

# Living the Lotus 1

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

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Rissho Kosei-kai of Oklahoma

## Living the Lotus Vol. 232 (January 2025)

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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.

# Every One of Us Is an Oasis

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



## A Departure Station Called “New Year’s”

Happy New Year!

New Year’s is when everyone welcomes the beginning of the year and makes a fresh start together. In other words, it is like the departure station on a railroad track. New Year’s also presents us with a fine opportunity to make a new vow, based on a review of the past year, and turn over a new leaf. To quote a poem by Mokichi Saito (1882–1953), “At the start of a new year, / Focus on one thing, / Put your mind to it, / And move forward.” Similarly, at this departure station, we want to make sure to be well prepared for the year-long journey that lies ahead. By the way, what vow did you make and decide to “put your mind to, and move forward” with?

This year, I am blessed to celebrate my *beiju* (one’s eighty-eighth birthday, according to the traditional Japanese way of counting years), something for which I am extremely grateful and happy. No matter how old we are, though, if it is human nature to aim for growth and self-improvement, then I think that a *beiju* birthday is just another milestone, a stop along the railroad track of life, and once I get over this hill, I can take on the next one. For this reason, once again this year, I hope to continue progressing and growing, while always remembering to be diligent and considerate of others.

This is my annual plan that never changes, but in recent years, it has been particularly important for me to make a greater effort to “develop people.”

The earth is a beautiful planet of blue water, floating in the universe, but its environment is deteriorating year by year, while the human beings living there endlessly engage in conflict and war. . . . This state of affairs reminds me of the importance of each and every one of us making it part of a personal plan to raise people who have a rich sense of humanity and who truly understand the pain of others. After all, we have a responsibility to leave behind a beautiful planet earth, where there is harmony in the minds of people as well as in the environment.

## Growing a Tree in Your Mind

As I have mentioned before, looking ahead to the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, we should make “raising human beings” a priority. Speaking from our position as Buddhists, this means that through the Buddha’s teachings, we are raising bodhisattvas—people with the mind of consideration who do their utmost for others and who want to not only make themselves happy but also bring happiness and liberation to members of their families, their communities, and even people on the other side of the world.

Wherever there is a bodhisattva whose mind is like an oasis, giving people comfort and peace of mind, that place becomes an oasis. The ideal I envision is that when such people gather together, they form an oasis called a local sangha (a community sharing the same faith), which will expand as a place that nourishes people’s minds. Of course, the primary goal is not the development of this organization, but rather an ideal stemming from an urgent sense of danger regarding the future of the earth and humanity.

On the one hand, in olden times, there were people who had murderous intentions, even toward Shakyamuni, and since the emergence of the human species, the human desire to do whatever one pleases has never changed; furthermore, the trend has only been for greedy desires and violent impulses to multiply. On the other hand, just as greedy desires are without limit, those who came before us taught us that our ideals must also be without limit. Without ideals, there can be no progress, and making ideals into reality is the purpose of human life. Each of us is standing at the starting line of realizing an ideal. It begins when you become like a tree in an oasis for your own family, and then your family becomes like an oasis for your neighborhood.

In Buddhism, taking life—that is, taking the life of another person—is considered the greatest wrongdoing. Therefore, practicing compassion—doing things like acting and speaking with kindness and consideration toward others every day—helps us understand the sanctity of life and our oneness with others. Such practices are also a form of benefiting others and can lead to planting flowers and trees that become a new oasis in people’s minds. In this way, getting along well with many people, living life to the fullest in the present moment, and showing gratitude toward one another means, in the words of Founder Niwano, “transferring merits to those entrusted with what comes after us”—that is, connecting with the future by transferring merits to future generations.

From *Kosei*, January 2025



# Spiritual Journey

## The Power of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha Has Supported Me Along the Bodhisattva Way— Reflections on My Dharma Journey as a Minister

Rev. Kris Ladusau, Oklahoma Dharma Center

*This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall on November 18, 2024, to represent retiring ministers during the Meeting of Ministers and Headquarters' Leaders.*

*Mihotoke-sama, Kaiso-sama, onegai itashimasu,*  
“The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano,  
please guide me.”

*Kaicho-sensei, onegai itashimasu,* “President  
Niwano, please guide me.”

*Mina-sama, onegai itashimasu,* “Everyone, please  
guide me.”

Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to share things I have learned from my experience of being a Reverend in Rissho Kosei-kai. I would like to discuss the following points:

I have learned that I never accomplish anything independently. In the Lotus Sutra it says that if there is sincere dedication to the Dharma, and efforts are made to share it, then whoever or whatever is needed will appear for that Dharma Teacher. I have been greatly supported.

*This realization helped me trust in the power of dedication to the Way.*

I learned the importance of respecting everyone's unique timeline on the path to enlightenment. One member, who was always slow to practice and grow in the teachings, later realized they were like the “poor son” in the Lotus Sutra parable, who took twenty years to fully understand.

*This realization showed me the importance of patience and skillful means.*

I learned that some of my best teachers were my students. If my sangha members developed bad habits, I needed to look at myself first, because they had been watching me as their example.

*This realization gave me a new perspective on the many ways I could learn.*

I learned what a truly great blessing it is to study and teach the Dharma in this lifetime. The study and



*Rev. Kris Ladusau delivers her Dharma Journey talk, representing retiring ministers at the Horin-kaku Guest Hall on November 18, 2024.*

practice of the teachings has guided and supported me throughout my life.

*This realization created an unimaginable depth of gratitude in me.*

Once, while meditating, I saw myself sitting between a statue of the Buddha and a sangha member who was expressing their suffering to me. I reached up and took the Buddha's hand, and with my other hand, I reached out to hold the hand of the member. I was simply a connector, a conduit for the Buddha's wisdom to reach the person who needed it.

*This realization helped me take my ego out of giving Dharma guidance.*

With each of these realizations, I renewed and deepened my commitment. A new sense of possibility emerged as we all progressed together.

# Spiritual Journey

Many times, I saw the power of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

When I think of an example of the power of the Buddha, I think about the fact that the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni and Rissho Kosei-kai brought a Dharma center to Oklahoma in the middle of America—a predominantly Christian area and a very unexpected location for a Japanese Buddhist center.

When I think of the power of the Dharma, I think about a member in Oklahoma who had held bad feelings toward her deceased mother for over fifty years. Because of these feelings, the member had never visited her mother's grave and no gravestone had ever been placed there. After this member began practicing the Dharma teachings, she wanted to find the grave and make an appropriate marker for her mother. (The member's childhood had been very difficult and unhappy because her mother was an alcoholic and the child had to take care of the parent.) Sadly, the mother had died in a car accident when the member was young. Everyone in the family thought it was suicide because she had driven off the side of a bridge on her way to work.

When the sangha member went to the cemetery to find her mother's grave, the employee of the cemetery remembered the situation and showed her a police report concerning the car accident. The report stated that the other driver had been in the wrong lane as they entered the bridge, and after reading this, our member realized that not only had her mother not committed suicide, she had actually saved the other



*Rev. Ladusau with Rev. Yasuko Hildebrand, the previous minister of the Oklahoma Dharma Center.*

driver's life by choosing to go over the side of the bridge so they would not have a head-on collision. With this new information, she totally shifted her perspective about her mother. She also healed some of the sadness she had carried for over fifty years. This new understanding would not have happened without the Dharma teachings and ancestor appreciation practices gained through Rissho Kosei-kai.

When I think of the power of the Sangha, I think about a member who wanted to be the chanting leader for her brother's memorial service. As the service began, she became emotional and started crying, unable to chant. Automatically, the sangha began chanting for her until she regained the ability to lead chanting for the remainder of the service.

All of these experiences are my treasures, and I am very, very grateful.

They were made possible through the generosity and kindness of Rissho Kosei-kai. A sincere thank you to Founder Niwano, Cofounder Naganuma, President Niwano, and President-Designate Kosho Niwano. All blessings to you.

Many years ago, when I was traveling in Japan, I had the opportunity to spend some time visiting very old and beautiful gardens. They all had a unique beauty, and I reflected on the considerable amount of thought, planning, and continual care that went into each of them. One of the gardens incorporated a large



*Rev. Ladusau (second from left) with her sangha members at the Oklahoma Dharma Center.*

# Spiritual Journey

pond in its design. Across the water were stepping stones that helped visitors cross to the other side safely and see the garden from a new perspective.

Years later, I could see a correlation to teaching the Dharma. As I traversed the bodhisattva path, my teachers created stepping stones to guide me through my process. They gave me a nudge when I needed it, suggesting practices to do, books to read, and speeches to write, and they provided opportunities to experience sharing the teachings with others. Although there may have been times when I was a bit scared to go to the next step, I had full trust in my teachers, knowing that they too had been guided through the same process by those who came before them.

When I became a teacher, I noticed myself incorporating the style of Dharma guidance I had received from my mentors. After carefully observing each individual in my sangha and trying to grasp their abilities, energies, and depth of devotion, I became focused on trying to create the most efficient and effective way for each of them to continue growing through study and practice by pointing out the stepping stones.

I am standing here today because of many teachers. In Oklahoma, I had the wonderful opportunity of developing the Dharma center with Rev. Yasuko Hildebrand. She was a great mentor. Many people have used the word “synergy” to describe our work together. Our time together provided me with emotional maturity and growth. Sometimes she would trust in the American-style choices I made concerning management of the facility, and at other times she would gently remind me to consider the potential effects my ideas might have on others. She could always be trusted to provide a bigger perspective when needed. I feel deep gratitude.

I learned that in Japan, if you ask someone how they are doing, they will answer, “Because of the efforts of others, I am doing well.” To me, this beautifully expresses a true understanding of our connec-

tion to others and to nature. On this day, I acknowledge and give thanks for the many gifts I have received in my life. I know that gratitude is most easily found through reflecting on the past, but if I am mindful, I can also experience it in moment-to-moment living, for gratitude naturally arises when I have the focus and awareness to see the gifts of life as they are happening. What a “joy-full” experience.

My heart and mind are at peace. I feel complete as I hand the leadership to Rev. Chris Peters, our new reverend in Oklahoma. I truly appreciate his wisdom and his dedication. May he deeply experience the Great Way.

It has been my great honor to be a leader in this generation of Rissho Kosei-kai’s world sangha. Thank you so much for the tremendous support you have shown me through the years. I will always hold it dear to my heart.

*Mihotoke-sama, Kaiso-sama, arigato gozaimasu,* “The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, thank you very much.”

*Kaicho-sensei, arigato gozaimasu,* “President Niwano, thank you very much.”

*Mina-sama, arigato gozaimasu,* “Everyone, thank you very much.”



Rev. Ladusau congratulates Rev. Chris Peters, the new minister of the Oklahoma Dharma Center, at the inauguration ceremony on December 7, 2024.

# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

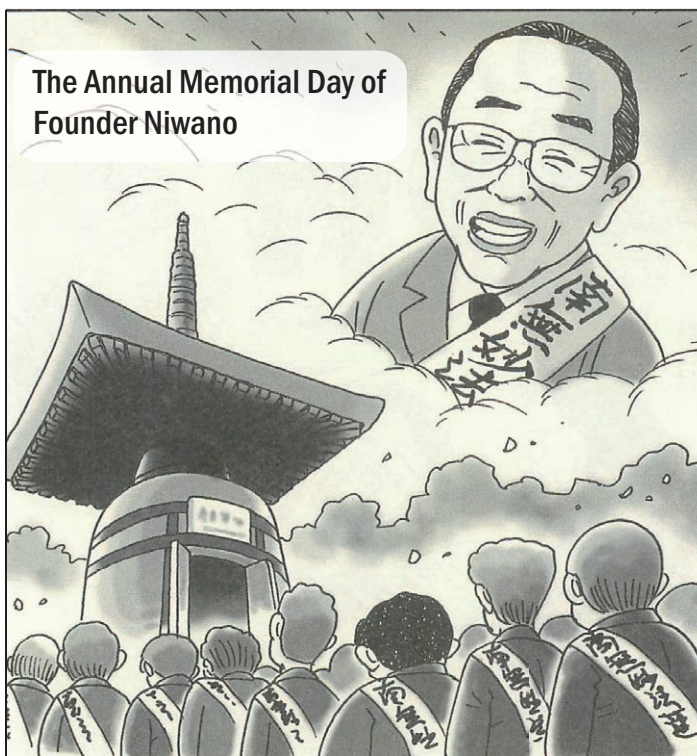
## Annual Events of Rissho Kosei-kai

### The Annual Memorial Day of Founder Niwano

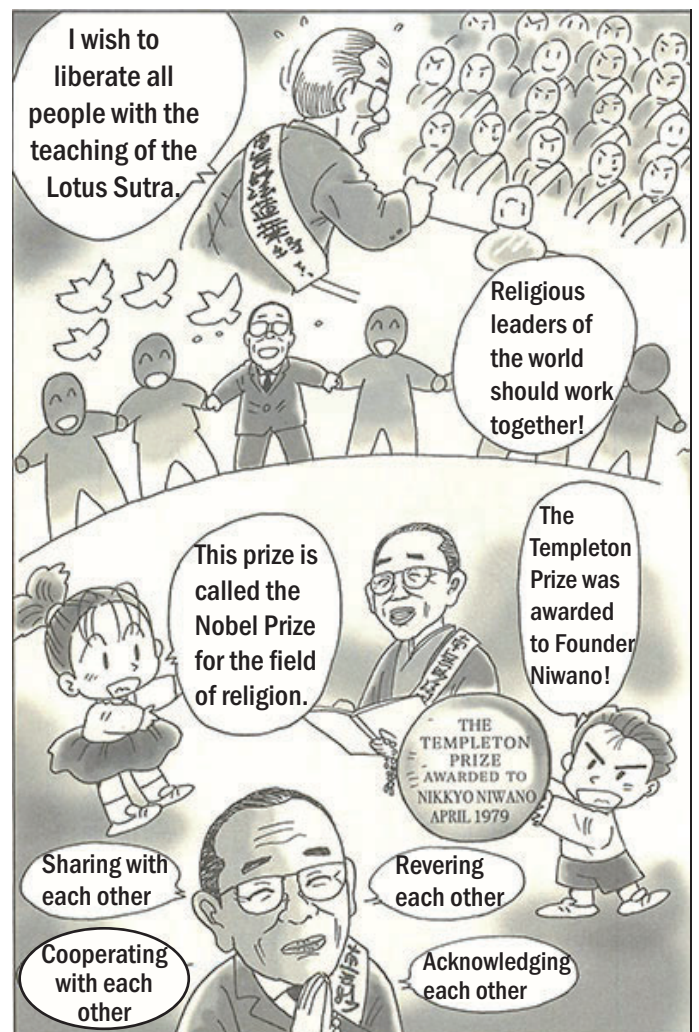
The ceremony for the annual memorial day of Founder Niwano's entering nirvana is held on October 4.

Founder Niwano entered nirvana on October 4, 1999, at the age of ninety-two. During this ceremony, members of Rissho Kosei-kai cherish his memory, praise his virtues, and repay our debt of gratitude. We also vow to inherit his teaching and put it into practice.

After establishing Rissho Kosei-kai, the Founder vigorously worked for the realization of world peace through interfaith dialogue while spreading the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and liberating people with the spirit of the One Vehicle, which encourages us to respect, accept, cooperate with, and share our feelings with others.



The Annual Memorial Day of Founder Niwano



#### Did You Know?

Founder Niwano received the Templeton Prize in 1979. This prize, established in 1973, is often called "the Nobel Prize for the field of religion" because it rewards those who dedicate themselves to progress in religion.



## The Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival

*Matoi* (standards carried by traditional Japanese firefighters) are stirring at the head of the parade, followed by the sound of bamboo flutes, handheld gongs, and handheld drums, which provide the rhythm of the music. Then the paper cherry blossom that decorates the *Mando*, “portable, lighted pagoda,” symbolizing the cherry blossom in full flower, goes up and down in the air as if soaring and spreading over the sky.

Generally, the *Oeshiki* means the memorial service for Priest Nichiren (1222–1282), the founder of the Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism, held on October 13, the date he passed away. The *Mando* parade is performed during the ceremony.

Annually, Rissho Kosei-kai holds the *Oeshiki* and the *Oeshiki-Ichijo* Festival, a procession of the *Mando*, near headquarters and the Great Sacred Hall on the first Sunday of October to commemorate the virtue of Priest Nichiren, who spread the Lotus Sutra, and that of the Founder, who established Rissho Kosei-kai and dedicated his entire life to world peace. The organization also encourages members to repay our debt of gratitude, keep the spirit of “many in body but one in spirit,” and spread the teaching widely on this day.



### ● Did You Know?

Priest Nichiren was born in what is now Chiba Prefecture during the Kamakura period (1185 to 1333). He became a monk at the age of sixteen and was trained in Kamakura and on Mount Hiei, where he studied the teachings of various sects of Japanese Buddhism. He left several pieces of writing, including “*Rissho Ankoku Ron* (Establishing right doctrine and peace of the nation),” and devoted his life to spreading the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.





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

### **Making the World a Great Big Sangha**

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



#### **Sangha Is the Entirety of the Buddha Way**

After thinking deeply about the significance of the Sangha, Ananda, the Buddha's personal attendant, asked Shakyamuni Buddha, "I believe that having good spiritual friends and spiritual companions is half of the Buddhist path. What do you think?"

The Buddha then replied, "No, it is not half. To be with good spiritual friends is the entirety of the Buddha Way."

A basic criterion for being a Buddhist is taking refuge in the Three Treasures. To take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha was an essential requirement for being a member of Shakyamuni Buddha's religious community. Of these, our inclination to take refuge in the Sangha



(the assembly of practitioners) tends to fade, even if we always take refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma (the teachings), keeping them in the forefront of our thoughts.

I believe that the Buddha's words, "the entirety," should be interpreted to indicate something which brings about perfection or something without which, things are incomplete.

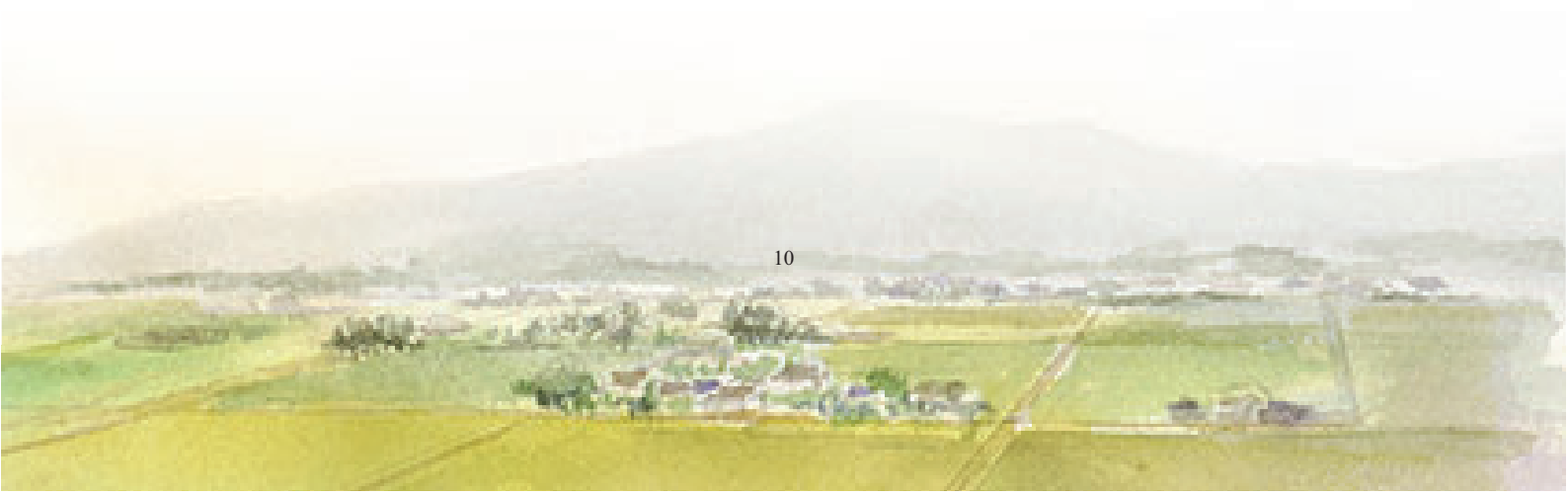
What the Buddha meant is that when we practice our faith in isolation, we tend to slack off, fall into doubt, or succumb to various desires in daily life. At such times, having companions who share the same faith—who encourage us, constructively critique us, or guide our thinking in the right direction—can help us overcome these challenges.

And it is not just about avoiding dangers. How delightful it is, when we have a wonderful spiritual experience, to have someone to share that joy with, testifying together to the reliability of the Dharma! How much it can deepen the faith of us both! This, too, is precious.

The importance of affirming one another is also taught in the Lotus Sutra. Just because the Buddha expounded the Treasure of the Dharma at the Lotus Sutra assembly doesn't make the sutra complete. It was only when the Tathagata Abundant Treasures appeared in the "Appearance of the Jeweled Stupa" chapter and verified the Treasure of the Dharma, as expounded by Shakyamuni, who says, "Excellent, excellent . . . all that the World-Honored Shakyamuni expounds is the truth" that the sutra was truly complete. The sight of both Shakyamuni Buddha and the Tathagata Abundant Treasures seated together in the stupa is the very symbol of the sutra's completion.

For this reason, Rissho Kosei-kai members—the sangha—sharing their experiences in Dharma Circle is, from the standpoint of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, an absolutely essential practice for mutually affirming the preciousness of the Treasure of the Dharma.

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 65–67



# Director's Column

## Hoping to Value the Warmth of the Sangha in the Coming Year

Rev. Keichi Akagawa  
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

Happy New Year! I sincerely hope that this year will be a wonderful one for all of you.

Last year, the Noto Peninsula earthquake occurred on New Year's Day in Japan, making people depressed at the beginning of the year. A year has passed since then, but it is heartbreaking to see that the scars of the disaster are still evident in that area. Also, as the United Nations Secretary-General mentioned, "The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived," and a number of natural disasters occurred around the world last year because of extreme weather caused by rising sea temperatures. We also heard tragic news of many people losing their lives due to the intense heat.

I strongly hope that this year will be one in which we can make progress, even if only a little, toward the construction of the Land of Tranquil Light, where nature and humanity are in harmony, by combining the wisdom of humanity gained through suffering and sadness.

The other day, a staff member of an organization working to tackle alcoholism shared with me some wonderful words. They are "The opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is connection."\* To put this in Buddhist terms, we could say "People can let go of attachment only in the warmth of the sangha." As President Niwano tells us in this month's message, the sangha, or a place consisting of cheerful, kind, and warm human relationships—an oasis, as it were—will energize us to respond to various difficult issues. Trusting in the power of the sangha, I would like to start the year 2025 by devoting myself to the Three Treasures.

\*Johann Hari, "Everything You Think You Know About Addiction Is Wrong," TED Talk, London, June 2015. <http://t.ted.com/cXvjJRp>.



*Rev. Akagawa (front row, center) with ministers of overseas Dharma centers after a special event at Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters. Photographed in the Horin-kaku Guest Hall on November 13, 2024.*



# Donate-a-Meal Movement

The Donate-a-Meal Movement by Rissho Kosei-kai celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. In honor of this milestone, we are sharing more about this initiative every other month throughout the year.

## Let Your Heart Rejoice

### What Is the Donate-a-Meal Movement?

This movement invites people to reflect on those suffering from conflicts, disasters, and poverty in the world. By donating a portion of the money you might spend on meals or personal indulgences, you contribute, in the spirit of sharing, to the movement's activities.

If you are fortunate enough to have food on your plate, a family to talk to, and a safe place to live, we encourage you to share that happiness with those who lack these necessities. We hope you'll experience the joy that comes from the act of sharing.

### A Movement That Rejoices the Heart Through Donating a Meal

This initiative highlights the joy and fulfillment that come from acting thoughtfully toward others. Through this practice, we cherish the feeling of kindness and compassion growing within ourselves.

While the basic practice involves skipping a meal several times a month and donating the money you saved, we hope you will also find other ways of your own to practice donation. For instance, you could donate money by cutting back on your hobbies or luxury items. Or, on days when you are particularly happy, you could donate money to share some of your good fortune.

We suggest you participate in the movement in a way that brings joy to your own heart.

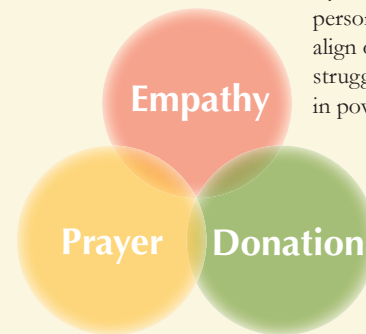


Children in Malawi, Africa, eat lunch supplied through the School Meal Program.

"I eat delicious porridge made of corn and soybeans every day! Before the school meal program began, I often felt hungry and couldn't concentrate in class. But thanks to these meals, I can study hard and even look forward to going to school. I'll keep attending school every day and do my best in my studies."

—Benson, thirteen years old

### The Three Pillars of the Donate-a-Meal Movement



By forgoing a meal or personal indulgence, we align ourselves with the struggles of people living in poverty or conflict.

We pray for peace for those in difficult situations. We also reflect on the preciousness of life and deepen our wish to create a peaceful society.

We donate money saved from skipping meals to support people in need. This act allows us to reflect on our mind and foster a spirit of having little desire and knowing satisfaction.

When we practice donation, we recite the Words of Prayer and observe a moment of silence.

#### Words of Prayer

I pray:

Let there be peace on earth

Let more people be considerate of others

Let it begin with me

(Moment of silence)



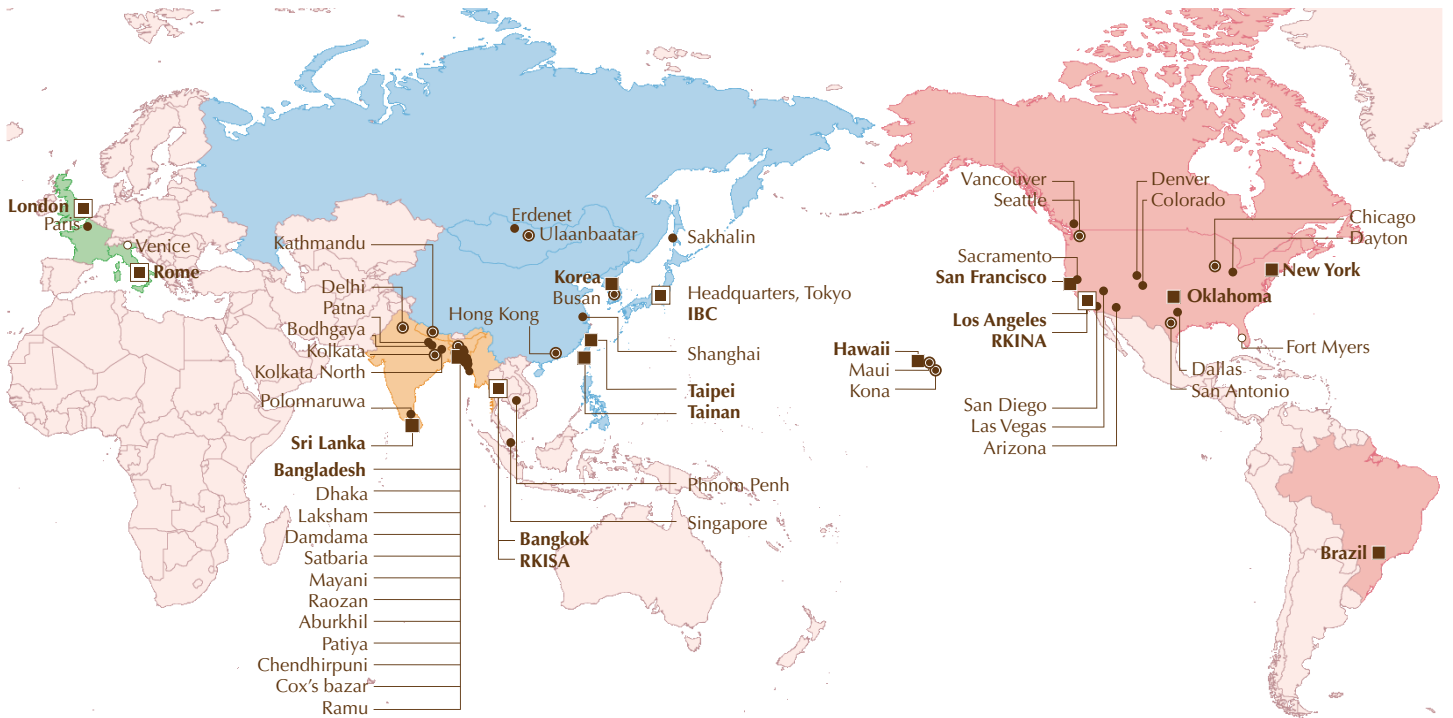
Children in Myanmar enjoy fortified biscuits received through the WFP's School Meal Program.

# Rissho Kosei-kai International

Make Every Encounter Matter



## 🌸 A Global Buddhist Movement 🌸



Information about local Dharma centers



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