

Living the Lotus

2
2022

VOL. 197

Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Receiving the Power of the Sutra

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

ANOTHER year's midwinter sutra recitation has begun. Early in the morning darkness before first light we brave the cold and hurry to the Dharma center, and when we fervently recite the Lotus Sutra by vocalizing from deep down inside, it fills us with energy from within.

The wish of the Buddha dwells within every single word of the Lotus Sutra, which also contains the prayers of the countless people who have recited it thus far. When we become one with the wish of the Buddha and the prayers of all those people, we can receive the power of the Lotus Sutra.

The Buddha doesn't protect us by using his transcendent powers to fulfill our wishes. Whatever difficulties we face, the Buddha is always with us, and he brings out all of our potential by encouraging us, saying, "It's going to be all right because I'm watching over you," and "You have the strength to overcome this." This is how the Buddha protects us.

It's important to have faith in the fact that the Buddha is watching over us, and give everything our best.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 212–3

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.



Saving Money and Spending Money— Donation, Part 2

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Donation Is a Manifestation of the Mind of Compassion

I think that as the Ceremony for the Anniversary of Shakyamuni's Entering Nirvana (February 15) approaches and we reflect upon Shakyamuni's virtues, many people are learning something new. In that sense, when I reread the historical account of the Buddha, I am struck by Shakyamuni's words to his disciples, foretelling his nirvana. When he entrusted them with practicing the teaching and disseminating the Dharma, he did so "in order to benefit many people, bring happiness to many people, and show compassion to the people of this world." These words express his earnest wish for the happiness of everyone.

For Shakyamuni, who dedicated his life to benefitting other people, disseminating the Dharma after having attained awakening was nothing other than the practice of donation. In other words, through this donation, Shakyamuni devoted himself to compassion. His example also teaches us that one's mind of consideration and kindness takes a concrete form in social interactions only when it is actually put into practice through donation (teaching, material goods, or physical abilities). Therefore, donation is one and the same as the practice of compassion.

That said, society at large still has the strong impression that "donation" means giving money to temples or religious organizations and I feel that this idea of donation, as something financial or material, is a misunderstanding of its original meaning.

Is Accumulating Wealth Also a Buddhist Practice?

Buddhism's view of wealth, according to the Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura (1912–99), is to "explain to ordinary lay practitioners that this-worldly wealth should be respected and viewed positively, [because] the accumulation of wealth is considered one of life's desirable purposes." Even in the seemingly austere world of Buddhism, seeking a profit and saving money are not deemed activities to refrain from, but rather part of a positive way of life that can lead to a sense of purpose. The reason, according to Nakamura, is that "we save money because we aim to share it with other people and thereby contribute to their happiness and well-being."

People say that whether or not money is put to good use depends entirely on the intention of the person spending it. Money is sometimes used for bad purposes and therefore, how we spend is important. Buddhism praises people who become wealthy and give to many people, underscoring the importance of letting go of the stingy mind in order to share with others. No matter how much wealth you accumulate or money you save, “if you keep it all for yourself, it is rotting away. But by spreading it around, your money is put to good use,” which Professor Nakamura says is the original meaning of “donation.”

The Japanese word *keizai* (economy) comes from a classical Chinese phrase meaning, “to govern the nation by providing relief to the people,” so it could be that the basis of the economy is sharing accumulated wealth with impoverished and suffering people. Of course, it goes without saying that those savings have been properly and legally earned.

In the midst of the present reality, as all lives around the world are threatened by crises such as climate change imperiling the global environment, food security, and wealth disparity, we must find a way of life that rethinks human activity.

Well-known international economists are saying that from now on, when considering the world order and the future of humanity, the principle of benefitting others is key. In other words, it is essential that the spirit of benefitting, and sharing with, others takes root in everyone's minds and that government and business work together to benefit others for the purpose of building a bright future. This way of thinking harmonizes with the Buddha's voice urging us to “awaken to the teaching that ‘oneself and others are one and the same,’ which means all things are fundamentally one and, with the mind of donation, share what you have.”

In that sense as well, donation could even be called one of our most important forms of diligence. Indeed, donating (sharing) the teachings of the Buddha is fundamental to our being bodhisattvas, but so too is practicing compassion—showing consideration for the feelings of those in the midst of pain and suffering—by donating (using) our physical and mental abilities to give them peace of mind.

However, regarding monetary donations, it is necessary to carefully consider matters such as what the receiving organization does with them. What does it mean for those monetary donations to be truly utilized so that they bring merits to both oneself and others?

I wonder what all of you think about this.

From *Kosei*, February 2022

Spiritual Journey

Three *Goen* That Have Changed My Life

Mr. Ryosuke Hagiwara

A staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai International

*This Dharma Journey talk was presented on January 6, 2022,
during an online event called Transatlantic Sangha.*

GOOD morning, good afternoon, and good evening, everyone. And Happy New Year!

I am Ryosuke Hagiwara, a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai International (RKI). First of all, I'd like to express my appreciation for your kind support of the work of RKI. I was assigned to RKI in December 2019 and was in charge of the Dharma centers in North America, South America, and Europe until last November. Now I'm in charge of the Dharma centers in Mongolia and Sakhalin, Russia, and my work is supporting the members' Dharma activities. Before I began working for RKI, I was a student at Rissho Kosei-kai's seminary, called Gakurin. In May of last year, I was given the opportunity to participate in this online program and I am deeply grateful for having this opportunity today.

Founder Niwano said, "The Lotus Sutra teaches us the importance of encounters. It encourages us to make every encounter matter." We are surrounded by a variety of things, experiences, and people. In Buddhism, these various things that surround us are called "karmic conditions" or "karmic connections," which we call *goen* in Japanese. I believe that through these words, Founder Niwano was teaching us to cherish such "encounters with *goen*."

Today, I would like to share my spiritual journey. I would especially like to share the three *goen* I've met in my life and the merits and learnings I've attained through them. Lastly, I would like to talk about an important thing I've learned through my encounters with *goen*. I deeply appreciate your donation of time and kind listening that allows me to speak about my spiritual journey, even though I am short of life experience.

The first *goen* is a psychological problem. I was born into a Rissho Kosei-kai family. My father was a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai and now serves as minister of the Nerima Dharma Center in Tokyo. Until eight years ago, he had been serving as deputy director of Rissho Kosei-kai International, so I'm sure many of you know him. And my mother serves as a chapter head in the Urawa Dharma Center in Saitama Prefecture, next to Tokyo. My grandmother also played an important role in the Dharma center. However, I had not been interested in this faith until I became a university student. Since Japanese society is critical of new religions such as Rissho Kosei-kai, I felt embarrassed to have my own faith. Of course, I rarely went to the Dharma center.



Mr. Ryosuke Hagiwara gives his Dharma Journey talk online.

I was involved in Rissho Kosei-kai's activities for the first time when I worked as an intern at the Vatican Press Club in Rome when I was a university student. In Rome, there is a branch office of Kosei Publishing Company, where Mr. Hiroshi Miyahira works as chief correspondent. When I traveled to Rome in the summer of my second year of university, I met Mr. Miyahira, who asked me if I'd like to work with him at the Vatican. I was undecided because I didn't know a word of Italian, nor anything about working as a journalist. When I asked for advice from Rev. Katsutoshi Mizumo, the director of the Rome Dharma Center, he told me, "Don't ask yourself if you can or can't do it; ask if you want to do it or not." With this advice, I decided to give it a try.

While preparing for the internship, however, I began to suffer from a mental illness called obsessive-compulsive disorder. It was partially due to being unable to adjust to university life, so I became stressed and, before I knew it, I had this disease. I washed my hands over and over and checked things repeatedly, and frequently experienced emotional ups and downs. I felt as if someone was watching me, so I always suffered from anxiety and fear, thinking that something terrible might happen if I made a mistake.

The internship was held in two terms because of the visa requirements. Throughout the first term, I suffered from the illness. I talked about my feelings with Rev. Mizumo and his wife, Yuka, every evening in order to get rid of my suffering. But I was soon struck by the next rush of anxiety. Even so, Rev. and Mrs. Mizumo never gave up on me and continued to listen to me. They always supported me kindly, but my mind was occupied only with my own affairs.

I managed to finish my first term, however, and I was able to gain spiritual relief when I was back in Japan. But I soon learned that my younger sister wasn't able to go to school. One night, I saw my sister crying

alone in her room. I intuitively thought, "This is my responsibility. She has lost her energy because I was too wrapped up in myself and only thinking about my illness." I was struck by a strong sense of guilt that I had never felt before. At the same time, I thought, "I have to live strong for my sister." And I decided to try my best for the second term of internship for my sister.

As I was doing my second internship "for my sister," strangely enough, I gradually became less bothered by my own illness. So I began to think, "If I live for the good of someone else, my suffering may disappear." Under these circumstances, one day, I had the opportunity to meet Rev. Munehiro Niwano, then president of Gakurin Seminary, at the Rome Center. Three hours before our meeting, I received a call from Rev. Mizumo, telling me, "Ryosuke, I'm sure Rev. Niwano will ask you today if you'd like to take over for Mr. Miyahira. It means that you must make up your mind to leave Japan and live in Italy throughout your life. You'll have to decide before you meet him. Good luck!" I felt it unfair that I had only three hours to decide what course of life I would choose. But soon before I met him, I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be better for me to work for others first, rather than doing what I want to do? Isn't it the way for me to live a happy life?" A few hours later, I said to Rev. Niwano, "I would love to take over for Mr. Miyahira, if I can be help of others through my work." Rev. Niwano accepted my decision and told me that the first thing I should do is study the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai. He then suggested that I enroll in the Gakurin seminary. This is how I entered Gakurin and began to seriously face the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai.

I have learned the importance of living for others through my *goen*, even with my psychological issue. I also realized how wonderful the faith in the Buddha's teaching is and how excellent the sangha of Rissho Kosei-kai is. Having the disease was a painful experience, but now I think it was the Buddha's arrangement.

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I'm sure that the Buddha was always telling me, "Ryosuke, it's time to become a person who can care for the people around you, not yourself." Thanks to that illness, I was able to learn about the "bodhisattva's way of life" and realize the importance of the faith.

The second *goen* is an "unfulfilled dream." Because of the circumstances I mentioned earlier, I was admitted to the Gakurin seminary. In order to take Mr. Miyahira's place, I needed to learn Catholic theology as well. So I was very eager to go to Italy to continue my study as a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai after graduating from Gakurin.

I learned a lot at Gakurin. I studied the Lotus Sutra and Founder Niwano's teachings through both classroom learning and practice. I was also fortunate to have wonderful friends. However, at the bottom of my heart, I had an unshakable thought that I was learning at Gakurin in order to study in Rome. At that time, I devoted my entire life to make that dream come true. Before I knew, my dream of studying abroad to help others had been replaced by a means for self-realization.

When our graduation from Gakurin approached, however, there was an announcement that I would be assigned to Rissho Kosei-kai International instead of studying abroad. I felt that my effort during the past three years was all in vain. I even thought that I would quit Gakurin and go to Italy through a different career path.

The day after the announcement was made, on November 15, the anniversary of the Founder's birth, I was at the headquarters to serve at the ceremony. In the morning, I received an email from Rev. Niwano, which said, "I'm sorry that I couldn't be a help. But it is also true that it is up to you whether you make the most of this turning point or spoil it. Let's keep on practicing together."

When the ceremony had begun, I became occupied with my duties, but I was able to hear the Dharma talk by Rev. Takeshi Kawabata, the then chair of the

Board of Trustees. In his talk, he shared with us the last instruction he had received from Founder Niwano.

"It doesn't matter if you can or can't fulfill your assigned duty. What is important is to think that it is the role given by the Buddha and give your best to it with sincerity and diligence. All goes fine as long as that determination is made. The Buddha is waiting for the emergence of a person with such a determined mind. The Buddha will surely give us suitable duties, so there is no need to fret. Fulfill the duties in front of you with all your heart."

When I heard this, I didn't know what kind of emotion I was feeling, but I couldn't stop tears flowing. I felt as if Founder Niwano was speaking directly to me. After the ceremony, I ran into Rev. Kawabata, who had just finished his talk, and his secretary. The secretary introduced me to him. "He is Mr. Hagiwara. He will be assigned to Rissho Kosei-kai International next month." Then Rev. Kawabata encouraged me, saying, "Good luck to you!"

It has been three years since I was assigned to RKI. Though we are still in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, I encounter so many sangha members every day, and I'm proud to be a member of RKI. When I knew my dream of studying in Rome wouldn't come true, I was disappointed and couldn't see my future. But now, I feel a lot of joy in working as a staff member of this group. I feel joy when I participate in activities at Dharma centers all over the world, directly or online, and come into contact with my fellow members of the sangha, and when I am able to serve someone else. I thought that studying abroad was the only way to realize the kind of life I hoped for. But I now think I am living a good life, in which I can be true to myself and blessed with wonderful encounters with new *goen*.

The other day, when I met one of my relatives, we talked about Rissho Kosei-kai. He was critical of Rissho Kosei-kai and pointed out various matters in

my workplace that he thought were problems. It may be true to some extent that any workplace, including mine, has problems as part of an organization. However, I like Rissho Kosei-kai, my work, and the sangha members, and that is the reason I was working here. When my desire of studying in Rome was not fulfilled, I thought about leaving Rissho Kosei-kai. But now, I have come to believe that, from the Buddha's perspective, that experience was necessary for me to realize the most important thing in my life.

The third *goen* is "my father as a senior staff member." As I mentioned earlier, my father is a staff member of Rissho Kosei-kai. Until he became a minister, he had worked in the international field. He graduated from Gakurin exactly thirty years before me, and for the next twenty years he worked for international dissemination. Because of this background, I spent my first year of life in Frankfurt, Germany, and lived in Oxford, England, until I was six. From that time to the present, Ms. Yoko Phillips, who is a member of RKUK, and many other people have been kind to our family.

I became interested in working in the international field because I had seen my father travel around the world through his work for Rissho Kosei-kai International, and I admired my father, simply thinking he was "cool." After I joined Gakurin and became a staff member like my father, I began to feel the greatness of my father more. When I was doing my work as part of assigned duties for the students at Gakurin, I would ask myself, "What would my father think?" I was very conscious of my father's presence. At the same time, I began to feel inferior to him, thinking resignedly that I could never catch up with him, to say nothing of surpassing him.

At Gakurin, we have a privileged tradition of having a dinner at President Niwano's home before graduation. I was also there with my classmates and teachers. The President and his wife treated us to a

wonderful feast. During the dinner, a picture of Founder Niwano on the wall caught my eye. Then I came up with a thought, *What does President Niwano think of his own father, Founder Niwano?*

At the end of the dinner, when the closing remarks was about to begin, I couldn't help asking the President about it and raised my hand. I asked, "I respect my father, but I also feel inferior to him. What did you think of Founder Niwano?" Then he immediately replied, "If you don't go over your father, there will be no development." He continued, "Surpass your father, even by 0.1 percent. Surpass him through your given role. If you don't, you won't be able to contribute to humanity." I had thought that I could not exceed my father, but the President gave me an unexpected, surprising answer. What does it mean to "surpass my father"? To be honest, I still don't have a concrete answer or an image in my mind. However, after the dinner, the deputy director of Gakurin, who was present as well, told me, "The President has surpassed the Founder."

I think President Niwano gave me a homework for life, clearly telling me my life's purpose. I think he taught me to continue to follow in my father's footsteps in order to "surpass" him. My feelings toward my father and my relationship with him have changed after I became a staff member, but the *goen* with my father as a senior staff member continues to be a driving force in my work.

These are my reflections on the three *goen* I encountered in my life. I received all sorts of *goen* from the Buddha, including seemingly unfavorable ones. In chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata," these are words of the Buddha.

"Good children, the sutras expounded by the Tathagata are all for the purpose of liberating living beings. I may speak of myself. I may speak of someone else. I may appear as myself. I may appear as

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someone else. I may appear through my own deeds. I may appear through someone else's deeds."

"Myself" or "my own deeds" refers to the events or phenomena that we feel favorable or advantageous. "Someone else" or "someone else's deeds" means negative events or phenomena. The passage teaches that the Buddha is trying to bring us closer to the Buddha's enlightenment through encounters with various *goen*. The three stories I just mentioned are my experiences of realizing how to see the Buddha through the *goen*. However, even if the Buddha brought me to experience many different kinds of *goen*, I think I couldn't have understood their significance if I was alone.

My three stories about the *goen* have one thing in common. That is, "thanks to the sangha around me, I have been made aware of the significance of the *goen*." Today, when I reflect on my past experiences, the faces of people who liberated me—Rev. and Mrs. Mizumo, my sister, Rev. Munehiro Niwano, and my parents—and the words of President Niwano and Founder Niwano, come to my mind. They guided me to realize what seemed like bad *goen* were actually the necessary *goen* for me to improve as a human being. I believe that only with the support of sangha could I realize the intention of the Buddha and make the most of the *goen* that he had prepared for me.

The new year has begun. I would like to follow the path throughout this year with renewed gratitude to all sangha members who helped me to grow spiritually. With the guidance of the sangha, I will cherish the *goen* with all of you and devote myself to become your good company in your Dharma journey.

Thank you very much. Grazie mille. Muito obrigato.



Mr. Hagiwara with his father.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

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

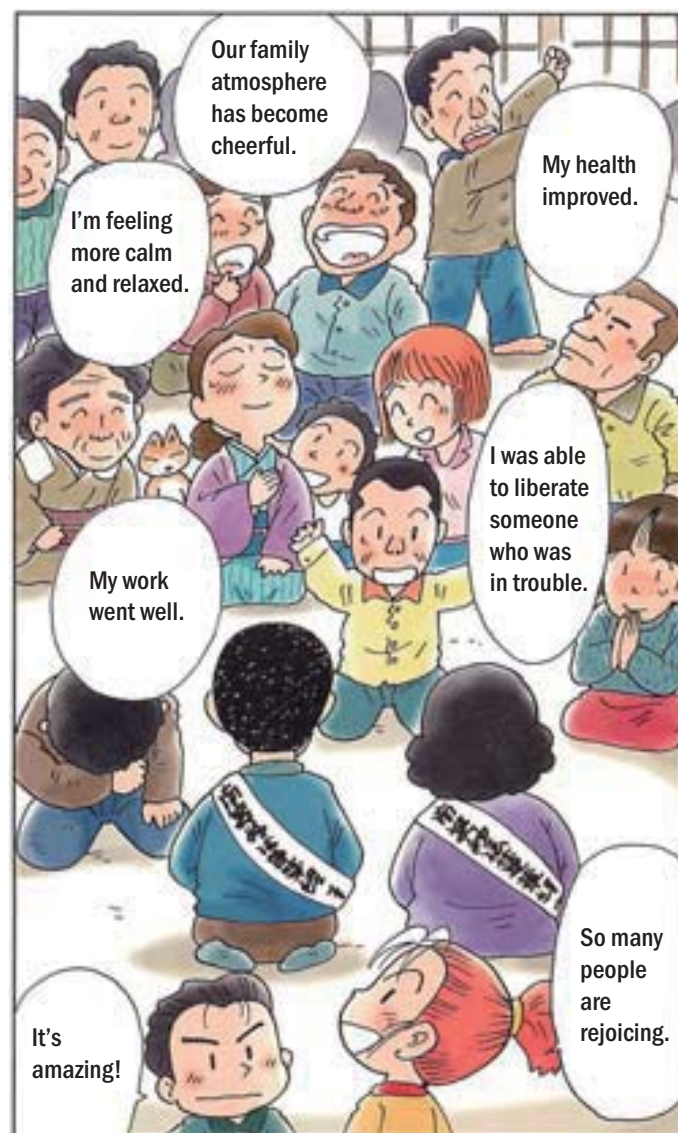
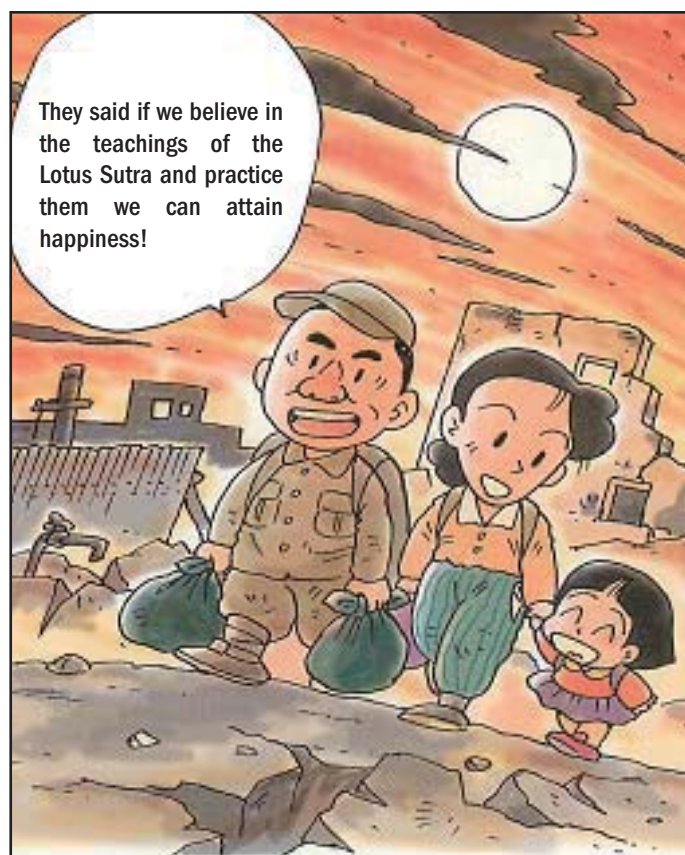
Increase of Membership

In Japanese society right after the end of the war, people lived in poverty. Many people were frustrated and irritated—some were narrow-minded and others thought negatively, and there were also many sick people.

The Founder and members of Rissho Kosei-kai expounded the teachings, telling people, “If you have faith in the Lotus Sutra and practice its teachings, you can attain happiness.” As a result, they liberated

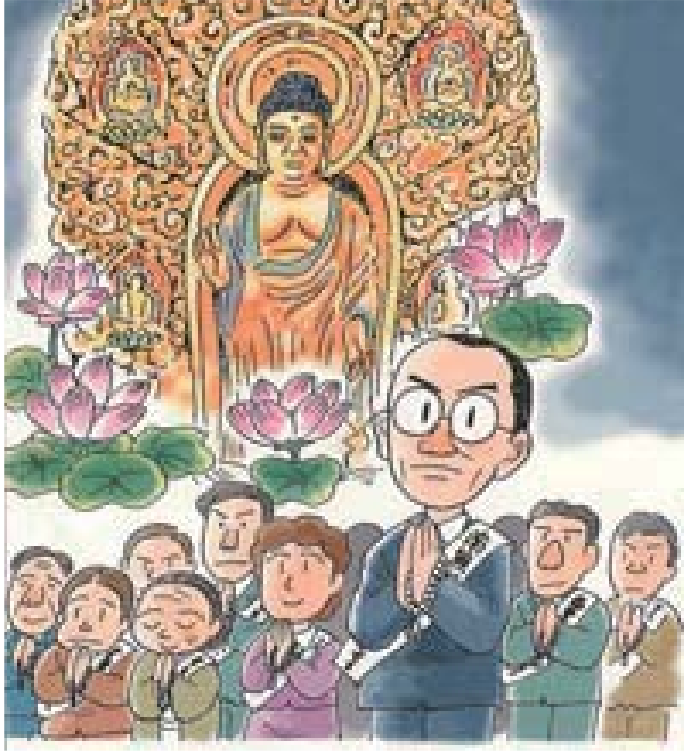
many people from suffering. Even those who were half in doubt at the beginning were gradually transformed to believe in the teachings from bottom of their hearts and minds as their views and mindset had changed after practicing them.

Those who were liberated disseminated the teachings with joy and a heart of gratitude, which gradually expanded the circle of sangha. Thus, Rissho Kosei-kai membership steadily grew.



Did You Know?

In 1945, the year the war ended, the organization had 1,300 member households. A year later, membership had grown to 10,000 member households, and 18,000 the year after that.

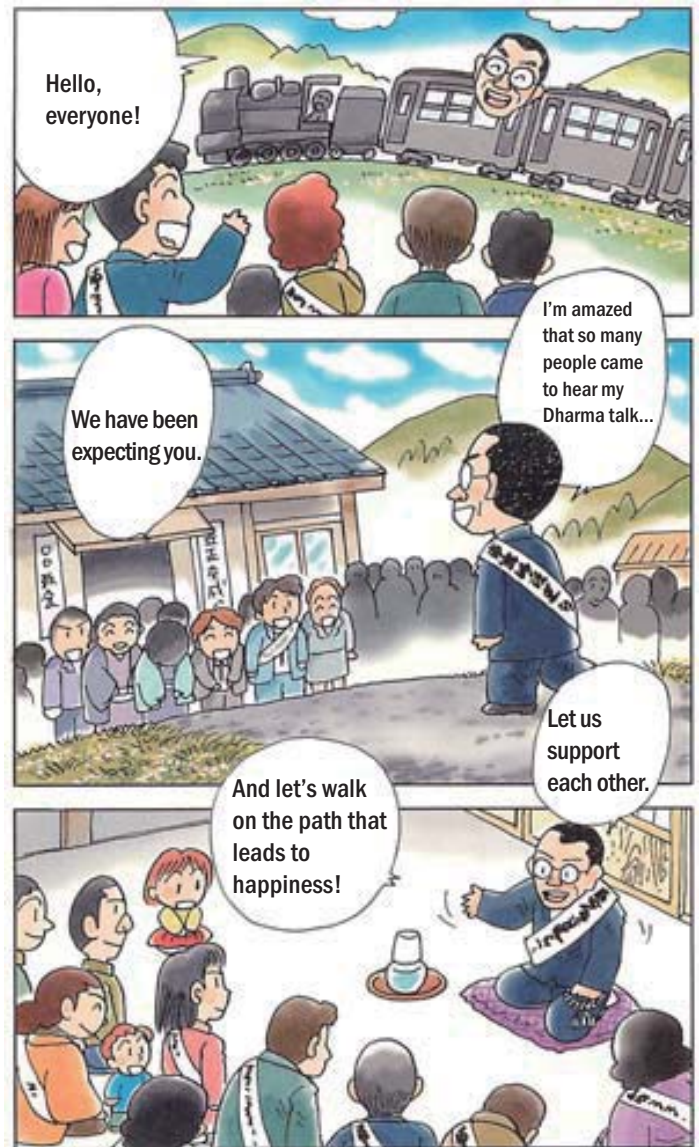


Enshrinement of the Focus of Devotion

In 1958, a year after Myoko Sensei, the Cofounder of Rissho Kosei-kai, passed away, the Founder affirmed within and without the organization that the focus of devotion for Rissho Kosei-kai members is the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One. This declaration is known as the Manifestation of the Truth.

That same year, the Founder toured the entire country for the first time, from Hokkaido in the north to Kyushu in the south, to disseminate the teachings. He visited forty-eight places throughout Japan, meeting the local members in person and expounding the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to them.

During this trip, people were attracted by the Founder's warm personality and moved by his Dharma talks. Many of them would join Rissho Kosei-kai on the spot.



Did You Know?

The two decades from the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai until the year of the Manifestation of the Truth is known as the Age of Skillful Means. In Buddhism, "skillful means" refers to the measures that lead people to the right path.



Director's Column

Donation Brings Merits to Both Self and Others

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

In his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano continues his discussion on donation—one of the Six Paramitas. Let us all read his message carefully and reflectively to deepen our understanding of donation.

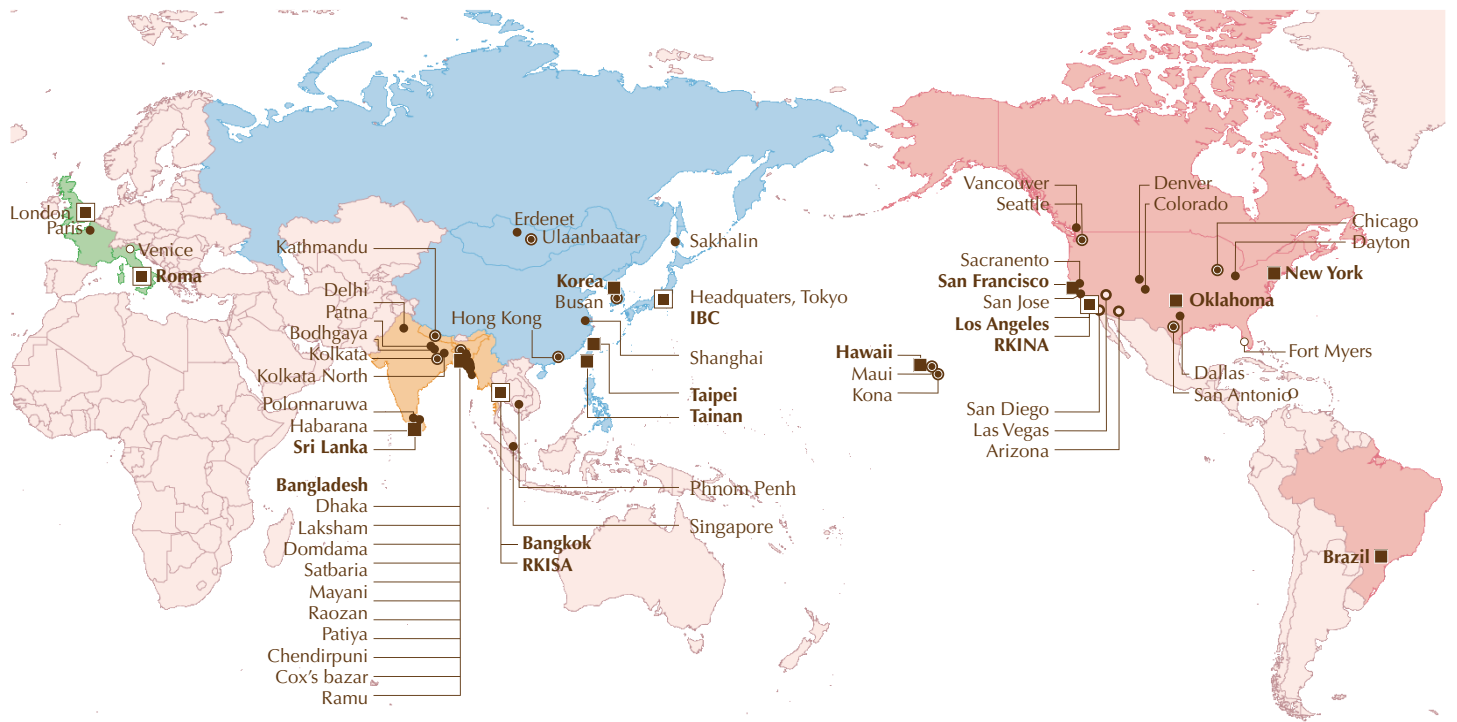
I hope we live each day thinking about what we can do to practice donation in our daily life, following Shakyamuni who devoted himself to compassion through the practice of donation. If we are willing, we have numerous opportunities to practice donation—donation (sharing) of the teachings, donation of money or material goods, and donation (use) of our physical abilities, as well as the seven types of nonmaterial donation—in all aspects of life.

President Niwano introduces a positive view of accumulating wealth by quoting the words of the Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura: “the accumulation of wealth is considered one of life’s desirable purposes” as long as “we save money . . . to share it with other people and thereby contribute to their happiness and well-being.”

Rissho Kosei-kai’s Donate-a-Meal Fund for Peace contributes part of its raised funds to other NGOs and support groups to help promote their activities. It is a good example of Rissho Kosei-kai’s long-standing spirit of cooperation and “putting others first.” That is the mindset of Rissho Kosei-kai, which I hope will be adopted by many more people in the world.



Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



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