

Living the Lotus 5

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil

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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.

Being Kind to Yourself

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



This Era of Being Easily Psychologically Scarred

Since long ago, in every culture, people have considered it a virtue to be hard on themselves and kind to others. These days, though, it seems that we need to be kind to others and kind to ourselves as well, because there are many more people suffering from psychological scars than ever before.

In the world of social media, which seems to be symbolized by incidents of people being driven to suicide by anonymous postings that deny them their identity, many people are inflicting psychological scars on others by repeating baseless slander. Some experts are even saying that in this era, in order to protect your mental health, being overconfident is just about right. Surely that tells us how easy it is these days to become psychologically scarred.

At the same time, the problems leading to reports of child abuse and people being tormented by bullying and harassment are not going away at all. The reality is that such traumatic events leave their victims with many psychological scars that may make them become masochistic or self-denying. In light of this, it may be that we need to be kind to ourselves now more than ever.

An era like this must be calling out for self-compassion—not blaming yourself for some failure or trouble but doing self-care when facing such events—as the idea has been attracting attention in recent years. While this thinking comes from psychiatrists, who are working to improve our mental health, we can also say that it is derived from Buddhist teachings. In other words, basic Buddhist teachings, such as the importance of self-respect and accepting phenomena just as they are, protect our mental health.

Making Yourself Cheerful and Healthy

Self-care means, for example, that when you make a mistake, instead of viewing that as a negative event, you accept it broadmindedly as something that happens to everyone. When you can positively accept that such an experience will become one of your personal assets, you will not give in to the urge to unilaterally blame or punish yourself. By moving away from the viewpoint of making one-sided judgments about things being good or bad, you can face matters calmly, realize that the situation is not entirely bad, and put your mind at ease.

However, the expression “self-care” may sound like spoiling yourself, and some people might think it is the opposite of the self-discipline of being diligent and pursuing the Buddha Way. Actually, self-care ultimately means facing yourself calmly, encountering your one and only irreplaceable self, and maintaining inner harmony, which is the same thing as being diligent for we Rissho Kosei-kai members. In that sense, we can say that every day, we are practicing a method of maintaining good mental health.

In any case, what really matters is that through self-care, you clear away your worries and make *yourself* healthy. The result of everyone's mind being worry-free is that our homes and societies become healthier and brighter. Indeed, one research report states that people who are kind to themselves interact with others more kindly.

A man who was perplexed about how to cheer himself up asked for advice from Mark Twain, the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, who told him “The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up.” At Rissho Kosei-kai, we often hear stories of people distressed by worries who come to know of others' painful experiences and, before they know it, have forgotten what they were worried about. By helping others we help ourselves, and so those who have helped themselves feel compelled to help others.

People whose minds have been liberated in this way will all be healthy and cheerful. A society with many healthy, cheerful people is said to be a happy society. And that is precisely why, as long as there are people around us who seek spiritual growth and liberation from suffering, we must make certain that our own selves are cheerful and healthy, so that we can expand our circle of caring.

From *Kosei*, May 2023



Spiritual Journey

What I Have Learned During My Two Years of Gakurin Seminary and My Future Resolution

Ms. Atasi Talukder
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at Rissho Kosei-kai's Ome Retreat Center in Tokyo on March 2, 2023, during Sotsurin Seppo-e, a ceremony in which graduating overseas students of Gakurin Seminary present their Dharma Journeys.

IN 2020, I took the Gakurin Seminary entrance examination for the third time. For my second attempt, my family supported me, but unfortunately I didn't pass the examination. The third time was my last chance, because my parents worried about my career and future marriage.

We are a family of five: my parents, my older sister, my younger brother, and I. Before COVID-19, my father was a longshore worker, my mother was a housewife, my sister was in charge of ship operations at a marine shipping company, and my brother was an elementary school student. I worked for a clothing company. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, my father lost his job and my salary was cut down by half. Because my sister couldn't travel abroad on business, she quit the shipping company and began working at another company for a lower salary.

Meanwhile, I received the news that I'd passed the examination for Gakurin Seminary. I quit my job and started preparing to study in Japan, applying for an entry visa. However, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the visa application office was closed. It was then decided that classes for first-year students of the Gakurin Overseas Students Course would be held online.

In April 2021, I started my Gakurin Seminary life online. Although I was looking forward to school life, there were some difficulties. First, I had difficulty setting up an online connection. In Bangladesh, unlike in Japan, electricity is not available all the time. Due to the underdeveloped power generation system, we have regional rolling blackouts. In each area, electricity is cut off for four hours in the daytime every day. Moreover, the internet connection is often

severed by the weather. When my computer broke down and I couldn't fix it, I borrowed a computer from my friend to attend classes. I made it a habit to fully charge the battery of my computer and cell phone while electricity was available and before class started. When I lost my internet connection because of bad weather, I had no choice but to give up. In that case, I contacted my classmate and made up for the part I had missed.

The second challenge was my slow progress in the study of Japanese. It took me time to memorize new words and improve my pronunciation, as I was talking in Bengali with my family and only speaking Japanese when I attended classes. Teachers at our Japanese language school always tried their best to teach us in an easy-to-understand way. When I couldn't catch up, they extended the lesson for me.



Ms. Atasi Talukder delivers her Dharma Journey talk during the Sotsurin Seppo-e.



Since there is a three-hour time difference between Japan and Bangladesh, a class that starts at 10 a.m. in Japan starts at 7 a.m. in Bangladesh. In order to prepare for and attend class after morning sutra recitation, I had to wake up very early in the morning. As I shared a room with my siblings, my voice talking to the class and the brightness of the room's light sometimes woke them up, and we had quarrels because of this.

The teachers, staff members, and Japanese students at Gakurin supported us in various ways so that we, the overseas students, felt as if we were studying in the classroom of Gakurin. For example, Japanese seminary students spoke to us in easy-to-understand Japanese. They also planned Zoom parties and Dharma circle sessions for us in the evenings, after they finished classes and their duties for the day, so that we could deepen our sense of fellowship with other Gakurin students. Ms. Takayo Chiba, a staff member of Gakurin, relieved my anxiety by listening to me attentively whenever I called her about my worries over my studies and relations with my family, even on days when she was off duty. I was supported by many people in various ways, so I owe what I am today to all their support for which I am truly grateful.

The third challenge was that shortly after I became a seminary student, my mind began to waver about whether I should continue studying at Gakurin. When I was working at the clothing company, I was supporting my family financially as much as I could. But after quitting my job, I was being supported by my parents, and I began to feel shame for it. Not only was I unable to support my family but I thought I might be imposing an extra burden on them. When it turned out that going to Japan would not be possible due to the pandemic, I felt so powerless and sad.

Meanwhile, my sister had turned twenty-six years old that June, and my parents began to think about marriage for her. In Bangladesh, most women get married by the age of twenty-five. We needed a lot of money for her wedding, and in December, her wedding ceremony was held. During this time, I began to waver over whether I should move up to the second grade of Gakurin. Many people empathized with me. The teachers at the Japanese language school as well

as upper-level students and teachers at Gakurin encouraged me to advance to the next grade. Ms. Chiba was always on the side of the overseas seminary students and listened to our worries of any kind. Rev. Yoshie Otomo, a deputy director of Gakurin, guided us to practice raising a heart of gratitude to others by saying "Thank you" more than a hundred times a day, and accepting everything that happens in life as a present from the Buddha toward creating a better future. She taught us the importance of accepting all things with a positive mind. Moreover, when I shared my feelings with a classmate, I felt a lot better. Even though he was in a more difficult situation than I was, he was doing his best, and I was encouraged by his sincere effort. Thanks to all this support and encouragement from many people, I made up my mind to complete my studies at Gakurin, even though I would have to study online throughout the two-year course. Then I felt I had become patient and gained the confidence to persevere, even during the worst times in life.



Ms. Talukder leads the sutra recitation during a ceremony for Gakurin students.

Spiritual Journey

Moreover, I realized that being unable to go to Japan was a present from the Buddha to allow me to understand the feelings of my family. By studying the Buddha's teachings while living with my family at home, I became better aware of the various thoughts and feelings of each of my family members. Especially, I became keenly aware of my mother's daily hard work. She did household chores all the time. Before knowing that, I thought it was much harder to work in society. But once I knew about the surprising amount of housework she was doing every day, I became grateful to her and felt remorse for my self-centeredness. However, I was too shy to express my thanks to her. On the other hand, my fellow students at Gakurin always say "Thank you," even for very little things. Influenced gradually by their attitude, I became willing to convey my gratitude to my mother. When I finally became able to say the words of thanks to my mother, I received the news that the second-year classes would be held in Japan, and I could attend the classes in person.



Ms. Talukder with Ms. Chiba, a staff member of Gakurin, and her classmate, Mr. Shourab Barua.

In Japan, I've had two major lessons. First, I have learned the importance of ancestor-appreciation prayer. Just before Gakurin Seminary's summer vacation last year, when I was in Bangladesh, my grandmother passed away due to illness. I knew she had been hoping to see me, but I prioritized the Gakurin classes, thinking I would go to see her as soon as the summer vacation began. On the eve of the summer vacation, however, she made a video call to me, and soon after she saw my face, she breathed her last. I deeply regretted not having visited her. At the funeral, I felt so sad when I heard my cousins ask "What kept you from coming earlier?"

I came to Japan feeling guilty for not having been able to fulfill her last wish. Later, my grandmother appeared in a dream. I felt she was trying to say something to me, and I was scared. When I talked to Ms. Chiba and Rev. Otomo about the dream, they comforted me by saying "It was good, even on a video call, that you could meet your grandmother before she passed. She loves you so much that she came to see you in your dream." Then they advised me to offer an ancestor-appreciation prayer for her through sutra recitation. However, I was too busy preparing for my upcoming dissemination training at a Dharma center to offer the prayer satisfactorily. When I told this to Rev. Noriyuki Suzuki, the minister of the Toride Dharma Center in Ibaraki Prefecture where I had the training, he kindly joined me in offering the prayer by reciting the sutra specially for my grandmother. After the recitation, I felt at ease and I was able to believe from the bottom of my heart that my grandmother was not angry with me but that she truly loved me.

The second lesson I've learned is "if one changes, everything will change accordingly." During my life at Gakurin, I came across a number of challenges such as needing to understand different cultures and building harmonious relationships both with peers and with upper-level and first-year students. However, every time I practiced the teaching "If one changes, everything will change accordingly," a path opened up before me. When I reflected on myself in light of this teaching, I realized how selfish I was, always looking for benefits and trying to avoid hard work.

I also realized that I got easily frustrated when my wish was not fulfilled. In order to change my selfishness, I made it a rule to listen to others' feelings before expressing my own. This taught me that others don't always think the way I do. I also learned that what's good for me isn't necessarily good for others.

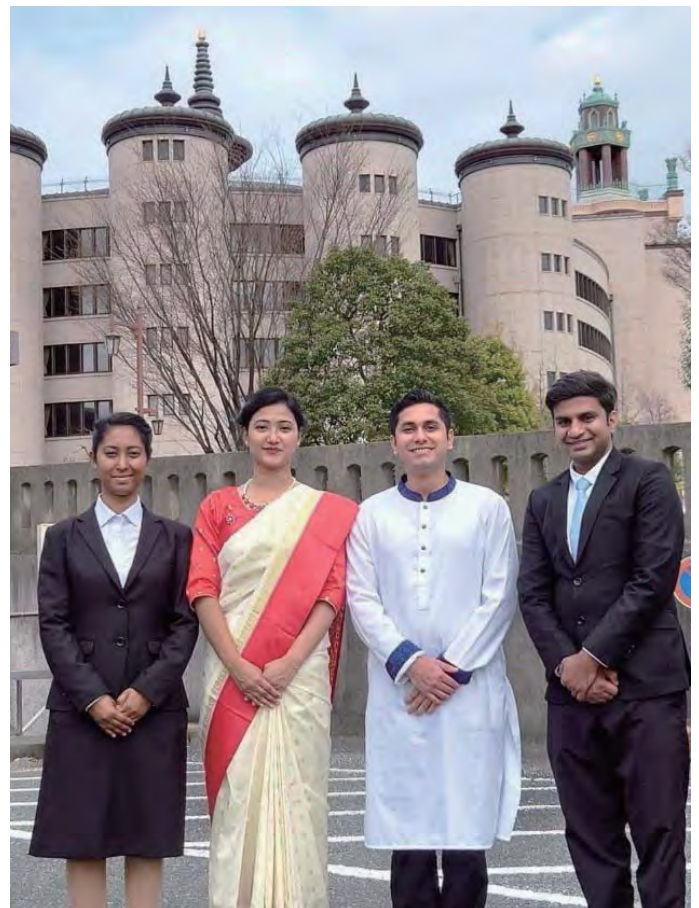
Rev. Suzuki, the minister of the Toride Dharma Center, taught me the importance of building harmonious relationships and cultivating a mind of gratitude. When I said "Thank you" and "I'm sorry" with a sincere and honest heart, as he had taught me, I felt that my feelings got through to others and better relationships were built. Always keeping in mind the importance of learning from others and understanding their wishes, I realized this had promoted harmony with people around me, and I had become more grateful for them.

In the second year of Gakurin, the students work on a senior thesis. I wanted to do research to help Bangladeshi women lead happier lives, but I was not sure what kind of theme I was going to address. During his lecture on the senior thesis, Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, the president of Gakurin, asked us if we could envisage our activities after we return to our native countries in light of the Four Noble Truths. The Lotus Sutra teaches that all human beings equally possess buddha nature, and that everyone can become a buddha. In Bangladesh, however, this kind of thinking is not common. Traditional Buddhism in Bangladesh still holds the idea that a woman can't become a buddha. Furthermore, women in Bangladesh are not allowed to make life decisions of their own will. In our culture, parents decide almost everything for their daughters, including which school to go to, where to work, and whom to marry. Women in Bangladesh are accustomed to this way of thinking, so they don't try to make their voices heard. Many of them think that even if they do so, nothing will change. Looking back on my own experiences, I desired to encourage fellow Bangladeshi women to change their way of thinking and take action to create a society in which women can build their lives on their own, while also valuing harmony with people around them.

So, I set the goal of my senior thesis around drafting a plan for a Training of Trainers (TOT) project

that aims to nurture young women leaders at Rishso Kosei-kai of Bangladesh and spread the idea that everyone possesses buddha nature throughout Bangladesh. Currently, I'm drawing up concrete measures with a list of action plans for the project and receiving guidance from Rev. Noriko Nakamura, the director of the Dharma Education and Human Resources Development Department.

I would like to express my gratitude to Rev. Keiji Kunitomi, the chair of the Board of Trustees, Rev. Nakamura, Rev. Otomo, and my fellow students and staff members of Gakurin, who gave me a supportive push toward my Dharma dissemination after returning home. I'm very grateful to all the people who nurtured me during my two-year Gakurin life. As soon as I return to Bangladesh, I will devote myself to diligent practice, while serving as a guide for Bangladeshi women on their path to a happier life.



Ms. Talukder (second from the left) with her fellow students of Gakurin in front of the Great Sacred Hall.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

Serving Others: Donation

Along with the Eightfold Path, Buddhism teaches the Six Paramitas that consist of six practices to attain happiness: donation, precept keeping, forbearance, effort, meditation, and wisdom.

To sum up the Six Paramitas, it is the teaching of serving people in society while improving ourselves at the same time. In other words, the practice of the Six Paramitas means taking actions with the wish to not only attain our own happiness but also make many other people around us happy. In this sense, we can say that it is a teaching for bodhisattvas.

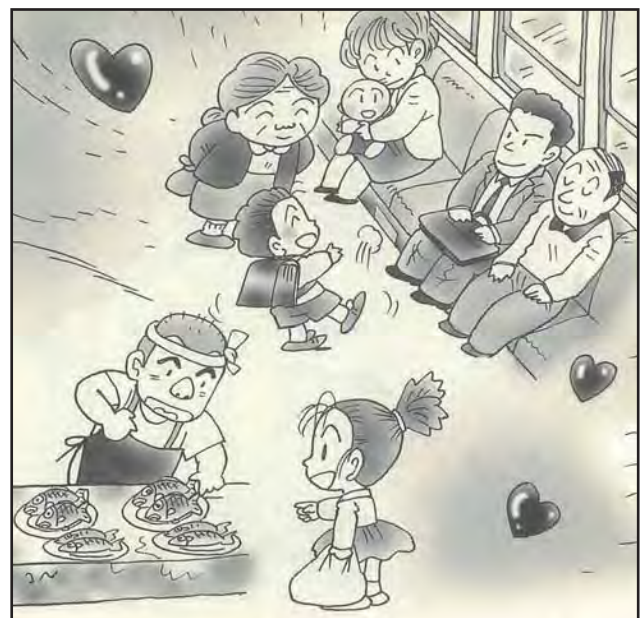
The first practice of the Six Paramitas is donation, which is taking right actions that are helpful for others.

The practice of donation includes donating your money, material goods, and physical labor, sharing the right teachings with others, and alleviating others' anxiety.

Donating your pocket money to organizations that are promoting the work of protecting the environment, giving up your seat for passengers in need on the train, and helping your mother with household chores are all actions that are wonderful practices of donation. Speaking with kind words to family and friends and smiling in communication with others are also practices of donation. Let us start practicing wholeheartedly whatever we can do.

Did You Know?

It is important that the person who gives a donation, the person who receives it, and the donation itself are all pure and clean. Those who donate to others should not be arrogant, and those who receive donations should not be subservient.





Abiding by the Rules: Precept Keeping

Precept keeping teaches us that we should improve ourselves by following the Buddha's teachings, observing the rules, and keeping promises.

We can enjoy playing sports because we, the players, keep to the rules. If we follow traffic regulations, we can cross at the crosswalk safely without worrying about getting into an accident. Thus, it is important to follow rules for the well-being of all.

Let us discuss and set rules that are suitable for our own family members, as well as for our friends, and put them into practice.

Did You Know?

The second of the Six Paramitas is precept keeping, a basic practice of Buddhists. In Buddhism, there are many precepts ranging from those that are to be kept by lay Buddhists, including members of Rissho Kosei-kai, to those that are to be kept by priests in the monasteries.





Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

You Were Born to Become a Buddha (2)

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



Becoming “an Awakened One”

Now, the word “buddha” has another meaning; it literally means “an awakened one.” Anyone who realizes the fundamental principle, or truth, that permeates this world and opens their eyes to the true state, or ultimate reality, of everything that arises in this world is called an awakened one, a buddha. Becoming a buddha in the sense of being an awakened person is something that everyone has the potential to do.



Of course, fathoming the fundamental principle of this world is an extremely difficult task. However, we don't have to awaken entirely through our own efforts. Shakyamuni Buddha has already expounded truth in its entirety, so we need only to unequivocally accept and follow his teachings.

For example, even the truth that all living beings have buddha nature would be impossible to realize with ordinary practice and diligence through our own efforts. However, if you accept Shakyamuni's teaching of universal buddha nature with an open and sincere heart, thinking "Of course! Every human being inherently possesses the nature of a buddha! And if I fully actualize that buddha nature, I, too, can become a buddha," then you've as good as realized it! Your decision to want to become a buddha by fully actualizing your buddha nature is the first step toward becoming an awakened one.

In our daily lives, the most important practice for becoming a buddha is to recite the Lotus Sutra every morning and evening. When we inscribe the teachings of the Buddha onto our hearts through reciting the sutra, we are naturally inspired to cherish and long for the Buddha and look up to him with thirsting hearts.

Then the wish to connect with all the people you encounter through a heart of compassion and mercy, just like the Buddha, will also well up from deep within your heart. Your journey on the Way of becoming a buddha consists of accumulating such bodhisattva practice.

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 26–27



Director's Column



Being Grateful for the Gift of Life

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

HELLO everyone. Thank you so much for taking the time to read my column again this month. In Japan, the cherry blossom season is almost over, and regarding the COVID-19 situation, the government has decided to downgrade, on May 8, the legal status of COVID-19 to Class 5, meaning the disease will be considered equivalent to seasonal flu. These changes in our surroundings make me feel the truth of the impermanence of all things.

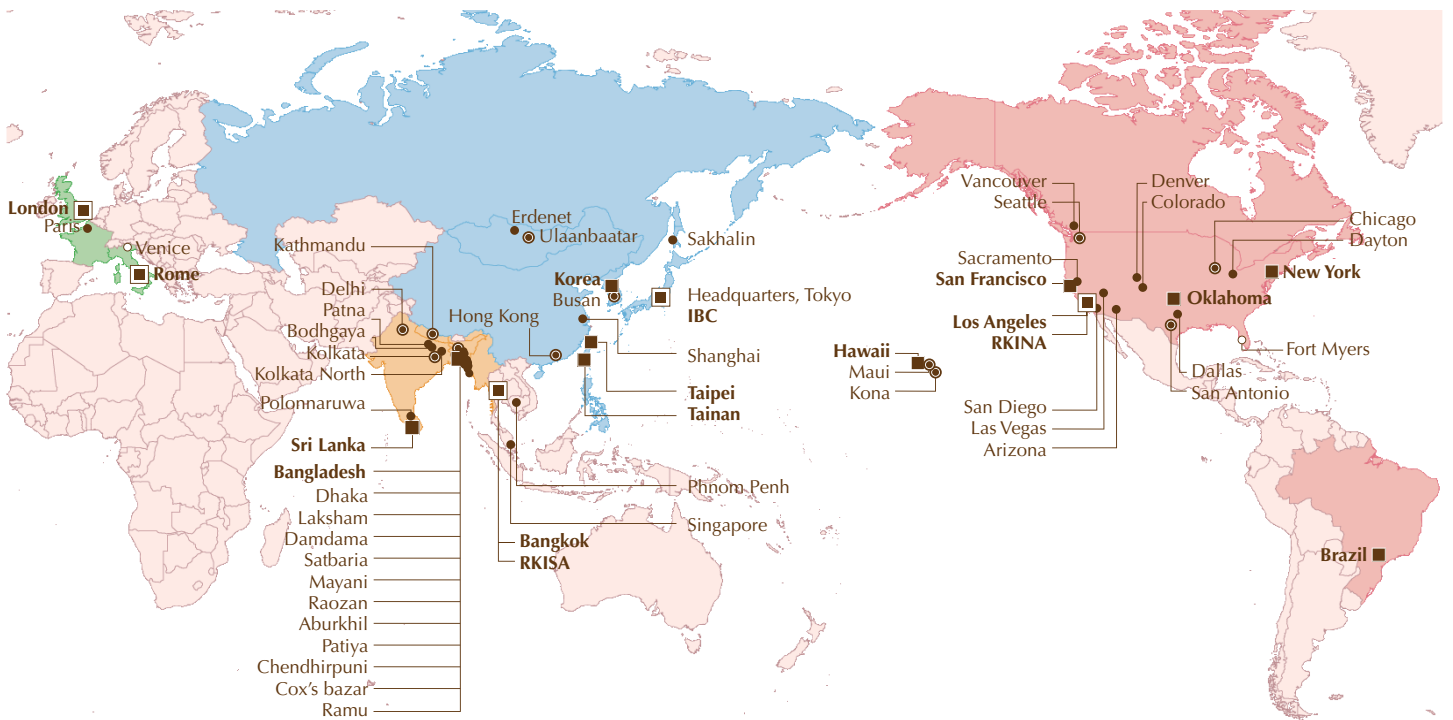
Through the series of messages on health that began in January this year, President Nichiko Niwano is teaching us that the forward-looking mind, which is the source of health and vitality, arises from reverence for the preciousness of life. I think it would be wonderful if an experience of suffering, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were to work as a catalyst, allowing us to realize the truth that the lives we thought we lived individually are actually sustained by the entirety of all existence. I believe this significant change in our perspective will lead us, with health and energy, to more diligence.

To make the most of the knowledge and experience we have gained through the unexpected three-year pandemic, I would like to continue my diligent practice and nurture my grateful and humble mind while appreciating the wondrousness of the gift of life that we are all given.





🌸 *A Global Buddhist Movement* 🌸



Information about
local Dharma centers

