

Living the Lotus 12

Buddhism in Everyday Life

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Rissho Kosei-kai of the UK

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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.

Illness and Pain Are Our Good Friends for Staying Healthy

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



“When Disaster Strikes, Meet It Head On”

December 8 is the day that Shakyamuni attained awakening, which we gratefully and reverently observe with the Anniversary of Shakyamuni's Attainment of Buddhahood Ceremony. So I would like, together with all of you, to sincerely reflect upon the wondrousness of encountering the teachings expounded by Shakyamuni and the blessings we've received through them.

In 1828, on December 8,* the same day as the Anniversary of Shakyamuni's Attainment of Buddhahood Ceremony, Zen master Ryokan (1758–1831) sent a letter of condolence to a friend affected by a large earthquake. I think that in Ryokan's letter, the Truth realized by Shakyamuni is described just as though the Dharma were alive, with blood running through its veins.

In his letter, Ryokan comforts his friend by writing: “To escape death and go on living, only to experience such sadness, must be very painful indeed.” Then he advises him, “However, when disaster strikes, you should meet disaster head on. When it is time to die, you should meet death head on. Thus does the wondrous Dharma free us from disaster.”

No one in this world can avoid disasters and the sufferings of birth, aging, illness, and death. What Ryokan means is that escaping these things is beyond the power of human beings, and there is nothing we can do about them, so the only way to avoid being crushed by pain and suffering is to accept them as they are.

At first glance, “when disaster strikes, meet it head on” is a rather cold pronouncement. But every time I see or say this phrase, I am struck by its crispness and clarity, and my mind is refreshed. I even feel invigorated by the relationship of trust that Ryokan enjoyed with his good friend (the same trust sangha members enjoy with one another), as he conveyed the Truth with a solemnity overflowing with compassion, and his friend had the fortitude to accept it.

Living with such a mindset and with gratitude for each day is certainly the way to lead a healthy and peaceful life.

Just “Cultivate the Buddhist Heart”

In the Lotus Sutra, it is written that “Devadatta was my good friend.” Devadatta was a disciple and relative of Shakyamuni’s, yet he tried to kill Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni called this man “my good friend” and, according to Founder Niwano, Devadatta is like “a friend who opens our eyes to the big question of how we should be living our lives.” Furthermore, it was Yokan (1033–1111), the head priest of Zenrinji Temple in Kyoto, who said, “illness is truly a ‘good friend.’” His feelings of gratitude are evident in his saying, “I was sickly and frail, but that very illness led me to realize the Truth and attain liberation.”

When you are faced with disaster or illness, it is normal to want to feel sorry for yourself. However, if you accept them as the rules of this world and make them your good friends, instead of being overwhelmed by pain and suffering, you will awaken to the wisdom that moves you forward calmly and with strength.

There is also the view that health and illness are not in opposition to each other. Just as life and death are two sides of the same coin, when you are healthy, you can also get sick, and only when you become sick are you grateful for being healthy. This is because illness is a part of health.

In the January 2023 issue of this magazine, I talked about how we are essentially energetic beings. From Yokan’s perspective, our bodies and minds are naturally inclined to be healthy and energetic, so even if we feel unwell at times, we should be able to transform an illness into the strength to live.

Someone said that the secret to good health is “being active with all your might and getting a good night’s sleep,” which means that when you give your all to doing what you must, your latent “vital energy” comes into play. Additionally—and even more importantly for us—we thereby transcend greed and anger, continuing in our diligent practice from day to day with a tranquil mind, and cultivating our Buddhist hearts.

In order to spend the new year with even more vitality, I would like to once again call upon the Buddha with renewed feelings and, touching upon the title of one of my own books and referring to other sources, think more about cultivating the Buddhist heart.

*According to the Japanese lunar calendar, the date is December 8, 1828. In the Gregorian calendar (currently in use in most parts of the world, including Japan), this date is January 13, 1829.

From *Kosei*, December 2023



Spiritual Journey

The Life Goal I Discovered at Gakurin Seminary

Mr. Shourab Barua
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh

This talk is an extension of the Dharma Journey shared at Rissho Kosei-kai's Ome Retreat Center in Tokyo on March 2, 2023, during Sotsurin Seppo-e, a ceremony in which graduating overseas students of Gakurin Seminary present their Dharma Journeys. This version also includes the speaker's post-graduation experiences.

HELLO, everyone. When I was fourteen years old, my father brought me to visit the Dhaka Dharma Center of Rissho Kosei-kai Bangladesh for the first time. I was very surprised to witness the ceremony that took place on that day because Buddhism in Bangladesh is of the Theravada tradition, and I had never before seen the kind of ritual that was performed at Kosei-kai. I was fascinated to see members reciting scriptures in Bengali while striking the bell and the wooden drum. I observed them participating in the *hoza*, or “Dharma circle,” discussion. That visit marked my first encounter with Rissho Kosei-kai. As I continued visiting the Dharma center with my father from our home in Dhaka, I was drawn to the liveliness of the youth members who were participating in the activities. Later, when I tried participating myself, I found it very enjoyable and started going to the Dharma center every week. As youth members, we gathered at one another’s homes to recite the Lotus Sutra, cooperated to take on various roles at the Dharma center, had many conversations, and enjoyed our time together.

How was it that the members of Kosei-kai could value each person and be kind to all people? These questions and my interest in Kosei-kai grew stronger as I participated in sutra recitation and *hoza*. However, as my school studies became more demanding, my involvement in Kosei-kai’s activities decreased.

In 2015, my participation in the Handwashing Project, initiated by Religions for Peace Bangladesh, prompted me to reconnect with the Dhaka Dharma Center. Occasionally, I even made a six- to seven-hour bus journey to the Chittagong Dharma

Center to join youth group gatherings. While at the Dharma center, I was deeply moved by observing the way many of my seniors, who had studied the Lotus Sutra at Gakurin Seminary in Tokyo and returned to our country, greeted, communicated with, earnestly listened to, and empathized with other people during *hoza*. These experiences reminded me of my childhood activities at Kosei-kai. Additionally, hearing about life at Gakurin Seminary from my seniors fueled my desire to study the Lotus Sutra there.

Around the time when I was considering taking the entrance exam for Gakurin Seminary, my father suffered a stroke and collapsed. We received a great deal of support from many members at the Dharma center. Out of gratitude for the help we received, I became even more determined to study the Lotus Sutra myself and contribute to the sangha, wishing to be of service to the youth group’s development.



Mr. Shourab Barua serves in the role of playing the bell during a memorial service at the home of a member from the Funabashi Dharma Center.

Thanks to everyone's support, I passed the entrance exam at the end of 2020 and was supposed to start my Gakurin life in Tokyo in April of the following year. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, I couldn't go to Japan. As a result, I had to take Japanese language classes at home via the internet for some time and interact with my instructors, seniors, and fellow students at Gakurin Seminary through various online programs. However, in Bangladesh, the internet connection frequently became unstable due to rain. As a result, I often couldn't participate in Japanese language classes. If I couldn't understand Japanese, I wouldn't be able to study the Lotus Sutra. This made me anxious, and I worried a lot when the internet connection became unreliable. It was quite disappointing when I couldn't engage in conversations with my fellow students and seniors in hoza. Nonetheless, on such days, there was the benefit of being able to assist my father, who operated a general store near our home.

My father would get up at 5:30 every morning and wake me up to make sure I didn't miss my classes. After suffering from the aftereffects of the stroke that had rendered his left side paralyzed, before going to work, he did daily rehabilitation at home to regain normal body movement. He always said, "Don't worry about the family; do your best to realize your own goals. Shourab, you can do it. I think you have been given this opportunity not just for the family but also to serve others." Watching my father, who cared about me and always persevered, even while battling his illness, filled me with courage.

When the internet was down due to rain, I helped my father at his store, studied Japanese textbooks, and watched YouTube to learn Japanese. On weekday mornings, if the internet was working, I attended Japanese classes. In the afternoons, I worked at my father's store, and in the evenings, I returned home to do homework. Not being able to go to Japan and instead helping my father at his store made me aware of the hard work he had been doing for our family. This realization filled me with a deep sense of gratitude.

Due to the increasing spread of COVID-19, the lockdown continued for about three months, during which we couldn't open the store. However, those

three months also meant our family of five could spend the whole day together at home for the first time in a long while. Despite various anxieties and hardships, such as the economic challenges caused by the pandemic and the temporary closure of my younger siblings' schools, my entire family had the opportunity to spend time together and deepen our bonds precisely because of the pandemic. We shared three meals a day, participated in evening sutra recitation together, and spent enjoyable moments every day talking about all kinds of things. Watching my mother cooking and cleaning for the family every day, I became aware that both my father and mother had worked tirelessly, without ever taking even a single day off, to raise my siblings and me. This renewed my awareness of my parents' love, and I appreciated it all the more. I felt discouraged because I couldn't go to Japan, and at one point, I even considered quitting Gakurin Seminary, but witnessing my parents' hard work, I realized that whether I could go to Japan was not the issue. What mattered was the importance of holding fast to my aspiration to study and never giving up, seeing through to the end what I had started.

Back then, I talked with my instructors and seniors at Gakurin Seminary in Japan every week on Zoom. I also participated in ceremonies for monthly memorial days and Zenyukai (the "All Good Friends Gathering," a monthly ceremony planned and performed by the Gakurin students). In addition, various online programs, such as hoza and other training sessions, made me feel like I was together with my fellow students even though I wasn't in Japan. I sensed that my instructors and seniors at Gakurin were praying for my happiness. By the end of my first year as a Gakurin student, the COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh had finally stabilized. At the start of my second year, travel to Japan was permitted.

On April 30, 2022, my life in Japan as a Gakurin student officially began in the town of Ome, in the western part of Tokyo, surrounded by the beauty of nature. I was delighted to meet in person my fellow students at Gakurin Seminary, whom I had only seen on a computer screen for the past year. Living away from my family made me feel lonely, but my fellow students became my new family. Dormitory life,

Spiritual Journey ❄️

which began with morning sutra recitation and ended with evening sutra recitation, provided an entirely new experience for me. With gentle guidance from seniors and fellow students, I eventually took on various roles at Gakurin. I felt alive through the way of life given to me by the people and phenomena around me. Through dormitory life, I interacted with individuals from diverse cultures with diverse customs, gradually learning to appreciate and accept our differences, as well as the changes, in life. Additionally, by upholding the basic practices of the faith and studying the Lotus Sutra, I could empathize with the joy, sadness, and hardships that my fellow students experienced.

At the Ome Retreat Center, there is a rice paddy. Through the experience of planting rice seedlings, a sense of gratitude for the food I received every day welled up in me. At the same time, that experience prompted me to reflect on the challenges that Founder Niwano had faced during his youth while engaging in agricultural labor. As part of my daily practice, I made a conscious effort to “greet people with enthusiasm,” “revere everyone’s buddha nature,” “respect others,” “value my responsibilities,” “express gratitude,” and “do cleaning thoroughly.”

From September 1, 2022 to the end of the month, I underwent dissemination training at the Funabashi Dharma Center. While engaging in the basic practices of the faith, I had numerous opportunities to interact with elderly members. I want to express my sincere gratitude for the support of the Funabashi Dharma Center’s members, who enabled me to have many invaluable experiences. Thank you very much.

Additionally, during the retreat held over a period of two nights and three days that started on October 4, the other students and I had the opportunity to visit and exchange ideas with the members of other religious organizations in Kyoto and Nara. We were warmly welcomed and learned a lot about traditional Japanese religions. Moreover, we were graciously allowed to pay our respects at ancient temples that are usually inaccessible to the general public. I felt that this, too, was evidence of Founder Niwano’s wish for peace and kindness for all, resonating across the boundaries of the different religious sects.

The Founder’s achievements extend beyond the borders of Japan. Through the activities of Religions for Peace, he paved the way for all religions to come together and contribute to world peace. I truly feel that Founder Niwano was, without a doubt, a genuine religious leader. Currently, Religions for Peace has chapters in over ninety countries around the world, with people from different religions working together to address common challenges facing humanity. Founder Niwano’s teachings have been transmitted worldwide. I want to convey his teachings, that have inspired me, to the sangha of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh, engage in dialogue with people of other religions, and contribute to the resolution of global issues through my activities.

I came to Japan with the hope of graduating Gakurin Seminary and serving everyone in Bangladesh. To fulfill this aspiration, I will work diligently without ever losing my feeling of gratitude for everything. As a first step, I plan to form a group for youth members at the Dharma center to promote interesting and uplifting activities that convey the basic practices of the faith and pass on both the spirit and proper form of offering sutra recitation. In my graduation research report, I made a vow to emulate Founder Niwano, committing myself to interfaith dialogue by engaging in four projects: First, “promoting environmental conservation through reforestation,” second, “achieving zero hunger,” third, “eliminating poverty,” and fourth, “realizing a hygienic and healthy lifestyle in Bangladesh.”

With these aspirations in mind, I graduated from Gakurin Seminary this past March and returned to Bangladesh. The first thing I did after returning was to find a job to support my family. In densely populated Bangladesh, finding a good job is not easy. Nevertheless, with my proficiency in Japanese, along with the support of senior graduates of Gakurin Seminary who kindly introduced me to several companies, I secured a position at a translation agency specializing in Japanese and Bengali. I am truly delighted to have had the opportunity to connect with my wonderful senior Gakurin students and practitioners through Rissho Kosei-kai. Moreover, I’ve come to recognize the significance of the principles I learned at Gakurin

❁ Spiritual Journey

Seminary: “greeting people cheerfully,” “always engaging people with a smile,” “proactively offering assistance,” and “attentively listening to others.” These teachings have proven valuable in the context of my work as well. It may be rare to come across someone who assists others with their tasks when they themselves are busy; however, I have discovered that by refraining from complaining and, no matter how busy I am, helping others by putting my own things aside and thinking of them first, I have gained the trust of my colleagues.

During breaks in my work, I would always ponder where to start with the four projects I had pledged to undertake in my graduation research report. Upon returning to Bangladesh, I had the opportunity to share my Gakurin Seminary learning experiences with the youth members at the Dharma centers in both Chittagong and Dhaka. On those occasions, as I briefed Rev. Yasutoshi Mori, the Minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangladesh, and the youth group leader about my projects, I received plenty of advice on how to steadily advance my plans for the projects one step at a time.

Currently, the Dhaka Dharma Center is using a room in a member’s home for activities. This situation makes it difficult to come and go freely or hold frequent meetings. Therefore, I communicate online with youth members in Dhaka once or twice a month, making simple, small efforts to share information about the purpose and details of the project, little by little. Regarding the details of our activities, we are advancing plans to launch a project to realize a hygienic and healthy lifestyle in Bangladesh around March of next year. The three-day program will begin with a full-day’s cleaning activity at designated locations within Dhaka. For the remaining two days, we will select two schools in the city where we will share methods of disease prevention through cleanliness. This will be done by distributing easy-to-understand materials to the students that summarize hygiene management methods and explain their effectiveness. We intend to carry out cleaning activities together with students, focusing on their classrooms, school buildings, school premises, and the roads around their schools. Through my four projects, I aspire to

contribute to building a society where people of different religions can harmoniously join hands, enabling everyone to live vibrant lives, as demonstrated by Founder Niwano.

Thanks to Rissho Kosei-kai, I have become someone who can appreciate the gift of life; I am grateful for being alive at this moment. Following the teachings of Founder Niwano, I aim to share the happiness I’ve received with many other people, continuing to dedicate myself to the pursuit of a society where we can all experience happiness together.



Mr. Barua with staff and fellow students from Gakurin Seminary (fourth from the right in the front row). This photo was taken just prior to his return to Bangladesh.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

The Lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Teachings of Buddhism

The Parable of the Jewel in the Topknot

The king of a certain country bestows rewards on soldiers who distinguish themselves in battle in proportion to their accomplishments. But a single bright pearl, the crown jewel in his topknot, he gives to no one because this pearl is so precious that it may only grace the head of a king. If he were to give it to someone else, the recipient would be upset and get in trouble. Yet this king, when he is extremely pleased with the sight of his soldiers distinguishing themselves, does at last present them with the incredible pearl.

Shakyamuni also only taught the teaching of the Lotus Sutra after the people's state of mind had been elevated. This parable teaches that the Lotus Sutra is the supreme teaching, and at the same time, it indicates that in order to understand the foremost teaching, we need to begin with the elementary teaching.



Did You Know?

This parable is found in chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra, "Peaceful and Agreeable Practices." The crown jewel signifies the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The king is called the "wheel-rolling sage-king." He is the ideal king, who governs the whole world with justice.

The Parable of the Good Physician

Once upon a time there was a wise and good doctor with many children. One day, after the father had left home on business, the children unknowingly drank some poison that they had found in the house. Returning home, the father found the children sick from the poison, so he tried to give them the appropriate medicine. However, some of the children had completely lost their minds and refused to take it. Then, the father went away again, leaving some good medicine for them, and sent a messenger back with news that he had died. Hearing the news, the children's hearts were filled with grief and anguish. But this grief caused them to come back to their senses, and they took the medicine and were cured.

By sending the messenger to inform the children of his death, even though he was not dead, the father used skillful means to liberate the children who didn't believe in the good effects of the medicine. "The father" symbolizes the Buddha, "the children" represent living beings, "the effects" mean the teachings, and "liberate" means connecting living beings with the Buddha's teaching.



Did You Know?

This parable is expounded in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata." The Buddha never forces us to open our mouths and take medicine. In other words, this parable teaches that it is important for us to pursue and grasp the faith through our own initiatives.



Germinating the Seeds of Awakening

Chapter 1
Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

The Reason You Are Here (3)

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



Building the Future Together

People who neglect the past and live carelessly in the present are unlikely to be respected by those around them. On the other hand, people who cherish the past while living to the fullest in the present are respected. However, there are people who are worthy of even greater respect: those who open paths to creating the future.

I believe that genuine practitioners of the Lotus Sutra—bodhisattvas—are people who open paths to the future. I'm convinced that people who, while seeking awakening



themselves, guide many other people onto the Way to truth, and try to bring even a little more happiness to all whom they encounter, are the people who build the future.

I hold the former American President Jimmy Carter in high regard. During his presidency, the American people made many demands upon him, and he also faced severe criticism that his efforts to promote détente (a policy aimed at easing the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union) went too far, allowing the Soviet Union to gain nuclear superiority.

Yet, Mr. Carter was a president whose belief in peace infused everything he did. A devout Christian baptized at the age of eleven, he was a man who, whenever making a crucial decision impacting the fate of the nation, would say “I seek God’s guidance regarding this decision.”

I had the honor of meeting President Carter at the White House when the Third World Assembly of Religions for Peace was held in the US at Princeton, New Jersey, in August of 1979. At that meeting, he said to us, “Your greatest task is to educate leaders. Let us pray for the success of your great work to lead the world to peace by guiding and fostering leaders in all fields, not only in the religious world, but also in the political world.”

Today, in 1992, the Cold War between the East and West has disappeared, détente has become a reality, and nuclear weapons are on their way to being abandoned. President Carter’s efforts to open a path to the future are now bearing fruit. As Rissho Kosei-kai has announced, the organization continues to support President Carter’s foundation, so all the members of Rissho Kosei-kai are contributing to his peace initiatives.

All of you are striving in your bodhisattva practice to have concern for the people close to you and to bring them happiness. It is through the efforts of individuals like you that we can slowly but surely impact politics in ways that lead to peace. I think this is the most precious way of being in the world, knowing “I am here!”

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 39–41



Director's Column



What Could Be the Secret to Well-Being?

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa

Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

GREETINGS to all the readers of this column. Time has flown by, and the year 2023 is coming to a close.

President Niwano's wish for all of us to pass every day in full health and happiness has run like a thread through all his Dharma talks this year. And in this month's issue, he offers the culmination of those talks, sharing the message "Illness and Pain Are Our Good Friends for Staying Healthy."

The Lotus Sutra teaches us that even a foe such as Devadatta, illness, or adversity can be a catalyst to open our eyes to the truth. However, we often perceive things through a dualistic value system that divides everything into diametrically opposed categories, such as "health versus illness," "fortune versus disaster," "ease versus hardship," and "gratitude versus a lack of appreciation."

There is no one who doesn't wish to lead a healthy and peaceful life. In this regard, the Dharma message for this month reminds us that the key to nurturing the ability to appreciate Devadatta as a good friend, and overcoming any kind of adversity, lies only in cultivating the "fields" within our hearts and minds.

I vow to redouble my efforts to identify my self-centered habits and cultivate a heart of gratitude informed by the principles of the Way with the hope that my gratitude and those principles take root in my heart and become solid. As the year draws to a close, I would like to pledge further devotion to living the Lotus Sutra.

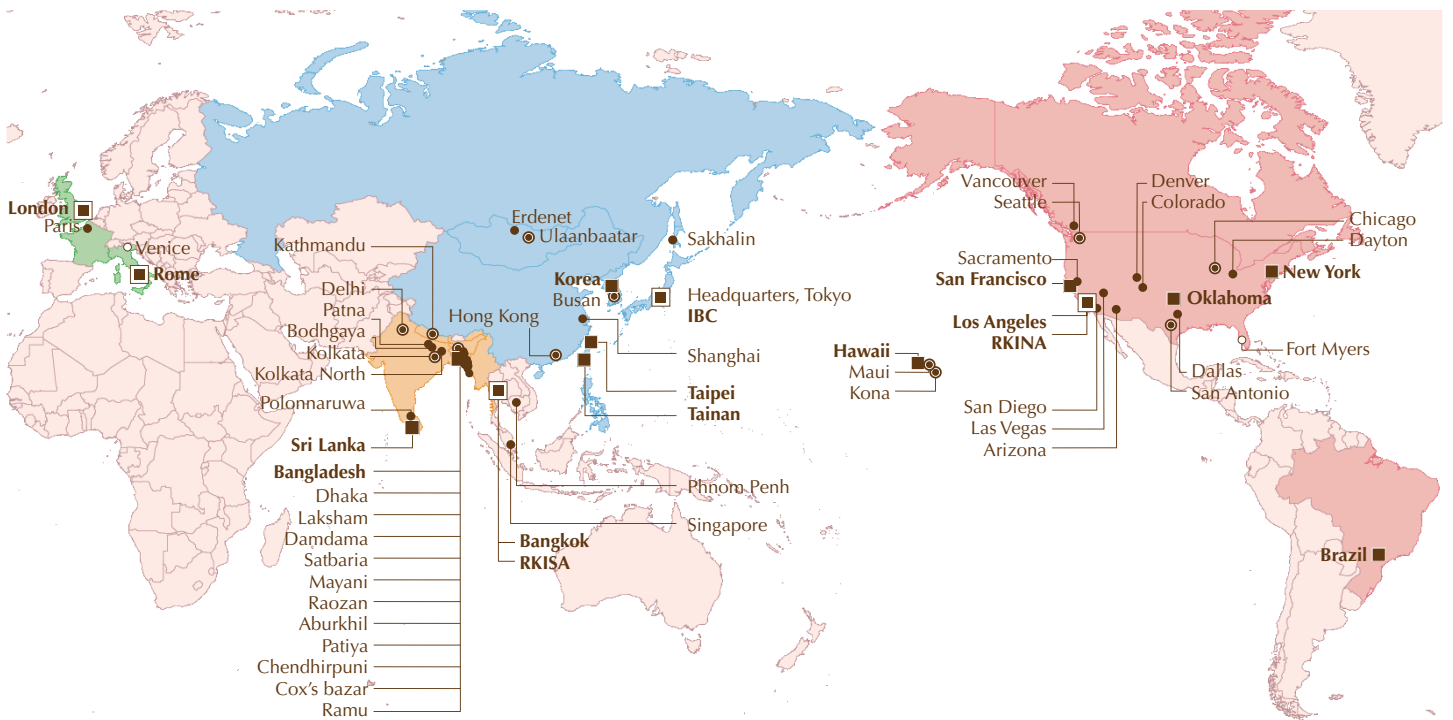
I would also like to express my gratitude for your readership throughout this year.

PS: Please scan the QR code below to read the script of my speech delivered in an interfaith-dialogue event—the International Meeting of Prayer for Peace—held in Berlin, Germany, in September 2023.





🌸 *A Global Buddhist Movement* 🌸



Information about
local Dharma centers

