

Living the Lotus 12

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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Overseas Members Cheerfully Participate in the 2024 Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival in Tokyo

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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

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.



Nurtured by Encounters— The Mind of Reverence and the Mind of Humility, Part 2

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

Encounters That Share the Buddha's Teachings

The Heian-era monk and poet Saigyō (1118–90) wrote this poem: “Collecting the dew / On every blade of grass in an autumn field, / I will make a lotus pond.” In this poem, Saigyō describes a beautiful scene, perhaps from late autumn or early winter, when crimson maple leaves glisten with morning dew. Although morning dew usually symbolizes something fleeting, that vanishes, he wrote that by gathering it together, it can become a lotus pond full of pure dew. While this poem seems to be describing the wonders of the natural world, Saigyō in fact alludes to this passage of scripture: “May these merits / Extend universally to all / So that we and all living beings / Together accomplish the Buddha Way” (“The Parable of the Conjured City,” chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra). Therefore, the “dew” is really the buddha nature.

Saigyō lived during the Heian era, when many people in Japan suffered from a series of natural disasters, plagues, wars, and famines. Saigyō must have worried in such difficult times and wanted to liberate every single person who was experiencing poverty and other hardships. Although some nine centuries have passed since Saigyō's time, to my eyes, there are no major differences today in the fundamentals of this world. To wit, everyone, everywhere in the world, still hopes to make their society as beautiful as a lotus pond, filled with people who are awakened to their buddha nature.

What we can do, each and every one of us, to make this happen, is to fully realize our own buddha nature and then strive to create a world in which everyone respects one another and lives in harmony, by closely interacting with and caring for people who are suffering. Simply stated, what we need now more than ever are encounters that share the teachings and spread the Dharma.

A Lotus Pond Sparkling with the Light of the Buddha Nature

As I mentioned in last month's issue, when we give rise to the mind of reverence, the mind of humility also spontaneously arises. I myself had a painful but valuable experience that unexpectedly taught me how the mind of humility arises.

It was the summer of my third year of university. At the time, I was a student at a kendo training hall (which was also the teacher's home), and I was scheduled to spend two months there for intensive training. Although I myself had applied for this program, after a month of kendo training and doing chores such as cleaning, I was exhausted and ran back to my own home. The next day, my teacher, Tokichi Nakamura, immediately came to my house and, in a loud voice that bounced off the walls, said, "Right now, you are no different from my own kid. Well, come on, we're going home!" And of course he took me back to his training hall. I still feel deep respect and gratitude for my kendo master, who seriously scolded me; at the same time, I remember that back then, I reacted emotionally and felt rebellious, saying to myself "To hell with this!" When we are lacking in awareness and the will to improve, our emotions may take precedence over self-reflection and erupt in shameless thoughts.

However, an expression of displeasure may cause us to admit that we cannot go on in such a way and motivate us to try to improve ourselves. As with the buddha nature, we are all equipped with the mind of humility; in my case, when it was activated, I was able to change my mind and try to regain my kendo master's trust.

I think this is the same as the way acknowledgment and remorse are, in our lives of faith, important for considering our growth as human beings.

Indeed, it is through our interactions with others—what we call "encounters"—that the mind of reverence and the mind of humility are awakened. The Rissho Kosei-kai practices of mentoring and guiding people to the Dharma also have great significance in nurturing that mental state in oneself and others. Although we are still being careful not to spread infectious diseases, if there is someone around us who is worried or in trouble, I think that we have a role to play by lending a helping hand and making that encounter an opportunity to expand the circle of people connected to the Buddha's teachings and transform the local community into an oasis—a lotus pond sparkling with the light of the buddha nature. To ensure that we do not forget this, we should deeply ponder the aforementioned lines of scripture during our daily sutra recitations and vow to build a world where everyone, through awareness of their own buddha nature, experiences happiness.

The first step toward building that world is for every one of us to exchange cheerful greetings and show each other kindness in our homes, workplaces, and communities. That said, looking back on this past year, have all of you been your best selves?



From *Kosei*, December 2024

Interview

Realizing Impermanence and Living This Moment to the Fullest— the Best Way to Transfer Merit to My Son

Ms. Tatjana Opia, Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK

When and how did you join Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK?

I joined Rissho Kosei-kai in May 2023. At the time, I was searching for a Buddhist center near my home or one I could join online. I found the website for the London Center of Rissho Kosei-kai. For the first few months, I was only reading the center's newsletters, which I received via email, but one day I saw an announcement that said, "Would you like to join a study course on basic Buddhism?" Interested, I contacted Rev. Kyoichiro Hosoya, the director of the London Center. He was pleased that I would be participating in the study session. When I first met Rev. Hosoya online, I was impressed by his kind and gentle personality, and the study session itself was very interesting. Since it was a Saturday, Rev. Hosoya invited me to come to the Sunday service at the London Center the next day, and I gladly accepted.

At the Sunday service, I met many members of the London Center. Everyone welcomed me warmly with a kind smile. I recited the sutra, which was a new experience for me. The sangha members came up to me and explained things to me: "This is done like this" or "That has this meaning." They were always there to help me. Since then, I have looked forward to



Ms. Opia with fellow members of the London Center in front of a member's home altar.



Ms. Tatjana Opia

Sunday services every week and tried to grow spiritually by learning the Buddha's teachings. I am very happy now and am grateful to have become a member of the sangha.

It's been one and a half years since you began to study and practice Buddhism at the London Center. Did you have any experiences that helped you understand the teachings?

It isn't easy to put into words, but to tell the truth, in September 2020, my son suddenly took his own life. He was only twenty-one years old. He was suffering from depression. I was very sad that I couldn't save my son, and I was tormented by the shock of suddenly losing him and the strong sense of that loss. I deeply regretted my powerlessness and endlessly asked myself, *Why couldn't I help him more? Wasn't there anything else I could have done for him?* Every day I cried until my tears ran dry, longing to see my son and hold him again. I spent many months in deep sorrow and anguish.



For three years after I lost my son, I could hardly accept the cruel fact of his death. Though I understood in my head that anyone and anything that has life will eventually die, just thinking that I would be eternally separated from my son broke my heart. However, while I was learning basic Buddhism and gaining small realizations with the support and warm encouragement of my fellow sangha members, my heart gradually felt better.

The Dharma of impermanence, one of the Three Seals of the Dharma, teaches us that all things are constantly changing. Through this teaching, I learned deeply that all the suffering, sorrow, joy, and pleasure we experience is temporary and does not last forever. In other words, we are living in the midst of impermanence every day. Moreover, by becoming aware of impermanence, I realized the importance of accepting the reality before our eyes as it is, instead of resisting change or clinging to temporary things. A year and a half after encountering the Buddha's teachings, I gradually began to accept my son's death, and I was able to change my way of thinking by realizing that



Ms. Opia strikes a gong while serving as a subleader in sutra recitation at the London Center.



Ms. Opia (front row, right) recites the Kyoten, "sutra readings," at the London Center.

the only way to overcome my grief and hardship was to accept them.

In July of this year, at the London Center, the Ullambana Ceremony was held, and in September, the memorial service for the anniversary of my son's passing was held. Many members participated in both ceremonies. Through the services, I felt a strong spiritual bond with my son, and it felt as if he was living inside of me. Through this experience, I became convinced that living each moment to the fullest while being aware of impermanence would lead to a fulfilling and positive life, and that would be the best way to transfer merit to my son.

Are there any particular phrases or passages in the Lotus Sutra that you hold close to your heart?

I've only been a member for a short time, and I haven't studied the Lotus Sutra in depth, so it's hard for me to say what passage I treasure most. However, before the memorial service for my son in September, a member taught me the merit of reciting chapter 25 [Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World as Universal Gateway] of the Lotus Sutra. Her advice impressed me, so I recited the chapter wholeheartedly, believing in the wisdom and compassion of the

Interview

Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World. Then, somehow, I felt at peace and comfortable. I am sure it is thanks to the merit accomplished by the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Sounds of the World. I love this chapter now, and I believe it will also become an important chapter for me.

Are there any words or deeds you especially value in the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai?

President Niwano repeatedly teaches us how important it is to “cultivate the fields in our hearts and minds.” I always keep this phrase in mind and cultivate my heart by repeating words and deeds that soften the soil of my mind.

What aspect of Rissho Kosei-kai are you fascinated by?

Before joining Rissho Kosei-kai, I read some books on Buddhism and visited a Tibetan Buddhist organization in search of spiritual peace, but none of them really suited me. There was something about them that didn't quite fit. However, when I visited the London Center, curiously enough, I felt as if I had returned home where I could feel true peace of mind.

Here I can improve myself spiritually by learning basic Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra from Rev. Hosoya and, through hoza, by reflecting on my mind and sharing ideas and experiences with fellow sangha members. That is the biggest attraction of Rissho Kosei-kai for me.

Finally, please tell us your dreams and goals for your practice.

My goal is to learn the teachings more deeply, participate in various practices with other members, and ultimately gain Buddhist wisdom. My dream is to visit the headquarters in Tokyo, meet President Niwano, and receive guidance directly from him. To make my dream come true, I hope to study the teachings more deeply, put them into practice, improve myself, and live each day with spiritual peace. For the rest of my life, I would like to continue my practice in order to acquire the Buddha's wisdom so that I can accept any hardship as an opportunity for growth. I would also like to work hard to become a person who can have a positive influence on the lives of people around me.



Ms. Opia with members of the London Center after the Ullambana Ceremony on July 13, 2024. On her lap is the child of a fellow member.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

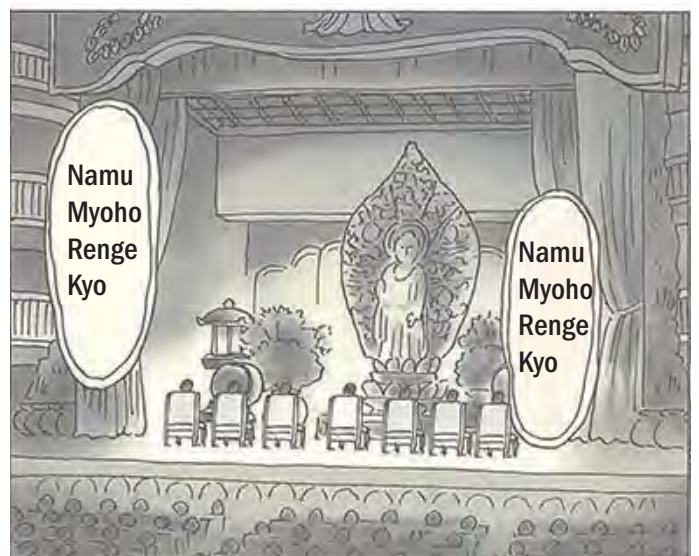
Annual Events of Rissho Kosei-kai

The Ullambana Ceremony

Obon Festival (the Ullambana Ceremony) is an annual event for commemorating our ancestors. It is mainly observed from August 13 to 16, although in some areas it is observed from July 13 to 16. During this period, it is customary to invite the spirits of our ancestors to this world (into our homes), to spend time together, and make offerings.

The customs followed vary from region to region, but it is nevertheless an important event that we cherish as an opportunity to express our gratitude to our ancestors for passing their lives on to us.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, members annually observe the Ullambana Ceremony in mid-July and recite the Lotus Sutra for their ancestors.



Did You Know?

Maudgalyayana, one of Shakyamuni's ten great disciples, sought Shakyamuni's advice on how to save his deceased mother, who had fallen into the realm of hungry spirits. Shakyamuni instructed him to invite the assembly of the Sangha for her memorial service and make offerings of food to them. Maudgalyayana followed the advice and made offerings to the Sangha on July 15. Then she escaped the realm of hungry spirits and ascended to the peaceful realm of heaven. This is the origin of the Ullambana Ceremony.

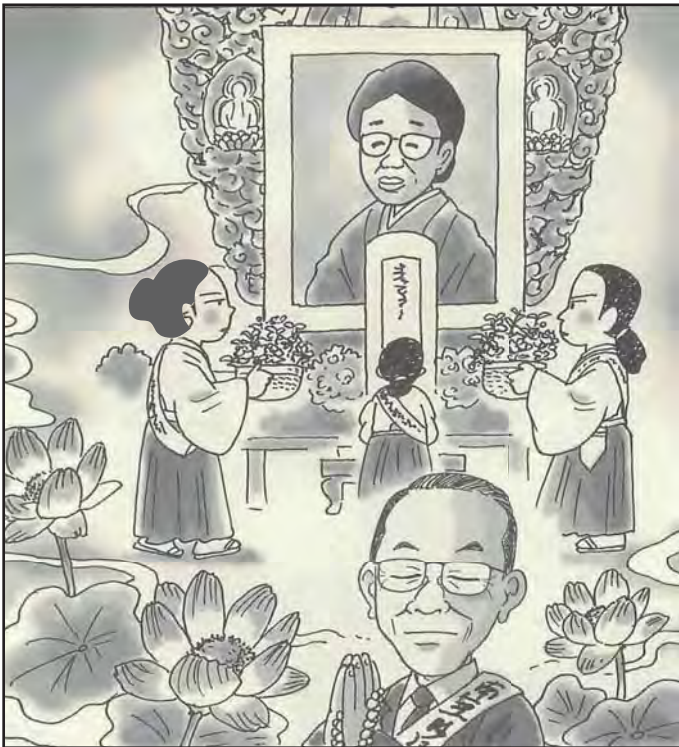


The Annual Memorial Day of Cofounder Naganuma

Cofounder Myoko Naganuma passed away on September 10, 1957, at the age of 67.

She guided members to the way of happiness with compassion, at times being gentle and at other times being strict. She is still revered by members as the mother of compassion.

We observe this memorial day as an opportunity to commemorate her life of compassion in which she dedicated herself single-mindedly to Dharma dissemination. It is also the day on which each member of Rissho Kosei-kai makes a vow to practice the teaching, following her spirit of compassion.



The ceremony for the Memorial Day of Cofounder Naganuma

Did You Know?

Jihi [慈悲], meaning compassion, is composed of two kanji characters, *ji* [慈] and *hi* [悲]. *Ji* means the heart that wishes to live life by making the lives of others happy, while *hi* indicates the mind wishing to relieve the suffering of others through actions.





Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

We Are Given the Gift of Life by the Buddha

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



Sharing the Joy of Having Received the Buddha's Gift of Life

The best way to appreciate the fact that you have received the Buddha's gift of life and are sustained by the Buddha is by offering sutra recitation. Every time you recite the Lotus Sutra, morning and evening, a sense of joy and gratitude for the Buddha's gift of life wells up within your heart.

When we are filled with joy for the Buddha's gift of life and sustenance, we naturally interact with others in a flexible and harmonious manner. If we are with someone who is troubled, we may be able to help them by suggesting how they can make things better or by sharing with them what the Buddha's teachings say. And for those who are unaware that they have received life from and are sustained by the Buddha, we can open their eyes by telling them "The Buddha brought you to life and supports you!" This is the role and spiritual practice of those of us who are aware that we have received the Buddha's gift of life and are sustained by the Buddha.

Whenever I have the chance, I visit our Dharma centers in various locations, and wherever I go, I am greeted with great joy by many members. At such times, I am deeply moved, thinking "There are so many people who realize they were brought to life by and are sustained by the Buddha!"

The more you appreciate the Buddha's gift of life, and the more you practice, the greater your joy becomes. I encourage all of you to share this joy in a resounding voice with all the people around you.

Director's Column

My Year-End Vow

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

Hello, everyone. With the arrival of December, the season of cold north winds has come around again. It's chilly in the mornings and evenings even in Tokyo, and it's hard to believe that the days were sweltering just a few months ago. How are you all doing?

Continuing from last month's message, President Niwano introduces us to the importance of "the mind of reverence and the mind of humility." He says that it is essential to see good points in other people that we ourselves don't have and to connect the mind of humility to a desire to improve ourselves. He also tells us that, on top of this, each and every one of us is required to fully realize our own buddha nature, care for people who are suffering, and strive to create a beautiful world, like a lotus pond, where everyone respects one another.

Even though we inherently possess the same wisdom and virtue as the Buddha, we tend either to compare ourselves with others and feel inferior, or to allow our prideful mind to run wild as a backlash to our sense of inferiority, turning our eyes from our inconvenient reality. Perhaps it is our weak minds that drive us to such impulses.

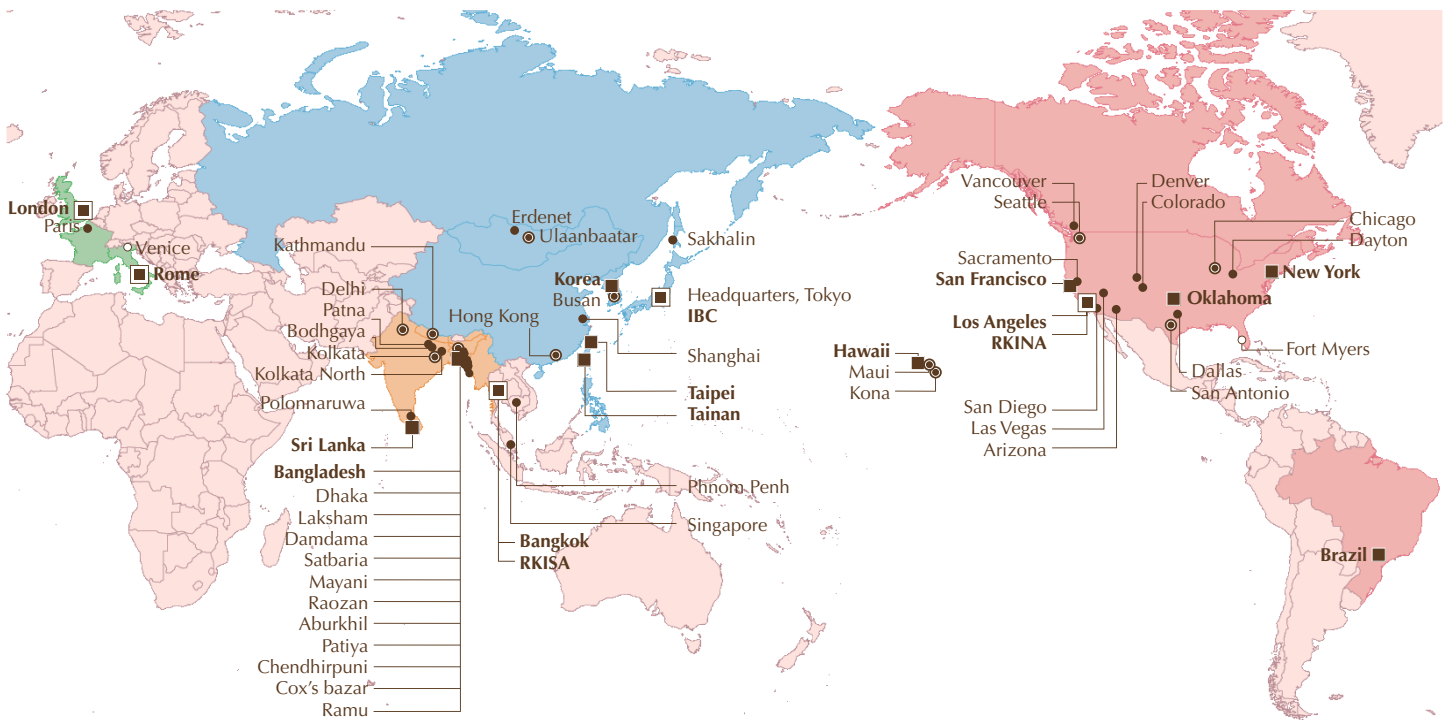
When we join Rissho Kosei-kai, we are taught to be "upright in character, gentle in mind, humble in attitude." At the end of this year, I have made a renewed vow to diligently practice these teachings and become healthier in body and mind.



Rev. Akagawa (front row, right) with recipients from overseas Dharma centers after the presentation ceremony of the Dharma Teacher certification, held at the Great Sacred Hall on October 27, 2024.



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Information about
local Dharma centers



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