

# Living the Lotus 7

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

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Rissho Kosei-kai  
of Phnom Penh



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Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa  
Editor: Sachi Mikawa  
Copy Editor: Ayshea Wild

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TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 / FAX: +81-3-5341-1224  
Email: [living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp](mailto: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.



## Our Lives and Eternal Life

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



### Life Is a Relay Race

For decades, the Rinzai sect priest Taido Matsubara (1907–2009) continued expounding the Buddha's teachings in a simple, easy-to-understand manner. On the occasion of his *beiju* (eighty-eighth birthday, according to the traditional way of counting years), he composed this poem:

“For more than eighty years, / My deceased mother has led me by the hand, / Over mountains and across rivers, / To be blessed with this day.”

In a lecture in honor of the Ullambana Festival, Rev. Matsubara added a few sentences to this poem, which unreservedly express his feelings of longing for and gratitude toward his mother: “Thank you, Mother. Thank you for causing me to live, hearty and hale, down to the present year.”

Next year, I will be the same age as Rev. Matsubara was when he wrote this poem, and especially when the Ullambana season comes, I will surely not be the only one who feels all the more keenly such emotions as he expressed for a deceased parent.

I also remember the following passage from one of Rev. Matsubara's books:

“Life is like a relay race that has no finish line. Human beings live and die, as runners in this relay race of life, which has continued for billions of years. We run as fast as we can, and then we pass the baton to the next runner” (*Matsubara Taido no seppo jinsei* [Taido Matsubara's life of teaching the Dharma], Kosei Publishing, 2004).

All things that receive life must someday face death. We tend to think of the moment when our lives end as “the finish line of life.” However, Rev. Matsubara said that life is a relay without a finish line.

I feel an indescribable sense of peacefulness in this passage that helps us understand that even though we will face death, it is not the finish line of life. In each of our lives, we run a different distance and in a different manner, but we are all relay runners who run as fast as we can through one section of the functioning of one great life force so that the baton of life will continue to be passed on forever. And when you accept this interpretation, you feel refreshed and invigorated.

## We Are Living Eternal Life

Professor Ko Hirasawa (1900–89), who served as president of Kyoto University, presents a more concrete view of the vitality in which life has been functioning for billions of years.

“Death is when life, given by nature, returns to its original source, changes back to being a part of nature, and once again takes part in the construction of nature. Death is not life changing into ‘nothingness,’ it is life participating in the emergence of new nature” (*Ikiyo, kyo mo yorokonde* [Live with joy again today], Chichi Publishing, 1995).

These words of Dr. Hirasawa do not give even the slightest impression of loneliness or sadness in facing death. On the contrary, they present us with a magnificent panorama, spreading out before us, of our lives going home at the moment of death, like joining a great river that continues flowing from the past to the future, returning to nature, and continuing to live as eternal life.

Many people feel increasing anxiety and fear as death finally comes for them. It seems that some people cannot bear to think of such things as they themselves disappearing from this world. Indeed, Shakyamuni’s search for the true Dharma was motivated by his desire to liberate all people from the sufferings of birth, aging, illness, and death, so we could even say that wanting to avoid death is a natural impulse. Later on, however, Shakyamuni expounded and transmitted teachings by which we human beings can overcome such sufferings and anxiety, in the form of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, which are principles based on truths including impermanence—in other words, everyone will be liberated by learning to accept suffering and practicing the virtues of these teachings. Actually though, as we know from the Parable of the Mustard Seeds, Kisa Gotami, who lost her young child, had an encounter with Shakyamuni that led to her awakening, after which she herself stated: “I have practiced the noble Way consisting of eight methods of Dharma practice, [the Way] leading to immortality. I have truly awakened to real peace of mind and looked into the mirror of the true Dharma.”

What interests me in Kisa Gotami’s statement is the word “immortality.” In the Sutta Nipata, Shakyamuni says that people who cultivate their minds are rewarded with immortality, but what does “immortality” mean? In the next issue, I would like to give some consideration to immortality as one of the clues for how we, who in reality must face death, can live our daily lives with peace of mind.



From *Kosei*, July 2024

# Interview

Following the May issue of *Living the Lotus*, we are featuring an interview with a young member who graduated from Gakurin Seminary in March 2024.

## Working for a Better Indian Society Free of Caste Discrimination

Vishwajeet Gautam, Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya, India

### Looking back on your two years in Gakurin Seminary, what is your most memorable experience?

When I first came to Japan, I was often bewildered by the differences in language and culture. I am also a nervous person by nature, so I had difficulty speaking in public. However, at Gakurin Seminary, I had a lot of opportunities to serve as a moderator, and every time I was asked to do so, I felt anxious and nervous, thinking, “I can’t do this.” At that time, my lecturers and senior students encouraged me by saying, “Vishwajeet, you can do it” or “Don’t worry, it’ll be fine,” and, thanks to them, I gradually gained confidence even though I was making mistakes. Thanks to everyone who treated me like family, I enjoyed two years at Gakurin, and now I am filled with gratitude and excitement.

### What was the most significant thing you learned from your studies of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra at Gakurin?

What was most impressive for me was the truth of dependent origination, which is one of the basic teachings of Buddhism. When trouble arises in our daily lives, we often blame others or the environment around us as its cause. However, this will not change



Mr. Gautam, second from right, with lecturers and fellow students of Gakurin when they visited the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters.



Mr. Vishwajeet Gautam is interviewed by Living the Lotus

the situation at all. What kind of mindset should we have now in order to change the situation in front of us for the better? In the case of human relationships, we cannot change others whom we interact with, so we need to change ourselves first because we are the cause of whatever may happen. Through the teaching of dependent origination, I have learned that the key to happiness is in my own hands.

Gakurin is Rissho Kosei-kai's global training center for engaged Buddhism and interfaith action. Through holistic education based on Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra, Gakurin trains future leaders of engaged Buddhism as well as leaders engaged in interreligious cooperation and peacebuilding both locally and internationally.



English website  
for Gakurin Seminary

**In your graduate research presentation, you spoke on the theme of “Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: His Responses to the Caste System in India and Buddhism.” Why did you choose this theme?**

The caste system is a social hierarchy based on Hindu thought that has been ingrained in Indian society for centuries. Although the caste system is illegal under the present Constitution of India, the constitutional provision is only intended to eliminate discrimination, and caste itself remains a social custom. As a result, discrimination against lower castes still persists and has a significant impact on education, the economy, society, and culture, and is a cause of confrontation, conflict, and increasing crime. I believe that as long as castes exist in India, it will be difficult for the country to truly develop and become peaceful.

Dr. Ambedkar was born into a Dalit (untouchable) family, which belongs to the lowest stratum of castes. He converted to Buddhism to overcome discrimination and contributed to the drafting of the Constitution of India as Minister of Law and Justice. I chose this theme because I wanted to examine his thoughts and actions and to study the idea of equality and respect for human beings taught in the Lotus Sutra,



*Mr. Gautam, third from right, and his fellow Gakurin students harvest rice they grew.*

which states that all human beings are precious and irreplaceable and that all people can become buddhas. **How do you plan to put the results of your research into action when you return to India?**

There is a Dalit community in my area. Throughout their long history, Dalits have been employed in dangerous and disagreeable jobs such as animal processing and filth disposal and have been segregated from the upper castes in social life in terms of where they live, the roads they walk, the water they draw, and the temples they can worship at. Dalit children cannot even read or write due to their lack of educational opportunities, and many children are forced to engage in child labor or live by begging or collecting garbage, and crimes involving Dalit children are gradually increasing. Dalit people are still discriminated against throughout India, and attempts to improve their social status are violently suppressed. In order to change discrimination in Indian society, I would like to focus my efforts on supporting children’s education, and initiate change for a better society by working with people who are fighting against caste discrimination.

To achieve this, based on Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, the teachings of the Founder, and the spirit of Dr. Ambedkar, I would like to take action in three ways: first, respect all religions and all people without discrimination based on caste; second, provide educational support for children of lower castes; and third, promote exchange and dialogue among different castes and religions. I would also like to share with as many people as possible the teachings of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra, which I learned at Gakurin, as the teachings respect all people. Regarding concrete actions, I would like to provide stationery to Dalit children who are nearby, teach them how to study, and interact with them by playing games or participating in other activities. I believe that through

education, children can learn about their fundamental rights and grow as human beings.

People of different castes can also interact with each other through sports such as cricket and soccer, and through volunteer activities such as tree planting, they can deepen their understanding of each other and build good relationships. However, these activities cannot be done alone. First of all, by seeking cooperation from members of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bodhgaya, I would like to gradually increase the number of supporters.

### **Are there any specific teachings in the Lotus Sutra you hold close to your heart?**

The attitude of Purna's leading people by walking half a step ahead of them, which is taught in chapter 8 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Assurance of Buddhahood Given to the Five Hundred Disciples," is most memorable to me. When Purna guided people to the teachings of Shakyamuni, he took the stance of going half a step ahead of others to take the lead, and people followed him with trust while feeling familiar with him. I would like to make the most of what I have learned in Gakurin to study and act together with members in Bodhgaya after returning to India and, if possible, become a leader who can grow with them while walking half a step ahead like Purna.

### **Finally, what are your dreams for the future?**

India has many different religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. It is a very big

dream of mine, but I would like to be involved in activities to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation in India. I became aware of this desire last year when I went to Kyoto and the neighboring area as part of Gakurin's training program for exchange with other religious groups and visited Enryakuji temple on Mount Hiei, the head temple of the Tendai denomination.

In August 1987, the Religious Summit on Mount Hiei was organized under the leadership of Rev. Etai Yamada, then head priest of the Tendai denomination, and Founder Nikkyo Niwano. When I first learned about it, I wondered how I could carry on, in my own way, the passion and actions that the Founder had dedicated to religious cooperation. In the future, I hope to contribute to peace in India and the world, even if only a little, through the development of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, which is being promoted by thoughtful world religious leaders, whose efforts I would like to join, through mutual understanding and recognition.



*Mr. Gautam serves as chanting leader during a Dharma meeting with Bodhgaya members, held in his home on March 24, 2024.*

# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

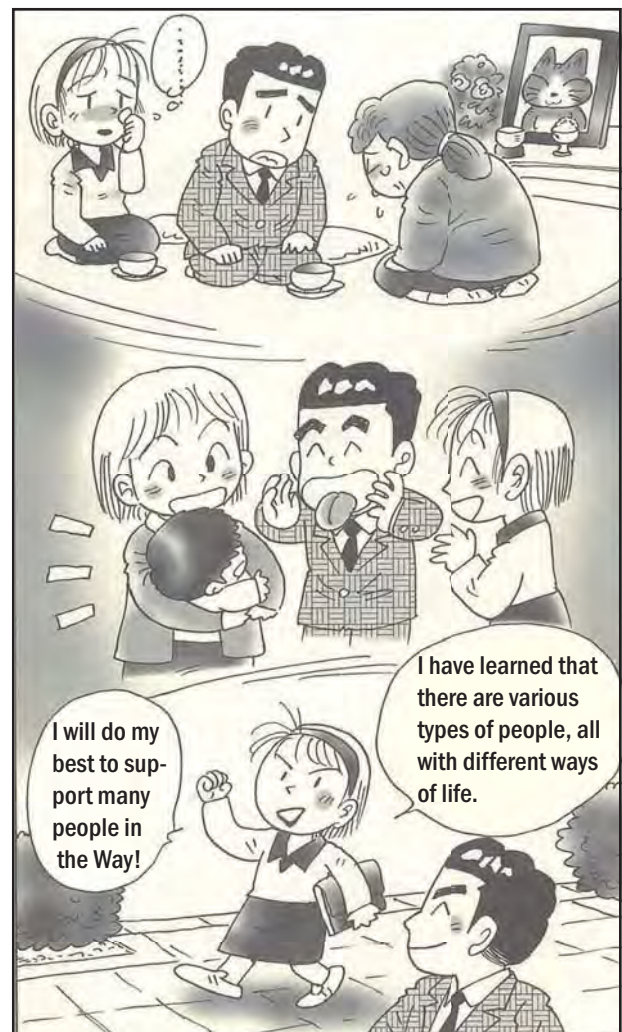
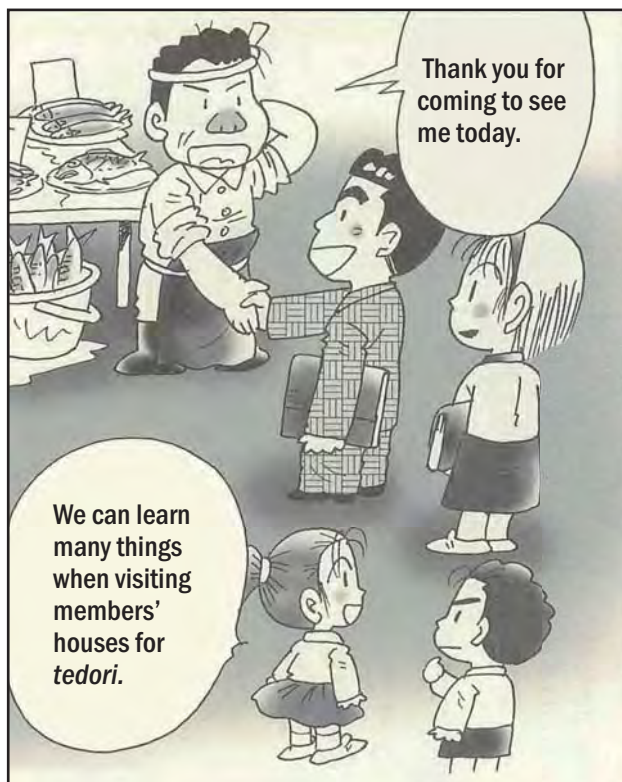
## Becoming Members of Rissho Kosei-kai

### Taking Members by the Hand for Enhancing Their Connection with the Dharma (*Tedori*)

Even though the teaching is wonderful, you cannot attain happiness by only becoming a member. It is important to put the teaching into practice in your daily life. For new members to practice the teaching in their daily lives, leaders and members preceding them need to take the new members by the hand and support them in the Way; this is called *tedori* practice.

New members can learn many things when they accompany their senior leaders on Dharma dissemination. Receiving questions from someone they meet could lead them to realize that they haven't studied the teaching enough and help motivate them to learn more.

Moreover, through listening to another person's views and seeing his or her way of life, new members can reflect on their own lives.



#### Did You Know?

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we have an idea that everyone who joins our organization is given a role as a disseminator of the teaching. It means that from the very day we become members, we have a responsibility to do what makes other people happy and convey what we have learned from senior members. Let us accompany senior members on their *tedori* practice.



## Study and Practice of the Dharma

At Dharma centers and other places, members participate in practice, sitting in a circle, where they learn from each other how to see things from the Buddhist perspective. This is the practice of a *hoza* session, or Dharma circle.

Rissho Kosei-kai places great importance on *hoza* because it is a place where people can share their experiences of attaining happiness by practicing the Dharma as well as a place where people who are suffering from worries can listen to the teaching.

Study and Practice of the Dharma means that while we study the Buddha's teachings, we always think about whether we are leading our daily lives in accordance with the teaching.

Therefore, in the processes that we repeat by joining *hoza* and the study and practice of the Dharma, we can develop our characters.



### Did You Know?

Originally, the Japanese word *hoza* referred to the seat of Shakyamuni Buddha or the seat placed one step higher for a person who expounds the Dharma. It also means the place or gathering where the Dharma is taught.





## Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

### Our Deep Connection with the Buddha

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



#### **The Lotus Sutra Teaches Us We Have a Deep Connection with the Buddha**

This time, for the benefit of beginners, let me talk about the subject of our connection with the Buddha.

About 1,400 years ago in China, the monk Zhiyi, also known as Master Tiantai and often referred to colloquially as “the little Shakyamuni,” logically organized and expounded the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. During Master Tiantai’s training, various incidents, like the following, unfolded.

One day, Master Tiantai journeyed through the war-torn countryside in desperation to Mount Dasu in Guangzhou (present-day Henan Province) because he learned that the venerable monk Nanyue Huisi (515–77) was staying there. When he arrived there, he asked Nanyue to accept him as a disciple. It is said that the moment Master Nanyue cast his first glance upon the young Master Tiantai, Nanyue spoke the following words:



“In the distant past, on Divine Eagle Peak, you and I listened to the Lotus Sutra together. That karmic connection has come to fruition, and so now you have come to me.”

“Divine Eagle Peak” is the mountain where Shakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra. The term “karmic connection” refers to ties stemming from the events of a previous life.

By the way, Reverend Etai Yamada (1895–1994), the leader of the Tendai Buddhist sect [at the time of this 1990 Dharma talk], and Professor Zhao Puchu (1907–2000), the chairman of the Buddhist Association of China [also in 1990], are the Buddhist leaders I hold in highest regard. In the summer of 1987, I had the privilege of spending three whole days, from morning until evening, discussing the Lotus with both masters. Throughout those three days, Professor Zhao spoke with conviction, joyfully repeating the following words many times:

“The three of us discussing the Lotus Sutra together like this is an utmost joy. I have no doubt that when Shakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra on Divine Eagle Peak, we were all there listening together.”

When I first heard him say this, I was surprised for a moment, but upon further reflection, I have come to believe that people who can wholeheartedly trust one another in this life are bound by some kind of karmic connection from a previous life. The experience made me deeply appreciate this.

The Lotus Sutra, to which we devote ourselves and our practice, is sometimes called the “Sutra of Assurances of Buddhahood.” The term “assurance of buddhahood” refers to the guarantee of buddhahood that Shakyamuni Buddha gave to his disciples, saying, “In the future, you will surely attain the awakening of a buddha.” In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha repeatedly gives large numbers of disciples these guarantees of becoming a buddha.

Moreover, [in light of these assurances, which foretell the recipient’s attainment of buddhahood in the distant future], I think that [contrary to other interpretations of the Lotus Sutra] it can also be called a “Sutra of Practice Through Many Kalpas.” The phrase “practice through many kalpas” means that individuals continue their spiritual practice across numerous lifetimes, being reborn time and time again until they ultimately attain buddhahood.

In addition to those ways to describe the Lotus Sutra, I think it’s fitting to call it the “Sutra that Teaches Us Our Connection with the Buddha,” because from beginning to end, it describes our deep connection with the Buddha.

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 53–55



## The Vitality of Summer Bulbs

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa  
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

Hello, everyone. In the blink of an eye, half the year has passed and in Japan the hot summer season is just around the corner.

In this month's message, President Niwano introduces us to the idea of eternal life, which is also expressed in Rissho Kosei-kai as "life that continues through eternity." Since we all partake in this eternal life, I hope that each of us will live our lives with the utmost respect.

Last year, I received summer flowering bulbs from a friend who is a member of Rissho Kosei-kai. However, as I didn't store them properly, they became dried out, so I hastily soaked them in water, causing mold to grow, which is the worst thing that could have happened to them. Half giving up, I waited for spring and then planted the bulbs in a corner of my garden. At the end of May, when I had almost forgotten that I had planted them, two lovely twin leaves appeared and smiled at me. To my surprise, the bulbs that I thought were dead still had life in them. I was very moved by their vitality.

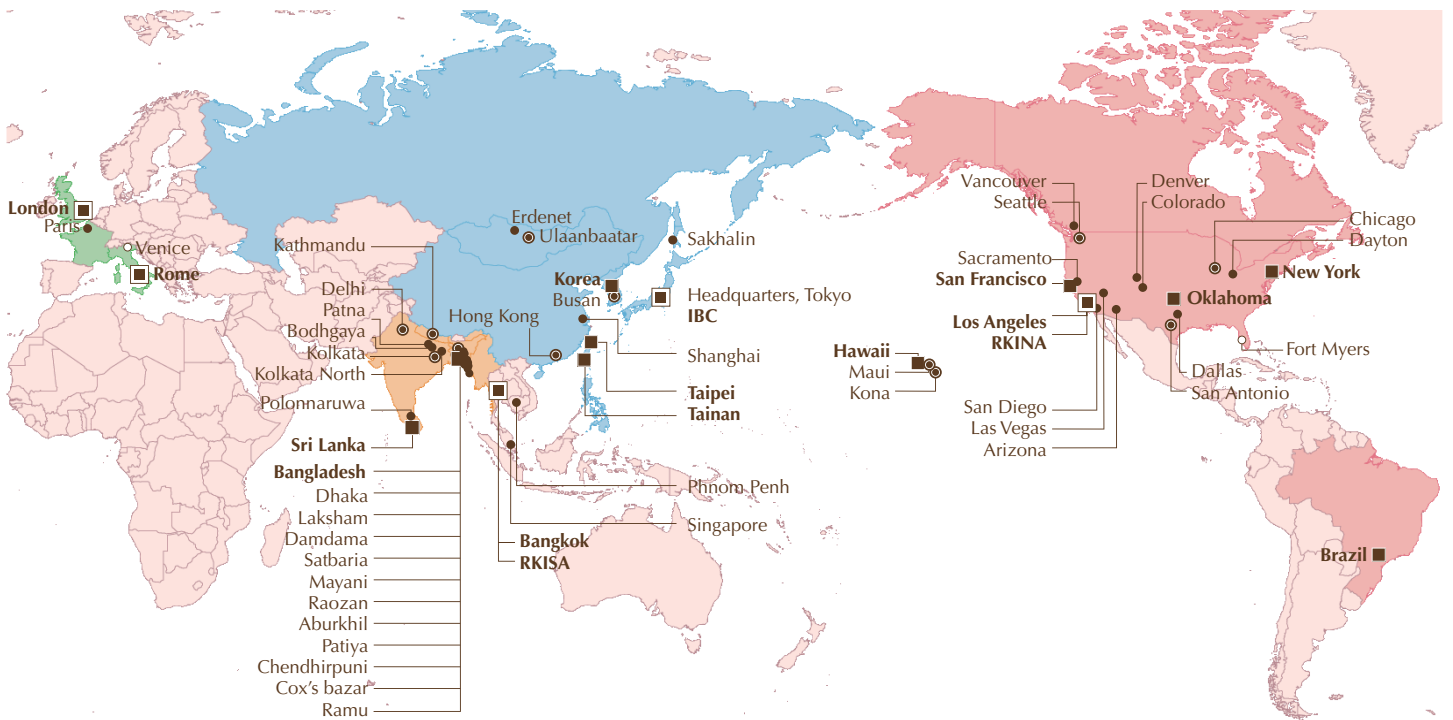
In his message, the President teaches us that the baton of life will continue to be passed on forever. Like a relay runner who runs through a section of the functioning of one great life, I will live as powerfully as these bulbs and dedicate myself to passing the baton to the next generation with dignity.



*Rev. Akagawa (left) and Rev. Kris Ladusau (right), minister of the Oklahoma Dharma Center, visit the home of Ms. Yasuko Hildebrand (center), former minister of the Oklahoma Dharma Center, on March 19, 2024.*



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local Dharma centers



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