

Living the Lotus

2

2023

VOL. 209

Buddhism in Everyday Life



Rissho Kosei-kai of Ulaanbaatar

Living the Lotus Vol. 209 (February 2023)

Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa

Editor: Sachi Mikawa

Copy Editor: Ayshea Wild

Living the Lotus is published monthly by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Sugunami-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

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.

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.

What Happens to Other People Also Happens to You

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Being Aware of Arrogance and Self-Conceit

I think that many people have a common desire to live long and healthy lives. In reality though, as we get older, every time we feel our years, get sick, or face someone's death, we may become overwhelmed, depressed, or pessimistic.

The Heian-era poet Ariwara no Narihira (825–80) commented on this in his final poem, which expresses sadness and regret for his own conceitedness: “You must take this road / Leading to the end— / So had I been told. / Alas, I did not think / That day would come so soon.”

No one wants to accept that aging, illness, and death will come to them. It may be human nature to wish that such things will only happen to other people and never to ourselves. It is recorded in ancient scripture that even Shakyamuni, in his youth, looked at the elderly with shame and revulsion, saying “Although I, too, must age, it does not suit me,” and when he saw sick people, he worried that “illness does not suit me.” When he saw people dying, he was similarly filled with worry, shame, and revulsion.

However, Shakyamuni reflected upon such thoughts, which were due to arrogance stemming from the youth, health, and life he had received. Proud to be young, spoiled by good health, and taking life for granted without even trying to understand its meaning, he pointlessly despised aging, illness, and death. Realizing the fallacy of such thinking, he reflected upon his own arrogance and haughtiness and left us his admonition against them as “the three kinds of arrogance” described in the scripture.

People often say things like “When you're young, it's okay to be a little reckless.” That does not mean though, that just because it is your life, you should do whatever you want with it. Shakyamuni teaches you that because the life you have been given by the gods, the buddhas, and nature is finite, it is important to quickly realize its wondrousness and preciousness, and always live—to the fullest—the life you have received.

A Truly Healthy Lifestyle

Ariwara no Narihira died when he was about fifty-five years old. When I was that age, I often said such things as “This is my year to go, go, go!” because fifty-five is pronounced *go-ju-go* in Japanese. But when I think about it now, I suppose that being proud of my good health was my own arrogance. Sure enough, these days it takes me longer than expected to get dressed to go out, and I am often painfully reminded that I am getting old, while thinking to myself “This isn’t supposed to happen to me.” Since I have experienced the difficulty of continuing on from day to day while not feeling very well due to such conditions as back pain, I have come to fully understand what a blessing it is to enjoy good health. Also, as I closely observed Founder Niwano’s gradual decline, I had a vague idea that I would age too; in reality, as I have grown old, I have certainly come to accept that aging, illness, and death are pressing matters for me personally.

With experience, we are said to gain a better understanding of other people’s feelings, especially their sadness and suffering. This is the meaning of maturing as a human being and, in my understanding, also means that we are getting closer to the Buddha. Therefore, it is important that we quickly realize the truth about life and that it is precious.

When Ananda openly wept at the prospect of his teacher’s entering nirvana, Shakyamuni resolutely conveyed the truth to him, saying “Ananda, do not cry. That which receives life must surely die.” However, a witty expression may make it easier for us to learn and accept the truth about life, such as this poem by Zen master Ikkyu (1394–1481): “What has been born, / Must someday die. / On the whole, this is true. / Even for Shakyamuni and Bodhidharma. / Even for the cat and the spoon.” Whichever you prefer, accept this truth about life as your own, and live each day with gratitude and joy. Doing so, whether our lives are long or short, is the meaning of a truly healthy lifestyle for those of us who want to enjoy good health. That is something I would like to consider anew, along with all of you, during this month in which we observe the anniversary of Shakyamuni’s entering nirvana.

From *Kosei*, February 2023



Spiritual Journey

The Support of Sangha Members Has Liberated Me from Suffering

Mr. Katsuhito Hiramatsu
Rissho Kosei-kai of New York

This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the ceremony for the annual memorial day of Founder Niwano's entering nirvana held online by the New York Dharma Center on October 2, 2022.

I would like to express my deep gratitude for this opportunity to share my spiritual journey at the ceremony for the annual memorial day of Founder Niwano's entering nirvana.

I was born in Tennoji-ku, Osaka, in 1959, as the eldest of two brothers in my family. Both of my parents were born and raised in Tokyo. After they married, they moved to Osaka because of my father's job transfer.

We moved to Tokyo when I was in my second year of junior high school. I went on to high school in Tokyo, and then to college, but dropped out after two years. After working as a part-time employee for a while, I became a hairdresser. However, through a chance encounter with an American motorcycle, I became fascinated by the charm of motorcycles and quit the beauty salon to get a motorcycle license. After obtaining a license, I got a job at a motorcycle shop affiliated with Yamaha Motor. I also participated in racing activities and won a regional competition. Then I was promoted to store manager and got married. But this enjoyable life didn't last long. When I was twenty-eight years old, I began to suffer from severe back pain, and my body became numb. Since I couldn't even walk, I had no option but to leave the company. At the same time, I got divorced from my first wife. During this time of recuperation, I went to several hospitals, but the diagnosis was unanimous. I was told only to go to rehab, but there was no sign of improvement. I was desperate. At that time, I would put my palms together at my home altar and pray for the pain to disappear. That was my first encounter with the Buddha.

Then I began to train my body, and after a while, I was able to overcome my back pain. Then, I got a food-related job. In 1988, when I was twenty-nine years old, my best friend, who was living in Chicago at that time, invited me to work at his company, so I moved to the United States. I married my current wife when I was thirty-seven years old.

My mother was a member of Rissho Kosei-kai, and my grandfather on my mother's side was also a member. He lived in Kita-ku, in northern Tokyo. I have heard that my grandfather had opportunities for friendly conversation with Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Cofounder Myoko Naganuma shortly after the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai. My mother joined Rissho Kosei-kai when my father was diagnosed with lung cancer in November, 1989. He was repeatedly admitted to and discharged from the hospital, and at the time of his fourth hospitalization, he was given a



Mr. Hiramatsu with sangha members of the Chicago chapter.

Spiritual Journey

year to live. My mother cried all night in grief and anxiety and found herself the next morning at the entrance to the Kita Dharma Center. Later, she was introduced to the Ota Dharma Center, near our home and became a member.

In order to support my mother, who looked very tired after she had tried her best for two and a half years to support my father's medical treatment, I returned to Japan for a while in 1993 and visited my father at the hospital every day. My father always shaved and changed into neat clothes when he knew he would have visitors. His sincere attitude touched my heart, and at the same time, I felt sorry for not having been able to do anything for my father until then. The day before I returned to the United States, my father said to me, "Please take good care of your mom. Thank you." They were his last words to me. Perhaps because he felt relieved to have entrusted me with the words, he passed away shortly afterward.

When my family had recovered from the loss of my father and daily life had finally gotten settled, the next painful event struck my family. In 2012, my younger brother was found to have lung cancer. He was active in his work before he got ill, but two years after the diagnosis, he passed away at the age of fifty-three.

I had lost my father and brother to cancer. Since my two uncles and my grandfather had also died of cancer, I had always thought in the corner of my mind that someday I would also develop cancer.

I had lived in Dallas, Texas, since 2012, away from my family. I was very busy as a manager at a Japanese food warehouse, overseeing nearly thirty employees while also handling delivery work. I liked my job. However, as I began to work on weekends, I felt more stress, and eventually I started drinking a lot. Because I lived alone, apart from my family, I was living as I pleased. Every once in a while, I would think *I'm from a cancer-prone family*, and

became desperate. At work, I was in a top position, and now that I think about it, I treated the other employees as I pleased, directing them without regard to their convenience. However, my department's performance steadily improved, and I was evaluated highly by top management at headquarters. On the one hand, I was ecstatic over the recognition of my work. On the other hand, as I continued to live alone, I had fewer opportunities to talk with my wife.

In 2017, my boss, whom I had trusted deeply, left the company. This brought a change to my mind. I began to feel an ineffable loneliness as if a hollow had opened in my chest that used to be filled with motivation to work. At that time, however, due to the relocation of Toyota's headquarters to Dallas, many Japanese restaurants were rapidly opening in the city. As a result, our workload increased significantly, and the days of being chased by work continued.

As such a super-busy life had become normal, I was exhausted both mentally and physically, and I became mentally unstable. In June, 2019, I discussed my problem with my wife and decided to quit the company and return to Chicago.

I was going to get a new job and restart my life with my wife and three dogs in August. However, during the months of July and August, I was so seriously mentally unstable that I barely remember anything about how I spent my days during that time. I thought backwards, had little appetite for food, and satiated my remaining hunger with alcohol. As my mental illness progressed, I stopped talking to my wife and locked myself in my room. I couldn't go out and spent all day without seeing people. My wife also got run-down because she always had to be with me, taking care of me. My mental state got worse. I yelled for no reason and aimlessly drove my car around the city. I troubled my wife over and over. Finally, I started thinking about committing suicide. I thought every day about where and how I would kill myself. I

Spiritual Journey

couldn't think about the future at all, my meager savings were almost consumed, and everything had become unbearable. Worried about my unusual behavior, my wife called her mother and asked her to come and visit from Japan. From then on, instead of my wife, who had to go out to work during the day, my mother-in-law watched over me every day. My mother-in-law and I were good friends from the time before I married my wife, so I was gradually able to talk to her about various things, and my suicidal thoughts faded.

Later, I went to the hospital for a medical test, and I was diagnosed with severe depression. The cause was overwork. The doctor pointed out that one of the causes of the disease was I hadn't made much time to face daily events, using my busy schedule as an excuse. Medical treatment began immediately, and I was told to abstain from alcohol because it would hinder the treatment. Under the supervision of my mother-in-law, rehabilitation began.

My mother, in Japan, was worried and arranged for me to meet with the members of the Chicago chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai, but I was not yet in the right state of mind. Therefore, my mother-in-law met the members, Mrs. Kayo Murakami, the chapter head, and Mrs. Kinuyo Matsuhashi, in my place. I still vividly remember my mother-in-law saying "They were both very pleasant people." After my mother-in-law returned to Japan, however, I had no one to talk to again during the day, so I began to read about Rissho Kosei-kai's activities online. One day, as I was tidying up my belongings, two copies of Rissho Kosei-kai's magazine, *Kosei*, which my mother had given me a long time ago, emerged. As I read them repeatedly, my mind calmed down, and at the same time, I realized that everyone was living with some kind of hardship.

I was especially impressed by the President's Dharma guidance in the May 2019 issue, titled "Why

Don't Our Sufferings End?" and a spiritual journey talk in the August 1995 issue by Rev. Noriyo Sugihara, then minister of the Shinagawa Dharma Center in Tokyo, which I read over and over. I felt as if they were talking to me directly, and I began to think about how self-centered I was. Because I hadn't talked to people for a long time, I had trouble getting my voice out, so I started to practice sutra recitation to rehabilitate my voice. At the same time, in order to regain physical strength, I started a practice of going up and down the emergency stairs of my apartment and training at the gym. I also began to study to get a heavy truck trailer license. I had a Texas license, but to obtain a license in Illinois, where Chicago is located, I had to go through the process again from the beginning. It was a big challenge for me at that time, but I passed the test and got a license safely. My wife paid all costs for the exam; I am very grateful to her. When I passed the exam, I sent an email to Mrs. Matsuhashi for the first time. It was in mid-October in 2019. Then I began looking for a job, and through a friend's introduction, I took a recruitment exam for the truck company called Schneider. The pass rate is 50 percent, but fortunately I received a notification of employment.

I was assigned to a department that delivered merchandise to Walmart, the world's largest supermarket chain. My workplace was near the border between Illinois and Iowa, so I started a life of living in the truck six days a week and going back home once a week. It was snowy on the first day of work, which was really a challenge for me, but I told myself not to give in as I was restarting my life from the beginning. The job was simple, so I didn't feel much stress. Moreover, as I was alone while driving, I didn't have to worry about other people. So I thought it might be my calling.

It was fun to stay in the truck, but as I couldn't move freely or get enough exercise, after discussing it with my wife, I decided to rent an apartment near my

Spiritual Journey

workplace. It was my first winter since my depression. My doctor told me “Winter in Chicago is tough for people with depression, so be careful.” So I tried to keep a positive mindset as much as possible every day, especially while I was driving. When that winter and then spring were over, I again sent an email to Mrs. Matsuhashi, reporting to her how I was doing. In her reply, Mrs. Matsuhashi asked, “Why don’t we three, Mrs. Murakami, you, and myself, meet and talk face to face in a Zoom meeting?” I said, “Yes, please.” Around one year had passed since I had been diagnosed with depression.

A week later, in a Zoom meeting, I saw the faces of Mrs. Murakami and Mrs. Matsuhashi for the first time. As I had imagined, they were very nice people. The first Zoom meeting ended after we talked about how my mother-in-law had taken care of me, and the process I went through after my mental health problems started. I think the call lasted about thirty minutes. At that time, neither Mrs. Murakami nor Mrs. Matsuhashi suggested I join Rissho Kosei-kai. I didn’t ask anything about Rissho Kosei-kai, either.



Mr. Hiramatsu sits in the driving seat of his truck.

But after the Zoom meeting, I felt a lot better somehow, and I was pleased to know that there were people who worried about me. A month later, I contacted Mrs. Matsuhashi again and we decided to meet in person. Since we had already met on Zoom, I didn’t feel nervous, and I could talk to her comfortably. At that time, I decided to join the Chicago chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai. That was in September 2020. Since then, I have met Mrs. Matsuhashi once a month and received periodicals such as *Yakushin*, *Kosei*, and the *Kosei Shimbun* (Kosei newspaper). Every time I meet her, Mrs. Matsuhashi’s kind personality heals my heart.

Since then, I have participated in the study sessions of *Germinating the Seeds of Awakening* by Founder Nikkyo Niwano, which are held every Sunday by the New York Dharma Center, and the Zoom meetings held by the Chicago chapter. As I’m usually at work when the meetings are held, I join them by phone. One day, Mrs. Murakami explained that the Zoom meetings had started as a measure to secure opportunities for the sangha members to meet regularly after



Mr. Hiramatsu's truck as his partner.

Spiritual Journey

the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I felt very fortunate to have joined Rissho Kosei-kai during the pandemic. By listening to the President's Dharma talks and Rev. Hatakeyama's explanation of them, I reflected on my past behaviors and realized that I had been living in a way that was completely opposite to the Buddha Way.

A year after joining the Zoom meetings, I had opportunities to visit the Chicago chapter and even dine with sangha members. Since beginning to read the members' accounts of their spiritual journeys in the pages of *Yakushin* and *Kosei*, I have come to realize that the sufferings I have experienced are small compared with the hardship that other members have gone through. Since becoming a member, I've always admonished myself to "control material desires," "listen to other people well," "consider things from various angles," and "be kind to other people." When I'm at work, especially when I am driving, I keep in mind to "stay calm," "be respectful, considerate, and make concessions," and always be mindful of safe driving. I make it a rule to do three good things for others every day and write them down

in my notebook at the day's end. I also write down my reflections for the day. I have heard it's better to focus on good things because this leads to our improvement, although we should be careful not to be overly proud of our achievements. When something goes wrong, I share it with Mrs. Matsuhashi as much as possible and receive her advice. Also, listening to what my fellow sangha members have to say about the Dharma during the Zoom meetings brings me immeasurably important learning opportunities.

I would like to reflect on my past actions and remarks, put my reflections into practice little by little, and live the rest of my life in accordance with the Dharma. I owe it much to Rissho Kosei-kai that I can think that way. As I look back on how I was living three years ago when I felt I had lost everything, I can't help but be grateful for being alive now or, to be more accurate, being enabled to live. I am truly fortunate that I didn't commit suicide three years ago.

Now, I will continue to be diligent, always putting the teachings of Founder Niwano and President Niwano into practice in my daily life.

Thank you very much for today.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

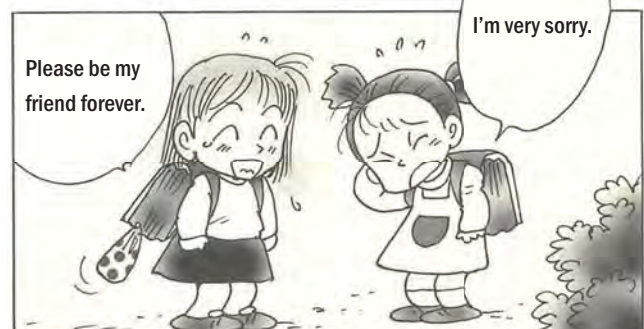
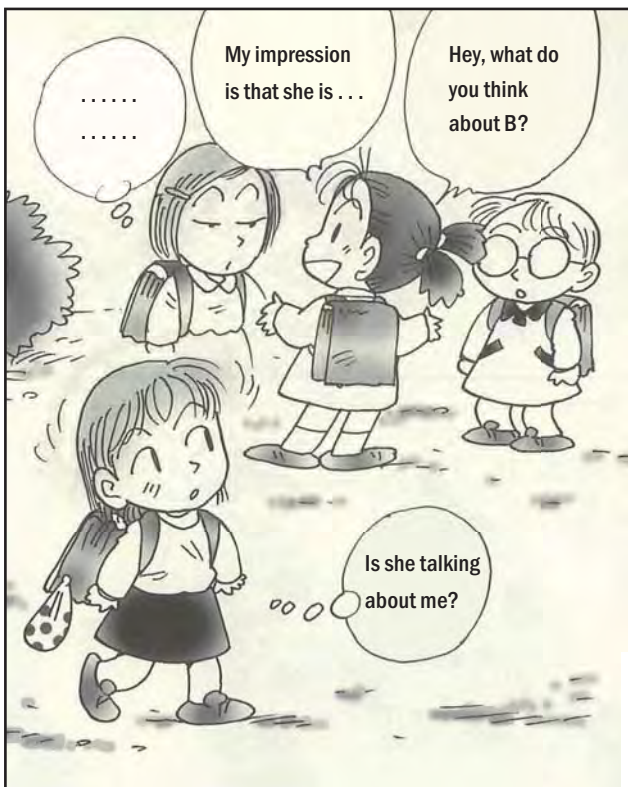
The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

Speaking the Right Words: Right Speech

Right speech means appropriate use of language.

It is not good to lie, speak frivolously, speak ill of others, or speak with a double tongue. If you use the right, compassionate words and respect your friends' positions, they will also use the right words to communicate with you. However, if you tell lies to your friends, they will leave you.

Therefore, let us use kind and compassionate words and cultivate our friendships.





Leading a Moral Life: Right Action

Right action means living pure daily lives in accordance with discipline and rules that morally guide our behavior. It includes getting up at a regular time in the morning, keeping promises, practicing cheerful greetings such as “Good morning!” and “See you later!” doing homework, review, and preparation for class.

It also involves acts such as not wasting money, eating meals without leaving any leftovers, helping with housework, and putting one’s palms together in reverence before the Buddhist family altar.

Are you taking right actions? Let us reflect on our daily conduct.





Making Vows and Putting Them into Practice

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



I was born the second son of six children to a farming family in Niigata Prefecture, Japan. My older brother remained at home and carried on the family line, while I ended up going to work in the Japanese capital, Tokyo, when I was sixteen. On the night train to Tokyo, I made six vows and repeated them to myself.

The first three were “I will never lie,” “I will work with all my strength,” and “I will undertake tasks that others find disagreeable.”

The second three were as follows: First, “I will never struggle with others. No matter how miserable my experiences, I will hold firm to the belief that they are all according to the wishes of the gods and buddhas.” Next, “I will work steadily and work hard, whether others are watching me or not.” And finally, “No matter how unpleasant the task, I will see it through once I have undertaken it.”



I also added the following tenets since my grandfather as well as my father had taught them to me almost every day: “Always do what’s right,” “Never deceive anyone,” “Grow up to be a person who does good for others,” and “Rise early and work late.” I traveled to Tokyo with these vows engraved on my heart.

Because of my faithful adherence to these vows and my willingness to suffer hardships to put them into practice, my employer placed great trust in me, telling me “Hardworking and honest young men like you are rare.”

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), p. 22





Two Pills

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

IN this month's Dharma talk, the President dealt with the subject of arrogance and haughtiness about "being alive" and reminded us of the preciousness of good health and the importance of living each day with gratitude and joy.

Speaking from personal experience, I overestimated my own physical fitness last year and pushed myself too hard, only to get a cautionary yellow light on my health. After a routine medical checkup, I was found to have high blood pressure and began taking antihypertensive medication on a regular basis. I also ignored the fact that I was already overworked and went on an overseas business trip for the first time in three years, which ended up causing me prolonged stomach trouble. In addition, since my fourth COVID-19 vaccination, I seem to have developed an allergy that occurs when my physical strength wanes, so I have also begun taking anti-allergy medicine on a regular basis.

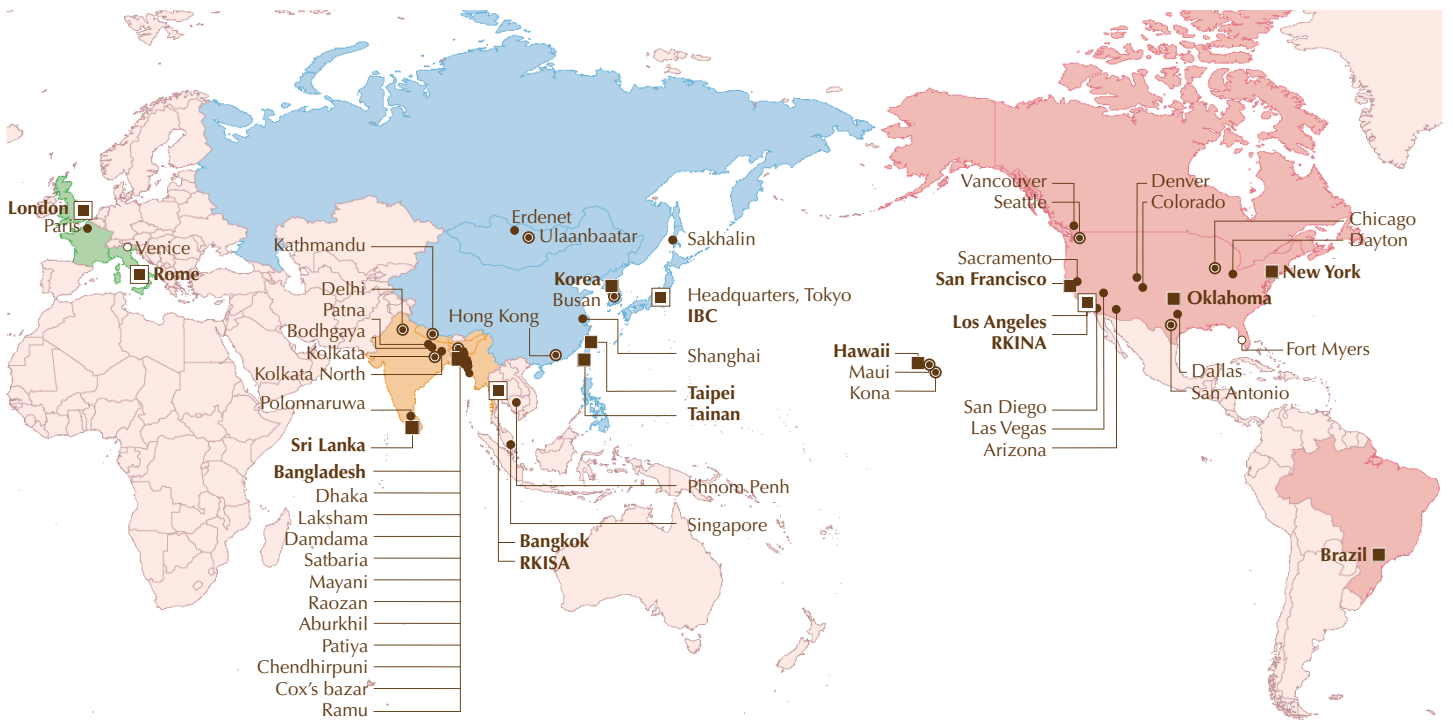
My daily life is maintained with the help of two pills, each as small as a grain of rice, that I take every morning. I reflect on the reality that my ordinary days that pass without any complication are supported by the accomplishments of medical science and once again accept this situation of mine as the wonder and preciousness of life. And every day, I spend my time learning abundantly in a way that I could never have imagined when I was in my fifties.

I hope to continue to deepen my introspection so that I can appreciate the "truly healthy lifestyle" that the President speaks of.





🌸 *A Global Buddhist Movement* 🌸



Information about
local Dharma centers



facebook



twitter

