

Living the Lotus 6

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Buddhism in Everyday Life



**2024 Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival
Rissho Kosei-kai Members in North America
Participate in the Grand Parade in San Francisco**

Living the Lotus Vol. 225 (June 2024)

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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.

Living with a Calm and Peaceful Mind

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



“I Wish I Could Live Like This”

Soon it will be the season in Japan when bright green leaves, washed by the rain, catch the eye. As the humidity and temperatures rise, however, the rainy season may also dampen our minds and make us feel gloomy, so let's try to at least keep our minds clear and cheerful.

The other day, I came across a wonderful volume of poetry titled *Sukoyaka ni, odayaka ni, shinayaka ni* [Healthy, calm, and flexible], (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 2006). In it, the poet Shuntaro Tanikawa (b. 1931) freely expresses, in Japanese, his impressions of passages from an English translation of the Dhammapada. Here is a poem from this volume:

Calmly

If you chase after pleasure,
You may only be left with sadness,
And if you indulge in it too much,
You may smart with pain forever.
Into a mind with nothing to lose,
Joy flows freely.
Anger will narrow your view,
And close your mind.
Arrogance will tie you down,
And restrict your mind.
So let your mind be calm
And carefree, flexible, and cheerful.

The promotional blurb for this book only says, “I wish I could live like this,” and I feel that is exactly what it explains. Calm, carefree, flexible, and healthy. If we can live like this,

truly our minds will always be clear, cheerful, and tranquil—and this is certainly the way to lead peaceful daily lives without attachments, regrets, or worries.

Shakyamuni teaches us that we are transported to a state of tranquility by our diligent practice. Therefore, we can believe that by continuing our diligent practice, we will experience peaceful days. In that case, what exactly does “diligent practice” mean?

Because We Have the Desire to Improve Ourselves

Buddhism is called “an unsurpassable teaching,” and of course we can accept it as a most excellent teaching. That said, we should not merely revere it with gratitude; we should also accept it as a teaching that—no matter how much we study it—has no limit or endpoint so that we go on cultivating our minds as we put what we learn into daily practice. I think this is how diligent practice leads us to tranquility.

Religious faith is meaningful precisely because our physical actions are its concrete manifestation. Therefore, our diligent practice takes the form of applying the teachings we have learned to all our daily actions by being kind, showing consideration for others, and interacting with others cheerfully and warmly. The accumulation of such moments brings us peace of mind day after day.

Although we say “apply the teachings you learned,” some people may be confused about what to keep in mind and how it applies to their daily practice. I think it is up to each of us to determine what diligent practice means, depending on our own concepts of an ideal person and our aspirations to lead this kind of life or become this kind of person.

For example, making an effort to stay healthy in order to complete your responsibilities every day is a form of diligence that corresponds to making a nonmaterial donation, like doing volunteer work. And while no one can live without occasionally burdening others, exercising self-restraint so as not to be a burden is performing another form of diligence. By always taking on, with gratitude and joy, not only paying work but also child-rearing and such daily housework as cooking and laundry, you are also performing a wonderful form of diligence. In other words, I think there is diligent practice in each and every thing you do in the course of your daily life that comes from the desire to improve yourself and follows through on that aspiration; this in turn brings you joy and peace of mind.

From time to time, though, there may be a day when our minds are not clear and bright. At such times, we should follow the example of Yoshio Toi (1912–91), who wrote these words, so appropriate for this season: “When it rains, / Do not grumble. / On a rainy day, / Live your rainy day lifestyle.” So why don’t we perform the diligent practice of trying to make something disagreeable into discovering a new way of living? Doing so will certainly make the whole day a good, peaceful day.

From *Kosei*, June 2024



Spiritual Journey

Devoting Myself to Sharing the Dharma with the Sangha

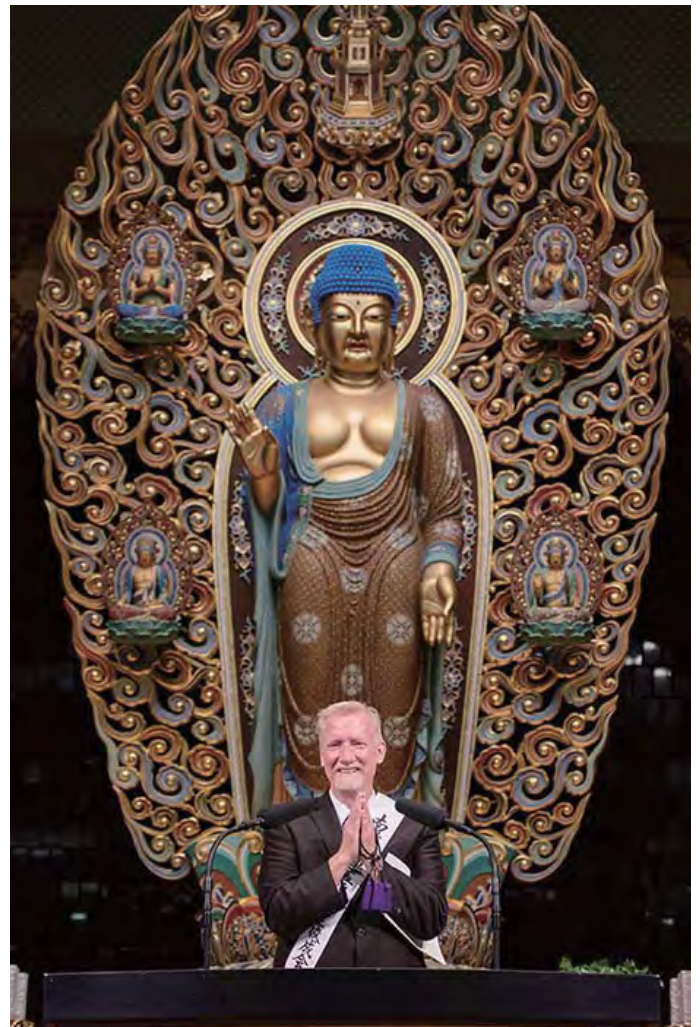
Rev. Kevin Roche
San Antonio Dharma Center

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Great Sacred Hall on March 15, 2024, during the ceremony celebrating the monthly memorial day for Shakyamuni Buddha.

Ohayo gozaimasu (Good morning). My Name is Kevin Roche. I am the Associate Minister of Rissho Kosei-kai in San Antonio, Texas. I am deeply honored to stand before you today and humbly tell my story of faith and liberation through my practice of Buddhism with Rissho Kosei-kai.

I was born and raised in New York. I was the fifth of seven children. My Father was an FBI agent, and my mother was a cook and housekeeper for a community of Catholic nuns. My parents grew up as working-class children of Irish immigrants. They raised their own children in a strict but loving fashion.

I was not a tranquil child. I had an explosive temper and was well known to my school and my community as a troublemaker. The school I attended had no plan for dealing with behavioral issues such as mine, and as a result, I increasingly received physical and emotional punishment. I soon developed self-destructive tendencies and behaviors. I began drinking alcohol and abusing substances at a very early age. My involvement in dangerous street activities



Rev. Kevin Roche delivers his Dharma Journey talk at the Great Sacred Hall.



Rev. Roche (front row, center) is surrounded by family members in his childhood.

increased dramatically. I cannot recall a single pleasant school experience after the age of nine. My school life became one of dismal failure and rebellion. I alienated myself completely from all my family's activities. Eventually, I left home and moved to Texas. My sister lived in San Antonio and invited me to stay with her. Although I was far from sober, I was able to escape from the darker environments and associations of my childhood.

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I completed my education and began working in the medical field. During my early career I married a young woman, and we lived for a short time in Iwakuni, Japan. While living in Japan, I had my first experience with sobriety and began to gain some peace of mind. When I returned to America, however, the familiar ghosts of alcohol and substance abuse returned to my life, and our marriage disintegrated into darkness. In 1986, I moved back to Texas in a state of dread, despair, and divorce.

In 1989, my world changed. I met a wonderful woman who is my wife, Barbara. She is here with me today. She supported me in stopping the alcohol and substance abuse with her love and kindness and insistence that I respect my own life. Thanks to her, the clouds obscuring my vision gradually dissipated and revealed a quality of buddha nature in myself that I had never known. We have spent the last thirty-five years happily together, living on a farm and raising horses, donkeys, llamas, and dogs.

I encountered the precious Dharma in 2004. I was driving past a small building, a building I passed every day, in San Antonio. I noticed the sign in front of the building had changed from Chinese kanji characters to English. It said Rishsho Kosei-kai—Every-

one Is Welcome. I nervously turned my car into the parking area. I saw this language change on the sign as the Buddha's message to me. I met Rev. Naomi Nakamura that day. He told me he had been waiting for me! Somehow, I felt I was home. Rev. Nakamura talked to me about Rishsho Kosei-kai Buddhism and the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and Founder Nikkyo Niwano. For the first time in my life, I felt spiritually inspired and nurtured.

At that time, Rishsho Kosei-kai of San Antonio had a Japanese sangha and a small English-language sangha of perhaps fifty to seventy members. Rev. Nakamura held study meetings about the Lotus Sutra every Tuesday night for our spiritual growth. As I learned the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, my heart softened and my perspective on life changed.

In 2008, I had a health issue, and my doctors suspected cancer. I was terrified. When I discussed this with Rev. Nakamura, he told me to go home and chant chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra aloud in front of my altar. He said these unforgettable words to me: "The Buddha has other plans for you." I felt that Rev. Nakamura was talking about something much deeper than my physical health, but I did not know what it was that he was trying to teach me. As it turned out, I did not have cancer at that time. Later, his words became invaluable to my life.

In 2009, Rev. Nakamura retired. There was no successor in San Antonio, and the English-speaking sangha members were surrounded by uncertainty. Soon after that, the members began to resign, retire, or simply fade away. The sangha was desperate for a leader, but I failed to step forward. I was too afraid to try. I felt a sense of despair, but I could not leave the sangha because I knew that if I did not continue to practice the teachings, I would go back to the mistakes of my earlier life. I called the remaining



Rev. Roche visits Rishsho Kosei-kai of Seattle to see Rev. Naomi Nakamura (former minister of the San Antonio Dharma Center).

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sangha members, and we organized a study group to read and discuss *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* and the teachings of Founder Niwano. We began to meet at a local shopping center. We had only a handful of English-speaking members then, and I felt alone. I did not know how to go forward. Rev. Kris Ladusau, the minister of the Oklahoma Dharma Center, supported me spiritually. Whenever I called her, she always picked up the phone and listened to me. She often said, “If you feel motivated to share the teachings, then the Way will show itself to you.” I remained diligent in my efforts. I will always be grateful to Rev. Ladusau for her wisdom and encouragement.

During this time, a wonderful person joined our sangha. Her name was Sandy. We practiced the Dharma together, even during the period when we had only a handful of members remaining in the sangha. Unfortunately, she passed away from cancer in 2013. Sandy had been living with cancer for many years, but she never showed any sign of suffering and only cared about the well-being of others. Sandy and I were friends in the Dharma, not just in the Dharma center. We took walks every day and talked about the Dharma.

Two days before Sandy died, I went to her bedside, and she said she wanted me to have her prayer beads,



Rev. Roche (back row, center) with members of the San Antonio Dharma Center after they performed a play featuring the parable of the medicinal herbs.

which she was holding in her hand. She then handed me an envelope and told me to read the contents later. After her death, I opened the envelope and was shocked to find that she had written a list of everything we had ever discussed. Each day, after our talks, she had listed each topic, especially the Dharma teachings.

Her profound practice taught me so much about revering every moment in my life, even the sufferings. I realized that learning the Dharma makes life joyful, while practicing the Dharma makes life precious.

In a mysterious coincidence, I was diagnosed with a form of blood cancer soon after Sandy died. I began months of chemotherapy with anxiety and a fear of death. The chemotherapy was difficult and frightening, but during those treatments, I visited the Dharma center every day. I felt that as long as I had my life, I would like to cherish every moment as Sandy had and share the teachings with the members.

Later, when Rev. Toshiyuki Kodaka, who was the minister of the Los Angeles Dharma Center, recommended me for Dharma teacher, I was humbly overwhelmed with joy. At that time there was no active English-speaking Dharma teacher and no minister living in San Antonio, so there were no role models to learn from. But I was changing. Thanks to the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and Founder Niwano, I was equipped with a growing confidence in spreading the teachings. I finally understood what Rev. Nakamura was trying to share with me: “The Buddha has other plans for you.”

In the ensuing years, the San Antonio Dharma Center developed new and wonderful leaders and welcomed many new members from a diverse population of eager new Buddhists. In 2020, I was honored to be named Associate Minister of Rishso Kosei-kai of San Antonio. Now I take delight in joyfully work-

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ing with our sangha members each and every day. By listening to the members in *hoza* circles and study sessions, I have learned so much from the wisdom that springs from their experiences and the way they put the Dharma into practice in their lives and are liberated from their sufferings. The misfortunes in their lives are not scars that diminish them, but shining, healing, and inspiring signs of their spiritual resilience.

Today the San Antonio sangha has grown to nearly four hundred members. The sangha members, through their bodhisattva efforts, have become rays of light that guide me and cultivate my growth as a leader and as a person.

President Nichiko Niwano wrote in his monthly message in October 2017, “it is only after first having had various experiences that we can begin to accept

suffering and hardship as valuable experiences for which we should be grateful and see for ourselves that ‘Truly, it is only because there is suffering that there is joy.’”

To my worldwide sangha and my beloved sangha in San Antonio, I say, “My pockets are filled with experiences of suffering, but my heart is overflowing with joy.”

Therefore, today, in front of the Buddha, I would like to pledge my vow to joyfully and diligently practice the Dharma, to be a fountain of spiritual energy in a weary world, and to be a grateful member and leader of Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio, Texas.

From the bottom of my heart—arigato gozaimashita (thank you very much).



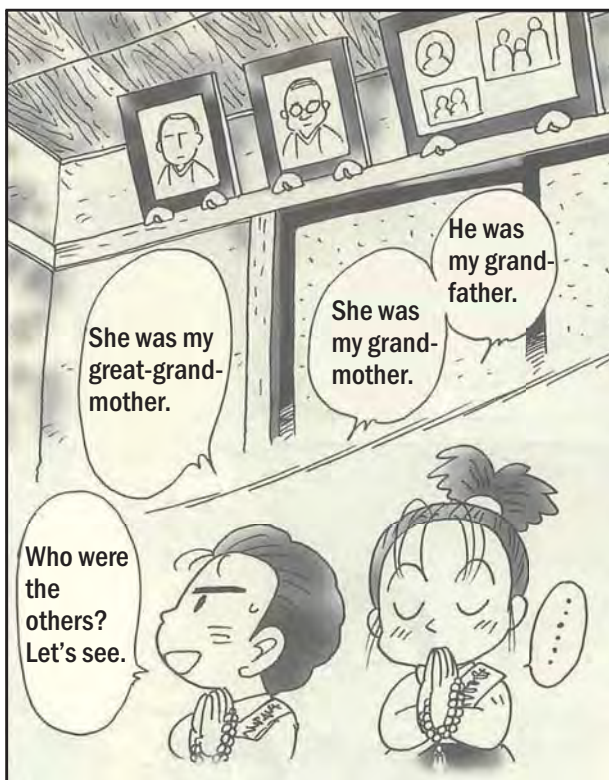
Rev. Roche with Rissho Kosei-kai staff members and their families and friends who came to the Great Sacred Hall on the day of his Dharma Journey talk to cheer him on.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Becoming Members of Rissho Kosei-kai

Appreciating Our Ancestors

Sokaimyo, an inscription that is enshrined at each member's home altar, bears the posthumous names for all the spirits of the family's ancestors. *Sokaimyo* symbolizes one of the primary goals of our faith as well as shows us the bodhisattva way for us to achieve it. Each of us has parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and ancestors far beyond them. Because of this, there is a huge number of ancestors who handed the gift of life to us. Thanks to them all, we are alive now. Someday in the future, we will be called ancestors too. This is how life is passed on to the next generation. Given this fact, it must be said, it is very wondrous that we are alive today.



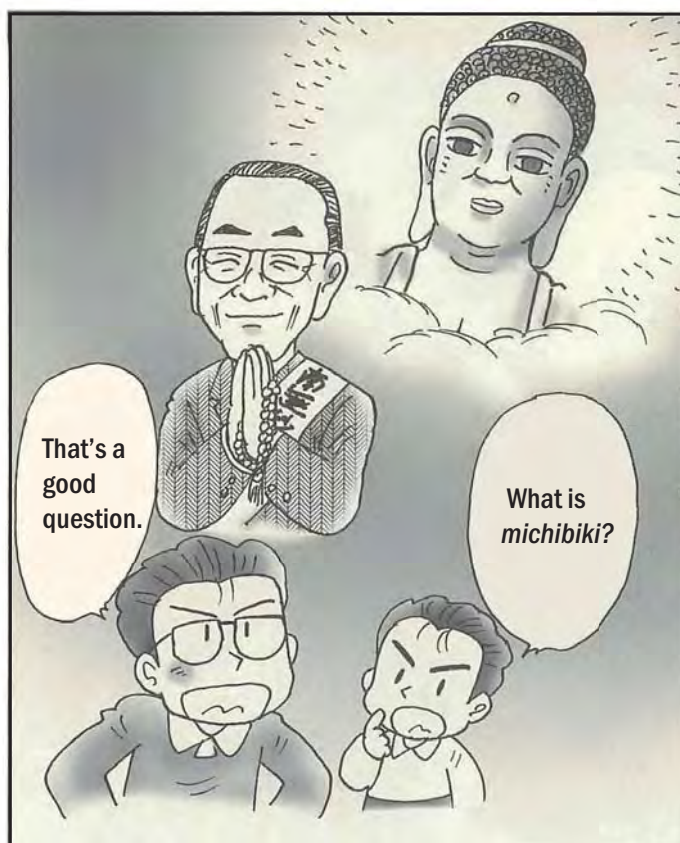


Connecting People with the Dharma (*Michibiki*)

As the Buddha's teachings are spread more widely and the number of people who practice them increases, many more people lead happy lives, and therefore, our society becomes brighter. For that reason, we should connect people with the Dharma by recommending the Lotus Sutra teaching to them so that they can live in accordance with the Dharma. This is our practice of *michibiki*.

By explaining the Lotus Sutra teaching to others, we can recognize the points we haven't fully understood, as well as the wishes and workings of the Buddha.

Michibiki is a precious act that guides others to the right path and creates a brighter society. At the same time, it is a significant practice that enables us to understand the teaching and grow spiritually.





Chapter 1
Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

People Who Serve in Roles

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Role Given to You by the Buddha

Acts that benefit others do not merely have a positive impact on other people; they inevitably also lead to “self-benefit.” That is, they contribute to one’s own good. This is because as you accumulate acts of altruism, you gradually elevate your own character step by step.

It is the same with roles at the Dharma center. Even if you have a small role, when you perform it to the best of your ability, an indescribable joy wells up within you. That’s because as you fulfill your role, you keenly feel the workings of the Buddha Dharma in



your life. Moreover, that role brings you a step closer to the highest ideal for a human being, the state of buddhahood. This is why I want to loudly proclaim that fulfilling a role means giving and receiving benefit, and what's more, embracing your role is awakening itself!

In reality, some people find roles troublesome or hesitate to accept them, thinking “Can I handle such an important role?” However, it is precisely at this point that we discover the merit of faith by joyfully accepting and embracing the roles that the Buddha has given us. Those who trust the Buddha Dharma and aspire to fulfill any role despite all obstacles progress steadily toward liberation.

The Zen Master Dogen, in one of his writings, *Guidelines for Studying the Way*, put it like this: “People today say that one should practice what is easy to practice. These words are entirely incorrect. They do not accord with the great Buddha Way.” The idea that it's better to cultivate easy practices is incompatible with the Way of the Buddha.

Exerting one's utmost effort to fulfill a role that seems beyond one's capabilities—this is what is in accord with the Buddha Way and how true merit is gained. I hope you will take some time to deeply contemplate these words of Dogen.

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 52–53



Director's Column

Repaying My Debt of Gratitude to the Community

Rev. Keichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

How are you all? The refreshing early summer has come. As I look at the trees swaying in the wind, I feel the vibrancy of life in the natural world.

In his January message, referring to his book *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, President Niwano taught us that we can attain a state of peace and tranquility by “simply accepting what Shakyamuni wished for us and wanted to convey to us, and reasonably putting that into practice in our daily lives.” In this month’s message, for those of us who are wondering what exactly we should do, he teaches the importance of aspiring to lead this kind of life, which he says will lead each of us to diligent practice.

This spring, I was asked by my neighborhood association to become a leader in my neighborhood. The leader has important roles in the community, such as collecting association fees from the residents, organizing regular meetings and various events, and honoring those who have made significant contributions to the community. My family has lived in this community for twenty years. I believe that my role as leader has given me the opportunity to express my gratitude to people in the community who accepted us as newcomers, and trusted us, and to express my gratitude for living in the community peacefully. I am sure there will be many hardships, but by having the aspiration to repay my debt of gratitude to the community, I feel that a world I could not see before is unfolding around me. It is becoming more interesting.



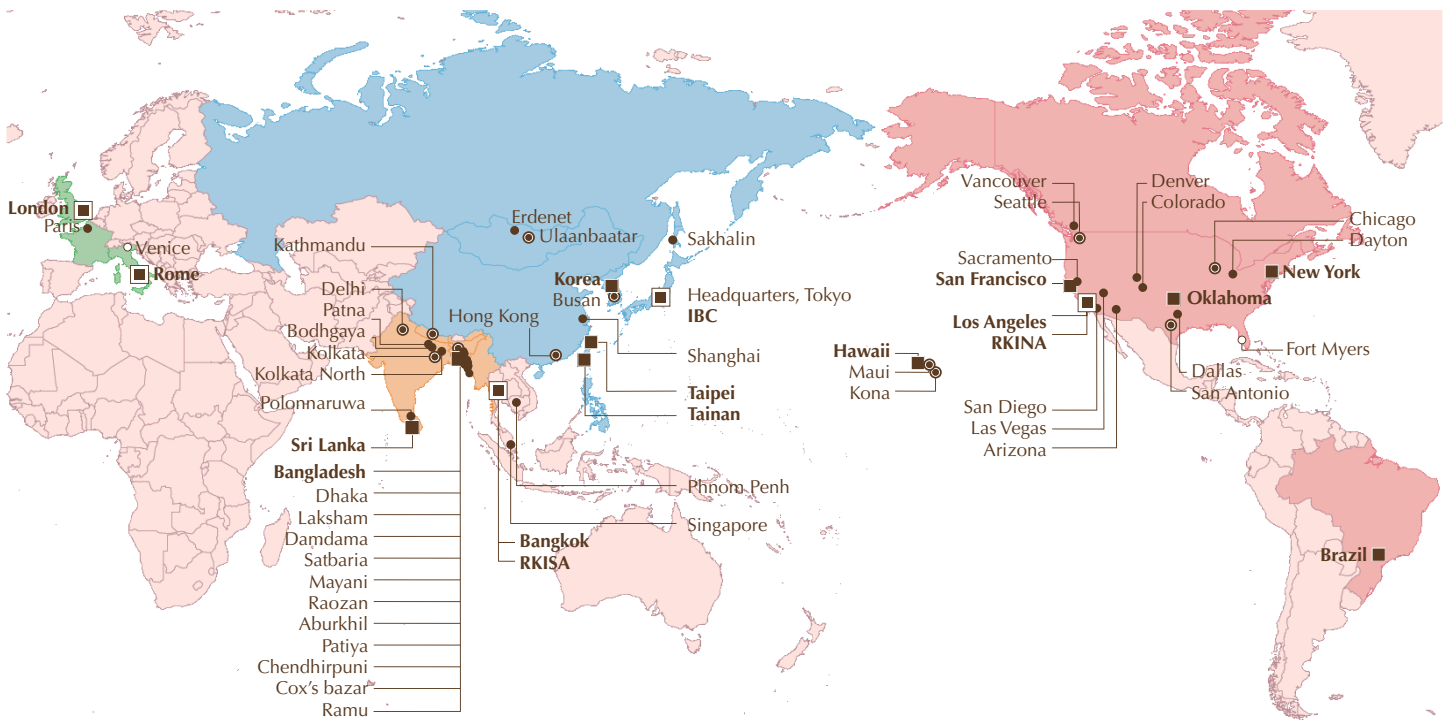
Rev. Akagawa (front row, third from left) with participants in the group pilgrimage to the headquarters, who attended the ceremony for the anniversary of Shakyamuni's birth, in front of the Precious Stupa of the One Vehicle on April 8, 2024.

Rissho Kosei-kai International

Make Every Encounter Matter



🌸 A Global Buddhist Movement 🌸



Information about local Dharma centers



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