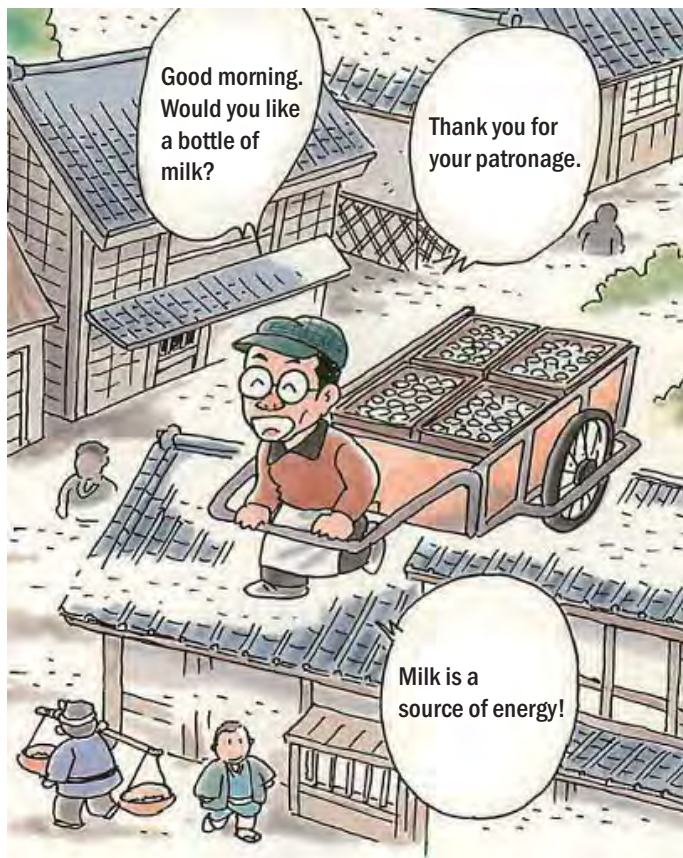
The Founder opened a milk delivery shop on the grounds that it gave him more free time to disseminate the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

One of his customers was Masa Naganuma, the cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai. She was later known in Rissho Kosei-kai as Myoko Sensei*. She also ran a small business, selling ice in summer and baked sweet potatoes in winter, but unfortunately she was in poor health.

As the Founder continued to deliver milk to her, he learned that she was chronically ill, so he taught her the importance of performing ancestor appreciation. This led to her encountering the teaching of the Buddha.

Eventually, the Founder established Rissho Kosei-kai with her as Cofounder and spread the teaching to many people.

* *Sensei* is Japanese for "teacher."



Did You Know?

The Founder closed his pickles shop and opened a milk shop because the early morning and evening milk deliveries left the rest of the day free for Lotus Sutra studying and Dharma dissemination.



Foundation of Rissho Kosei-kai

Rissho Kosei-kai was established on March 5, 1938. The original name of the organization was “Dai-Nippon Rissho Kosei-kai.” In 1948, the organization was renamed “Rissho Kosei-kai.”

The organization had started with fewer than thirty members, with the headquarters at the Founder’s house, from which he also ran the milk shop.

The Founder began delivering milk at four o’clock in the morning. Later in the day, he would visit each member’s house to expound the Dharma. After delivering milk again in the evening, he would visit members who needed his guidance or mentor persons who visited him for his guidance. This was his everyday routine.

Did You Know?

“Rissho” of Rissho Kosei-kai means establishing the teaching of the true Dharma in our hearts and minds; “Kosei” means aspiring to perfect ourselves through interaction with many people, learning together, and encouraging each other.

Director's Column

A Familiar Practice of Acknowledgment and Remorse

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

IN his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano continues his discussion on the Sutra of the Method for Contemplating the Bodhisattva Universal Sage. I hope everyone will savor the message with a mind of gratitude.

In the first half of his message, the President elucidates the true meaning of acknowledgment and remorse. In the second half, he explains the attitude of the Bodhisattva Never Unworthy of Respect as a familiar example of the practice of acknowledgment and remorse, encouraging us to practice the bodhisattva way, that is, revering the buddha nature in everyone.

President Niwano indicates that acknowledgment and remorse mean deeply contemplating the true aspect of all things by liberating ourselves from delusions and attachments and seeing things as they really are. For ordinary human beings, however, seeing things as they are is not as easy as it sounds.

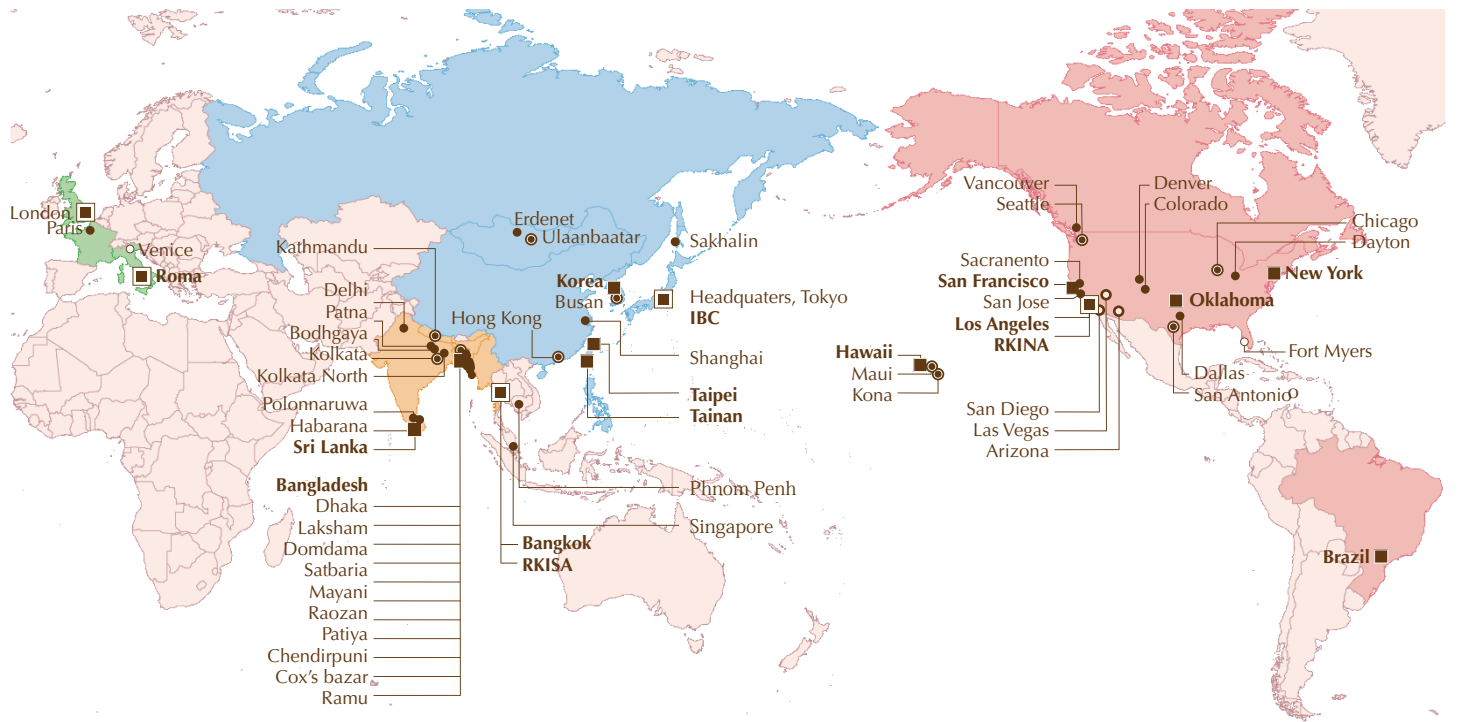
So the President shares his own experience of awakening by referring to an almanac he always carries in his bag and frequently consults. He says that whenever he looks at the almanac that explains the origins of the universe and the magnificent history of Earth, life forms, and human beings, he renews his awareness that his own life is a part of this vast expanse of history and is related to all things in the universe. In doing so, he feels better and finds his mind and body purified.

Right now, can you hear the voice of your “inner buddha” talking to you? Let us listen carefully to the voice of our hearts that the practice of revering buddha nature will enable us to hear.



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

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Rissho Kosei-kai Satbaria

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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

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

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