

# Living the Lotus 4

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

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Rissho Kosei-kai of Brazil

## Living the Lotus Vol. 235 (April 2025)

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.



## Believing and Following

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai

### The Meaning of Faith

The day on which Shakyamuni was born is very significant for those who believe in the Buddha's teachings, so in Japan, a ceremony to celebrate his birth is mainly held on April 8.

In this haiku by Sumio Mori,<sup>1</sup> "On the day of my birth, / I was also that small— / Bussho-e," "Bussho-e" is a name for a ceremony celebrating the birth of Shakyamuni—the same as the Kanbutsu-e, Hanamatsuri, and Gotan-e ceremonies. In this haiku, we can feel how moved Mori was on the day of Bussho-e, when he poured sweet tea over the statue of the baby Buddha in the temple's *hanamido*,<sup>2</sup> and the image of the infant Shakyamuni reminded him of his own birth, making him suddenly realize that he, too, had received the same precious life as Shakyamuni.

Shakyamuni revealed, in the proclamation made upon his birth, that "I alone am honored, in heaven and on earth," and similarly, Founder Niwano told us that "your ability to deeply appreciate and feel grateful for the preciousness of receiving life as a human being" while also feeling a sense of security and knowing that "your mind is always communicating with the Buddha's mind and you are breathing together . . . is the mind of faith." Therefore, it is truly wonderful that, through such a Gotan-e ceremony as the Anniversary of the Birth of Shakyamuni, so many people can appreciate and be grateful for the sanctity of their own lives and other people's lives.

Moreover, Founder Niwano also stated that "faith teaches us the true way of life for human beings." This means that faith—religion—teaches us the basics of human life and spirituality and how we should live, and I think that the most basic among these basics is knowing the sanctity of our own lives and being grateful for having been born as human beings.

When we hold firmly in mind the truths of suffering (that is, birth, aging, sickness, and death, symbolized by the passing away of Shakyamuni's mother, Maya, seven days after his birth), impermanence (that all things in this world are constantly changing), and nonself and emptiness (that all phenomena are mutually interconnected through the workings of cause and condition), we see that the true way of life for human beings is to humbly accept things just as they are and live in harmony with others.

In other words, “faith” means believing in and following, as sacred guidance for personal growth, a way of life learned from the teachings of the God one follows, or from the Buddha, and one way to creatively put this faith to use is through the bodhisattva practices we perform in our daily lives.

### Clear-Headedness in Changing Times

A person of faith was having a conversation at home about the so-called “illegal jobs” that have become a social issue in recent years. When that person asked their daughter, “Why are young people OK with committing robbery or murder?” she quite naturally replied, “Because they don’t have faith, right!?”

When faith makes us realize the sanctity of our own and others’ lives, and we understand that none of us are living solely through our own strength, it awakens in everyone the mind of consideration and the desire to help others, which not only stops us from doing wrong, but also helps us develop a core way of life that encourages us to be kind to others, doesn’t it?—and I feel that such an awareness is apparent in the words of the daughter, who was raised in the fertile ground of a family of faith.

However, this certainly does not mean that if you have faith, you will never do anything wrong or that through faith, you will be able to escape poverty or illness. It means that by believing in and following the sacred teachings that show us the true way of life—religion—we can learn many things and aim to improve ourselves as human beings.

In these times of increasing diversity, it is said that society has a harsh view of religion and faith. However, deep down in people’s hearts, there absolutely exists the desire to know, learn, and then grow from teachings that can be believed in and trusted as a foundation for life, and therefore, I think that all people are already “believers” in religion.

Bearing this in mind, what matters most now is not that we try some clever gimmick, but that we interact with others with the heartfelt compassion and thorough consideration that is the basis of the Buddha Way, and that we become individuals who can provide others with emotional support in times of need. If this brings about an indescribable feeling of peace of mind, then inherently possessing the mind of faith, everyone will naturally be guided to the true way of life.

From *Kosei*, April 2025

#### Notes

1 Sumio Mori (1919–2010) was a renowned Japanese haiku poet, awarded the Yomiuri Prize for poetry (1977) and the Dakotsu Prize (1987).

2 *Hanamido*, a small pavilion/shrine placed in the temple’s precinct. See: [www.gotokyo.org/en/spot/ev025/index.html](http://www.gotokyo.org/en/spot/ev025/index.html); <https://ibc-rk.org>



# Interview

## Turning Suffering into Growth: My Commitment to Helping Others

Mr. Shawn Richards, Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii

### When and how did you join Rissho Kosei-kai?

I was introduced to Rissho Kosei-kai by my coworker, Karen Fujii, a chapter leader at the Hawaii Dharma Center, and I became a member in January 2017 at the age of forty-seven. During my last few years of high school, I had become addicted to alcohol. I later dropped out of college because I was drinking too much. After that, my drinking increased to the point where I could no longer control it, and I changed jobs several times because of my drinking. I was diagnosed with alcoholic hepatitis in 2007. Doctors warned me that if I did not quit drinking, I would have cirrhosis of the liver, but I still couldn't stop.

However, I had always been interested in Buddhism, and after joining Rissho Kosei-kai, I began to learn basic Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra at the Hawaii Dharma Center, participate actively in *dojo toban*, or "Dharma center duties," and help prepare the Dharma center's events in order to change my life from being addicted to alcohol. When I earnestly engaged in various practices and Dharma center activities, I was very happy to be able to help others and felt the joy of being a member of the sangha. In this environment, I started a new life without drinking alcohol.

People with alcohol dependence have a fear that even if they stop drinking for a while, they will relapse and regress back to their original state. After having quit for several months, I myself started drinking alcohol again in April 2018 due to a slight lapse in my resolve. My drinking worsened to the point where I was drinking at work. But then, with the support and encouragement of Rev. Laura Meya, the minister of the Hawaii Dharma Center, and many others in the sangha, I began to attend a self-help group for alco-



Mr. Shawn Richards

holics. In the self-help group meetings, we shared our experiences with each other and implemented the twelve steps to recovery. Finally, in December of that year, I successfully became sober after more than thirty years of alcohol addiction.

### Since then, have you had any experiences helping people struggling like you were?

One day, Rev. Meya introduced me to a member's son, Chris, who was having problems with drug addiction, and she asked me whether I could help this young man. I know from experience the pain of addiction and not being able to quit when you want to. I also know how hard it is to recover from addiction. So, I wanted to grow close to Chris with a mind of compassion and support him spiritually. After being introduced, we met many times at the Dharma

center. I listened carefully to Chris’s story and shared with him my own experience of struggling with alcoholism. I prayed for Chris’s recovery and for help with lessening his sense of isolation. I told him that if he called me, I would be there for him twenty-four hours a day—no matter how late at night or early in the morning—and reassured him that I would always be there for him.

At other times, I also accompanied Chris to a self-help group for drug addicts. Watching Chris was like seeing the person I used to be. Meeting Chris helped me to realize that my parents and many people had worried about me in my life. I have learned that suffering is a source of growth, and I feel deeply that my experience of suffering from alcoholism for many years is now helping me to encourage others, thanks to the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai.

**How do you approach your practice?**

In June 2024, the National Leaders Training for English members was held in Los Angeles, where I met people I had previously studied with at the Advanced Lotus Sutra Seminars. Around the time when I began to participate in the seminars in 2018, I was still suffering from alcoholism; I was



*Mr. Richards serves as the recitation leader during the National Leaders Training held in Los Angeles in June 2024.*

constantly attacked by a vague anxiety, I never felt happy, and I wanted to quit Rissho Kosei-kai many times. Six years later, on the first day of the National Leaders Training, I served as the sutra recitation leader. During the recitation, the image of myself suffering from alcoholism came back to me as a flashback, and at the same time, I realized that I had grown spiritually and become truly happy through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and the support and encouragement of the sangha. Thanks to the experience of suffering from alcoholism, I have been able to deepen my faith and accept my hardships with gratitude. From now on, rather than worrying about the future yet to come, I would like to cherish every day and every moment, diligently practicing the teachings to lead a rich and fulfilling life.

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

I am filled with great joy, honor, and humble feelings. Receiving the Dharma Teacher certification is the start of my new practice. I feel that I’ve been liberated from many sufferings and that my buddha nature has come through.



*Mr. Richards (back row, second from left) with other recipients of Dharma Teacher certificates from overseas Dharma centers after the presentation ceremony held in the Great Sacred Hall on October 27, 2024.*

# Interview

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

The Parable of the Conjured City in chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra is deeply engraved in my mind. In this parable, travelers who are on their way to seek some rare treasure are exhausted from the long and arduous journey, so the guide conjures a city for them to rest in. He encourages them and finally leads them to the treasure. This parable has many overlaps with my own life so far, and I am truly grateful to Rev. Meya and other Dharma center leaders for encouraging me and guiding me to the true Way with skillful means.

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

I am very much fascinated by the Members' Vow because it clearly states the purpose and model for practice, which is to practice the bodhisattva way in

order to perfect our individual characters as well as to build peace in our families, communities, countries, and the world. I also think that Rissho Kosei-kai's promotion of international interreligious dialogue and cooperation is a major attraction of Rissho Kosei-kai.

## **Finally, what are your hopes and goals for your practice?**

My greatest hope and goal is to share the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, which can liberate everyone, with more people. I would like to strengthen the connections among the members of the Dharma center and disseminate the teachings to all those who are seeking liberation so that they can join the sangha. I will accept any role in the Dharma center with joy and gratitude, believing that they are all necessary for my growth.



*Mr. Richards, his wife Kina, and his niece.*

# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

## Supporting Society and Upholding Culture

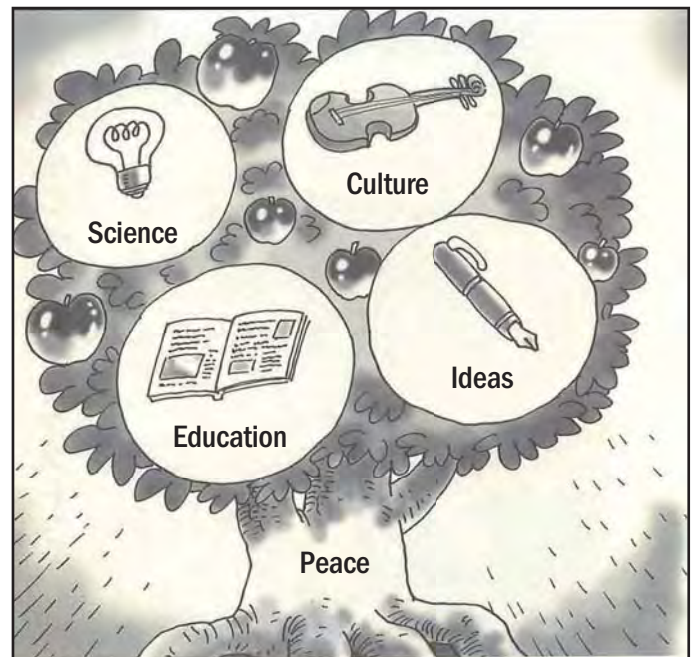
### The Niwano Peace Foundation

A peaceful society cannot be created only by the initiative of a single country or cooperation between religions or by the power of politics and the economy. We can say that it is built by cooperating with people who work for peace in various fields, such as education, culture, science, and ideas. The Niwano Peace Foundation was established based on this principle.

The Niwano Peace Foundation, based on religious spirit, engages in peace activities in various fields that contribute to the betterment of society. It was chartered in 1978 as one of the projects commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's founding.

The foundation established the Niwano Peace Prize to honor and encourage people or organizations that dedicate themselves to resolving conflicts or problems by joining hands with people from various religions. The prize is awarded to an individual or organization every year.

The foundation is also active in other areas, such as awarding grants to support organizations that conduct research and provide activities to foster peace, such as holding symposiums and promoting cultural exchanges with people worldwide.



#### Did You Know?

In May each year, when the Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony is held in Tokyo, there is a dialogue between the chairperson of the foundation and the recipient of the prize. They discuss the importance of accepting the differences between nations, cultures, and religions and striving for the realization of peace.



## Kosei Gagaku-kai (Japanese classical music and dance group)

Do you know the musical instruments called *sho* (a polyphonic, free reed mouth organ), *hichiriki* (a double reed, vertical flute), and *ryuteki* (a side-blown bamboo flute with seven holes)? They are the traditional Japanese musical instruments used in *Gagaku*, Japanese classical music, historically used to perform imperial court music and dances, and they have a history of over twelve hundred years. Kosei Gagaku-kai serves the role of transmitting Gagaku to people today.

Kosei Gagaku-kai was inaugurated in 1950. It performs music on occasions such as the ceremony of Rissho Kosei-kai, held at the Great Sacred Hall, and its regular concerts. It also offers performances to gods and buddhas at shrines and temples. Moreover, it promotes traditional Japanese performing arts overseas—in Paris, France; Los Angeles, the United States; and Vancouver, Canada.



## School Education

Rissho Kosei-kai established Kosei Gakuen, an educational corporation, in 1954 to nurture people who are considerate of others. Kosei Gakuen manages two kindergartens and two combined junior and senior high schools, which are separated into boys and girls schools.

Rissho Kosei-kai also established Kosei Gakurin, another educational corporation, for those who have completed secondary-level education. It runs Hoju Vocational College, which educates students based on the teaching of Buddhism. It aims to nurture students who will later contribute to society by making the most of their personal strengths.







## Chapter 2 To Connect with Others

### Learn to Like People You Dislike

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



#### **To Connect with Others, Learn to Like People You Dislike**

Let's say that after starting a new job or being transferred this spring, you have now spent about three months at your new workplace. This is the time when you may begin to develop feelings of like and dislike in your relationships with your bosses and colleagues. While it's fine to like others, developing a dislike for people can be problematic. Not only can it be a source of stress, but when you say to yourself "I dislike that person" or "I don't like this person," that can be enough to narrow the scope of your world. Therefore, you should try to avoid developing a dislike of others and find ways to come to like them instead.

Since likes and dislikes are matters of emotion, reversing them is difficult—but not impossible.



That's because the human mind is surprisingly easy to change. Just think about it. Can you change iron into gold? Can you turn wood into aluminum? Compared to these, the mind is remarkably adaptable.

So, how can you learn to like people you dislike? I believe there are three main approaches.

The first approach is to reflect on yourself. In large part, our likes and dislikes stem from our own self-centeredness. It's important to consider this carefully. For example, we tend to write off people who speak harshly to us and dislike them, but their harsh words can be valuable teachers, revealing flaws and shortcomings we might not have noticed. Therefore, the first step in learning to like those we dislike is to make an effort to change our own perspectives. As you change, the other person will naturally change as well. I can say this with confidence, based on my experience interacting with hundreds of thousands of Rissho Kosei-kai members.

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 74–75



# Director's Column

## Learning from Shakyamuni's Proclamation upon His Birth

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa  
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

Hello, everyone. We have welcomed the joyful season of spring that is in full swing. I feel the vibrancy of life as the trees and plants sprout, and the scenery is colored with bright pastel hues.

This month, we will observe the ceremony celebrating Shakyamuni's birth, which is one of the three major Buddhist events. As lay Buddhists, we should take this opportunity to renew our gratitude for the birth of Shakyamuni into this world. So, what can we learn from Shakyamuni's proclamation made upon his birth, "I alone am honored, in heaven and on earth"?

In this month's message, President Niwano teaches us the importance of each of us being grateful for the preciousness of receiving life as a human being and facing the truth that we have been given the same precious life as Shakyamuni. We tend to think of Shakyamuni as someone who is very different from us, but I think it is significant for us as Rissho Kosei-kai members to imagine that we, too, have the same spark of life as Shakyamuni. I feel that the reason the President always tells us to "love and respect ourselves" is that he wants us to awaken to the precious buddha nature that resides within our own lives.

With that in mind, this month, as the President tells us, I would like to devote myself to interacting with others with heartfelt compassion and thorough consideration and to be a person who provides emotional support to others in their time of need.



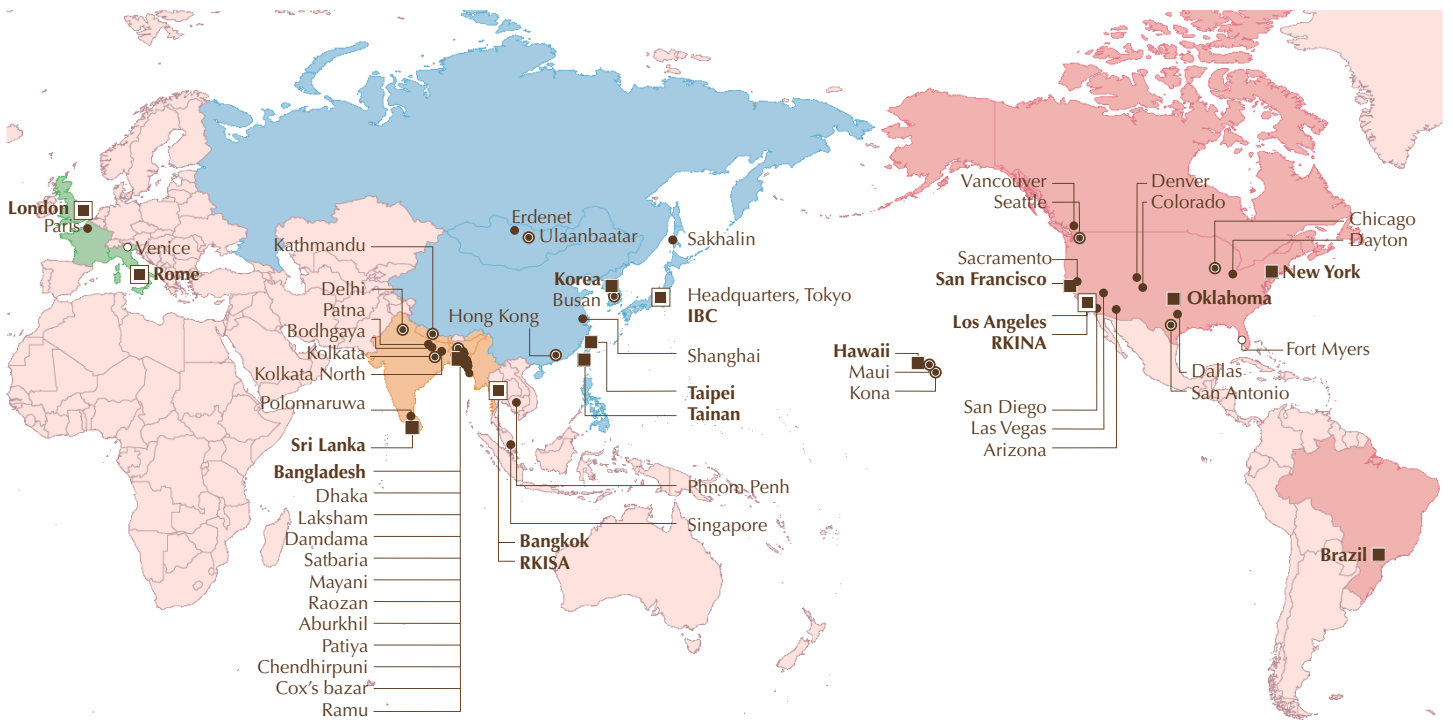
*Rev. Akagawa (third from right in the front row) with participants in the Meeting of Ministers and Board Chairs in North America held at the Los Angeles Dharma Center on March 15, 2025.*

# Rissho Kosei-kai International

Make Every Encounter Matter



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