

# Living the Lotus

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*Buddhism in Everyday Life*



## Founder's Reflections

### A Diary Is Your Personal History

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

I HAVE been in the habit of keeping a daily journal, recording all the events of the day—what time I got up, who I've met, what happened, and so forth.

If you continually keep a journal from a young age, you'll notice that over time you will have gradually come to see the world and yourself more objectively.

Looking back at my diary, there were times when I desperately struggled with challenges so daunting that I doubted I could overcome them. But, I've realized that it was those times in particular that offered me the greatest opportunities to grow. Even if your diary contains only brief entries, rereading it evokes memories of such times, making it an irreplaceable personal history.

What's most important, I think, is that through your diary you'll come to fully understand that not a single thing that has happened in your entire life has been in vain. That's why you won't be able to stop yourself from adding the words "I'm truly grateful for everything" to the end of your diary entry on the day you recognize this.

*Kaiso zuikan* 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 282–83

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.



## Living Our Daily Lives as Expected— Diligence, Part 1

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Risho Kosei-kai

### What Is Diligence?

I often say, “Diligent, diligent, until I die, I must be diligent. And if I receive another lifetime, I must be diligent again.” For a human being, there is no such thing as being perfect, so I admonish myself with these words, which remind me of my aspiration to make progress and improve myself.

However, if you simply hear this without understanding the meaning of diligence, you may feel that extraordinary resolution is required in order to practice diligence. Some people may suppose they are unable to practice diligence and shrink back from it.

Well, then, what exactly does diligence refer to?

In Buddhism, diligence is defined as “single-mindedly applying oneself to practicing and perfecting the Buddha Way.” Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) said that diligence is “never ceasing in one’s efforts to wholeheartedly perform various good deeds for the sake of other people.” At the same time, “never ceasing” also sounds nearly impossible to do.

This reminds me of Founder Niwano’s words: “I hope we are all people who can naturally do what is expected of us.” For we lay Buddhists, that means never ceasing to live our daily lives with the attitude that at any time and in any place, “this is the place of the Way.” And in that case, diligence is not so much a practice of relentlessly driving yourself onward but rather, of being considerate of others in the course of your daily life and being mindful of speaking and acting in ways that will give those around you peace of mind. In other words, it is nothing more than living an ordinary life and doing what is expected of you as a person of faith.

The Buddhist scholar Shobun Kubota (1896–1986) used the expression “reading the Lotus Sutra twenty-four hours a day” to express the importance of “reading the teachings of the Buddha with our whole being,” while also showing us what a blessing it is to be able to put them into practice by living the Dharma in the course of our daily lives. Therefore, diligence is precisely what we are expected to do, naturally, as we live one day after another.

## Awakening and Diligence Are One and the Same

To cite a well-known anecdote, when the visually impaired Aniruddha was patching his robe, he muttered, “Could someone thread the needle for me?” and Shakyamuni replied, “Yes, I will, as you will help me accumulate merits,” and threaded the needle for him.

Seeing that his disciple was filled with surprise and awe by the words and actions of his teacher, who had already attained the highest level of awakening, Shakyamuni said, “Aniruddha, there is no limit to how much consideration we can show to other people and I, more than anyone, seek happiness.” He gently explained to Aniruddha that regardless of one’s standing or degree of learning, there is happiness in perfecting one’s mind through the practice of benefitting others, and that continuing to do so is diligence.

This anecdote, like the aphorism “Practice and awakening are one,” shows us that being able to perform faith-based practices is proof of awakening, and in awakening there is the joy of diligence. Rather than seeing diligence as the means of awakening, I feel the joy of the faith in interpreting diligence to mean that every time we practice benefitting others, we are shining forth our buddha nature and, at the same time, deepening our awareness of our own buddha nature.

However, even though we know the importance of practicing what is expected of us as people of faith, at times we are unable to do so, defeated by our self-centered desires or a lazy mind.

At such times, the thought “this won’t do” crosses many people’s minds, doesn’t it? If you have this thought, even for a moment, that’s fine. Your mind cannot reset what it does not have, but you can go back to what you do already possess as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

The switch that resets the lazy mind to the diligent mind is the self-reflection of saying “this won’t do,” and the moment that your mind reaches that thought, it should return to the true, original mind of self-improvement, just like when you first aspired to live your life according to the teachings of the Buddha.

In that sense as well, the aspiration to vow to lead such a life is important. Our daily diligence and practices of benefitting others, which are supported by that aspiration, will eventually lead to world peace.

From Kosei, July 2022

# Spiritual Journey

## Make Challenges the Source of Your Growth

Ms. Rongzi Chen  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the ceremony commemorating the anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha's Birth at the Tainan Dharma Center on April 8, 2022.*

I WAS born in Tainan City in 1960 as my family's second daughter, one of four children that included my older sister and two younger brothers. After growing up, I lived with my parents while working at a bank. However, I eventually left the bank due to the impact of its merger with another bank. Following that, I focused on caring for my mother at home after she suffered a stroke. My mother passed away in 2010 and my father in 2016, and I have lived alone ever since. I am a second-generation Rissho Kosei-kai member and currently serve in the role of the Dharma center's accountant.

In 1992, my father joined Rissho Kosei-kai through the encouragement of an old school friend, and he received the Gohonzon (a statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, the focus of devotion) at the Tokyo headquarters in May 1997. He was such a devoted member that he rode his scooter to the Dharma center every day. However, my father, who was over eighty years old, declined rapidly after my mother's passing, so I began driving him to and from the Dharma center. I also started making daily offerings to the family altar and performing sutra recitation in place of my aging father. Although I dropped my father off at the Dharma center and picked him up every day for six years until he passed away, I never once thought of entering the center.

After my father's death, Ms. Shufen Wang, who was then serving as the Dharma center's treasurer, guided me by giving me my father's posthumous name, and with her encouragement I myself became a member of Rissho Kosei-kai in September 2016. When I first joined, I rarely went to the Dharma center. I only participated in sutra recitation on those

days I was asked to serve at the Dharma center. However, in 2017, at Ms. Wang's recommendation, I was assigned to serve as an accountant, and I began going to the Dharma center more often. When I was first given this role, I thought all I had to do was write the receipts correctly. However, in 2019 I attended a seminar for board members of affiliated overseas entities at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters with then-chairperson Minhuei Wu, which completely changed my perspective on the role. During that seminar, I learned that I was already connected to the teachings through the issuance of receipts and that through me, the Buddha and the center's members were also connected. I had never thought that serving as an accountant could have such a precious significance.

Sometime before this, I had a strange experience when I felt the presence of the Buddha for the first time. Prior to the first Ullambana ceremony following my father's passing, the wife of my oldest little brother



*Ms. Chen after pouring ama-cha on the Buddha statue at the celebration of the Buddha's birthday.*

saw him in a dream. My father was wearing a suit with a Rissho Kosei-kai sash. He remained still and silent but seemed to be asking for something. She thought that my father had appeared to her in a dream because he wanted his sash. Hearing this, I recalled that I didn't place his sash in his coffin. In order to fulfill his wish, I had it burned at the ceremony for burning sacred objects, which took place at the Dharma center after the Ullambana ceremony.

In May 2019, I caused a car accident while driving. I was attempting to make a left turn at an intersection not more than a few minutes from my home. The other person involved in the accident had physical and intellectual disabilities. I deeply regretted causing the accident, thinking that I had brought serious injury to her, but the medical examination results showed that she did not need to be hospitalized or even return to the hospital for a follow-up, and would only need to recuperate at home. I was very relieved. And I truly felt the Buddha watching over me and was grateful to him for minimizing the damage. I prayed for her speedy recovery during daily sutra recitation. Fortunately, the president of the local neighborhood association, who had known me well for some time, acted as a go-between, and I was able to reach a settlement with her without any trouble. This experience made me firmly determined to apply myself more diligently to my duties at the Dharma center.

Two years ago, in August, a medical checkup at the hospital detected a tumor in my liver. The doctor's opinion was that the tumor was significant and could be malignant, so I was immediately sent for a full examination. The next day, I went to the Dharma center and told the then-chapter leader Reisin Hu—currently the minister of the Dharma center—about it, and she advised me to perform a memorial service to transfer merit to the past four generations of my ancestors. I immediately received the posthumous names for them, but because of the large number of ancestors, Ms. Hu instructed me to divide them into four groups and hold four separate services to transfer merit to all of them.

More than twenty years had passed since my father received a statue of the focus of devotion, and over that time its hands had oxidized and turned black.

Astonishingly, immediately after the first memorial service, the color of the right hand of the focus of devotion turned gold, and the entire statue regained its brilliance. I remember that my brother and his wife also noticed that the hands of the focus of devotion were shining, and we were all amazed. As a result of this experience, I felt that just as human beings need nourishment, so does the focus of devotion. I was also convinced that if we sincerely offer sutra recitation to the Buddha, he surely hears it.

Ms. Hu also advised me to complete the fourth memorial service before my examination results became available. So, I conducted the last service three days before I went to the hospital. As I was receiving the lab report, the doctor said that the growth in my liver was benign and that although the fatty mass of the growth was large, no other abnormalities were found. I once again felt the Buddha's protection. I witnessed another example of the wondrous merit of ancestor appreciation, in which a major obstacle is reduced to a minor inconvenience, and a minor obstacle ceases to be a hindrance at all.

At the beginning of this year, my brother's wife was rushed to the hospital in critical condition due to internal bleeding from a ruptured benign tumor in her kidney. I went to the Dharma center to discuss her condition with Rev. Hu, who was now the minister of the Dharma center. She advised me to immediately perform a sutra recitation service to pray for her healing, and on the same day, together with senior members, we held the service for my sister-in-law's recovery from illness in the room set aside for writing posthumous names.

While she was in the hospital, my brother asked me if I had any talismans for her, as she was having trouble sleeping. So I gave him a sash and told him to place it next to her on the bed. A short while later, I asked my brother how she was doing, and he told me that she seemed to sleep better with the sash next to her.

After my sister-in-law was released from the hospital, I told Rev. Hu that I might not be able to come to the Dharma center for a while because I wanted to stay at my brother's house to take care of her. I thought it would be difficult for their children to take care of their mother while she was recuperating

# Spiritual Journey

at home. But Rev. Hu explained it to me that this was a chance for their children to mature and awaken to the importance of having gratitude for their parents, so I decided to leave things up to them.

Rev. Hu also recommended that we transfer merit to my sister-in-law's own ancestors during the ceremony marking the spring equinox that was to be held at the Dharma center on the occasion of the forthcoming Qingming Festival—Ancestor's Day. When I asked my sister-in-law for her father's name to write a request for a transfer of merit service, she was surprised and very pleased that she could have such a service not only for her husband's ancestors, but also for her own ancestors. Then, she told me that while she was in the hospital, she had a dream that her grandfather was taking her to the other world, and she woke up scared. I got goosebumps when I heard this story, but it actually made me aware of the Buddha's compassion.

That's because Rev. Hu helped me realize that this situation was arranged by the Buddha, and that it all happened so that I could guide my sister-in-law to make appreciation offerings in memory of her own ancestors and transfer the merit. My sister-in-law told me that after her own father died, there had been a series of family problems, including her own illness. But she noticed that all of these problems, which seemed like major difficulties in the beginning, turned out to be only minor issues in the end. When I told Rev. Hu about this, she reminded me of the "impermanence of all things," and went on to say that if we accept the unexpected (that things are impermanent) and accumulate virtue by benefitting others, the Buddha and our ancestors will watch over us.

Through the various problems that have befallen me, I have learned that nothing is predictable, and I have been able to accept this as the "impermanence of all things," thanks to the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai and the guidance of Rev. Hu. When faced with impermanence, we can do nothing but accept it, and things can be resolved harmoniously only if we accept them as they are. Having noticed this, I can now see the changes I face in life as opportunities to learn something, and that those challenges help me grow. If I can believe that they are the tasks that the Buddha has given me, I can study the Dharma with pleasure and joy.

I am by nature a very optimistic and straightforward person. Therefore, I was not even aware that I was offending those around me with my comments. However, since I began regularly attending the Dharma center, I started to change without even realizing it. Before saying something, I now think twice about whether I should say it or not. When I see an inappropriate act or manner of doing something, I reflect on myself and wonder if I might make the same mistake. I am now continuously practicing introspection, purifying the actions of the body, speech, and mind, and making the goals of practicing doing good, saying positive things, and being kind to others.

I was never interested in religion to begin with. When I was young, someone once told me that in the future I would walk the Buddha Way. However, since I believed that living with my family was the most important thing in my life, spiritual discipline and following the Buddha Way were unthinkable. But the Buddha had made arrangements for me to practice at home by joining Rissho Kosei-kai, because Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization that values family life and fosters harmony between people.

I do not yet understand the teachings very well, but I am willing to start by trying to practice what I have learned. I will devote myself to connecting people with the Dharma so that many more young people will be able to encounter the Buddha and have the opportunity to study the teachings of Kosei-kai. And I vow to walk the Buddha Way with joy, together with my fellow members of Rissho Kosei-kai.



*Ms. Chen participating in the Dharma circle (fourth from the right).*

# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

## The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

### Ascetic Practices

After the prince renounced the secular world, he visited hermit-sages and monks to learn their teachings. He soon understood them and attained the same level of enlightenment. However, there was a long way to go before reaching the “enlightenment” that solves anxiety about old age, sickness, and death. He finally entered the forest alone and began to practice asceticism there.

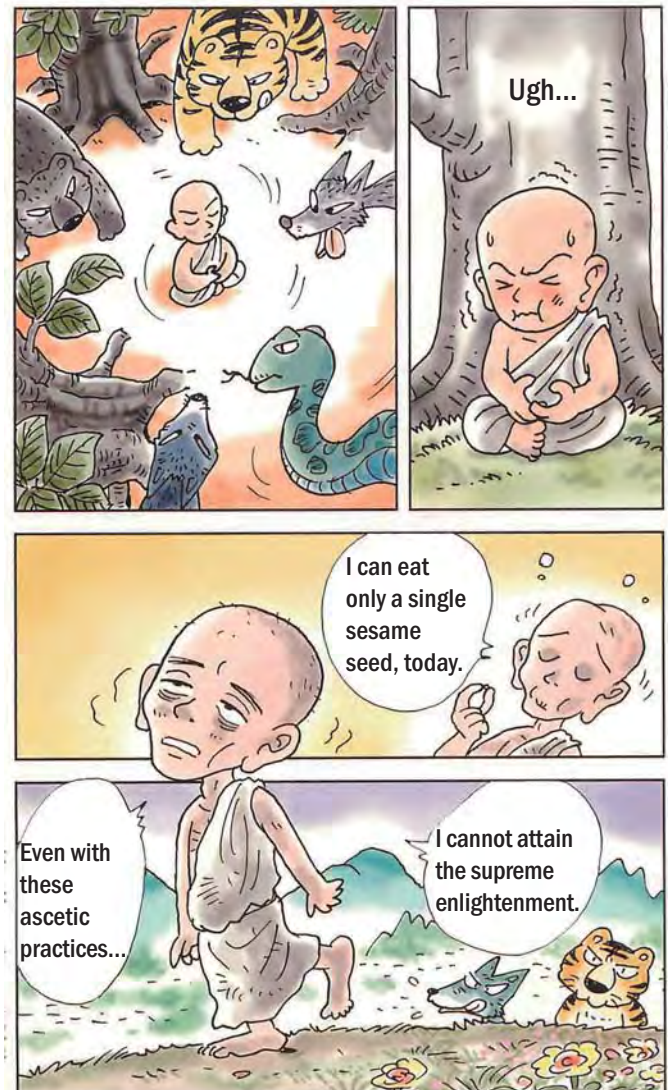
Most ascetics at that time would practice various kinds of strict self-discipline to attain enlightenment. Their practice included eating only one grain of rice and a single sesame seed a day, and holding their breath for a long time.

Even with these practices, however, he couldn’t attain enlightenment.



#### Did You Know?

While the prince practiced austerities in order to seek a path to liberation for all, he learned the teachings from the hermit-sage Arada-Kalama and soon acquired them. The hermit-sage acknowledged the profundity of his understanding, and proposed that the prince become his successor. However, he declined the hermit-sage’s offer and set out to seek how to conquer the fears of aging, sickness, and death.





## Attainment of Enlightenment

After six years of ascetic practices, he realized that he could not attain the enlightenment through extreme self-mortification, and left the forest. He went to the Nairanjana River, where he bathed and purified his body. Afterward, he accepted a bowl of rice boiled in milk from Sujata, a young woman from nearby village. Mentally and physically refreshed, he entered into meditation under a *bodhi* tree.

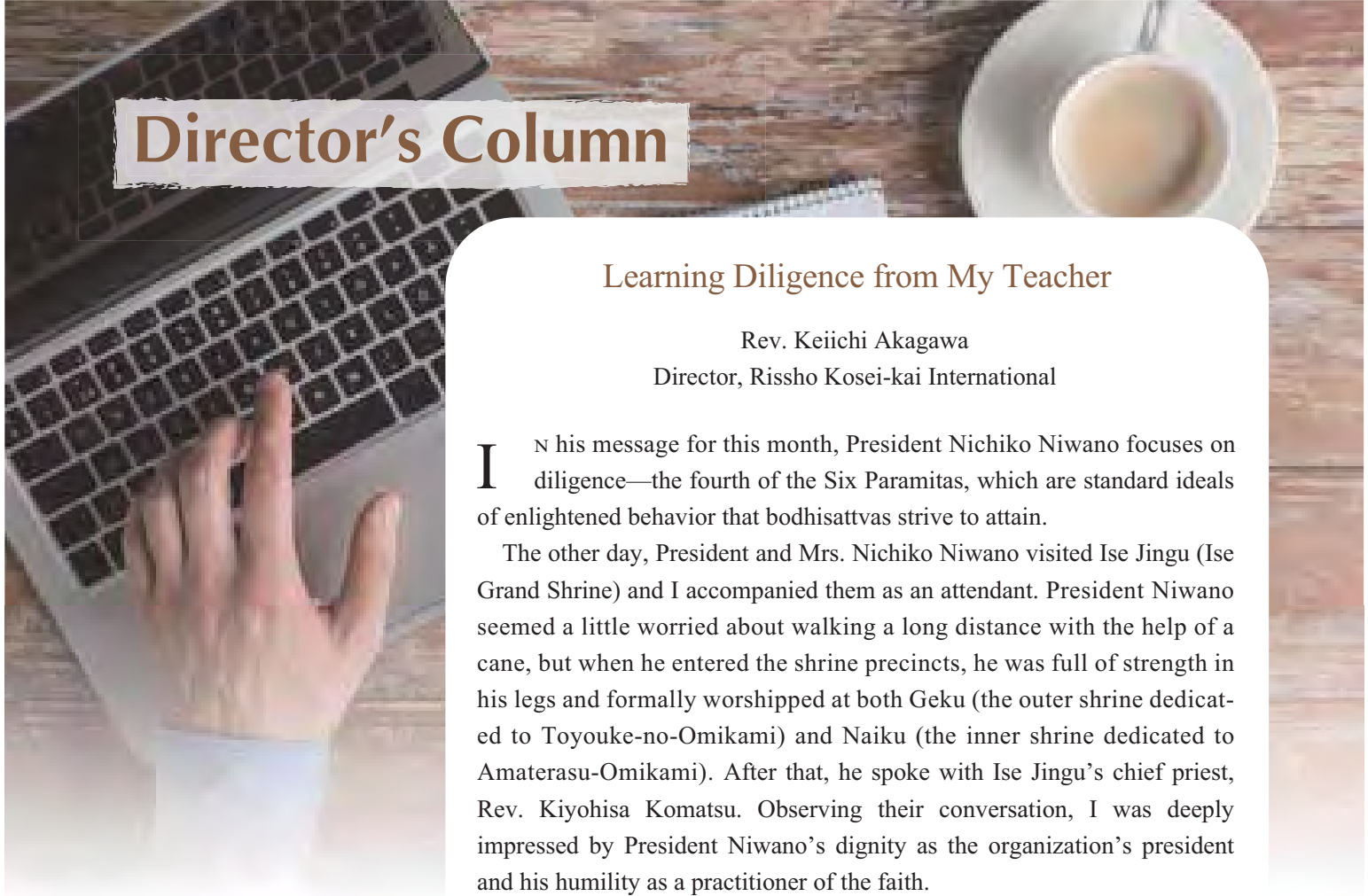
Evil spirits tried to disturb his meditation through various strategies, tempting him with sweet words and threatening him with violence. Despite all their efforts, he single-mindedly kept meditating and finally attained the enlightenment in the early morning of December 8 when he was thirty-five years old. The site where he attained enlightenment is called Bodh Gaya and is known as the sacred place.



### Did You Know?

After the prince was enlightened, he became “Buddha,” which means “the one who is awakened to the Truth.” The tree under which he meditated is a kind of fig tree. Its original name was *asvattha* and is now called a *bodhi* tree.





## Director's Column

### Learning Diligence from My Teacher

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

**I**N his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano focuses on diligence—the fourth of the Six Paramitas, which are standard ideals of enlightened behavior that bodhisattvas strive to attain.

The other day, President and Mrs. Nichiko Niwano visited Ise Jingu (Ise Grand Shrine) and I accompanied them as an attendant. President Niwano seemed a little worried about walking a long distance with the help of a cane, but when he entered the shrine precincts, he was full of strength in his legs and formally worshipped at both Geku (the outer shrine dedicated to Toyouke-no-Omikami) and Naiku (the inner shrine dedicated to Amaterasu-Omikami). After that, he spoke with Ise Jingu's chief priest, Rev. Kiyohisa Komatsu. Observing their conversation, I was deeply impressed by President Niwano's dignity as the organization's president and his humility as a practitioner of the faith.

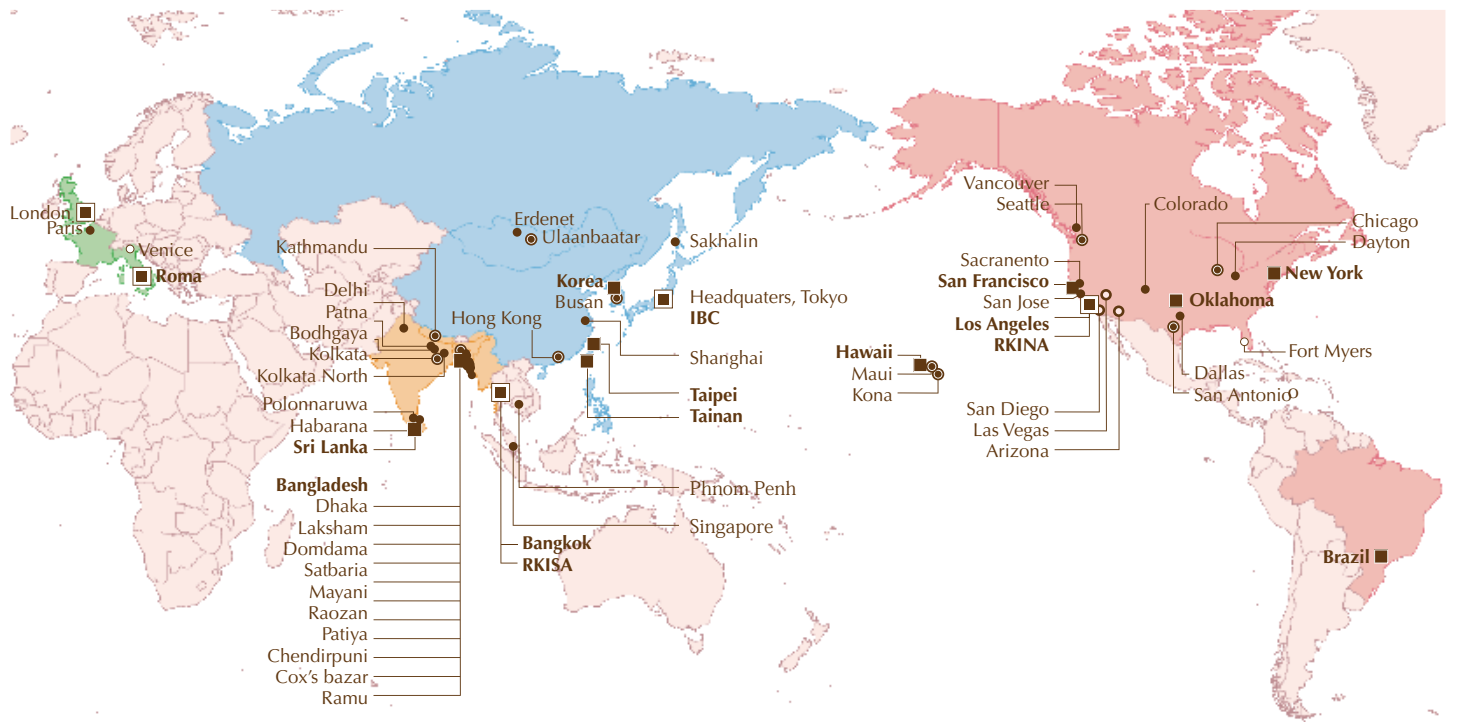
There were also things that impressed me deeply in regard to the President's practice of diligence. Before he left the Kaguraden (a hall for ceremonial music and dance), he went to the restroom. When he saw slippers scattered at the entrance, he spontaneously bent down and began to tidy them up. After he washed his hands, he cleaned up around the faucet.

President Niwano explains diligence in his message that “regardless of one's standing . . . there is happiness in perfecting one's mind through the practice of benefitting others, and that continuing to do so is diligence.” His words agree with his deeds and I'm deeply grateful for this opportunity to learn from his constant practice of diligence.





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