

Living the Lotus

6
2022

VOL. 201

Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

The Power of Persuasion Is Born of Experience

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

THE Venerable Etai Yamada (1895–1994), the head priest of the Tendai Buddhist denomination, once graciously complimented me, saying “You are really impressive, Niwano! The day after you learn something you are already putting it into practice.” The reason I immediately apply what I have learned is because I follow a model—Shakyamuni Buddha. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha tells us to quickly apply what we have learned, which is why he attained buddhahood before Ananda:

“Good children, Ananda gave rise to the aspiration for Supreme Perfect Awakening at the very same time as I did. . . . Ananda always took pleasure in listening and learning, while I was always making diligent effort in practice. For this reason, I have already attained Supreme Perfect Awakening.”

A local youth group leader once asked me, “How can I learn to teach the Dharma with confidence?” I don’t think it’s that difficult. You don’t even have to learn that many things. When you are taught one thing, just try putting that single thing immediately into practice, and then you will master one thing. If you have experienced something yourself, you should be able to teach it to others with confidence. All you have to do is increase your body of experience by adding to it one at a time. The reason you are not confident is your lack of experience.

For example, even though you’ve learned that if you want to change others, you first have to change yourself, you will not fully believe this is the case until you actually try. The teachings of Buddhism will only make obvious sense to you when you put them into practice. Experience is the source of the power of persuasion.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 190–91

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.

Living the Lotus Vol. 201 (June 2022)

Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa
Editor: Jigjikhloroo Gereltuya
Copy Editor: Catherine Szolga

Living the Lotus is published monthly by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan.
TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 / FAX: +81-3-5341-1224
Email: living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.

The Mind of Compassion —Forbearance, Part 2

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Highest Form of Forbearance

“When you question / Whether someone is good or bad, / You are questioning yourself, / For that person becomes / Your mirror,” is a poem by Zen master Ryokan (1758–1831). It gives us an impression similar to the proverb, “The fault of another is a good teacher,” which means that by looking at people’s words and actions, you are reflecting on your own behavior. However, this poem seems to have an additional, deeper meaning.

In this poem, Ryokan is telling himself, “If complaints or compliments reach your ears, do not get angry or let them go to your head, just take a good long look at yourself.” After all, when someone evaluates you in that way, isn’t there something about you that makes them have such thoughts?

This poem teaches us that such self-reflection is a practice of forbearance that naturally calms any disturbance in our minds. Also, although many people, from children to adults, were fond of Ryokan, it seems that some people were not amused by that.

One day, a monk who had always been jealous of Ryokan came, drunk and covered in dirt, to call on the Zen master. Suddenly, he started beating Ryokan with his own sash. Ryokan, however, just let the monk beat him and in the evening, after the trouble had passed, saw that a steady rain was falling and murmured, “Did that monk have rain gear?”

In last month’s issue, I mentioned that forbearance is the feeling of being able to naturally accept events and people, rather than just enduring or putting up with them. Of course, we should accept and acknowledge them but, in addition, as this anecdote shows us, compassion also gives us great strength and support in practicing forbearance.

Founder Niwano said, “When people hear the teachings, gradually deepen their sense of the oneness of self and others, and form the habit of looking at things objectively, they acquire a spirit of tolerance and are able to understand other people’s positions. As a result, their minds no longer give rise to feelings of anger, hatred, and resentment. Instead, they are compassionate, feel bad for those people, and wish to help them free themselves from their mistaken ideas” (*Shinshaku hokke sanbu kyo* [The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Modern Commentary], Vol 1). This spiritual state is called “the highest form of forbearance.”

Turning Our Minds a Little toward the Teaching

We may only realize what is important in life through an event that brings suffering and sadness. Ryokan also wrote the maxim, “Forbearance is the source of merits.” I think that “merits” here indicate those things that, little by little, we come to understand and realize through painful, sad experiences. These are the merits that come from looking firmly at things that are difficult to accept and acknowledging them, so that your mental capacity gradually expands and you become able to accept things more flexibly. Also, I think that for those of us with strong egos, hardship can provide a great opportunity to realize the limitations of our thinking and to start a new life in our present lifetimes; this, too, is one of the great merits of forbearance.

That said, we aren’t giving up on being able to practice forbearance with a calm mind like the Buddha’s, are we?

Looking at Ryokan’s legacy, I feel that by simply doing such things as freeing ourselves from the past, enthusiastically taking on even one pastime, listening sincerely to people’s advice, and accepting that “it’s all up to me” when we reflect upon ourselves, we are turning our minds, even a little, toward the Buddha’s teachings in that moment and in that situation, and are thereby able to master for ourselves the mind of flexibility and forbearance—what the Lotus Sutra describes as “the robe of the Tathagata.” Speaking of the importance of the compassion that supports forbearance, from the perspective of the unity of oneself and others, we should always remember to interact with people sincerely. We do so because we inherently possess the buddha nature.

In closing, I would like to quote another one of Ryokan’s poems. “At my inn, / A spider’s thread is attached to some plants. / I was about to brush it away, / But I quickly stopped myself.” With the mind of unity between ourselves and others, we pray for the well-being of even those we dislike or hate. I believe that those prayers bring with them peace.

From *Kosei*, June 2022

Spiritual Journey

I Realized the Kindness of Others at the Bottom of My Despair

Mr. Yosuke Kikuchi
Koga Dharma Center

This Dharma Journey talk originally appeared in Japanese in the March 2022 issue of Kosei, a monthly magazine published by Kosei Publishing.

I felt something wrong with my body in the sixth year working as a system engineer at an IT company in Tokyo. It was the spring when I was twenty-five years old. While I was getting dressed in the morning, I suddenly felt like vomiting. I began to feel listless and didn't want to do anything. I took two days off from work, but I didn't feel any better. When I went to see a doctor, my problem was diagnosed as depression. My company ordered me to take a three-month leave of absence.

At the time of the diagnosis, I was a team leader assigned program development for a telecommunication company. I supervised four junior staff. Even though I worked overtime for many hours and had to instruct the junior staff, I didn't get overtime pay. Furthermore, the junior staff, who had strong academic backgrounds, received higher salaries. I felt that I was not being fairly evaluated by the company. My complaints toward the company had gradually undermined my confidence and, as a result, I was unable to sleep without the help of alcohol. This state continued for a few years until, finally, I had become mentally ill with depression.

While I was on sick leave, I spent all my time at a pachinko parlor, because I felt excited when my eyes were chasing the silver balls. When I was alone at my apartment, however, I felt so wretched about my weakness of being unable to work due to depression, and sometimes I impulsively cut my wrist with a utility knife. But I didn't think of consulting someone because my pride prevented me from showing my weakness to others. My condition didn't improve during the leave of absence, and my will to return to work faded, so I quit the company in July 2008.

After that, I was completely absorbed in playing pachinko and went so far as to borrow money from consumer finance companies. It was not until I became saddled with heavy debt and ended up falling behind in paying rent that I confessed my circumstances to my mother, Yoshii. She told me to come home soon and, in early February 2010, I returned home to Sakai-machi in Ibaraki Prefecture. I felt as if I was running away from Tokyo.

I began to live with my parents and older brother, Kazuto, who runs a vegetable farm. My mother took over my debt and I paid the rent arrears, which tentatively solved my money problem. Despite their support, I didn't feel any gratitude to my parents, nor to my brother and sister-in-law. I thought it couldn't be helped because I was sick. I stayed in my room browsing the internet or drinking or sleeping, except when I worked part-time at a family restaurant.

At that time, I was suffering from insomnia and



Mr. Kikuchi shares his Dharma Journey talk during the ceremony celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Koga Dharma Center.

was taking as many as ten kinds of medicine. In desperation, I would wash the pills down with a large amount of beer. One morning, on his way to the farm, my father, Akio, severely reprimanded me, saying, “You are not sick. You only think you are. Why don’t you help with farm work and sweat even a little?” I thought he was telling me that I was a nuisance for the family, and my loneliness became intense.

A few years later, I started living alone in Koshigaya City, Saitama Prefecture, where my primary care doctor was located. When I was eking out a living as a day laborer, I got to know Mr. A through social media. Mr. A was older than me and had the same medical history as me, so he empathized with my suffering—it had been a long time since I had felt some peace of mind. After a while, he told me that he had launched a business to manufacture organic fertilizer in Hiroshima Prefecture and asked if I could help him in ways such as producing a website for his company. As I was glad to know that he needed my help and I wanted to show my family how well I was doing with my work, I accepted his request. In late June 2014, I moved to Hiroshima to support him.

Mr. A supported me in an unfamiliar place, and he also began to urge me often to stop taking medicine for depression, saying that the side effects were strong. When I quit taking the medicine, however, I experienced symptoms such as perspiration, facial twitching, and paranoia. Consequently, I became unable to work. Mr. A began to yell at me and sometimes used violence against me. I couldn’t stand it anymore and, in late November, five months after I began working in Hiroshima, I switched off my cell phone and jumped onto the Shinkansen bullet train with no idea where to go. I next found myself checking into lodging in Osaka.

“I have no choice but to commit suicide . . . ,” I thought. A sense of despair had spread in my mind, as I had lost my ties with Mr. A, who I felt was my last hope. Though I sometimes felt like going back to my

home in Ibaraki, I didn’t have any courage to contact my family. So all I could do was turn on my phone for a few minutes every night and wait for a call I might receive from my family.

On the evening of November 28, a week after I hid myself in Osaka, at the very moment when I turned on my cell phone, it rang. It was from Rev. Yukimasa Hagiwara, then minister of the Koga Dharma Center of Rissho Kosei-kai. Being afraid that he would tell me off, I hesitatingly answered the phone. To my surprise, however, Rev. Hagiwara asked me in a calm tone, “How have you been, Yosuke? Where are you now?” As this relieved my tension, I told him all about what had happened in Hiroshima, telling him that I wouldn’t go home because I was too ashamed to show my face to my family. But Rev. Hagiwara encouraged me to go home and said, “I’m waiting for you to come back.” The instant I heard it, tears welled up in my eyes, and I decided to go home.

Three days later, when I entered the gate of the Koga Dharma Center, Rev. Hagiwara welcomed me. Next to him were my father, with a stiff expression, and my mother, who looked as if she was about to burst into tears. I felt relieved to see my parents, but at the same time, I felt so embarrassed that I wished I could disappear.

In the minister’s room, I sat side by side with my parents, facing the minister on the other side of the table. As soon as we took a seat, my father stood up and with a deep bow said, “I apologize for the trouble my son has caused you.” After the minister asked him to sit down, he looked at me and asked, “What would you like to do from now on?” I lost for words. Though he advised me to come back home, I couldn’t say yes because I didn’t think that my family would welcome such a troublemaker like me. Also, I didn’t want to feel as if I were lying on a bed of thorns at home.

I said, “I can’t go back home,” with my eyes downcast. Then the minister suggested I join in *shukuchoku toban*; a voluntary service serving as a night

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guard for the Dharma center. It was one of the practices performed by the members of men's group before the Covid-19 pandemic began. Some members stayed at the Dharma center overnight and performed sutra recitation in the morning and evening along with other duties. When my mother heard his suggestion, she said with tearful eyes, "I'm worried if my son can perform the duty satisfactorily, but we'll leave him with you," while my father kept silent. I made my mother cry and disgraced my father, which deepened my awareness of being a troublemaker for my family. At the same time, however, I thought I should respond to the expectation of the minister who didn't abandon me and provided a place I could belong to.

I had one thing I wanted to straighten out by any means before I began my duty at the Dharma center—the issue that I left Mr. A without notice. A few days later, when I asked the minister for a guidance, he said, "It's true that he took good care of you, so you should be grateful for that. Why don't you visit him with your parents and express your gratitude?" Following his advice, on December 14, I went to see Mr. A with my parents.

I apologized to Mr. A for my sudden disappearance from the workplace and expressed my gratitude to him for his support over the past six months. Mr. A put his hand on my shoulder and, with a smile on his face, told me he was glad that I could see my parents. Knowing Mr. A's concern for me, I realized how self-centered I was for having not given any thought to his caring heart.

In that moment, I became aware that I had been the same way toward my parents who had traveled with me all the way to Hiroshima. In the Shinkansen on our way back, I gathered my courage to apologize to them. My father looked at me and said, "Instead of worrying over what has been done in the past, think about what you will do from now." My mother was looking at the travel brochure in her hand and said casually, "Next time, I'd like to come to Hiroshima

for sightseeing and enjoy some delicious food." I felt the kind consideration of my parents, who didn't blame me for my past deeds and were trying not to hurt my feelings. At the same time, I was ashamed of thoughtlessly having resigned myself to being the family troublemaker, and felt truly sorry.

After I went back to the Dharma center, I joined in *shukuchoku toban* with a refreshed mind, wishing to reflect upon my way of life. I'm a second-generation member, but I had been away from the Dharma center since the time I took part in the student group activities, and so it was the first time for me to participate in *shukuchoku toban*. There were many things I didn't know, such as the manner of offering to the altar and sutra recitation. But whenever I asked sangha members for advice, they kindly responded to me. I was truly pleased and felt relieved to be back home when I was told, "Let's try our best together," by a member of the men's group who was as old as my father.

I have learned a lesson through the *shukuchoku toban* practice. One morning, I didn't wake up one of the members who had looked tired the night before, waiting until just before the morning sutra recitation began at six. He said to me, "I'm here for my Dharma practice, so you don't need to worry about me."

When I heard his words, my past attitude as a company team leader came into my mind. I didn't let the



Mr. Kikuchi with his fellow sangha members. At right is Rev. Takashi Oya, the present minister of the Koga Dharma Center.

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junior staff do the difficult work because I thought I could do it more quickly. But I realized that by doing so I had deprived them of their opportunities to gain experience, only to increase my own work and build up stress. Here again, I became aware that I had been self-centered.

From January 2017, I rented an apartment in Koga City, Ibaraki Prefecture, and continued to join in *shukuchoku toban* while working at a bread factory. During that time, Mr. Koichiro Ezawa, who was a member of *shukuchoku toban*, asked me if I would work for his gardening company. I hoped to, but I was worried if I could do the job of landscape gardening when I was still suffering from depression.

When I asked the minister for guidance, he said, “Not taking action disturbed from an anxiety for the future is called *saikaku*, or the state of mind controlled by self-centered ego. Not taking action by clinging to the past is called *shuchaku*, or the state of mind shackled by attachment. Kosei-kai teaches the importance of focusing on the present moment.” This guidance reminded me of my earlier resolve to change myself, and I decided to venture into an unknown world.

So I decided to take the job. After I finished *shukuchoku toban* at six thirty each morning, I would leave for Mr. Ezawa’s company in the neighboring town. My duties included mowing weeds in the park and cutting off branches from roadside trees. Every evening, I would be completely exhausted from the work. However, when I received words of appreciation, such as “Thank you for keeping the garden so beautiful,” my fatigue would blow away, even when I had worked under the blazing summer sun. Moreover, I used my whole body for this job, so I came to sleep well, enjoy meals, and depend less on medication.

During this time, I was also entrusted with editing video for the Dharma center. These recordings of Dharma center ceremonies, events, and topics for the

sangha were received favorably by sangha members, which I found very rewarding.

When I became aware that I was serving others through the gardening job and the duties of the Dharma center, my subservient mind gradually disappeared. What’s more, motivation to work as a system engineer again began to grow. Last August, I started working as a freelance system engineer on weekdays and helped with the gardening on weekends.

In December of last year, under the Covid-19 pandemic, the Koga Dharma Center set up a strategic digitization team and I took charge of it. I’ve started online streaming of ceremonies and events held at the Dharma center for members.

I perceive both my role at the Dharma center and my job as a system engineer as opportunities to practice the bodhisattva way and repay my debt of gratitude to all who have supported me. It is because my parents, the sangha members, and the many other people I have become acquainted with have enabled me to realize that even a person like me can be of service to others. With this joy always in my mind, I hope I will continue to give my best to both my Dharma practice and my work.



Mr. Kikuchi working in a garden.

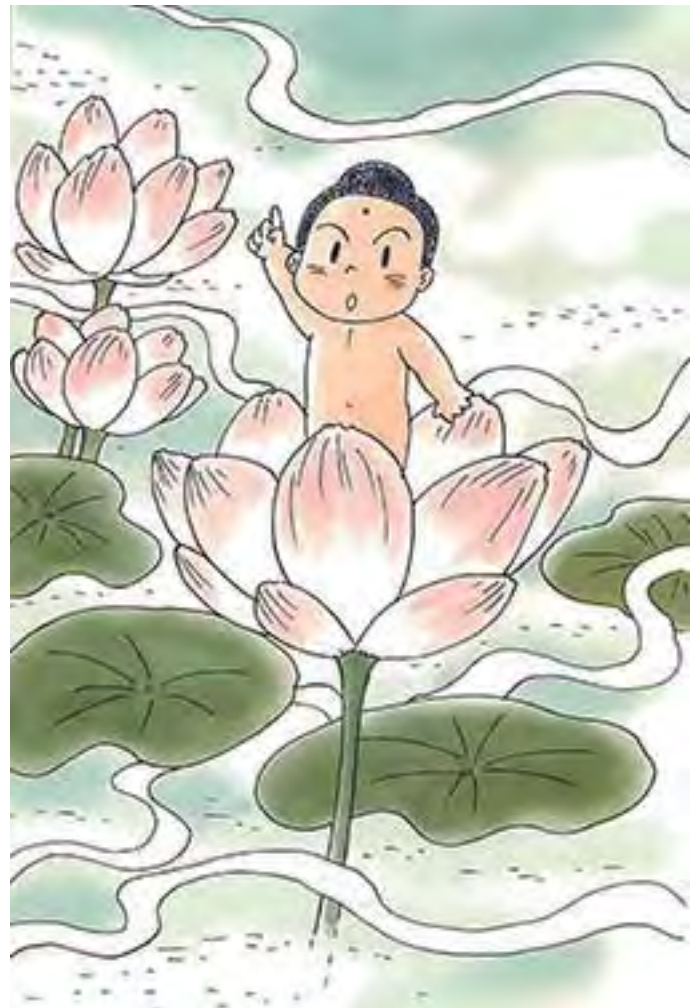
An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

The Birth of Shakyamuni Buddha as a Prince

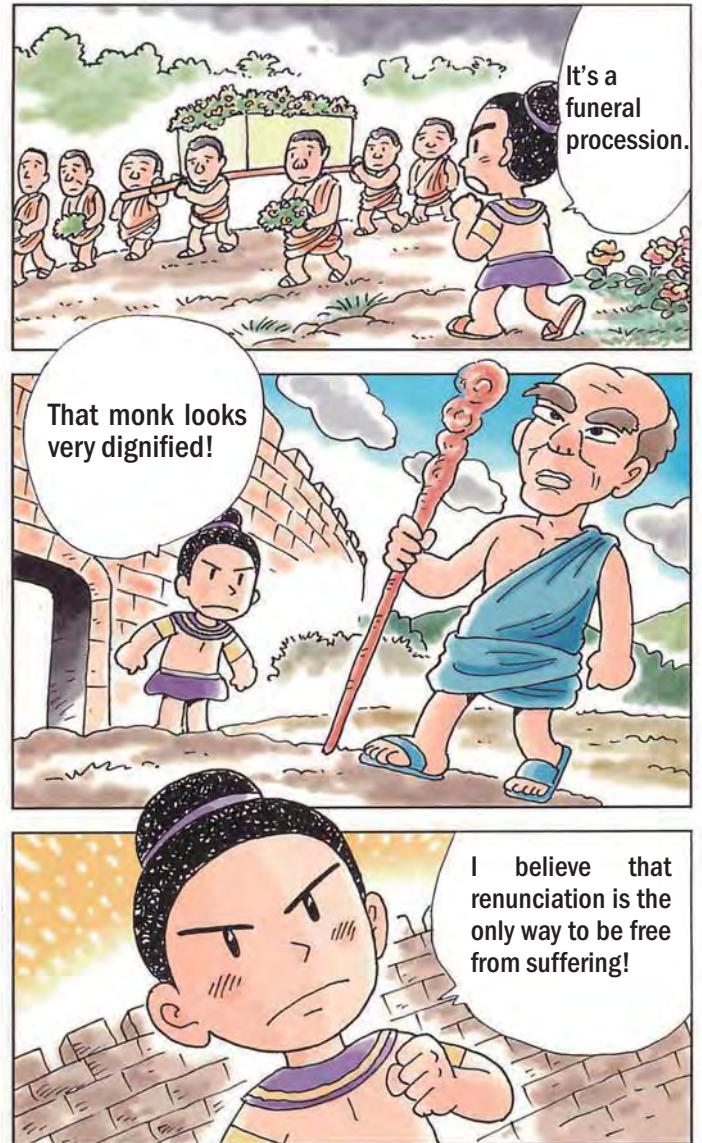
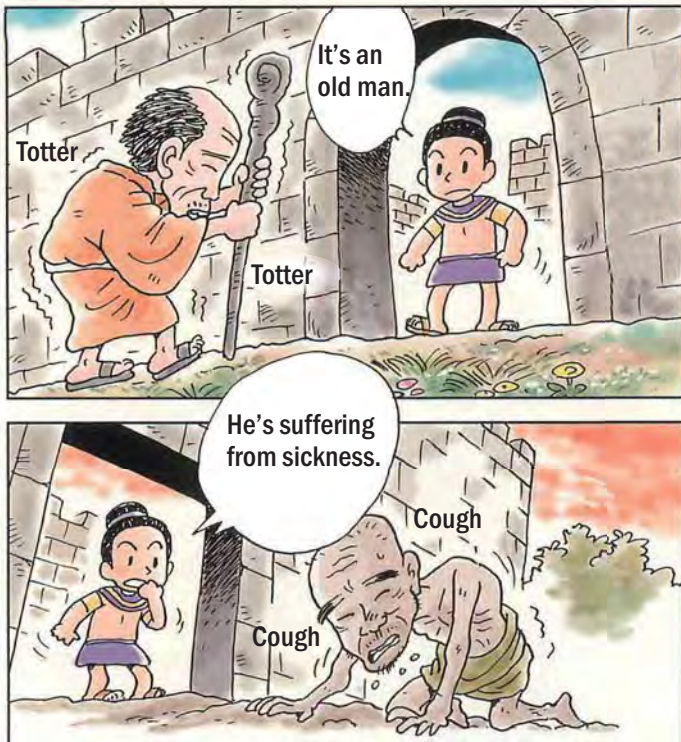
Shakyamuni Buddha was born as a prince of the Shakya clan at Lumbini in ancient India (currently in southern plains of Nepal) about 2,500 years ago.

It is said that his mother, Queen Maya, knew she was pregnant with Shakyamuni Buddha when she dreamed that a white elephant with six tusks descended from heaven and entered her belly. However, since Queen Maya passed away seven days after Shakyamuni Buddha's birth, he was raised by her younger sister. Legend has it that upon his birth the infant Buddha took seven steps in each of the cardinal directions and declared, "I alone am honored, in heaven and on earth."



Did You Know?

Shakyamuni means "sage of the Shakya clan." The Japanese epithet *Shakuson* is an abbreviation of *Shakamuni seson* ("Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One"). It is said that Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, was born in 463 BCE (or possibly 566 or 624 BCE) and passed away at the age of eighty.



Determination to Renounce the Secular Life

When Shakyamuni was a prince, he saw an old man as he left from the eastern gate of the palace for an outing to a park. On another day, he met a sick person as he left by the southern gate. On his next outing, he noticed a funeral procession when he left from the western gate. Another day, he met a monk when leaving through the northern gate. Moved by the monk's pleasant attitude, he decided to renounce secular life and become a monk. Human beings eventually get old, become sick, and finally die. How can we be liberated from these sufferings? This story, called "Outings from the Four Gates," shows Shakyamuni renouncing secular life in order to seek a right path for the liberation of all people.

Did You Know?

At midnight, Shakyamuni mounted his favorite horse, Kanthaka, led by his servant, Chandaka, and rode forth from the palace for renunciation. Coming to the border at dawn, he said farewell to them. It is said that when Kanthaka and Chandaka came back to the palace, Kanthaka passed away because of the deep sorrow.



Director's Column

The Highest Form of Forbearance

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

WE are already halfway through the year, though I feel as if the new year has just started. Time seems to be flying by quickly these days.

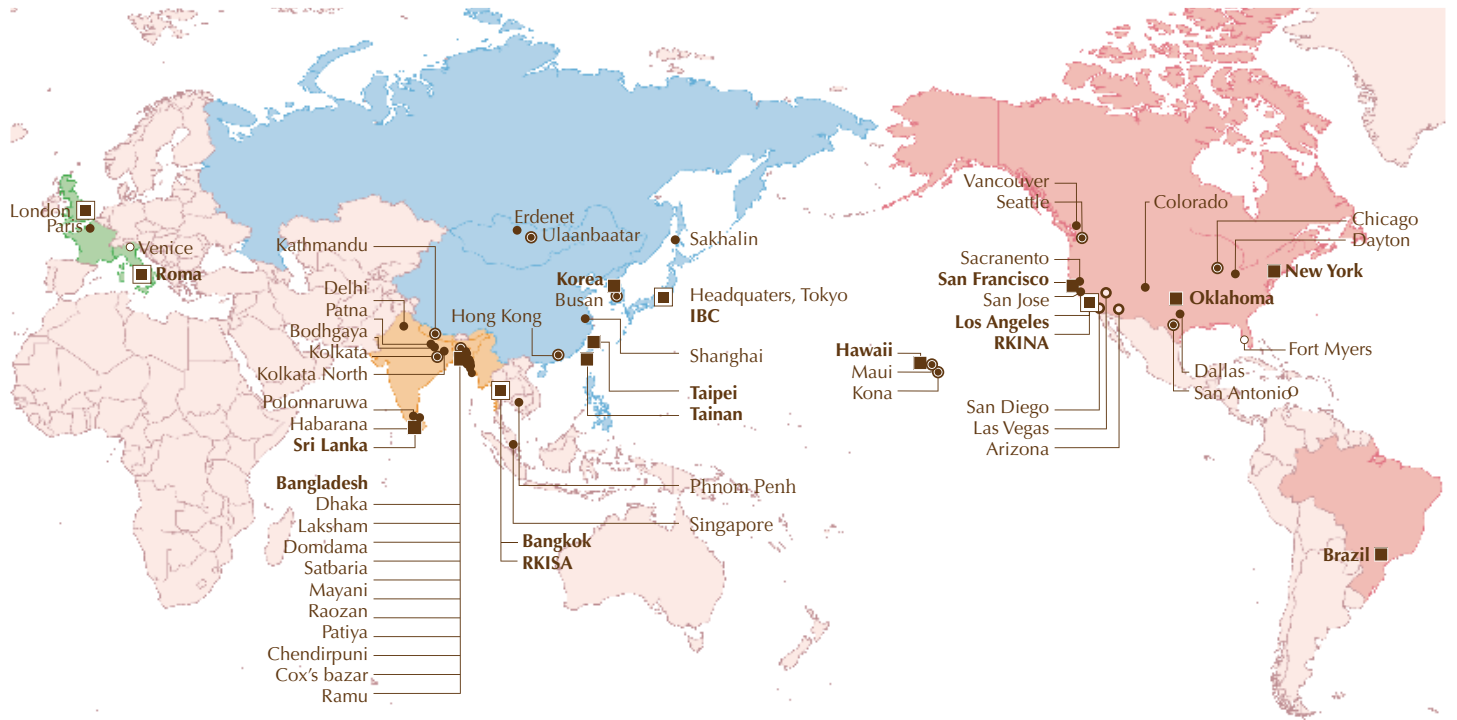
In his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano allows us to deepen our understanding of forbearance. I was particularly impressed by his account of the highest form of forbearance. Founder Nikkyo Niwano wrote in one of his books that by hearing the teachings and deepening your sense of unity with others, your mind gives rise to compassion. I believe that many people who have been practicing Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings have already experienced the state of mind that the Founder mentioned. I believe this sense of unity with others is what we should aim for—the mind of accepting and acknowledging any kind of situation.

Looking at the other side of the coin, we may be making value judgments by looking only at the surface of things we come into contact with, separating ourselves from them or making a distinction between “good” and “evil.” When we are engaged in the Buddhist practice, our minds—which as ordinary beings are usually attached to false self-centered views—will gradually be enlightened to the bodhisattva path of “seeking the highest awakening” and “teaching and transforming living beings far and wide.” The president's message teaches us that the springboard for the awakening inheres in the practice of the Buddha Way.



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

Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Hawaii

2280 Auhuhu Street, Pearl City, HI 96782, USA
 TEL: 1-808-455-3212 FAX: 1-808-455-4633
 Email: sangha@rkhawaii.org URL: <http://www.rkhawaii.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Maui Dharma Center

1809 Nani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793, USA
 TEL: 1-808-242-6175 FAX: 1-808-244-4625

Rissho Kosei-kai Kona Dharma Center

73-4592 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740, USA
 TEL: 1-808-325-0015 FAX: 1-808-333-5537

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

2707 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033, USA
 TEL: 1-323-269-4741 FAX: 1-323-269-4567
 Email: rk-la@sbcglobal.net URL: <http://www.rkina.org/losangeles.html>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Los Angeles

- Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Arizona**
- Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Colorado**
- Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Diego**
- Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Las Vegas**
- Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of Dallas**

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

(Address) 1031 Valencia Way, Pacifica, CA 94044, USA
 (Mail) POBox 778, Pacifica, CA 94044, USA
 TEL: 1-650-359-6951 Email: lotusbuddhist@gmail.com
 URL: <https://sf-buddhism.org/>

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco

- Rissho Kosei-kai of Sacramento**
- Rissho Kosei-kai of San Jose**

Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

320 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016, USA
 TEL: 1-212-867-5677 Email: rkny39@gmail.com URL: <http://rk-ny.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Chicago

1 West Euclid Ave., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056, USA
 TEL: 1-773-842-5654
 Email: murakami4838@aol.com URL: <http://rkchi.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Fort Myers

URL: <http://www.rkftmyersbuddhism.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Oklahoma

(Address) 2745 N.W. 40th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73112, USA
 (Mail) POBox 57138, Oklahoma City, OK 73157, USA
 TEL: 1-405-943-5030 FAX: 1-405-943-5303
 Email: rkokdc@gmail.com URL: <http://www.rkok-dharmacenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma Center of Dayton

617 Kling Drive, Dayton, OH 45419, USA
 URL: <http://www.rkina-dayton.com>

The Buddhist Center Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (RKINA)

2707 East First St., Suite #1, Los Angeles, CA 90033, USA
 TEL: 1-323-262-4430 FAX: 1-323-269-4567
 Email: info@rkina.org
 URL: <https://www.buddhistcenter-rkina.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Vancouver

Please contact RKINA

Rissho Kosei-kai International

Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center of San Antonio

(Address) 6083 Babcock Road, San Antonio, TX 78240, USA
 (Mail) POBox 692148, San Antonio, TX 78249, USA
 TEL: 1-210-558-4430 FAX: 1-210-696-7745
 Email: dharmasanantonio@gmail.com
 URL: <http://rksabuddhistcenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai of Seattle's Buddhist Learning Center

28621 Pacific Highway South, Federal Way, WA 98003, USA
 TEL: 1-253-945-0024 Email: rkseattlewashington@gmail.com
 URL: <http://buddhistlearningcenter.org>

Rissho Kosei-kai do Brasil

Rua Dr. José Estefno 40, Vila Mariana, São Paulo-SP, CEP 04116-060, Brasil
 TEL: 55-11-5549-4446, 55-11-5573-8377
 Email: risho@rkk.org.br URL: <http://www.rkk.org.br>

在家佛教韓國立正佼成會 Korean Rissho Kosei-kai
〒 04420 大韓民國 SEOUL 特別市龍山區漢南大路 8 路 6-3
6-3, 8 gil Hannamdaero Yongsan gu, Seoul, 04420, Republic of Korea
TEL: 82-2-796-5571 FAX: 82-2-796-1696

**在家佛教韓國立正佼成會釜山支部
Korean Rissho Kosei-kai of Busan**
〒 48460 大韓民國釜山廣域市南區水營路 174, 3F
3F, 174 Suyoung ro, Nam gu, Busan, 48460, Republic of Korea
TEL: 82-51-643-5571 FAX: 82-51-643-5572

社團法人 在家佛教立正佼成會 Rissho Kosei-kai of Taipei
台灣台北市中正區衡陽路 10 號富群資訊大廈 4 樓
4F, No. 10, Hengyang Road, Jhongheng District, Taipei City 100, Taiwan
TEL: 886-2-2381-1632, 886-2-2381-1633 FAX: 886-2-2331-3433

台南市在家佛教立正佼成會 Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan
台灣台南市東區崇明 23 街 45 號
No. 45, Chongming 23rd Street, East District, Tainan City 701, Taiwan
TEL: 886-6-289-1478 FAX: 886-6-289-1488
Email: koseikaitainan@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei-kai South Asia Division

Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkok, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8141 FAX: 66-2-716-8218

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kathmandu
Ward No. 3, Jhamsikhel, Sanepa-1, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Nepal

Rissho Kosei-kai Society of Kolkata
89 Srirampur Road (VIP), Garia, Kolkata 700084, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Kolkata North
AE/D/12 Arjunpur East, Teghoria, Kolkata 700059,
West Bengal, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya Dharma Center
Ambedkar Nagar, West Police Line Road, Rampur, Gaya-823001,
Bihar, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Patna Dharma Center
Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Society of Kolkata

Rissho Kosei-kai of Central Delhi
77 Basement D.D.A. Site No. 1, New Rajinder Nagar,
New Delhi 110060, India

Rissho Kosei-kai of Singapore
Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai International

Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh
W.C. 73, Toul Sampaov Village, Sangkat Toul Sangke, Khan Reouseykeo,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

RKISA Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia
Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkok, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8141 FAX: 66-2-716-8218

Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok
Thai Rissho Friendship Foundation
201 Soi 15/1, Praram 9 Road, Bangkok, Huaykhwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
TEL: 66-2-716-8216 FAX: 66-2-716-8218 Email: info.thairissho@gmail.com

Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation
No. 628-A, Station Road, Hunupitiya, Wattala, Sri Lanka
TEL: 94-11-2982406 FAX: 94-11-2982405

Rissho Kosei-kai of Polonnaruwa
Please contact Rissho Kosei Dhamma Foundation

Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh
85/A Chanmari Road, Lalkhan Bazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh
TEL: 880-2-41360470

Rissho Kosei-kai Mayani
Mayani Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Damdama
Damdama Barua Para, Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Satbaria
Village: Satbaria Bepari Para, Chandanaih, Chittagong, Bangladesh

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Raozan
Dakkhin Para, Ramzan Ali Hat, Raozan, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Laksham
Village: Dhupchor, Laksham, Comilla, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Dhaka 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

Rissho Kosei-kai Patiya
Rissho Kosei-kai Ramu
Rissho Kosei-kai Aburkhill

Buddiyskiy khram "Lotos"
4 Gruzinski Alley, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk 693005, Russia
TEL: 7-4242-77-05-14

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hong Kong
Flat D, 5/F, Kiu Hing Mansion, 14 King's Road, North Point, Hong Kong, China

Rissho Kosei-kai Friends in Shanghai
Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai International

Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar
(Address) 15F Express Tower, Peace avenue, khoroo-1, Chingeltei district,
Ulaanbaatar 15160, Mongolia
(Mail) POBox 1364, Ulaanbaatar-15160, Mongolia
TEL: 976-70006960 Email: rkkmongolia@yahoo.co.jp

Rissho Kosei-kai of Erdenet
Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai International

Rissho Kosei-kai di Roma
Via Torino, 29, 00184 Roma, Italia
TEL/FAX: 39-06-48913949 Email: roma@rk-euro.org

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai di Rome

Rissho Kosei-kai of Paris
Rissho Kosei-kai of Venezia

Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK
29 Ashbourne Road, London W5 3ED, UK
TEL: 44-20-8933-3247 Email: info@rkuk.org URL: <https://www.rkuk.org>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/rkuk.official>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/rkuk_official
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/rkuk_official

Rissho Kosei-kai International Buddhist Congregation (IBC)
166-8537 東京都杉並区和田 2-7-1 普門メディアセンター 3F
Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan
TEL: 03-5341-1230 FAX: 03-5341-1224 URL: <http://www.ibt-rk.org>