

Living the Lotus

1
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VOL. 196

Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Awareness of Having Been Given the Gift of Life

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

HAPPY New Year, everyone! It's now 1997 and, according to the traditional Japanese calendar, the ninth year of the Heisei era.

Speaking of beginnings, when we open the *Kyoten: Sutra Readings* to recite the Lotus Sutra, we first chant the opening verse, which begins with the following words: "The unsurpassed, profound, wondrous Dharma / Is rarely met in myriads of kalpas. / Now we see, hear, receive and embrace it."

It's often said that people are born twice. Obviously, a person experiences their first birth when they come into this world by receiving life from their parents. Then, having encountered the Buddha Dharma, they awaken to the fact that they are imbued with the great life of the Eternal Buddha and were born into this world because of a vow they had made. This is their second birth.

With their second birth, people receive and embrace the infinite life of their buddha nature. At the start of this new year, I would like you to once again engrave the knowledge of this gift on your hearts.

We who are imbued with life and sustained by the Eternal Buddha should never forget to express our gratitude. Expressing gratitude is practiced by devoting ourselves to others. Once living such a life of gratitude has become natural, each day fills us with joy. Before we realize it, we no longer have any complaints, and meet whatever problem we encounter with the thought, "OK! I'll be glad to take that on!"

Kaiso zuikan 11 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 8–9

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.



The Key Phrase of Our Time Is “Benefitting Others” — Donation, Part 1

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

The Key Points of Buddhism

Happy New Year, everyone.

At present the coronavirus has still not gone away; it continues to cause anxiety but, in the course of the pandemic, we have learned many things, haven't we? This year, let's apply that learning to the workings of wisdom and compassion and, as bodhisattvas who create peaceful homes and welcoming communities, steadfastly continue our diligent practice.

Well, then, for we who are studying the teachings of the Buddha, what teaching and diligent practice are the most important?

To quote Saicho (767–822), the founder of the Japanese Tendai school, “The ultimate form of compassion is taking unpleasant things for yourself while giving better things to other people, that is, forgetting about yourself and benefitting others.” He taught us that those who do so are bodhisattvas with such will to pursue the Way and are the treasures of the nation. “Forgetting about yourself and benefitting others” means practicing compassion by being considerate of other people and doing whatever you can to bring them peace of mind and joy—and that is the practice of donation, the most important teaching in the Buddha Way. Kukai (774–835), the founder of the Japanese Shingon school, said that, “Shakyamuni's teachings are vast and without limit, but to express them succinctly in a single phrase, they are ‘benefitting oneself and others.’” Kukai thus advises us that the key points of Buddhism are donation (benefitting others), which is one of the Six Paramitas, and becoming a buddha in your present body (benefitting oneself), just as you are.

If you think about it, when Shakyamuni renounced his home and family, his motive was to “liberate living beings, having seen how they strayed from the right path and suffered in the cycles of birth and death” (Shoko Watanabe, *Shin Shakuson den* [A new biography of Shakyamuni Buddha]). Shakyamuni cast aside his position and wealth as the prince of his own country in order to devote himself to seeking the wisdom (awakening) to liberate all people from suffering. Because of this mind of benefitting others, this practice of donation, there is the Buddha Way. I think that donation being the first of the Six Paramitas—the perfections of a bodhisattva's practice—is not unrelated to the particular circumstance of Shakyamuni's renouncing his princely birth.

In this sense as well, while many of our values are now at a turning point, let's consider what is important for us to accept from the practice of donation as well as the teaching of the Six Paramitas.

Having No Greedy Desire Is a Practice of Benefitting Others

In spite of the trend of physical and emotional distancing between people due to COVID-induced social restrictions, the practice of benefitting others in ways that transcend personal interests, regardless of whether such practice is part of one's faith or not, has attracted public attention in recent years. I think it is truly wonderful that more and more people are experiencing joy and a sense of accomplishment and purpose by using what they have for the sake of others through volunteer activities, support of local shops and businesses, and altruistic crowdfunding—thereby broadening and enriching people's minds.

We hear a lot about the coronavirus “disaster,” but if the spread of an infectious disease has led to refining the mindset of people helping each other, then the coronavirus is the cause, producing what we could call “the coronavirus effect,” and we can see the disease as something that also has a positive dimension.

In Buddhism, we are taught that donation can take the form of donating material goods, donating (sharing) the teachings with others, and donating oneself (one's physical abilities) or donating fearlessness (freeing people from anxiety or fear). However, if we rephrase these as contributing to society, helping others, and doing volunteer work, it seems we can all find a way of practicing donation and benefitting others that is well-suited to each of us.

Furthermore, Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) said, “donation means having no greedy desires.” In other words, if you have no greedy desire, whatever you do not eat or use reaches other people, which is itself a form of donation. In addition, when we think about a sustainable environment and society, we could say that the effort of every single person to practice benefitting others by having no greedy desire is a more contemporary, thought-provoking teaching.

On the other hand, we can take the point of view that as people interact with each other less frequently, they have difficulty showing the mind of compassion that takes action when someone in front of them is in trouble. Therefore, as it is all the more important to be kind to others, I would like to again reconsider, together with all of you, such matters as the mind of donation and the relationship between attachment to desires and material donations.

From *Kosei*, January 2022

Spiritual Journey

In Praying for the Happiness of Our Families, Sanghas, and the World

Ms. Eriko Kinoshita
Rissho Kosei-kai of Koganei

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Great Sacred Hall on November 15, 2021, during the ceremony celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Founder Niwano.

It is a great honor for me to have this opportunity to share my Dharma Journey on this auspicious occasion of the ceremony for the anniversary of the birth of Founder Niwano. I was born in 1978 as the oldest daughter of four siblings of the Nakai family. My grandmothers and parents were very devoted members of Rissho Kosei-kai, and I was also raised by the warm sangha members and successive ministers of the Fuchu Dharma Center in Tokyo. As a leader, I put my best effort into the fife-and-drum band with many other youth members, aiming to play at Fumon Hall, which was Rissho Kosei-kai's event hall until 2018. During that time, I strived to engage in youth group activities with the members. Looking back, that was the beginning of my faith.

In 2014, I got married to my husband, who is a member of the Koganei Dharma Center in Tokyo. At the same time, I was appointed as head of the women's group at the Dharma center, but I didn't know much about the roles and responsibilities of a head. Rev. Ikuyo Hirose, then minister of the Koganei Dharma Center, therefore often went to *tedori* with me, which is a Rissho Kosei-kai basic practice of visiting members to enhance their connection with the Dharma. Thanks to all her support, I now practice with many reliable sangha members.

I am now enjoying a cheerful and lively life with my kind husband and two daughters; one is in the first grade and the younger one is four years old. My father-in-law, who passed away last year, loved his eldest granddaughter very much and used to say to her, not even one year old at the time, "Let's build a house next door and live beside each other in the future." At the end of the year before last, just as my father-in-law

had said, we began preparing to build a new house next to my in-law's house to be completed at a good time of the year, and signed the contract. Immediately afterward, however, COVID-19 began to spread, which ended up sending shock waves through our family. A coronavirus cluster broke out at the hospital where my father-in-law was hospitalized, and he got it, too. This was in April of last year. Little was known about the virus at that point, and the treatment was still uncertain. My father-in-law's lungs had become very weak, so the infection was like a death sentence for him. I was filled with grief: "How could he get infected even though he can't move around by himself?" My husband had to handle all the calls from the hospital and public health center. The calls came in while he was at work and late at night, and my husband said that his heart rate would jump every time his phone rang.

Every day, I recited the Threefold Lotus Sutra with all my heart, praying for my father-in-law's recovery, as well as hoping that I would be able to support my husband. However, in spite of this desire, I ended up



Ms. Kinoshita delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the Great Sacred Hall.

blaming him because I felt that his handling of his parents was unsympathetic compared to my own experience of seeing my own father off. I regretted my foolishness and immediately asked Rev. Kiyo Tanji, current minister of the Koganei Dharma Center, to listen to my remorse. She said, “You should recite the Sutra of Acknowledgment and Remorse with all your heart and apologize for your self-centered mind. You should practice it immediately!” As Rev. Tanji advised me, I started the practice right away. My husband told me, “At that time, I felt as if I had no one on my side.” I acknowledged my failings, that I always forced my own values on others. Since then, my new goal has been to become a person who can always be on my husband’s side.

At the same time, youth group leaders discussed how we could get connected with our members and what we could do under the state of emergency caused by the pandemic. As a result of our discussion, we decided to collect reports from the Dharma center members on what each person took on during the first stay-at-home requests and the practice they undertook in the spirit of “This place is indeed the place of the Way,” and made a video of them. My oldest daughter, who was four years old at the time, and I worked diligently on this project, hoping to transfer the merits of our practice to my father-in-law. We wrote letters of gratitude to the hospital where my father was hospitalized, put messages of thanks to the people who collected the trash on the trash bags, and put letters of appreciation to the delivery people on the entrance door of our apartment. In May, three weeks after I started the recitation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, my father-in-law’s hospital informed us, “The second PCR test came back negative.” I was really happy, and cried with my husband when we were informed that we would be able to visit him. However, our joy was short-lived. The hospital contacted us again and said, “His heart is failing.

Please come to the hospital right now.” We rushed to the hospital, but he had already passed away from heart failure. He had been on a ventilator for almost a month, and his heart had become weak. I was really disappointed, but if the PCR test had come back positive, we wouldn’t have had the chance to see him again for the last time. Thanks to him overcoming the coronavirus, my mother-in-law and daughters could also see him again. When I think of this, I couldn’t help but feel his strong love for his family.

At the discretion of the public health center, the body was cremated beforehand, so we held the funeral service with his remains. Rev. Tanji said, “Why don’t you write Words of Guiding for the Newly Departed to your father-in-law as a last love letter?” I was very grateful for her great compassion, and I wrote Words of Guiding for the Newly Departed with gratitude to my father-in-law. He was not a talkative person, but with every word that came back to me, I felt the love of my father-in-law, who accepted all good and bad in his life. Before the funeral, I offered the Words, starting with, “Dear My Beloved Father” and recited the sutra in front of his remains. My mother-in-law sat with me and listened with tears in her eyes. It had been seven years since I was welcomed as a daughter-in-law in the Kinoshita family, and although it was a short time, I had received a lot of love from my father-in-law as if I were his real daughter. I am so happy that I married into the Kinoshita family. From now on, we will support our mother-in-law and practice filial piety to her, and we will devote ourselves to making a warm family.

In September, after my father-in-law’s funeral and the arrangements for his grave had been made, my mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer and had to undergo treatment and surgery. I was so shocked and heartbroken by this series of sorrowful events at a time when we were about to move into our new house. I did the best I could, but when I thought about

Spiritual Journey

my mother-in-law's daily struggles, I could only think negatively: "I would have done more for her if we had moved a little earlier," or "her cancer might worsen if we moved now." I cried, "Why do we have to keep suffering like this? Why now?" I also expressed this negativity in a *hoza*, and Rev. Tanji said to me, "This is the best timing! Now is the best time to repay your debt of gratitude to your mother-in-law. She believes that she will live close to her son and family soon, which gives her courage and hope for life." I burst into tears and at the same time felt like I had a weight lifted off my chest. I realized that the Buddha always leads and guides us with his great benevolence and compassion. Thanks to all the support, my mother-in-law overcame the painful treatments and now says to me, "To make the most of my prolonged life, I would like to devote myself to my grandchildren from now on." She now stops by our house on her way for a walk and gives warm and kind words to my children.

For the last year and a half, we have been through major sorrowful events; the passing of my father-in-law in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and my mother-in-law's cancer just before we moved into our new house and my daughters entered elementary school and kindergarten. If it had not been for the teachings of our founder Nikkyo Niwano, from which I always find the light that leads me to the mind of gratitude even when I'm lost in the darkness of sorrow and pain, I would not have been able to overcome the sufferings. Through the sufferings, I could deeply reflect on how grateful I am to be able to live with the teachings. I am filled with gratitude to both my grandmothers and parents, who passed down the teachings to me, and the members of the Koganei Dharma Center, who have always supported me.

This year, the women's group has taken on two practices. One is a *hoza* practice. When we had to suspend all activities last year, we were worried about

what we could do. In addition to communicating with other members through social networking services, we wrote letters, made and mailed Christmas cards, and did various other things in order to ease the anxiety of other members. In the midst of all this, I began to see how the women's group members were trying their best as mothers to cope with the changes in the world. When I saw their efforts, I thought that I would be able to take on the challenge of a Zoom *hoza* with them, so I asked Rev. Tanji for her guidance. A Zoom *hoza* is a place where we can find the "gratitude" that we can't see on our own. There, I saw the faces of group members turn from tears to smiles as they spoke, and I saw them shedding tears together as they listened to others' stories. Although I cannot physically be close to them and offer them tissues, I can still feel that our minds are connected as friends in the Dharma. Through the connection with the sangha members, when I prayed for their happiness in the mornings and evenings, I was able to receive surprising Buddha's arrangements. It was a moment when I truly felt that we can be connected by offering a prayer.

Another practice we focus on is Mame Cafe Prayer. We came up with this project because Mame Cafe, a kids' cafe that the women's group started in 2018, was no longer possible due to the effects of the pandemic. More than forty people from the community used to come to the Dharma center for Mame Cafe every month, so I struggled with the fact that I couldn't do anything to help them even though I wanted to. Therefore, I asked the sub-leader and other members of the women's group if there was anything we could do. During the discussion, they said, "Let's recite the sutra for the children! Let's pray for them!" When I imagined the women's group praying for someone in front of their home altar in each home, I thought that if we could expand this circle of prayer, the wish to reopen Mame Cafe would surely reach the Buddha! Immediately, I worked hard with the

women's group to spin each word into a prayer, hoping that we will become members that believe in a world where prayers can be understood, just like Rev. Kosho, who always sends out prayers to the world. The words became a prayer for happiness of all children, not just those suffering from poverty and isolation. It is very precious and noble that we open the Dharma center for Mame Cafe and provide meals without asking for anything in return, but I think that those of us who can sincerely pray for happiness of all invisible children are developing as humans and as practitioners. We had planned to reopen Mame Cafe in the Dharma center's parking lot this summer to provide food support, but due to the resurgence of new infections, we decided to put it off after careful discussion. However, we will never give up. We will continue to pray earnestly until the day when we can reopen Mame Cafe.

When you enter the building of the Koganei Dharma Center, there is a large picture of the Founder at the entrance. The children who come to Mame Cafe often ask, "Who is this old man?" I answer, "He is the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai." I have had this conversation many times. I am happy to think that the Dharma center that Founder Niwano established is familiar to the people of the community beyond the boundaries of the center and has become a nursery to nurture bodhisattvas. In his New Year's message this year, President Nichiko Niwano introduced the following quotation, "The father should be the role model for the child. The mother should be the seat of compassion for the child." I would like to be such a mother. Together with the members of the women's group, I will vow to make the best efforts to create a family that can be a nursery to cultivate children's minds and hearts. Last but not least, I would like to conclude my talk by making a resolution to become a person who can share the teachings with as many people as possible.



The Kinoshita family, photographed in 2018.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

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

The Threefold Lotus Sutra as the Basic Scripture

For Rissho Kosei-kai members, the Threefold Lotus Sutra is their basic scripture. It consists of the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma (the Lotus Sutra), and the Sutra of the Method for Contemplating the Bodhisattva Universal Sage. One of them, the Lotus Sutra, is

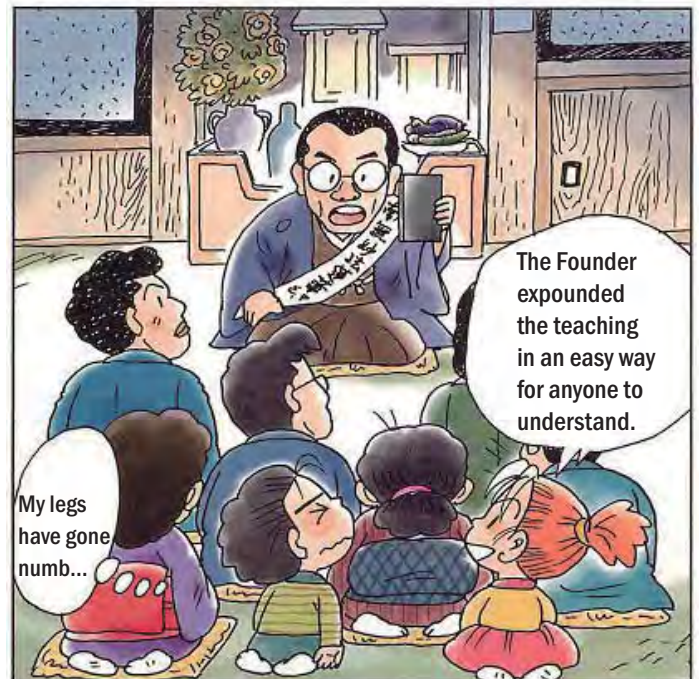
called the “king of all scriptures” and contains the essence of Shakyamuni’s teaching.

The scriptures of Buddhism expound a true way of living life. Above all, the great thing about the Lotus Sutra is that through various parables, it presents concrete ways of practicing the teaching that accord with the truth. Through his Dharma talks and books, the Founder explained such teachings in an easy-to-understand way.



Did You Know?

The Lotus Sutra is the shortened form of an English title, “The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma.” Rissho Kosei-kai interprets this title as the precious teaching that shows the way the human beings should live without being attached to delusion while living in this world.





Working Together with the Cofounder

Rissho Kosei-kai started with fewer than thirty members. In order to liberate as many people as possible, the Founder and Cofounder Myoko Sensei strove to connect people with the Dharma and mentor them by together visiting their houses almost every day.

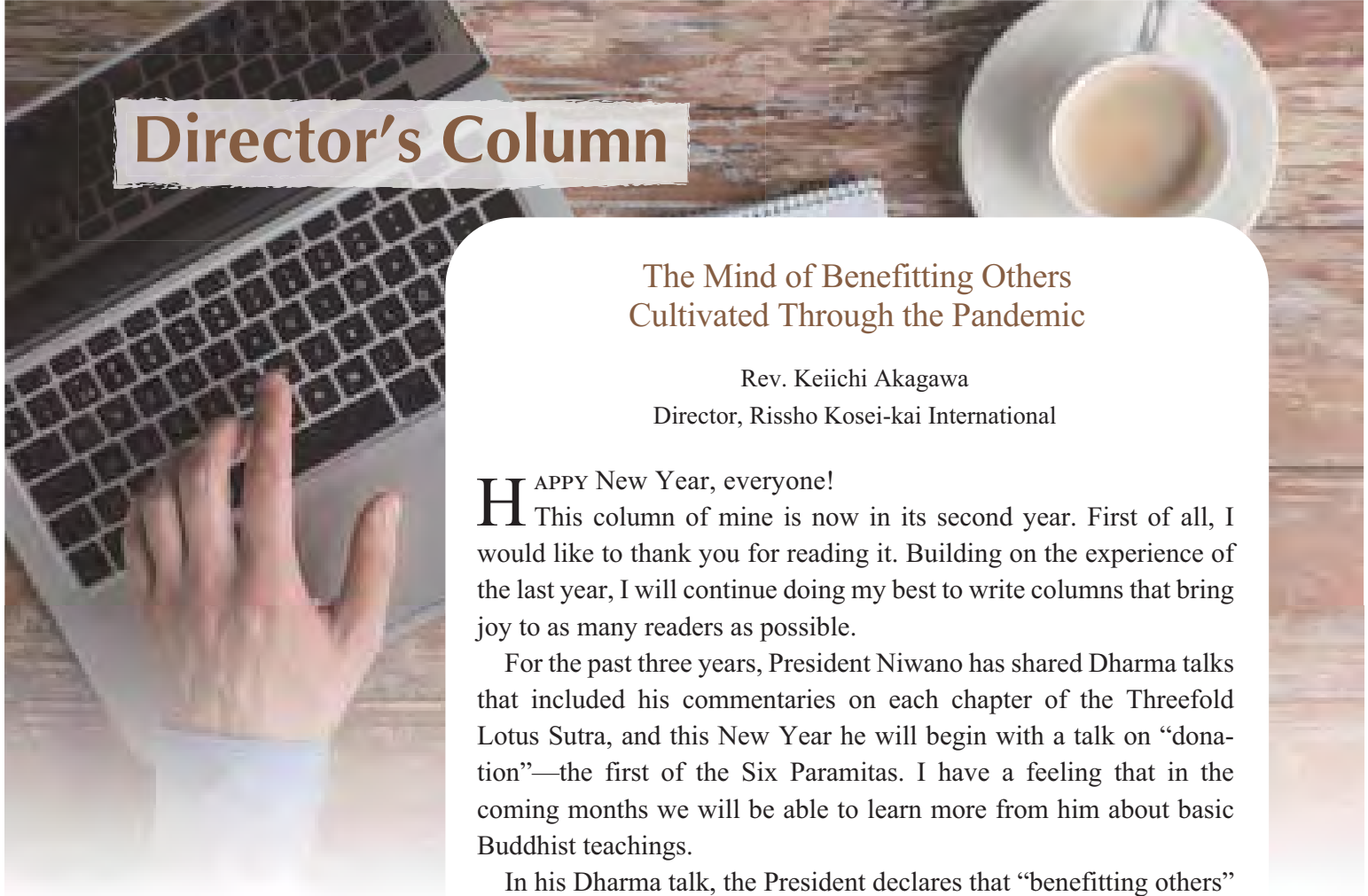
One winter day, the Founder gave Myoko Sensei a ride on his bicycle and visited members' houses to offer Dharma guidance. After visiting more than twenty houses that day and having forgotten about the time and the coldness, her face was pale and her legs were so chilled and numbed by the cold that for a short while she could neither stand nor walk.

The Founder spoke of Myoko Sensei as “an invaluable person.”



Did You Know?

The monthly membership fee in the 1930s was twenty sen, Kyoten (sutra readings) cost fifty sen and prayer beads were one yen and thirty sen. Many of the people who joined were suffering from difficult-to-treat diseases or were struggling with poverty or family problems.



Director's Column

The Mind of Benefitting Others Cultivated Through the Pandemic

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

HAPPY New Year, everyone!

This column of mine is now in its second year. First of all, I would like to thank you for reading it. Building on the experience of the last year, I will continue doing my best to write columns that bring joy to as many readers as possible.

For the past three years, President Niwano has shared Dharma talks that included his commentaries on each chapter of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, and this New Year he will begin with a talk on “donation”—the first of the Six Paramitas. I have a feeling that in the coming months we will be able to learn more from him about basic Buddhist teachings.

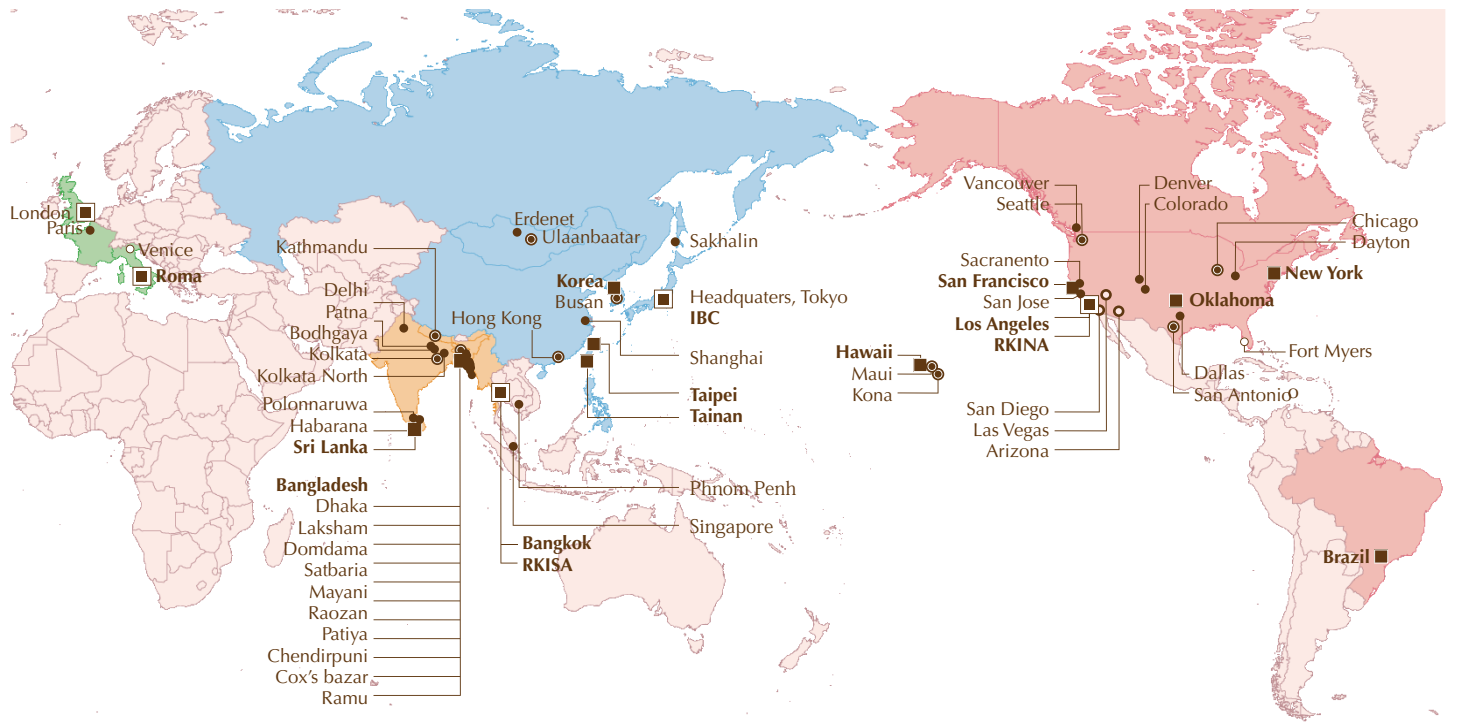
In his Dharma talk, the President declares that “benefitting others” is the key phrase of our time and explains the significance of the practice of donation. He describes the coronavirus “disaster,” which is now in its third year, in positive terms as “the coronavirus effect,” referring to the possibility that the spread of an infectious disease has led to people cultivating the desire to help each other. What types of kindness has this kindled in the world around you?

Buddhism is often referred to as “the path of insight.” This year, wouldn’t it be fantastic if all of us could more fully adopt perspectives—and learn ways of accepting things—that bring out the best in both ourselves and others, and live in an inspired way each day?





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Rissho Kosei-kai Satbaria

Village: Satbaria Bepari Para, Chandanaih, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Chendhirpuni

Village: Chendhirpuni, P.O.: Adhunogar, P.S.: Lohagara, Chittagong,
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Rissho Kosei-kai Raozan

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Laksham

Village: Dhupchor, Laksham, Comilla, Bangladesh

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