

Living the Lotus

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

Founder's Reflections

Cultivating the Fields of Your Heart and Mind

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

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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KONOSUKE Matsushita (1894–1989), the founder of Panasonic, was the kind of person who listened to everyone's story with a sincere nod of recognition and told them "I get your point!" It fascinates me whenever I see someone like that who, in addition to possessing the rich experience that comes with age, is also gentle and flexible in mind.

One day while begging for alms, Shakyamuni Buddha found himself standing in front of the home of a Brahman farmer. The Brahman told Shakyamuni, "I till a field and sow seeds in it to obtain my food. Why don't you do the same?" Shakyamuni replied, "I too till fields and sow seeds in them to obtain sustenance." The Brahman objected even more vehemently, "But I have never seen you tilling a field and sowing any seeds!" to which Shakyamuni replied, "I cultivate the fields in people's hearts and minds, sowing the seeds of faith."

The most important thing for us is to always keep on cultivating our hearts. Then we will always be able to accept those around us with a flexible mind, and sincerely listen to what people say. That's how people will naturally flock to us.

It is said that being a good listener is the key to building personal relationships and, especially for people who are in their prime, flexibility in mind is a treasure.

Kaiso zuikan 10 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 230–31

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 Your True Self—Diligence, Part 2

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



We Are All Points on a Sphere

“Imagine a sphere and mark a point on its surface. We are all like that point on the sphere.” So said Sogen Omori (1904–1994), a Zen priest and kendo master. He continued, “Wherever you mark a point on the surface of the sphere, that is the center. There is no point that is not the center . . . even if you mark its surface with millions of dots.” And he added, “while the sphere itself is still one and the same.” While this is a slightly unusual expression, it shows us the true aspect of our existence.

I think Omori’s idea is easy to understand if you think of his “sphere” as the planet Earth. Each of us on the surface is standing at the center of the earth and has a unique existence. However, each individual is caused to live by all things—including the sun, water, and air—as well as by everyone else, so in that sense, all existence is one and the same.

This perspective is the same, whether expanded to the entire universe or applied to a smaller group like a local community or a home. This does not mean that the father is at the center and the children are on the periphery, but rather that each family member has a unique, irreplaceable existence, and that each individual exists in relationship to the other members of the family and the community.

We are informed of this by these words, attributed to the infant Shakyamuni: “I alone am honored in heaven and on earth.” Each of us is an individual, coexisting as part of a large whole, which is the meaning of “I alone am honored.” On the other hand, as individual citizens of this universe and inhabitants of planet Earth, Buddhist teachings explain that we are all brothers and sisters, living together as one life-force, which is the true aspect of our existence.

We practice the diligence of the Six Paramitas so that we are grateful for being caused to live such a life and do not forget the mind of giving thanks. I think the deeper meaning of diligence is that by practicing it, we become people capable of sharing the burden of others’ sadness and reaching out to those who are suffering, just as we revere and love ourselves.

Let's Count Our Blessings

In last month's issue, I wrote that diligence is "performing good deeds for the sake of other people" and "doing what is expected of us as people of faith," but in order to continue such gratitude-based practices, nothing is more important than realizing the things we should be thankful for in our daily lives.

I think that most people know that they themselves are not perfect human beings. And while that may be why we continue to learn how to make ourselves more diligent, it is our encounter with the Buddha Dharma that makes us realize the importance of practicing diligence. That said, in reality, we are able to learn the teachings thanks to our friends in the Dharma and our Sangha of family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances, so while we give thanks to the people around us and work hard at perfecting ourselves together with our friends in the Dharma, let's definitely look for even small things to say "thank you" for and translate those thoughts of gratitude into action.

Speaking of things that will inspire you to count your blessings, our Rissho Kosei-kai Sangha members' personal Dharma journeys are a treasury of wisdom. These people, who have formed a connection with the Buddha through the desire to be liberated from suffering, have realized, thanks to the teachings of the Buddha, that the cause of suffering was their own misunderstanding or wrong views and their lives have been completely changed. Speaking openly about their personal Dharma journey, even people who may have forgotten that they are caused to live will awaken and say, "I am grateful for anything and everything that has happened" and undergo a transformation to a way of life full of gratitude—a testament to living faith.

When we reflect, in the light of the teachings, upon our own past and our way of thinking and first awaken to the many things we are thankful for, we encounter ourselves as we truly are—having always been caused to live. In that sense, sharing your Dharma journey can be an important practice of diligence in order to live your true self; as Founder Niwano said, "The experience of joy in the Dharma plants seeds of joy in the minds of those who hear about it." Your own joy expands to become the joy of your friends in the Dharma, which in turn becomes a practice of benefiting others that is full of compassion.

As we pray and hope for the realization of a world in which everyone can fall asleep at night with peace of mind, let's continue to practice diligence.

From *Kosei*, August 2022

Spiritual Journey

In Life, Nothing Is in Vain

Rev. Hironobu Suzuki

Minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka

*This Dharma Journey talk was presented
at the South Asia Missionary Leaders' Training Seminar held online on June 18, 2022.*

HELLO, everyone. I am Hironobu Suzuki. This is the fourth year since I was inaugurated as the minister for Rissho Kosei-kai of Sri Lanka.

I am the eldest son among four siblings. My family have been active members of Rissho Kosei-kai since my grandparents joined the organization. Both of my parents never failed to do their morning and evening sutra recitation, so they would often told me that their recitations were our lullaby.

My mother often spoke to us about the teachings she learned at the Dharma center. One thing she told us remains vividly in my mind. It was when I was in elementary school. One morning in early summer, my mother found lotus flowers in the pond and told us in a way children could easily understand: "You see the lotus flowers blooming in the pond, don't you? Do you know where they grow from? They all have grown from the mud. When you become adults, this world might be in more chaos. But I hope each of you will let a beautiful flower bloom no matter how small it is." Looking back now, I suppose that she wanted to teach us the mind of bodhisattva, or the spirit of devoting oneself to benefit other people and the world. Her words are engraved in my mind and are supporting me as the basis of my faith.

My mother would often say, "It is thanks to the Dharma that our family of six can live solely on your father's income." Our family was not rich, but my father managed to make a living by running a small twist yarn factory next to our house.

One day when I was a junior high school student, there was a collection of two thousand yen for a school activity. The night before, there was a great fuss at home because we did not have enough money

to bring to school. My family scraped together all the coins in the house and finally managed to get the amount, which I brought to school the next morning. Unfortunately, the student who took charge of the collection on that day was a boy who was always teasing me. When he received my coins, he spread them on his desk and began to count in a bothersome manner. I watched him count. Then he suddenly exclaimed in a loud voice that everyone in the classroom could hear, "Hey, Suzuki, you're short by a hundred yen! There is only 1,900 yen here." It made me extremely embarrassed. I soon learned that he had hid the other hundred yen temporarily just for fun. I wondered why I had to endure harassment like that and became filled with frustration. I then directed my frustration at my father. I was crying out in my mind, "Because his factory is so small, we are poor. Why do I have to feel so miserable?" At the same time, however, I saw my father work very hard from early in the morning until late at night every day. Through his



Rev. Hironobu Suzuki gives his Dharma Journey talk online.

attitude toward work, I felt he was telling me, “You must work single-mindedly regardless of how much money you get from it.” Frustration and respect for my father were mingled in my mind; I was shedding tears alone.

Even though I grew up in such circumstances, thanks to the support of my family, I was able to graduate from university and started working.

From then on, however, I experienced hardships through which the Buddha guided me to realize the true way of living.

In the middle of an economic boom when a new graduate could get an offer for employment from several companies, I found a job at a trading company in Osaka. A few years after I started working, however, Japan’s economy began to decline. Our company also began to have financial difficulties, which resulted in payment delays to suppliers and reduced salaries. I could also see other signs of managerial crises, which made me feel uneasy about my future. As I could see no prospect for improved company performance, I decided to quit and returned to my home town, Hamamatsu, in Shizuoka Prefecture. I rushed to look for a new job in order to support my family, and started working as a wholesale dealer at a fruit and vegetable market.

Though I was employed, I was not as happy as I had expected. The job at the fruit and vegetable market was quite different from the one at the trading company. I was covered in sweat, driving a forklift around from three in the morning and kowtowing to owners of fruit and vegetable stores and buyers of supermarkets in order to sell the products. It was not a “cool” job to my discriminatory eyes; I was drawing a line between jobs that looked cool and not cool.

Customers were gradually leaving me, perhaps because I had a sulky look on my face. With a subservient mind toward my life, I could not find any purpose in working. I was just working to earn my living.

At that time, I was invited to participate in a workshop on the Threefold Lotus Sutra, which was held at the Hamamatsu Dharma Center for the youth group members. To be honest, I was not enthusiastic about joining the workshop. It took place in the late

evening, so it seemed hard for a person like me who had to leave for work early next morning. I had already been invited several times but became somewhat interested in the theme of the workshop and decided to attend. The workshop was on chapter 4 of the Lotus Sutra, “Faith and Understanding.” When we continued on by reading *Buddhism for Today* by Founder Nikkyo Niwano, my eyes suddenly got glued to the following words.

“The first precaution we should take away from this chapter is that we must toss aside any sense of inferiority that we have. To look down upon ourselves as good-for-nothings is a denial of our own buddha nature, and by extension, an insult to the Buddha.”

My heart was jolted by these few lines of the Founder’s words. I became truly ashamed of my subservient attitude about the job. I realized that I had denied myself, and it was as foolish as if I was insulting the Buddha and the Founder. It seemed as if the seminar was being held for no one other than me, and I couldn’t help but feel grateful for the learning opportunity.

From the following day, my attitude toward the job dramatically changed. I went to the workplace earlier than anyone else and made preparations for the day’s work, such as opening the storehouse and receiving orders from the customers. It was the moment when I was awakened to the true way of living through the Founder’s guidance. And guess what happened? The job suddenly became enjoyable and I began to work enthusiastically. Then the number of customers gradually increased, and I came to find the job rewarding.

I had made up my mind to continue to do my best



Rev. Suzuki recites the Lotus Sutra with members of the Colombo chapter.

Spiritual Journey

at this job when the minister of the Dharma center recommended that I work as a staff member at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters in Tokyo. I accepted the offer in December 2000, working there for ten years—first as staff of the Youth Department and then as an assistant minister at a local Dharma center.

In December 2010, I was assigned as the minister of the Okinawa Dharma Center. In Okinawa, folk belief in *yuta* (shamans) remains deeply rooted, and soon after I was inaugurated as the minister, I came across an event that informed me of this.

One day, a member who worried about her sick family asked for guidance during a Dharma circle session (*hoza*). I listened to her with my whole heart and tried my best to give guidance. Then she looked relieved and said, "I'm glad to join in the Dharma circle today. Earlier I asked a *yuta* for advice but I couldn't get rid of my worries. But here my problem has been cleared." She left the Dharma center smiling, while my mind was left unsettled as I felt as if Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings had been weighed against the belief in the shaman.

An unsettled feeling remained in my mind when I had the opportunity to participate in a roundtable conversation with President Niwano. I asked the President, "I am serving as minister in Okinawa where the folk belief in *yuta* remains strong. Could I have your guidance on a necessary mindset to proceed with the enshrinement of Gohonzon (focus of devotion) there?" Then the President said, "What matters is how reverently you as the minister are putting faith in the Buddha." By saying this, the President taught me the importance of having a true faith in the Buddha and a sincere mind of devotion.

His guidance reminded me of a childhood episode with my mother, which had taught me the importance of believing in the existence of the Buddha for a great peace of mind.

When I was a child, my parents sometimes went out together to join in the devotional service at a member's home or visit members' houses to enhance the connection with the Dharma. My siblings and I felt anxious about staying home by ourselves at night. One evening my mother gathered us, with our worried looks, before the home altar and gave us the

following words: "You'll be alright because the Buddha stays home with you." I still remember how relieved I felt when I heard her words.

I believe that her steadfast faith in the Buddha brought my siblings and me great peace of mind. The President's guidance enabled me to recall this experience, making me realize the importance of having a wholehearted faith in the Buddha in order to fulfill my mission as a minister. I always keep in mind his important guidance, which planted a firm core of faith in a mind that used to be easily swayed by daily occurrences.

Founder Niwano teaches us, "In life, nothing is in vain." Looking back on my life, I truly feel there was nothing useless in my experiences. Taking in every single experience as nutrition, I think my own lotus flower was able to bloom, even though it was small.

The world is in chaos now due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, among other problems. Sri Lanka is in the middle of an economic crisis, with inflation proceeding at a rapid pace. Now is the time when the Buddha's teachings should reach many more people. I hope to actively engage in Dharma dissemination in Sri Lanka, where I live now, to convey to people the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to bring forth peace. I will also strive to promote human resource development—to nurture and support human beings so their lotus flowers bloom bright and full.

Thank you very much everyone for your kind attention today.



Rev. Suzuki with sangha members of the Sri Lanka Dharma Center on Posonpoya Day (the day when Buddhism is said to have been introduced to Sri Lanka).

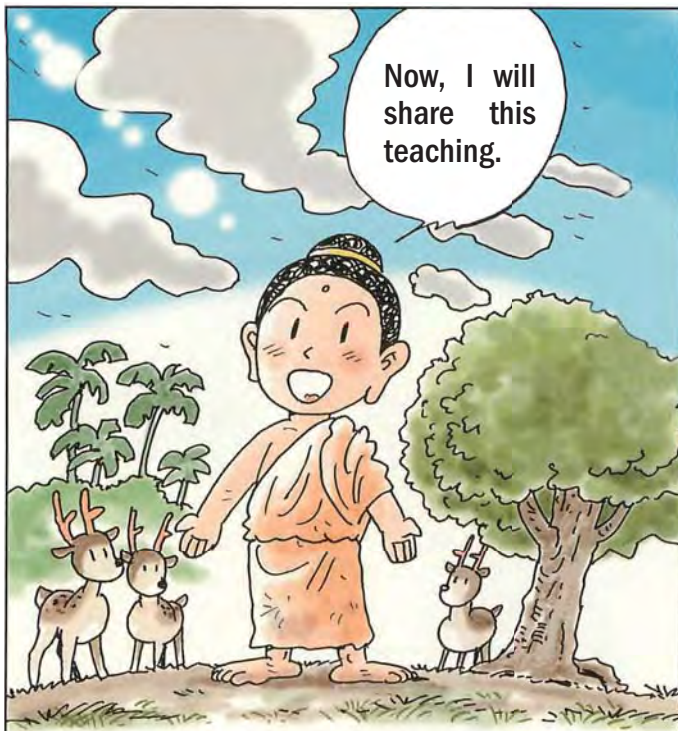
An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

The First Sermon

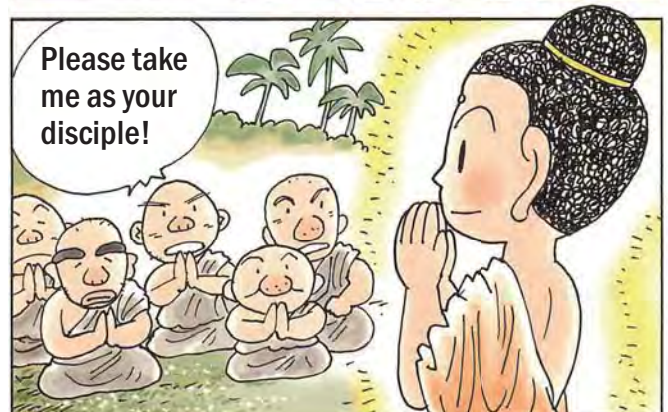
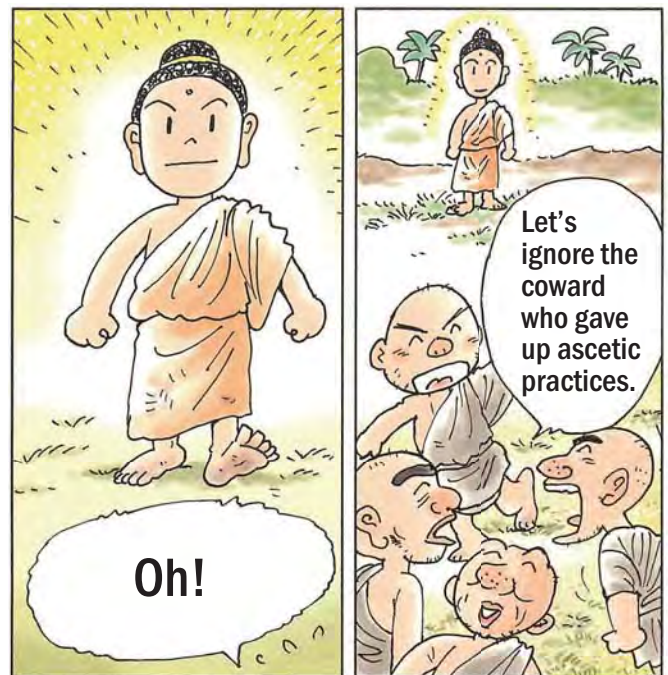
Shakyamuni Buddha visited what is today known as Deer Park in a suburb of Varanasi, in order to convey the truth to which he had been enlightened to five ascetics who had once practiced austerities with him.

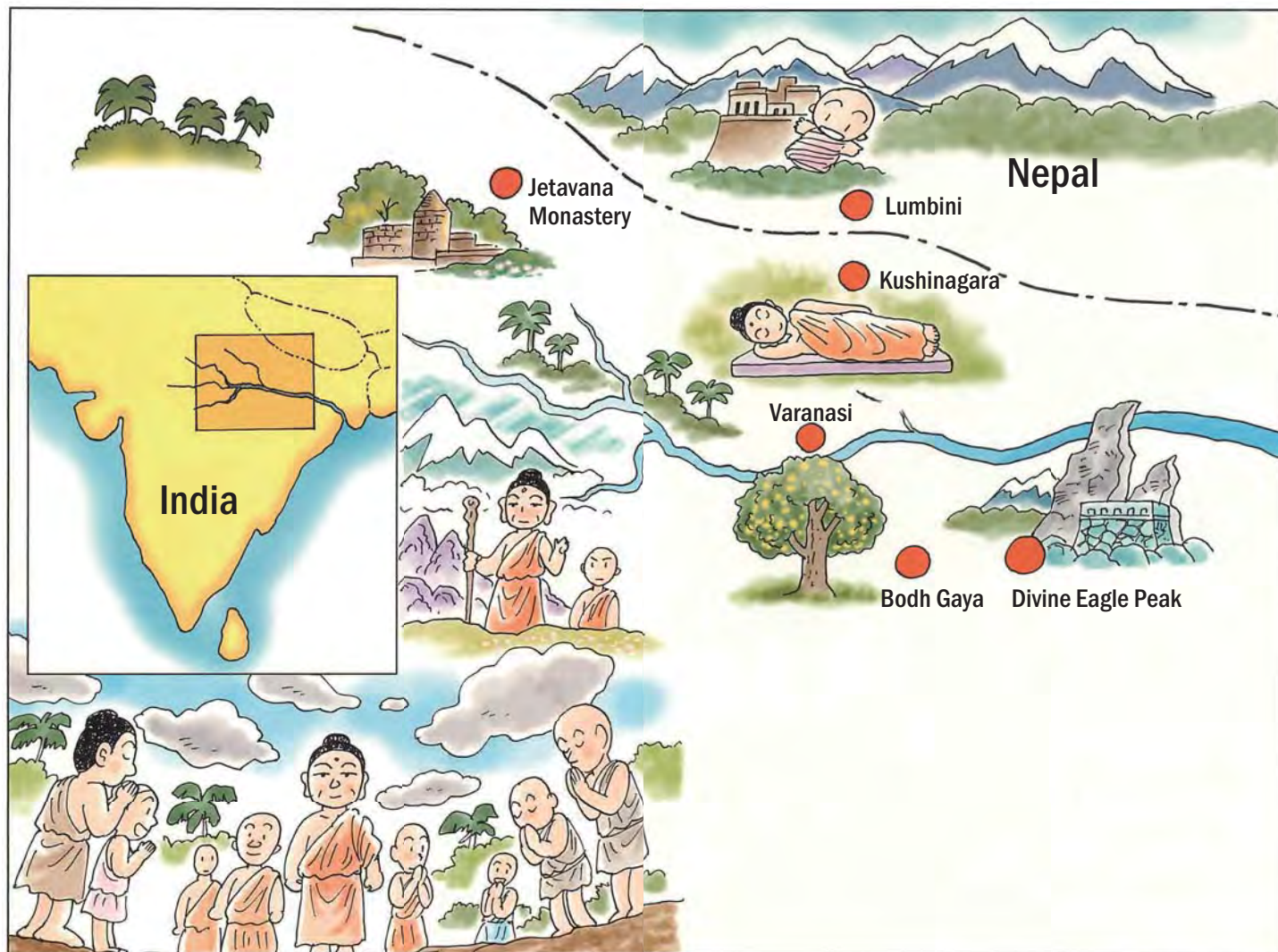
The five ascetics tried to ignore Shakyamuni Buddha at first, because they considered him a fallen monk who had failed in his ascetic practices. However, when they met him, they were so affected by his glorious dignity that they were incapable of remaining indifferent. They naturally bowed deferentially and welcomed him reverently. Furthermore, they were so moved by his teachings that they became his disciples. The teachings Shakyamuni Buddha taught at that time were the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. This first Dharma teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha is called the “First Rolling of the Dharma Wheel.”



Did You Know?

At first, Shakyamuni Buddha hesitated to convey to others the profound truth he had realized. However, he decided to do so out of his compassion to liberate people from suffering. Thanks to his resolution, all those who are alive in this time and age are also able to encounter the teachings.





Dharma Dissemination

Shakyamuni Buddha spent forty-five years disseminating the Dharma, from his enlightenment until his death. He traveled on foot, spreading the teachings mainly in northeastern India.

The places especially linked to Shakyamuni Buddha are still preserved as the sacred grounds of Buddhism: Lumbini where he was born, Bodh Gaya where he attained enlightenment, Deer Park in the suburbs of Varanasi where he taught the Dharma for the first time, and Kushinagara where he passed away.

Divine Eagle Peak and the Jetavana Monastery are also frequently associated with him.

Did You Know?

The Jetavana was one of the most important monasteries where Shakyamuni Buddha taught and trained his disciples. In India, rainy season runs from June to September. During this period, the monks would avoid going out and stayed in monasteries, where they would live together and concentrate on religious practices.



Director's Column

The President's Bodhisattva Practice

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

AUGUST has arrived and summer has reached its peak in Japan. I am certain that, through the interactions with the Sangha in your respective countries and regions, you are living your daily life to the fullest, diligently practicing the Dharma.

The Lotus Sutra is a teaching for bodhisattvas. In the Dharma messages that President Niwano has given on the theme of the Six Paramitas over the past several months, I sense the President's consistently high expectations for us—his wish that we mature into true bodhisattvas, and that we strive to realize a harmonious society and world by attaining happiness for ourselves and others.

In the first half of this month's message, the President speaks from a universal perspective about the existential meaning and uniqueness of each and every one of us. In the second half of his message, he speaks from the realistic and practical viewpoint of a person of faith, explaining the significance of becoming aware of the things we can be grateful for and the importance of transforming our gratitude into a way of life through the practice of benefiting others.

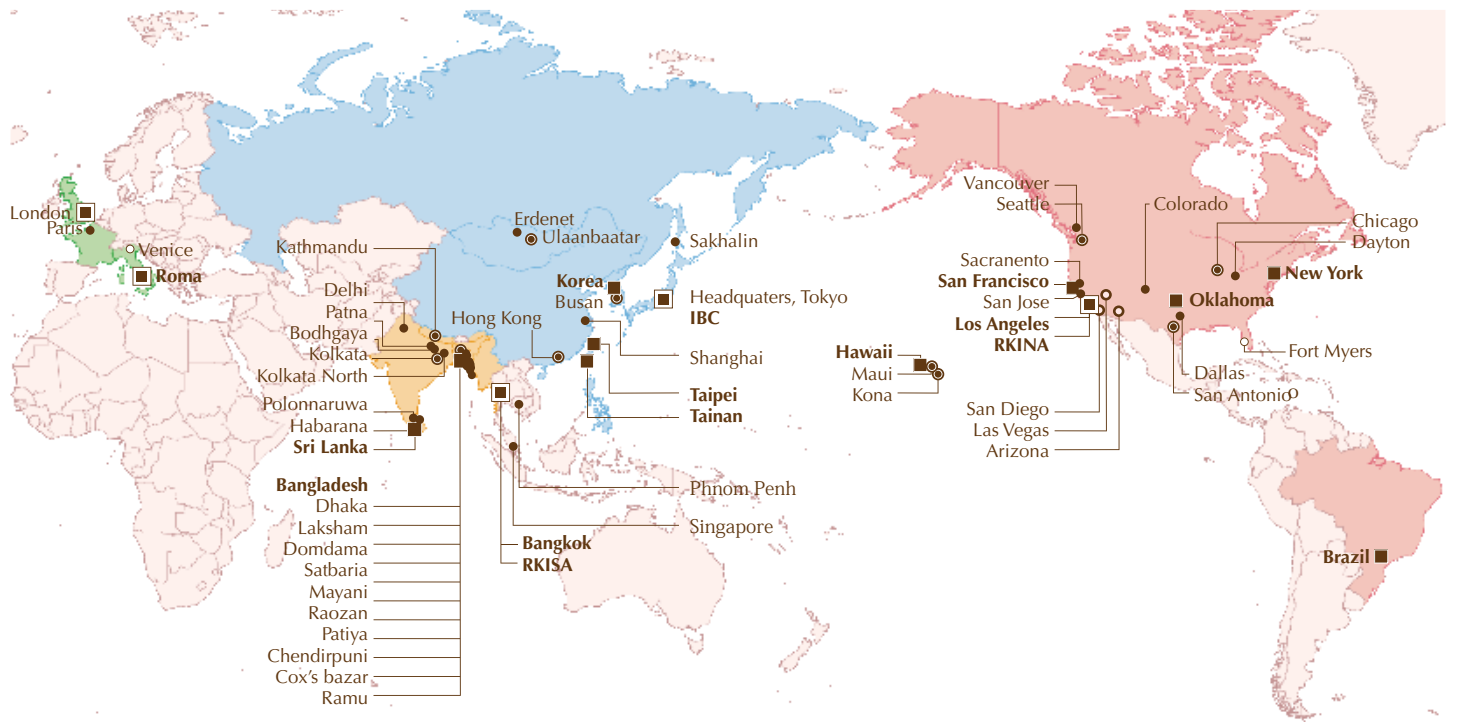
These days, I feel that the monthly Dharma messages we receive from the President, who has faith and trust in our buddha nature, are a form of his own unique practice of revering the buddha nature of all Rissho Kosei-kai members. What do you think?



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



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Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Raozan

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

Rissho Kosei-kai Laksham

Village: Dhupchor, Laksham, Comilla, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Dhaka North

408/8 DOSH, Road No 7 (West), Baridhara, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Rissho Kosei-kai Cox's Bazar

Ume Burmize Market, Tekpara, Sadar, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Please contact Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh

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