

# Living the Lotus 3

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## Living the Lotus Vol. 210 (March 2023)

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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.

# The Body and the Mind Are Deeply Connected

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



## Health and Vitality Come from the Mind

In recent years, as opportunities to go out have decreased, I think that many people are staying home more often and not getting enough exercise. If you do not walk regularly, the muscles in your legs weaken so that even a short walk might make you tired, and then you become even less willing to go out.

Regarding muscles, it is reported that people with greater muscle mass live longer. We could say this is due to the relationship between muscles, immunity, blood sugar level, and so forth. However, I am also experiencing the decline of muscle strength that comes with aging, so in order to stay healthy, I continue to take an hour-long daily walk, unless it is a scorching summer's day. Considering what else is indispensable for maintaining good health though, I think there is more to it than just training the body's muscles.

The body and the mind are mutually inseparable. Indeed, the functioning of the mind affects the body, so it is important that we give our “mental muscles” a daily workout with inspiration and stimulation, always keeping them active in order to build up a constitution that is resistant to both mental and physical decline and illness. That way, we can always enjoy good health. Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), whose writings have influenced me for a long time, also says that the cause of poor health and senility is more in the mind than in the body.

In particular, if you lose interest in things other than your private affairs and mundane daily routine, or become obsessed with trivial things, you will no longer experience the joy and stimulation of self-improvement but lose your mental vitality, which will, in turn, affect you physically.

What is important then for maintaining a stimulated, active mind that enjoys self-improvement, even when we are preoccupied with trivial, mundane matters? Yasuoka offers the following three principles.

## “The Three Principles of Good Health”

The first of these principles is to “always keep the god of happiness in your mind.” The god of happiness is the most authentic mind. In other words, this means always keeping happiness present in your mind. And doesn't that mean always accepting each and every event that unfolds before you with joy and the feeling of receiving the teachings of the Buddha? Even when we are suffering, by positively accepting the reality before us and asking ourselves “What is the Buddha teaching me now?” we realize that beyond suffering there is the light of liberation, and our minds continue to evolve and refine themselves.

The second principle for preventing the decline of your mental muscles is to “constantly keep thoughts of gratitude in your mind.” It is certainly true that every time we think of gratitude and say the words “thank you” they bring us fresh inspiration.

The third is to “always aspire to be quietly virtuous.” In reality, this is not limited to doing good deeds unknown to other people; it also includes being considerate of the people you come in contact with in your daily life, as well as practicing putting other people first while aiming to benefit them and bring them happiness. I think Yasuoka calls these “the Three Principles of Good Health” to mean that by maintaining this frame of mind, the body will also stay healthy. However, from our point of view, those who have cultivated these three things in their minds are called bodhisattvas, aren't they?

Incidentally, I first became interested in health in 1960, when I found, in a used bookstore in Kanda, a book titled *Nishi shiki kenko ho* (The Nishi Method of Health) by Katsuzo Nishi (1884–1959). That was the year that Founder Niwano made me president-designate. Thinking back on it now, at age twenty-two I was filled with anxiety, so perhaps it was my instinctual reaction to try to keep my body and mind in harmony and maintain my physical health in order to suppress that mental anxiety.

Thanks to all of you, this month that anxious young man will turn eighty-five years old, and Rissho Kosei-kai will also mark its eighty-fifth anniversary. Although we have not yet exited the long tunnel of the COVID-19 pandemic, let's definitely share with the people close to us the blessings of the wondrous Dharma—which itself can be called a method of maintaining mental health—and together build healthy and dynamic families and societies.

From *Kosei*, March 2023



# Spiritual Journey

## How Buddhism Shaped My Life

Ms. Hisae Katherine Utsunomiya  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Los Angeles

*This Dharma Journey talk was delivered during the ceremony for the anniversary of Shakyamuni's attainment of buddhahood at the Los Angeles Dharma Center on December 4, 2022.*

**M**y name is Hisae Katherine Utsunomiya. I was encouraged to come here today by Ms. Adachi, an area leader in Covina, who has given me the honor of sharing the story of my life, my growth, and the way that Buddhism has shaped me into the person I am today.

I was born in Los Angeles in 1982 as the eldest daughter of Kazushige and Keiko Utsunomiya. My faith in the Buddha was instilled in me by my late maternal grandmother, Mitsu Kusakabe. I grew up in a family of four, and my mother had the greatest impact on my life. My father was dedicated to his job, but his demanding work schedule meant that I saw him infrequently. As a result, my mother often assumed the role of both parents. My father's intense work schedule also put a strain on my parents' relationship. My mother was strict with her children. I have a younger brother who is four years my junior, but we never formed a close bond, likely due to our differing personalities. It took me a while to understand that her tough love came from her love for us.

Besides my immediate family, I also had a cousin named Christopher Yoshinori Takakura. Chris was more than just a relative, he was my best friend. He and I spent a lot of time together growing up, and he was always there to support me through the challenges I faced during my teenage years. Whenever I turned to him for advice, he always guided me by thinking rationally.

Throughout my adolescent years, I rebelled against my parents for a number of reasons. The primary factor was stress at school and another was a weakened family structure caused by my father's absences. Aside from my father's being away from home for

work, there were other problems in my family; the relationship between my parents was deteriorating, creating a tense atmosphere in the home. During all this, I gradually lost interest in my studies and eventually stopped attending school, abandoning my desire to mend my family as well.

The loss of what had been the center of my life made it impossible for me to make sound decisions. In an attempt to draw my parents' attention, I rebelled against them, but nothing worked. I felt neglected and isolated and believed that my parents were projecting their own problems, which I had no control over, onto me. My mind was exhausted and everything felt like a burden. Eating, sleeping, and even being at home were painful.

Due to the sadness and lack of structure in my home life, I began hanging out with the wrong people



*Ms. Hisae Katherine Utsunomiya delivering her Dharma Journey talk.*

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for support and eventually found myself in serious trouble. It was around this time that my parents started to notice the change and did their best to get me back on track, but by that time, I had reached a point where I didn't care about anything anymore. This chaotic lifestyle continued for some time, until I was nineteen years old. I still vividly remember the words my grandmother said to me one day when she could no longer bear my excessively poor behavior: "Please, don't make your parents sad. We never raised you to be like this. We raised you with faith in the teachings of the Buddha. Please stop doing this to us!" Upon hearing these words from my grandma, I was struck with a deep sense of shame and humiliation. It became clear that my life had more meaning than I had previously understood. My life was significant, not just to myself, but to those around me as well.

Realizing I had obligations, I started going to school again. I had to work twice as hard to make up for my long absences. After years of diligent study, I returned to my former self. I now had a goal in life and had gained the new perspective that with hard work, there was nothing I couldn't achieve.

But those confident days lasted only until March 2003 when I discovered that I was pregnant. I was a sophomore in pharmacy school. I was overwhelmed and flooded with thoughts like, "How do I tell my parents?" "Am I going to disappoint them again?" "What will they say? I'm still so young and I'm not even married yet?" Despite all the pressure and uncertainty surrounding my future, something inside me knew that I should keep my baby. I followed through, and in December 2003, I gave birth to my first child and only biological daughter Alice.

Alice was the biggest blessing of my life. I was afraid that my family would shun me for becoming a single mother when I was still so young, but in fact, what happened was the exact opposite. Alice's

coming into the world brought my whole family, including my grandmother, closer together. Alice is my inspiration in everything I do. I don't say it often, but I truly believe she was sent to me from an angel above.

While Alice's birth brought me joy and fun, I was also faced with the reality of parenting. My life had been changed forever, and the effort I had been putting in so far would no longer be enough. I was living for more than myself; I had a daughter whom I had to provide for and care for. I would leave Alice with my mother during the day so I could attend college and then work the night shift at Wells Fargo's mortgage compliance office, returning home late at night to take care of her. Despite sleeping only two to three hours a day, I accomplished something I had never thought possible, thanks to my mother's encouragement: I graduated from college and obtained my license as a pharmacist. I worked tirelessly to give my beautiful daughter the life I had always envisioned in my heart.

I have a friend named Jason. He also became the parent of one daughter at a young age. As a single father, he would frequently ask me for advice and help with child-rearing. He often let his daughter Laila play with Alice, and I watched over and raised the two adorable girls. I consider Laila to be my daughter, and she sees me as a mother figure. The two girls became inseparable and remain so to this day. When Alice and Laila were ten years old, I made the decision to foster a fourteen-year-old girl whose parents had given up on her and no longer wanted her to be their responsibility. I became a single mother of three cute girls.

All seemed to be going well then, but three years later, in 2017, our family was faced with the hardest time of our lives. In March, my cousin and best friend Christopher committed suicide. My father lost his job four months later. My uncle, Chris's father, fell ill and

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was admitted to the hospital. His condition became critical, and he passed away not long after Chris. My aunt, who had lost her only son and her husband, developed severe depression and was hospitalized.

While I was devastated, I had no time to mourn because I had to take care of everyone in my family both physically and financially. At that time, I felt there must have been something greater in this world that was giving me the strength to support those who needed me. I then realized that it was the working of the Buddha that had been empowering me. Reminded once again of what my grandmother had taught me, I saw the preciousness of life and why I was in this world. Even now I still remember the ones I lost every day, and my grief never goes away. But I have a role to play for those around me and a responsibility to provide for my family.

I had several goals in life. I am proud to have accomplished some of my smaller goals, such as helping my parents retire, graduating from pharmacy school, and starting some businesses. However, my



*Ms. Utsunomiya and her cousin Christopher in their elementary school days.*

biggest goal since graduating from pharmacy school has been to open my own long-term care pharmacy to provide medication and healthcare aid for the elderly, who are the ones most in need.

My grandmother brought Buddhism into my life by teaching me how to forgive, and how to practice kindness toward my parents. By letting go of the grudges and resentment I'd been holding onto for so long, I could love my family and find peace of mind. Buddhism has made it possible for me to grow as a human being so much more than I ever would have done without it.

I have lived my life pursuing my career and happiness for my daughters. These were the only things I focused on. My encounter with a friend, however, made me wonder if there might be more to life than my career and my daughters. That friend later became my best friend, my foremost supporter, my business partner, my handyman, my chef, and even my driver as I don't like driving. He is the man who does it all, my husband Steven. In 2021, we bought our beautiful first home together. He comes from a big family and is the youngest of eleven siblings. Through my marriage to Steven, I have learned several new things from the Buddha's teachings: patience, love, living, and letting go.

As I mentioned earlier, I, standing here in front of all of you today, have a dream that I've nurtured for many years: to open my very own long-term care pharmacy. This will help me give back to those in need. I am just days away from turning my dream into reality.

Steven and I offer incense and prayers to the Buddha every day to express our gratitude for the blessings he has given us. Furthermore, I am thankful my dad worked so hard to provide for his family. I am also grateful that my mom pushed me to excel academically. I now have the closest bond with my parents that I have ever had. I'm thankful for Steven's

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patience, which has rubbed off onto me. I am grateful for having been blessed with three beautiful daughters and for the possibility of having two more children through in vitro fertilization. But most of all, I am very thankful to my grandmother for sharing those important lessons with me when I was going through dark days. I am also grateful to my grandmother on my father's side, who taught me the meaning of many things in life. Sadly, we lost her this past May. I wish I had been able to make one last visit to Japan to see her so I could convey my gratitude for the unconditional love and support she gave me at all times.

I am deeply aware that the support of these significant individuals has had a profound impact on my life. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today. I would like to thank all of you for the support you have given me in my life.



*Ms. Utsunomiya with her parents and daughter Alice.*



# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

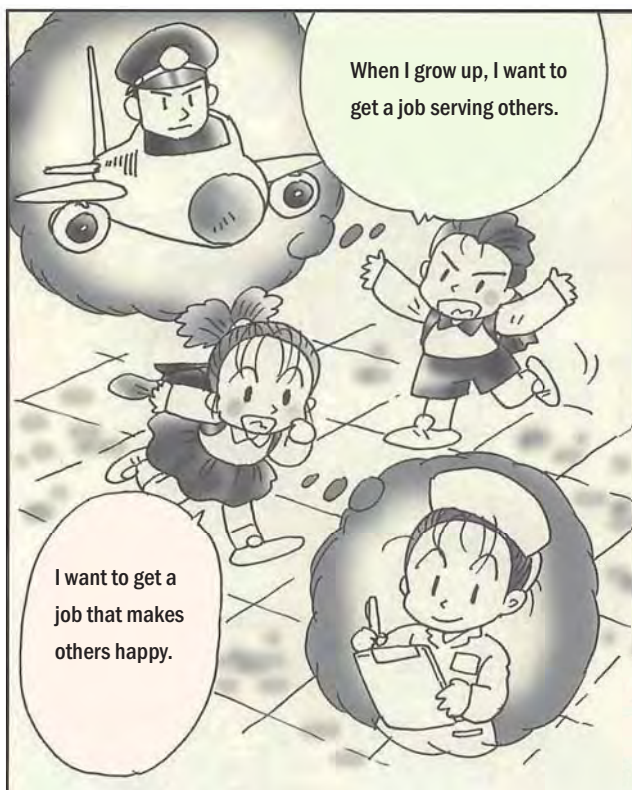
## The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

### Devoting Ourselves to Benefiting Others and Society: Right Livelihood

Right livelihood is securing such necessities of life as clothing, food, and shelter in a proper way. In other words, we should live on a justifiable income obtained through work, pursuing a career that is consistent with the teachings of the Buddha.

Also, when we engage in work, it is important to consider what we can do for others and society through our work.

Let us bear in mind that we should lead steady and well-ordered lives wherever we work: at school and at home for students and in the workplace for working adults.





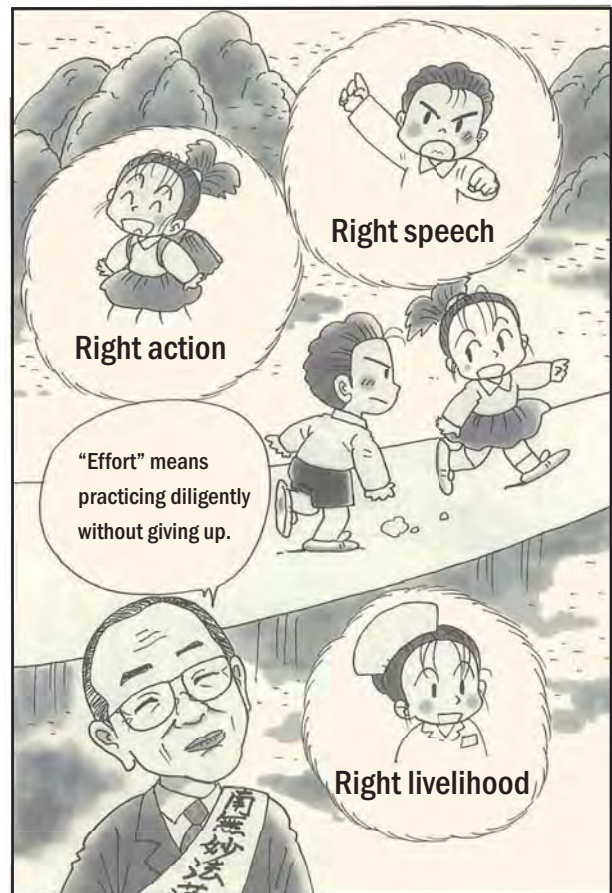
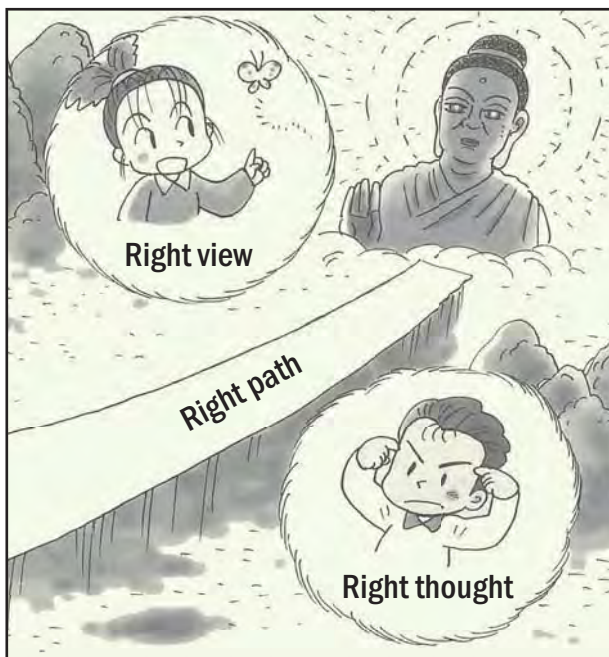


## Repeating Correct Conduct in Our Daily Lives: Right Effort

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.





Chapter 1  
Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

## The Buddha Is Always Right Beside Us

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai





At Oike Elementary School, where I attended, there were wise sayings and well-known adages hanging on all the classrooms' walls.

Those words of wisdom included famous expressions such as the Japanese saying “Nothing will be accomplished unless you just do it, and if something hasn't been accomplished, that's because you didn't do it” and the famous maxim “Heaven helps those who help themselves.” Those words as written in the principal's calligraphy are still clearly visible to my mind's eye and burned into my memory. It's impossible to measure the impact those words have had on my life.

Hard work and perseverance are fundamental to our growth. But they are so basic that we sometimes neglect them. This happens because we don't realize that the gods and buddhas are right beside us, and so we fudge things and slack off.

But I cannot help always feeling grateful because I believe that the gods and the buddhas are continuously watching over us. Therefore, no matter what task I take on, I always do my best and am as industrious as I can be.

It is important to improve oneself in this way for as long as one lives; to cherish the aspiration to devote oneself to the good of other people and the world at large, and to work hard and persevere toward realizing that aspiration.

The Buddha guided you into the world so that you could live your life in this way.

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 23–24





## Keeping the Body and Mind in Harmony Is Key to Good Health

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

**I** APPRECIATE your reading *Living the Lotus* every month. In Japan, the weather still remains cold although we are in spring according to the calendar. I hope all of you are doing fine in the places you live and practice the teachings.

In his message for this month, titled “The Body and the Mind Are Deeply Connected,” President Nichiko Niwano introduces “The Three Principles of Good Health” advocated by Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983). The President interprets these principles as ways to cultivate a mind that experiences the joy and stimulation of self-improvement.

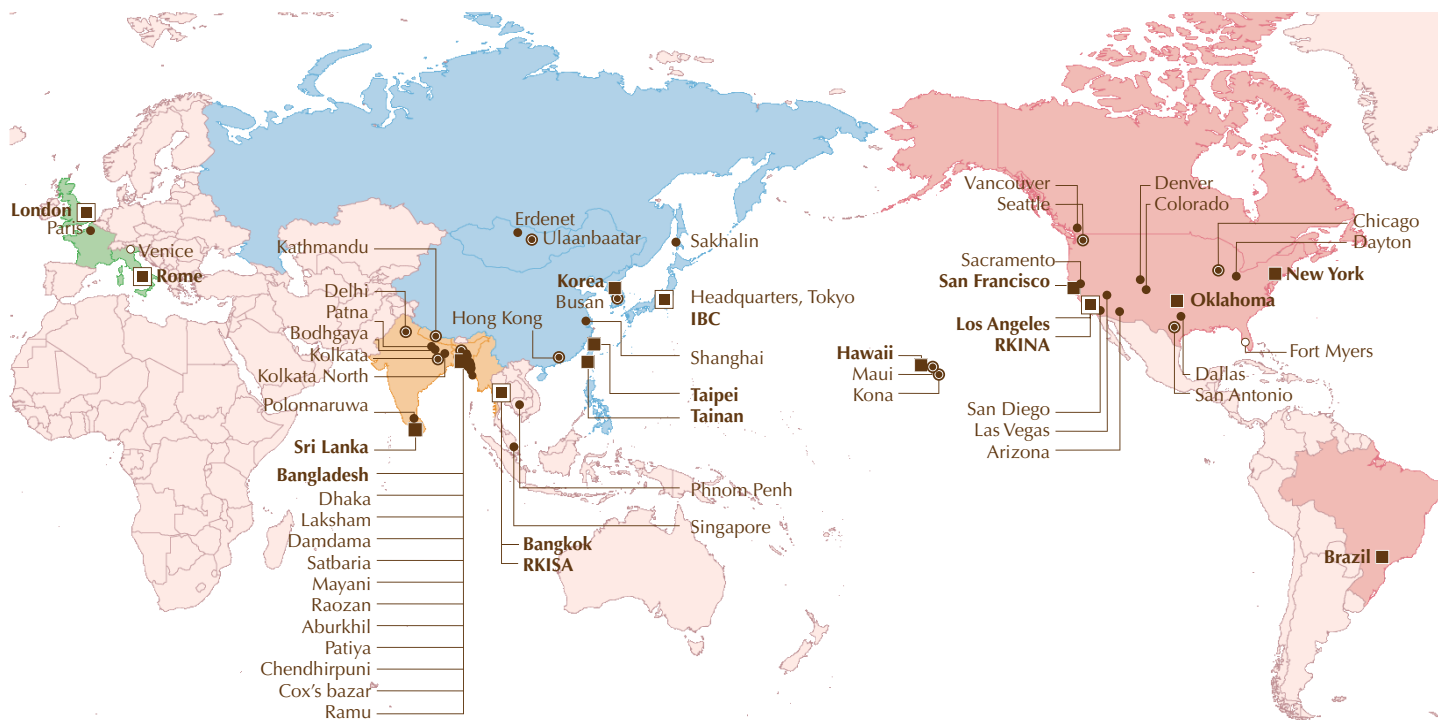
President Niwano notes that the body and mind are mutually inseparable, and we can easily imagine from daily experience that the functioning of the mind affects the body. Reflecting on his younger days, when he was made the president-designate, he says that he began to practice a method of health learned from a book, which was his instinctual reaction to try to get over the anxiety gnawing at him. This passage makes me feel close to President Niwano as a fellow human being who has anxieties and weaknesses.

I myself have also tried a number of practices to maintain my mental and physical health. One of them is a morning walk I take every weekend while also picking up trash on the street. But, as I remain full of health anxiety, I am now hoping to try a new challenge to keep my body and mind in shape.





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