

Living the Lotus

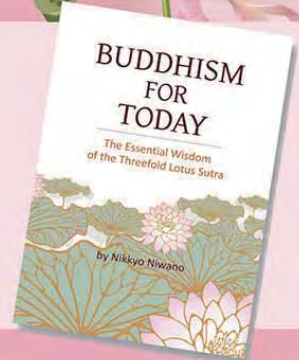
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Buddhism in Everyday Life



**Leaders in North America Study the Lotus Sutra
with Dr. Dominick Scarangelo,
Translator of *Buddhism for Today*, Revised Edition,
at the Los Angeles Dharma Center**



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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.

All of Us Will Go to "Our Hometown"

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



When Founder Niwano Entered Nirvana

The Sutta Nipata—said to be one of the oldest records of Buddhist thought—contains a section titled “Discourse to the Brahman Kasibharadvaja,” in which Shakyamuni spoke some verses to a brahman that I quoted in my book, *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*. In *Living the Lotus* this year, we have been considering our diligent practice and the proper state of our minds. The basis for doing so is found in this discourse, the closing verses of which read: “This is how you should cultivate, / And bring forth the reward of immortality.” Last month, I concluded my discussion of the meaning of human life by asking you to think about what “immortality” means to you. In this vein, I would like to express my frank thoughts about death, but before doing so, I would like to tell you about Founder Niwano’s final moments.

At 10:34 a.m. on October 4, 1999, my father Nikkyo Niwano, who was also the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, passed away. With family members forming a circle around Founder Niwano’s bed and Rissho Kosei-kai leaders keeping watch from a respectful distance, he peacefully departed this life. A few minutes before, I had been holding the Founder’s right hand as he lay in bed with his eyes closed, when his eyes opened wide. He slowly looked around at all of us surrounding his bed, as if to exchange a final greeting with every person there. And the moment he closed his eyes again, before we knew it, the Founder had taken his last breath.

What Is Immortality?

“My hometown— / That’s the place I came from. / My hometown— / That’s the place / I will go back to.” This is a poem by Yoshio Toi (1912–91) that, for a long time, I have loved to recite. As I mentioned in last month’s issue, we human beings have been given lives that will return to “our hometown”—the one great life force that continues to flow on and on, like a great river extending from the distant past to the eternal future. And I think that when we accept this, our anxiety about death eases.

Moreover, speaking from my own experience, when I saw with my own eyes how the Founder peacefully returned to the hometown of human life, I thought to myself, “Hmmm, when my time comes, I hope that I will be able to die like that,” and felt as though I had gained the ability to calmly accept death. The Founder’s final moments, which seem so ideal, imparted to me the reward of immortality, in the sense that I overcame the fear of death.

“Immortality” does not mean that we do not die. In my understanding, “the reward of immortality” is knowing that immortality means the peace of mind that comes from freedom from the suffering that stems from futilely wishing for something that will never happen, such as wanting to live forever.

By learning the Buddha’s teachings, we can attain the real reward of immortality. For example, we transcend death by engraving in our minds the teaching of impermanence. And we do so by accepting that dying is one part of the functioning of nature, in which all things are constantly arising, perishing, and changing. In addition, the Lotus Sutra explains that the Buddha’s life span is so immeasurably long, it is eternal. When we accept and understand this teaching, we have peace of mind, knowing that we will continue to live forever, even after we die, because we—whose very essence is buddha nature—are one with the immeasurably great life of the Buddha. Furthermore, the Dhammapada teaches that “by diligently applying yourself, you attain a state of immortality.” By continuing to practice diligently and never neglecting even the smallest details of your daily life, your actions, as Hajime Nakamura (1912–99) puts it, “continue to spread their influence infinitely, through the chain of many causes and effects, and never die.”

In other words, our daily actions, especially our bodhisattva practices, continue to have an influence that extends far beyond time and space. Because the way you live your life and manifest your personal integrity will continue to live on in people’s minds and memories, I believe that this constitutes another form of immortality.

I am grateful to have lived six years beyond the age at which Shakyamuni passed away. And I think that having witnessed the Founder’s entering nirvana and knowing the reward of immortality, there is no greater happiness than being able to calmly tell myself, “It’s all right if, at any time, you return to the hometown of human life.”

From *Kosei*, August 2024



Interview

Wishing to Become a Person Who Can Lead Others by Example

Mr. Luo Gongying, Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan

What led you to have faith in the teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai?

I would like to talk about the starting point for my faith. My mother-in-law and my wife Hu Reishin [the current minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Tainan] were members of Rissho Kosei-kai. Initially, I was not involved in religious activities, except for driving my mother-in-law to and from the Dharma center. Later, however, as I witnessed the diligent attitudes of my mother-in-law and my wife toward the midwinter sutra recitation practice and events held by the Dharma center, as well as their deep faith, I was gradually guided to become in touch with the teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Was there a turning point?

I have long been a Buddhist and used to recite the Amitabha Sutra, which is familiar to people in Taiwan. But after I participated with my wife in the *Gohonzon* [focus of devotion] bestowal ceremony held at the Great Sacred Hall in September 2015, I began to recite the Lotus Sutra. As I recited the sutra every morning and evening, I became interested in learning more about the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, instead of only reciting it. Thanks to this, I realized the profundity and wondrousness of the Lotus Sutra, and the study of its teaching has helped me improve my personality and morality. I also became aware of my true self and found peace of mind. Because of this, I believe that the *Gohonzon* bestowal ceremony was the most significant turning point in my life.

Are there any teachings in the Lotus Sutra that support you in everyday life?

In chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, “Springing Up Out of the Earth,” the four great bodhisattvas—Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and



Mr. Luo Gongying attends the Gohonzon bestowal ceremony with his wife, Rev. Hu Reishin (currently the minister of the Tainan Dharma Center), in 2015.

Steadfast Practice—appear. These four great bodhisattvas are my spiritual supports in daily life. Each of these four bodhisattvas made four primary vows to disseminate the Lotus Sutra in the age of the decline of the Dharma. These vows are: however innumerable living beings are, I vow to liberate them all; however immeasurable the defilements are, I vow to extinguish them all; however limitless the Buddha’s teachings are, I vow to master them all; however infinite the Buddha Way is, I vow to realize it completely. I think these four universal vows of the bodhisattvas are the guidelines for the practice of *hoza*, or the Dharma circle, in Rissho Kosei-kai. From these

vows, I learned that it is essential for us to keep a flexible, forbearing, and compassionate mind and encourage all living beings to give rise to the aspiration for Supreme Perfect Awakening.

Moreover, as the words of Zen master Dogen [1200–1253] teach us, “Although I have not yet reached nirvana, I must help others to reach it.” I would like to continue my practice with a pure heart, wishing for the happiness of others, while removing delusions and cultivating my heart and mind. I’m convinced that if we practice with boundless compassion, we can attain the same enlightenment as the Buddha. I also cherish the minds of bodhisattvas who practice seeking enlightenment for themselves while devoting themselves to the liberation of other people.



Mr. Luo participates in the presentation ceremony for the Dharma teacher qualification in 2018.

I believe that all of these aspirations and dedications are embodied in hoza practice.

You have studied the teaching of the Lotus Sutra seriously, haven’t you?

Since I received the Dharma teacher qualification in June, 2018, I have been keener than ever to learn the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. I have gained a deeper understanding of the teaching through the Dharma talks given by President Niwano. I am very grateful that the Dharma center minister explains the teaching, based on the President’s Dharma talks, in an easy-to-understand manner, applying her own experiences and giving examples. I also realize the importance of valuing both learning and practicing; we should put what we have learned into practice in daily life, thereby deepening our understanding of the teaching.

I discovered that the teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai is not just about solving suffering in life but also about transforming suffering into a source of wisdom. Furthermore, I learned that when we explain the teaching to others, we should never force our opinion on them, nor explain the teaching through our own perception. The most important thing is to learn from the person or occurrence in front of us and make ourselves grow spiritually through what we have learned from them.

Can you share with us an experience you had while supporting members in the Way or connecting people with the Dharma?

I have guided fifteen people to the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai. One of them, Ms. A, an acquaintance of mine, was a Buddhist, but she was not well acquainted with the teachings of Buddhism. Therefore, I shared the teaching of Kosei-kai and guided her to discover that Buddhism is not only about chanting sutras and learning the teachings but also about making use of and applying the teachings in our daily lives. Since

she became a member, Ms. A's attitude has changed a lot. For example, she used to be so busy with herself that she couldn't afford to think of other people, but recently, she began making time for others despite being busy with work. Through the practice of serving others, she continues to make an effort to cultivate her mind.

One day, however, Ms. A didn't keep an important promise with me, and I pointed this out to her, which resulted in my hurting her feelings. Through interactions with Ms. A, I understood the truths that all things are interdependent and constantly changing. I felt remorse for my lack of compassion and realized the importance of having a flexible mind toward other people and things.

What do you think is the attraction of Rissho Kosei-kai?

We have often been told that hoza is the life of Rissho Kosei-kai, and I think that hoza is the most attractive practice. During a hoza session, when you speak about your suffering, the facilitator gives you guidance in light of the Dharma. Participants intently listen to what other people have to say and share in their sufferings as their own. Hoza places great importance on empathy, or rejoicing and grieving together.

We also learn the importance of being thankful to the people who are closest to us, though it is often difficult to do this, especially with our families. I think that when family members respect and feel grateful for each other, we build a truly harmonious and peaceful family.

Lastly, please tell us your hopes and goals for the future.

My greatest wish is to support my wife behind the scenes while she serves as the minister so that she can fulfill her mission. I usually wake up at five in the morning and have a dialogue with the Buddha

through sutra recitation. During the recitation, I reflect on myself and listen to the Buddha's messages and wishes. I then transfer my realizations and the merits I've received through the dialogue to my ancestors and all the spirits, as well as to the victims of natural disasters and wars around the world, praying that the present chaotic world will become peaceful, if only a little. I don't think that one person can perform the work of a hundred people. If every one of a hundred people fulfill their individual roles, they are performing together the work of a hundred people. And eventually, they can achieve even greater work. I believe that the One Interconnected Buddha Land, which is expounded in the Lotus Sutra, will be achieved through the efforts of all people.



Mr. Luo strikes a gong, while serving as a subleader in sutra recitation at the Tainan Dharma Center.

For this to happen, I hope that members of the Tainan Dharma Center will learn this wonderful teaching of the Lotus Sutra and practice it at home, in their workplaces, and their local communities, so that they can live their lives vigorously and let pure and beautiful flowers bloom in their minds. As for me, I would like to continue my Dharma practice steadily

and diligently so that when people who see my activities ask me, “What is your faith?” I will be able to answer proudly, “I have faith in the teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai.” My ideals might be high, but I would like to be a person who can lead others by example—that is the goal of my training.



Mr. Luo with his family at his daughter's wedding on July 1, 2023.



An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Becoming Members of Rissho Kosei-kai

Improving Ourselves Through *Toban** Practice (Volunteering at the Dharma Center)

Volunteering at the Great Sacred Hall or the Dharma center, such as serving at the altar, welcoming visitors at the entrance with our palms together in reverence, and cleaning the facility, is called *toban* practice.

Members practice it not because they are told to do so by someone else, but because they feel pleased to practice it for self-improvement. Greeting visitors is the practice of revering other people, and cleaning is the practice of clearing away the defilement in our minds.

When we participate in any Rissho Kosei-kai practices, we always cherish the mind of humility by appreciating the opportunity to serve others.

*Now called *kenkogyo*



Did You Know?

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we often use phrases such as *sasete itadaku*, which means “I am pleased to do something.” This is a phrase we speak when we do something for the benefit of others to express our goodwill in serving them. This also reflects our mind of respecting the Buddha and other people, and of becoming humble instead of arrogant.



Living an Eco-Friendly Lifestyle

You may know the words “global warming.” Because humans have led comfortable lifestyles without caring about the natural environment, global temperatures are rising. Since we are blessed with the earth, we should take care of the natural environment.

The Buddha teaches us not to kill living things unnecessarily and not to waste things. If you throw away a pencil or notebook that is still usable, you are wasting the wood from which it is made.

Each of us must reflect on whether we are performing eco-friendly actions.



Did You Know?

The following are examples of things we can do to mitigate climate change: raise the temperature of the air conditioning by one degree and lower the temperature of the heating by one degree; cut back on the amount of time spent watching television; carry reusable shopping bags; turn off the main power to electrical appliances more often; and use bath water for washing clothes. Let us put those into practice right away.



Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

We Are People Who Have Revered Infinite Numbers of Buddhas

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



For example, in chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra, “A Parable,” when Shakyamuni gave an assurance of buddhahood to Shariputra, one of the ten great disciples, who was called the “foremost in wisdom,” he explained the karmic connection with Shariputra from past lives: “Shariputra, long ago I instructed you to aspire to the Buddha Way.”

Also, in the passage about the assurance of buddhahood given to Ananda, who served as Shakyamuni’s attendant for many years, Shakyamuni says:

“Good children, Ananda gave rise to the aspiration to Supreme Perfect Awakening at the very same time as I did, when we were together in the presence of the buddha King of Emptiness. Ananda always took pleasure in listening and learning, while I was always making diligent effort in practice. For this reason, I have already attained Supreme Perfect Awakening” (the Lotus Sutra, chapter 9, “The Assurance Given to Those Trained and Still in Training”).

Upon hearing these words, Ananda immediately recalls the great vow he made in his past life. It’s not only great disciples like Shariputra and Ananda who are bound to the Buddha like this



by precious “karmic connections” from past lives. It’s the same for us. We, too, have always harbored a wish to meet the Buddha every time we have been reborn.

In the “Dharma Teachers” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha explains it in the following way:

“You should know, Medicine King, that such people have already paid homage to ten thousand million buddhas and have completed a great vow in the presence of those buddhas. Out of compassion for living beings, they will be born in this human realm.”

This is an extremely important passage.

“Such people” (meaning, us) are those who, in their past lives, made the bodhisattva vow to honor infinite numbers of buddhas and liberate countless living beings. Though they could be reborn in a pure land, Shakyamuni explains that out of compassion for the suffering beings in this world filled with hardship, they have been born into this human realm filled with hardship.

In reality, we have completely forgotten about such past lives. However, even though we may have forgotten, memories of those past lives are inscribed somewhere in our hearts.

In a familiar example, since birth, we have learned all sorts of things from many people. It’s likely that we learned many things not only from our parents but also from elementary and middle school teachers as well as elderly members of the community. It’s normal for us to have completely forgotten those teachings, but on occasion, we might recall, Ah, I remember being taught such a thing by such a person.

Our karmic connection with the Buddha is similar, but it’s something even deeper. And even if you happen to forget it, there comes a time when the conditions come to fruition, and you realize that you are connected to the Buddha through a precious karmic bond.

Viewed in this way, the reason you are now encountering the Buddha’s teachings and diligently practicing the Buddhist path is because of the karmic connection you had with the Buddha in a past life. You are individuals who have accumulated such merit. I hope you can deeply appreciate this from the bottom of your heart.

And if you do, you will undoubtedly feel an indescribable peace of mind knowing that, as I continually say, “The Buddha is always by your side, watching over you.”

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 55–57



The Special Day

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

The hot weather continues in Japan. How are you doing?

In this month's message, President Niwano describes the Founder's final moments in detail. I vividly remember the day of the Founder's passing on October 4, 1999, even though twenty-five years have passed. The news of his death at 10:34 a.m. was immediately communicated throughout Rissho Kosei-kai. At the time, I was working at the Religions for Peace Japan office in Fumon Hall near Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters. While praying in my heart, I was busy informing people outside of Rissho Kosei-kai who had been close to the Founder of his passing. That evening, I had the great task of accompanying a high priest of the Tendai denomination, who came from Kyoto to pay his respects, from Tokyo Station to the Founder's home. We took a taxi from Tokyo Station and arrived at the Founder's home after 6:00 p.m., when the sun had set and night had fallen completely.

The house was filled with mourners, and there was a coffin furnished with a transparent glass lid so that the entire body of the Founder could be seen. Dressed in the familiar frock coat and wearing a sash, the Founder looked as if he were alive, greeting every guest with a warm smile while putting his palms together in reverence. This scene is vividly etched in my mind.

In his message, the President teaches us that "because the way you live your life and manifest your personal integrity will continue to live on in people's minds and memories, I believe that this constitutes another form of immortality." Like the Founder, I would like to spend my days with a peaceful heart, putting my palms together in reverence to all people I meet.



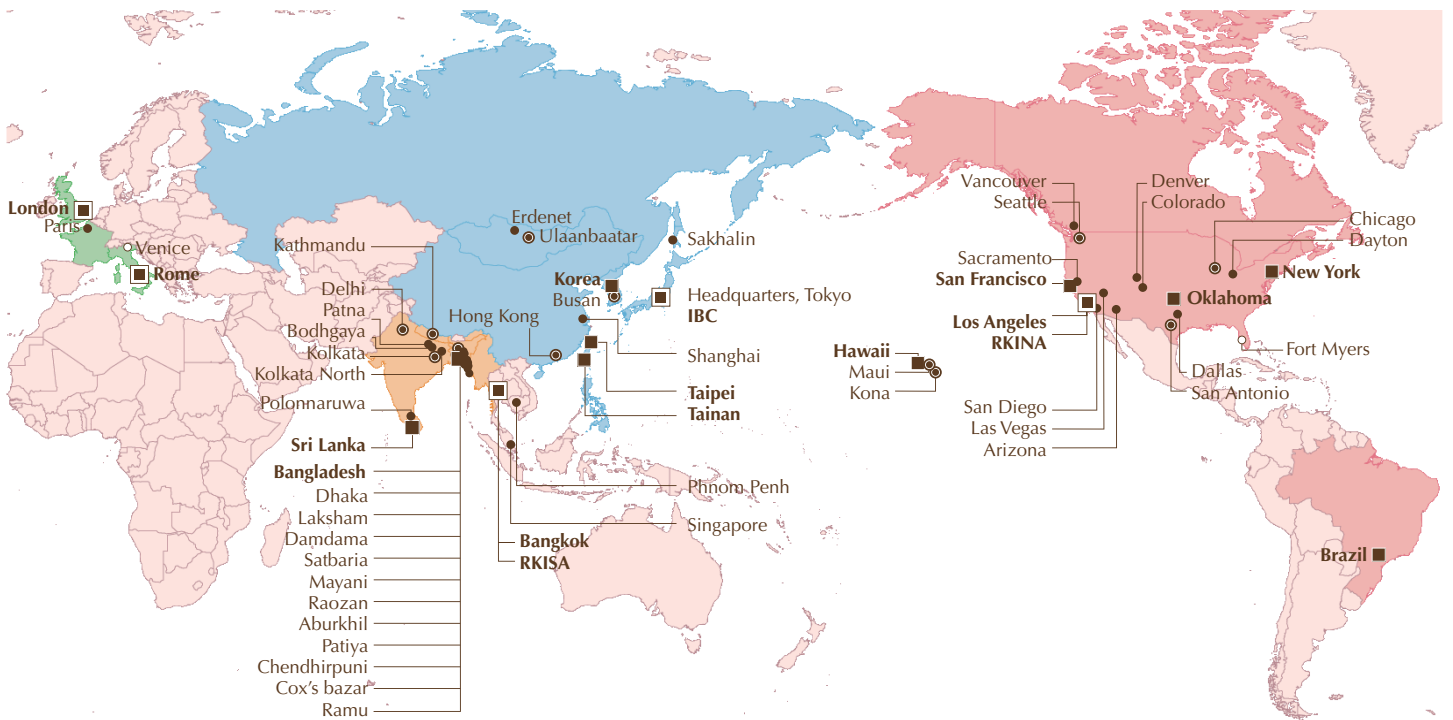
Rev. Akagawa (left) with students of Gakurin's International Program after their entrance ceremony on April 6, 2024 (photographed in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall at Rissho Kosei-kai's headquarters).

Rissho Kosei-kai International

Make Every Encounter Matter



🌸 A Global Buddhist Movement 🌸



Information about local Dharma centers



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