

Living the Lotus 2

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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The Inauguration Ceremony for Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio A New Beginning with Gratitude and Resolve

Living the Lotus
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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.

Nurturing the Future

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



What Is Making Society “Crude and Harsh”?

Although this may be coming out of the blue, I would like to ask you a question. If there were three mandarin oranges in front of you right now, and two people were supposed to share them, how would you divide them?

I read the following anecdote in a book. One day at school, a teacher handed three mandarin oranges to two students and asked, “How would you divide them?” One of the students answered, “I would make an offering of one orange to the Buddha, and then give one to each of us.” The teacher responded with a flat-out rejection of this idea: “What are you talking about? Divide them into one and a half oranges for each of you.”

Of course, the teacher’s response is the correct answer for an arithmetic problem. But Daigaku Hanaoka (1909–88), a children’s book author, mentioned this anecdote in a conversation with Tasuku Yoshioka (1915–2000), an expert on children’s culture. Hanaoka emphasized the importance of cultivating religious sentiment in early childhood education, saying that the lack of reverence for an existence that exceeds human knowledge is a major cause of this world becoming so crude and harsh that people do not have enough breathing space to refresh their minds.

I read, in a book written by Kazuo Murakami (1936–2021), a well-known authority on genetic engineering, that recently some mothers in Japan have requested that their children not be made to say, *itadakimasu*, “I gratefully receive,” before eating their school lunches. The mothers say that the reason for this is that they are paying for school lunches.

However, as everyone knows, “‘I gratefully receive’ is a phrase that expresses our gratitude and awareness that each time we eat something, we are ‘receiving’ life from other living beings that support our own lives” (Kazuo Murakami). This phrase expresses our gratitude to nature, which supports all life, to God and the Buddha, and to the many people whose efforts have brought food to our tables. In other words, it is an expression of the mind of reverence.

Surely I am not alone in worrying that the minds and attitudes of parents and adults who forget this, and focus narrowly on utility and efficiency, will greatly influence the minds of those responsible for the next generation of humanity.

The Future Is the Here and Now

However, this is what I think. In Japan, many people visit Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in the New Year's season, visit their family's graves at the spring and autumn equinoxes, and put their hands together reverently in welcoming home the spirits of their ancestors during the Ullambana Festival. Furthermore, considering the fact that Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism (based on the Analects) have permeated Japan and that Japanese people have also been able to accept Western customs, we have carved out our history by accepting, learning from, and harmonizing these many different kinds of teachings that cultivate our positive emotions.

This not only applies to Japan, of course; every country has a religious culture that reveres the sacred. In other words, all human beings are endowed with the mind of reverence. And if this is the case, it is important that we help people who have forgotten this to regain the mind of reverence, and to show children how parents and adults practice it in their daily lives by revering and paying homage to sacred things. One valuable opportunity to do so is daily sutra recitation.

This is because the present is the starting point for the future. When we are, here and now, refining our minds and making every effort to practice what we can, we are nurturing the minds of our children and grandchildren who shoulder responsibility for the next generation, which in turn is nurturing a future in which everyone can believe in each other's buddha nature. From a different perspective, this means that the more we grow and improve upon ourselves, the more we are building a brighter future.

In fact, when it comes to early childhood education, there is no better education than the daily practice of parents placing their hands together reverently before the gods and the buddhas and creating a home full of harmony and peace of mind. Similarly, experts talk about the importance of prenatal care because the mother's sense of wellbeing has a positive effect on the fetus and helps deepen the bond between parent and child.

Therefore, in this sense of building and maintaining peace in our homes, we should again reflect upon the meanings of the three phrases "thank you," "I gratefully receive this food" (spoken before a meal), and "I have gratefully received this food" (spoken after a meal) and make a point of habitually and sincerely saying them every day. After all, parents and adults who do so become good role models, who nourish and nurture the minds of those who will live in the future.

From *Kosei*, February 2025





Finding Happiness Through Prayers and Selfless Devotion to Others

Ms. Erika Gunji Misumi, Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil

When and how did you join Rissho Kosei-kai?

I joined Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil about thirty years ago after my father took me there. At that time, the Brazil Dharma Center had just launched a training program as part of its social activities, offering treatment for children with asthma. Many children in Sao Paulo suffer from asthma due to air pollution, and the center provided cervical massage therapy for children from just months old to thirteen years old. My father, a massage therapist, wasn't a member of Rissho Kosei-kai but volunteered at the center with other members of his massage therapists' group.

At the time, I was searching for a religion that

could bring comfort and support to my mind and heart. I believe it was the Buddha who led me to Rissho Kosei-kai and the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Initially, I didn't know anyone in the Dharma center, so I felt quite anxious about visiting. However, Rev. Maria Hiromi Sasaki, who is now the minister of the Brazil Dharma Center, was already an active youth leader and always welcomed me warmly with a bright smile. Her kindness helped me to gradually get involved in youth activities. Although she was close to my age, Rev. Sasaki was a highly respected youth leader and a deeply reassuring presence for me.

What made you seek religion during your youth?

I had a sister who was one year younger than me, but she died in a traffic accident when she was eight years old. I lost my beloved sister when I was an elementary school student, and I was traumatized by the great shock and sadness; I continued to live a very difficult life even into my adolescence. When I would suddenly remember the happy times I had spent playing with my sister, I felt sad and often found myself in tears. So, when I encountered the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai and learned about the importance and preciousness of ancestor appreciation, it became a source of strength for me. I was very grateful to recite the sutra in the morning and evening before the home altar. At first, I didn't understand the meaning of what was written in the scriptures, but when the core leaders told me that the merits of the Lotus Sutra would be transferred to my ancestors, grandparents, and my sister who had died in an accident, I recited the sutra with all my heart. And as I continued the sutra recitation, my heart gradually came to be at peace, my sadness healed, and I overcame the trauma that I had been suffering for so many years.



Ms. Gunji shared her spiritual journey on December 8, 2024, during the ceremony for Shakyamuni's Attainment of Enlightenment at the Brazil Dharma Center.

You received the Dharma Teacher qualification in October 2024. Could you tell us how you are feeling now?

Until now, I think I have studied Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra in order to solve my own problems. However, having received the Dharma Teacher qualification, I still want to improve myself, and at the same time, I want to take it one step further and wish for the happiness of others. I want to convey the precious teachings of the Buddha and allow as many people as possible to experience the happiness I have gained through these teachings. When I received the qualification at the Great Sacred Hall, I made a vow to the Buddha that I would share this feeling not just through words but also through my actions and the way I live my life.

Are there any teachings from the Lotus Sutra that you have engraved on your mind and heart?

After studying the Lotus Sutra, the Parable of the Medicinal Herbs in chapter 5 has left a particularly deep impression on me. In this world, there are various kinds of plants and trees, large and small, and it may seem like there is inequality. However, the parable relates that all plants and trees receive rain and grow, so in that sense, they are equal. And even though there are differences in appearance, such as shape and size, there is no superiority or inferiority—everything is a precious existence. Likewise, there are people with various personalities around us, but each person has an irreplaceable and wonderful buddha nature. I was moved by this parable, which teaches us that everyone is a precious existence.

Are there any teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai that you cherish?

In Rissho Kosei-kai, we are taught that “If you change, others will change.” In general, people try to change other people first rather than change themselves, but in reality, we can’t change other people. I



Ms. Gunji (left) serves as interpreter at the ceremony for the eighty-sixth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai on March 10, 2024.

myself had a bad relationship with my sister-in-law in the past and tried to change her in many ways. However, after that, I was taught in Rissho Kosei-kai that I have to change myself first. By putting this into practice, my relationship with her improved, and now we are very close, and I am really grateful for this teaching.

What is it about Rissho Kosei-kai that you find attractive?

The most attractive thing for me is that members conduct the bodhisattva practice with the mind of putting others first. I have learned the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and I have been taught that in order to truly become happy, it is important to pray for the happiness of others and to devote ourselves to others wholeheartedly. In other words, we have to devote ourselves to practicing the Dharma by becoming bodhisattvas through the teachings. We can grow by doing the bodhisattva practice with the wish for others’ happiness. By growing ourselves, we can practice the bodhisattva way for the sake of others more and more. I take this to epitomize the spirit of putting others first.

Finally, please tell us about your goals for your practice.

This year, the Portuguese translation of *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, which the members of the Brazil Dharma Center have been waiting for, is finally scheduled to be published. In this significant year, though I am still immature as a leader, I hope to support Rev. Sasaki, even if only a little, by joining forces with the sangha members. I am currently

assigned as an area leader of the Sao Paulo chapter, and I intend to continue to work on Dharma dissemination activities, united with other members as one. I also hope to devote myself to translating the words of the Founder and the President into Portuguese during the ceremonies and events at the Dharma center, so that I can convey the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to as many people in Brazil as possible.



Ms. Gunji with her husband, two daughters, and her dog.



An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Annual Events of Rissho Kosei-kai

The Ceremony for the Anniversary of Founder Niwano's Birth

Members of Rissho Kosei-kai celebrate Founder Niwano's birthday on November 15.

The Founder was born on November 15, 1906, in Suganuma, Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture. He left his hometown for Tokyo, where he encountered the Lotus Sutra. He founded Rissho Kosei-kai because he aspired to liberate people and rebuild society with the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Thanks to the Founder, we were introduced to the Lotus Sutra and can now walk the path of happiness.

We take the opportunity of the ceremony for the anniversary of the Founder's birth to deeply reflect upon the Founder's spirit and renew our gratitude.



Did You Know?

In Buddhism, regarding communication with others, there is a word, *wagenaigo*, which means “a cheerful face and kind words.” The Founder cheered people and brightened society with his loving smile and kind words. In this sense, he was indeed a person who embodied *wagenaigo* in his words and actions.



Uposatha Days and Go-Meinichis (Monthly Memorial Days of Rissho Kosei-kai)

Members of Rissho Kosei-kai observe *Uposatha* days on every first and fifteenth day of each month. On these days, we reflect on our daily practice and share our thoughts and joy with sangha members. We also renew our resolutions to disseminate the teaching.

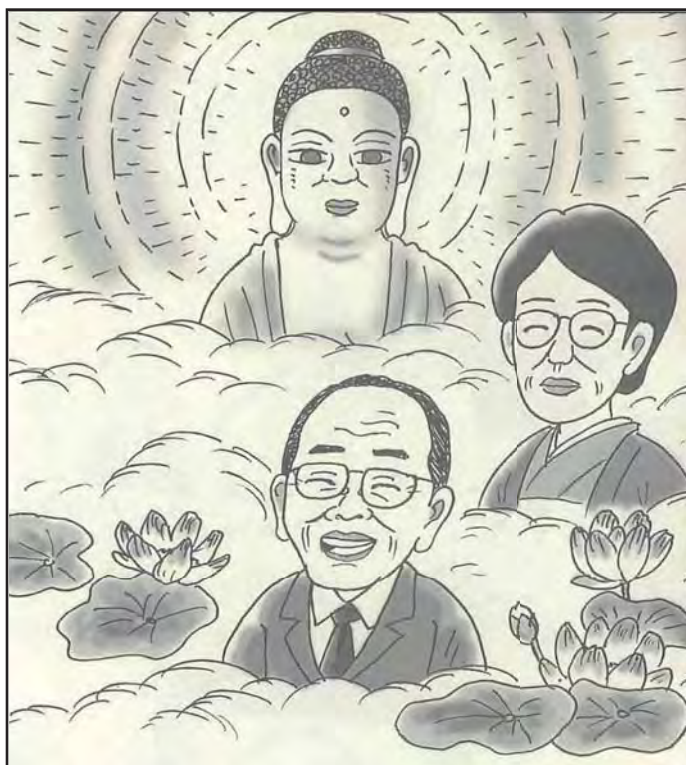
On *go-meinichis* (monthly memorial days of Rissho Kosei-kai), we members deepen our gratitude for our encounter with the Buddha's teaching and renew our vow to spread the teaching to other people. The following are Rissho Kosei-kai's monthly memorial days, including *Uposatha* days, and their significance.

The *Uposatha* Day Ceremony on the first day of each month: We study President Niwano's Dharma guidance deeply and keep it in mind as the guideline for our practice of the month. We also make a vow for our practice of the month ahead.

The Monthly Memorial Day for Founder Niwano on the fourth day of each month: We admire the Founder and renew the motto of "cherishing his memory, praising his virtues, deepening our debt of gratitude to him, transmitting the teaching to the next generation, and making a vow."

The Monthly Memorial Day for Cofounder Naganuma on the tenth day of each month: We vow to live following in the spirit of compassion demonstrated by Cofounder Naganuma.

The Monthly Memorial Day for Shakyamuni Buddha on the fifteenth day of each month: We express our debt of gratitude to Shakyamuni Buddha for showing us the path of liberation, reflect on the vow we made on the *Uposatha* Day, and review the half month of practice. We also renew our determination to put it into practice for the next half month.



Did You Know?

Go-meinichi or *meinichi* originally means the day of one's death. In Rissho Kosei-kai, we observe both the annual death anniversary and the monthly death anniversary as the deceased's memorial days, and we wholeheartedly make offerings to the spirit of the deceased by offering the food they liked on our home altar, and so on. In Rissho Kosei-kai, we also observe the family's monthly memorial day—the day when we are connected to the Buddha Dharma and are allowed to enshrine an image of the Eternal Buddha as the focus of devotion at our home altar.



Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

Making the World a Great Big Sangha

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



The Lotus Sutra Practitioner Is the Tathagata Abundant Treasures

A person who can share the merits gained through their practice of the faith with those around them is, without a doubt, none other than the Tathagata Abundant Treasures.

When Nichiren (1222–1282) was exiled to the Japanese island of Sado, Abutsu-bo, a local practitioner of *nenbutsu*—the practice of invoking the name of the Buddha Amitabha—saw Nichiren as an enemy of Amitabha and intended to kill him. However, Nichiren’s character and wisdom earned the deep respect of Abutsu-bo and his wife, and they both became Nichiren’s disciples.

Abutsu-bo once wrote a letter to Nichiren asking, “What does the emergence of the treasured stupa of the Tathagata Abundant Treasures signify?” To this, Nichiren responded as follows:

In the age of the decline of the Dharma, there is no jeweled stupa other than the figure of men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra . . . Those who chant Namu Myoho Renge Kyo are themselves the jeweled stupa, and their very bodies are also the Tathagata Abundant Treasures. There is no jeweled stupa apart from the Lotus Sutra . . . Therefore, Abutsu-bo is none other than the jeweled stupa, and the jeweled stupa is none other than Abutsu-bo. Any other knowledge is of no value. (Letter to Abutsu-bo)



The sentence “Any other knowledge is of no value” is truly a profound statement that strikes at the very heart of faith. It suggests that conventional intelligence or scholarly learning is unnecessary. What matters most is simple and sincere faith.

The members of Rissho Kosei-kai are people who have a karmic connection to the Lotus Sutra and recite Namu Myoho Renge Kyo morning and evening, so you are all the Tathagata Abundant Treasures. You are people who can duly share your seat with Shakyamuni Buddha and sit alongside him. I hope you can develop this kind of self-awareness. This is not arrogance; it is appropriate self-confidence.

In the Lotus Sutra’s Parable of the Rich Father and the Poor Son, it took the impoverished son twenty years to reach ultimate liberation because he lacked this self-awareness and confidence. The rich man (who symbolizes the Buddha) intentionally dressed in filthy clothes and dirtied himself to approach his son. He even went so far as to say, “From now on, let’s be like father and son.” Yet, the poor son continued believing himself to be a stupid person.

All of you may have thought of yourselves as the poor son or daughter up until now. However, now that you know the Lotus Sutra, you are no longer a poor son or daughter. You are a true child of the Buddha and his heir. Please take a moment to reflect on this truth once again. Truly, any other knowledge is of no value.

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 67–68

Director's Column

My Thoughts for Early Spring

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

Hello, everyone. The midwinter sutra recitation practice, which began on January 20, has now come to an end, and on February 3, Japan celebrated *risshun*, or “the first day of spring on the traditional lunar calendar.” Although it is still cold in Tokyo, we are starting to hear news from various places in Japan that the plum blossoms are blooming, heralding the arrival of spring. The subtle changes in the scenery and the sounds of the wind that I see and hear on my daily commute make me feel very happy, witnessing signs of life as plants and animals slowly recover their energy after their long winter hibernation. Spring is just around the corner.

On February 15, we will observe the ceremony commemorating Shakyamuni Buddha’s Entering Nirvana, which is one of the three major Buddhist events. Rissho Kosei-kai will also hold a grand ceremony at the Great Sacred Hall. While reflecting on the significance of the Buddha’s entering nirvana, I hope we will renew our vow to devote ourselves to daily practice as lay Buddhists.

In this month’s message, President Niwano teaches us that “the more we grow and improve upon ourselves, the more we are building a brighter future.” To achieve this, I would like to think about how I can make the most of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in my life. And, in order to become happier through the teachings, I will try my best to shed my old self from last year while practicing the teachings in my daily life in body, speech, and mind.



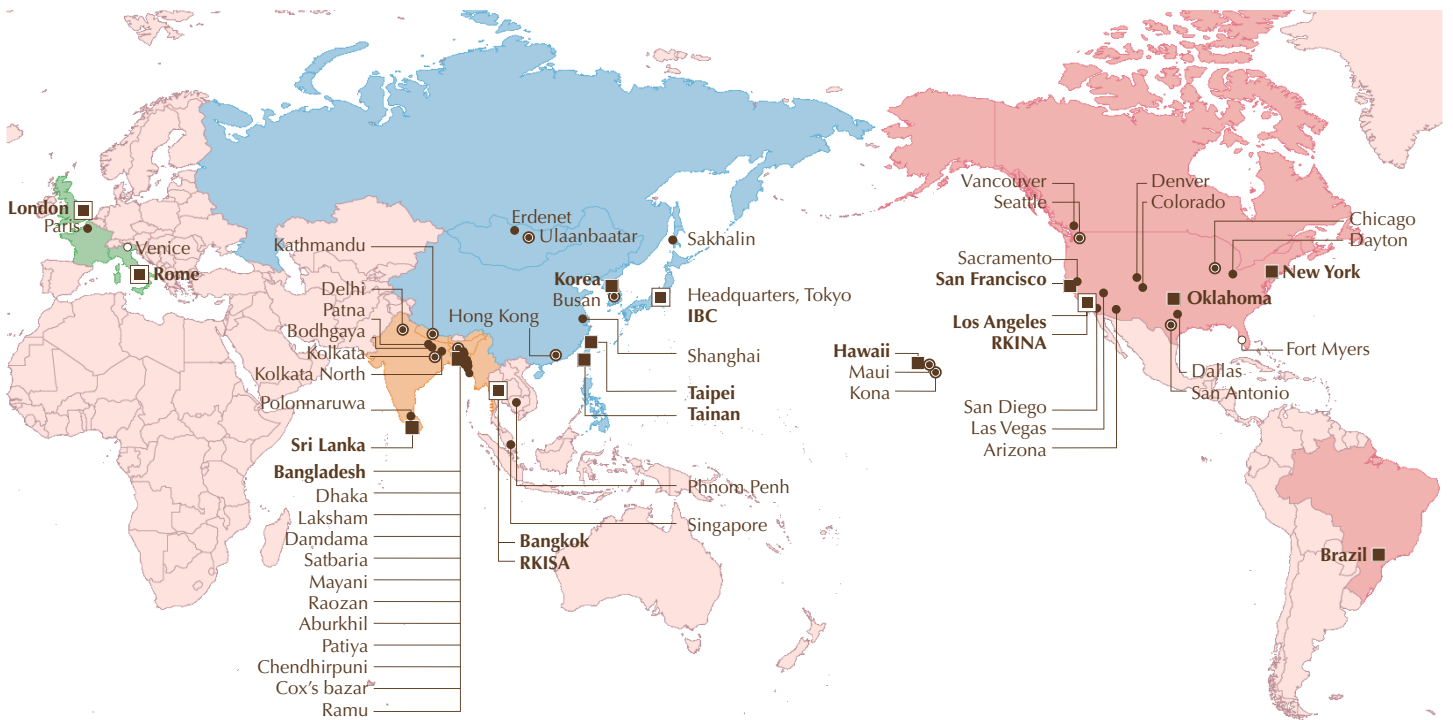
Rev. Akagawa with the participants in the inauguration ceremony of the San Antonio Dharma Center, who served in offering candles to the Buddha on December 8, 2024.

Rissho Kosei-kai International

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Information about local Dharma centers



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