

Living the Lotus 1

2024

Buddhism in Everyday Life

VOL. 220



Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio

Living the Lotus Vol. 220 (January 2024)

Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa

Editor: Sachi Mikawa

Copy Editor: Ayshea Wild

Living the Lotus is published monthly by Rissho Kosei-kai International, Fumon Media Center 3F, 2-7-1 Wada, Sugunami-ku, Tokyo 166-8537, Japan.

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.



Diligently “Cultivating the Buddhist Heart”

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Risho Kosei-kai

Diligent Practice Is Like an Ox Moving a Heavy Load

I wish you all a happy New Year.

“The front of every gate / Is decorated with small pine trees— / Spring is coming, / From house to house.” This poem by the monk Saigyō (1118–1190) celebrates the New Year by describing the cheerful mood of spring’s arrival at every home.* Fewer homes now decorate their entryways with New Year’s pines, but I hope that all of us will together enjoy a cheerful and healthy 2024, feeling as refreshed at New Year’s as the invigorating scenery of Japan.

We learn the teachings of the Buddha because we hope that by doing so, we can take even a step or two forward in improving ourselves as human beings. We are taught that this is hardly wishful thinking because by setting out to live like the Buddha and practicing diligently as we follow the teachings, we can always find joy in evolving as human beings and improving ourselves.

However, many people hearing about diligence and practicing the Buddha Way suppose that it is only possible if you are an extraordinary person who makes a tremendous effort. But in the Sutta Nipata, one of the earliest sutras, Shakyamuni says that “Diligent practice is like an ox moving a heavy load, carrying us to a state of peace and tranquility.” There is not the slightest trace of harshness or sternness in this expression. Instead, what comes to mind is the image of an ox slowly, quietly pulling a cart, or a cow silently pulling a plow and furrowing a field. With this in mind, about a quarter of a century ago, I wrote *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart* because I thought it was important for us to steadfastly pursue a path through life, neither rushing nor stopping, as we learn the Buddha’s teachings that cultivate the fields of our minds.

In that book as well, I quoted from the Sutta Nipata, which is said to be closest to Shakyamuni’s spoken words; its universality transcends differences in sects and sacred texts. While I mention it, I want all of you to join me in thinking about what Buddhism teaches as the basis for living as a human being. Furthermore, I believe that simply accepting

what Shakyamuni wished for us and wanted to convey to us, and reasonably putting that into practice in our daily lives, is the way to diligently pursue a state of peace and tranquility.

So, what did Shakyamuni want to convey to us?

Keeping to It, Continuously

Founder Niwano clearly stated: “Human beings are all the same and all things are one. These are none other than the basic ideas of Buddhism.” In other words, what Buddhism teaches us is that if we open our eyes to these basic ideas, our way of seeing things changes and our way of life changes, and if our world becomes a place where there are many people who have this kind of thinking, we will all be able to live together in harmony. Therefore, I believe that even though we may belong to different religious organizations or sects, we are all united under Shakyamuni’s teachings that “Every person has a life that is precious and equally worthy of respect” and “We are all fellow participants in the one life of the universe,” and that we all express these teachings in different ways, according to our individual natures and diverse needs.

Zen master Reirin Yamada (1889–1979), who served as abbot of Eiheiiji, one of the two head temples of the Soto sect of Japanese Buddhism, said: “No matter what Zen master Dogen saw or heard, he felt as though it were he, himself, who did it. . . . What we call ‘other people,’ Dogen called ‘the self of others.’ While other people were still other people, he felt as though they were also his own self and therefore, their joy was the joy of his own self and their sadness, the sadness of his own self” (*Daihorin* [The great Dharma wheel], vol. 36, no. 3, *Daihorin-kaku*, 1969). Yamada called this “the true way of life for human beings.”

While the rigorous practice of the Buddha Way is certainly diligence, whenever our minds are led astray by greedy desire, anger, or jealousy in the course of our daily lives, returning to the mindset of “all human beings are the same” and “all things are one” is also a form of diligence, and continuously keeping to that mindset is, for we who lead human lives, a way of life rooted in Shakyamuni’s wishes. I hope that we will cultivate our hearts so that this mindset supports our casual words and actions every day and we move forward, in health and peace, from one day to the next.

From *Kosei*, January 2024



Interview



Transforming New York City through Sharing the Buddha's Teachings

Rev. James Lynch

Minister of the New York Dharma Center

Please tell us how you are feeling after being appointed as the minister of the New York Dharma Center.

The leaders of the Dharma center and staff of Rissho Kosei-kai International are truly wonderful, and through my interactions with them, I keenly feel the spirit of being a bodhisattva that Founder Niwano showed us. Now I'm trying to figure out what I can do as a minister in order to follow in the footsteps of Founder Niwano, President Niwano, and Rev. Kosho Niwano, the President-Designate, as much as possible—that's all I'm thinking about.

What do you think about becoming the first American minister of the New York Dharma Center?

All the successive ministers before me who have served in New York loved America with all their hearts and embraced New York City with their compassion and energy. I think all the ministers before me, in their own ways, became New Yorkers. So, I'm very grateful from the bottom of my heart to each and every one of the successive ministers before me for conveying the teachings of the Buddha and guiding me in their own ways. Thanks to them, I have become the first American minister. I would like, step by step and without delay, to follow the road that the former ministers put down for me.

When and how did you begin to have faith in the teaching of Rissho Kosei-kai?

My late mother joined Rissho Kosei-kai in 1992, so I am a second-generation member in the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai. My mother had a very deep faith in Buddhism, and whenever she witnessed crimes or social problems such as violence and discrimination in New York, she was always concerned about these issues and tried to find a solution, thinking, "What can we do as Buddhists?"

Unfortunately, my mother had lung cancer in 2007, which made me seek more earnestly for the Dharma.



Rev. James Lynch, the minister of the New York Dharma Center, expressing his resolutions in the interview.

James Lynch was born in 1963. He graduated from Brown University and became a lawyer. He teaches at Brooklyn College and serves as head of the English group and director of external affairs for Rissho Kosei-kai of New York. He has also served as Rissho Kosei-kai's representative to the United Nations and as treasurer of Religions for Peace, USA. He is a second-generation member in the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai. He was appointed as the minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of New York in December 2023.

One day, she said to me, "Please go to the Dharma center for me and pray for my recovery. I need your help and support." Looking back on her statements now, I think her words were a skillful means to guide me to the Buddha Way.

In 2008, she entered hospice, which provides medical care to ease the symptoms and pain of patients who are in the last phases of incurable disease. Until March 2009, when she passed away, even though she was on her sickbed, she was worried about my father, who had heart disease and memory loss. She asked

me, “How is your father doing? You take good care of him when I am gone. Can you do this?” To which I replied, “Yes, of course, I can and will look after my father.” Buddhism teaches us to cherish the present moment. I can’t help but think that my mother taught me the importance of living each moment to the fullest until the last moment of her life. This was her great gift to me, other than giving me life.

What kind of role have you performed in the Dharma center, and what kind of activities have you been involved in?

I have served as head of the English group, lectured on the Lotus Sutra, and provided Dharma guidance in the study sessions held every Sunday. Usually, I prepared for the Sunday sessions at least four days before the actual sessions. I deeply studied the books written by Founder Niwano and President Niwano and practiced giving my presentations in front of my kind wife. I tried my best to connect the members with Founder Niwano and President Niwano through my lectures and my interactions with participants, wishing that their lives would be transformed by the teaching.

Moreover, I joined the Buddhist Council of New York as the director of external affairs for Rissho Kosei-kai of New York and as a result have participated in a variety of social projects in New York City. The Buddhist Council is a Buddhist organization in which many groups from different Buddhist sects are enrolled. It is probably the biggest Buddhist federation or organization in the United States based on its membership, and probably has more than nine hundred thousand members from eighty organizations based in China, Korea, Taiwan, and other countries. As president of this organization, some of the main activities I was involved in are the memorial services for the victims of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as organizing and directing love and peace walks in protest of and opposition to the hate crimes against Asian people and discrimination toward African Americans, and so on.

Before I became president of the Buddhist Council, I served as secretary. In 2017, I was elected as president from among its many Buddhist leaders, includ-

ing the head priests of temples, even though I was only a member of a lay Buddhist organization. It came as a big surprise to me, but I accepted the post as the Buddha’s arrangement, and it encouraged me to contribute to New York City more than ever. I was determined to serve as president of the Buddhist Council as a disciple of President Niwano and as a representative of the members of Rissho Kosei-kai. This was very important to me, that I focus on representing Rissho Kosei kai and all its members appropriately, as the Founder and the President would have wanted. Now, after serving as president for two terms, lasting four years, I am currently serving as the vice-president and supporting my successor.

One interesting thing occurred during the term of my presidency of the Buddhist Council. One day, we got to meet the Honorable Eric Adams, the Mayor of New York City, in a historic, first-time meeting of Buddhist leaders at City Hall. In that meeting, after listening to my remarks on behalf of the Buddhist community, Mayor Adams said some unexpected words. The Mayor said, “We need the wisdom of Buddhism in order to make New York City a place where everyone can live happily. Now I need the support of Buddhists like you.” I felt proud of the



With his late mother, Marian.

profound impact of the teachings of Founder Niwano and of President Niwano and of being a member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Please tell us about the passage in the *Kyoten*, “sutra readings,” you treasure.

It is the passage from the Sutra of the Method for Contemplating the Bodhisattva Universal Sage: “The ocean of all karmic impediments arises from illusion. If you want to perform acknowledgment and remorse, you must sit correctly and contemplate ultimate reality.” This section, and the one that follows it, teaches us that as snow is melted away by the sunlight, its warmth, the light of the truth illuminated by seeing things as they are, extinguishes all sins in a moment. The most important thing is that when we acknowledge our misalignment with reality, and then have remorse, we are putting the teaching into practice and our lives can immediately change. Therefore, I’m convinced that this is an excellent passage which gives us the courage and hope to lead our lives cheerfully and positively by simply practicing the Buddha’s teachings.

Please tell us the words of the Founder and the President that you always keep in your mind.

The words “cherishing every encounter” and “putting others first” are my spiritual support and guides in

daily life. To me, just as we need a compass and a map when we go on a trip, we need the Founder and the President’s guidance in life. Think of it this way: unless we are sure of the destination and the right direction to go in, we can lose our way. In this metaphor, the words by Founder Niwano are like a compass that points us in the right direction, while President Niwano’s words are the map which teaches us the way to go in life. So, I believe that the compass and the map provided by Founder Niwano and President Niwano are essential for us to lead steady and rich lives in this uncertain world. If you think of things in this way, you cannot go wrong, and your happiness is assured.

Please tell us your ambitions and dreams for the future.

I would like to continue to honor and respect the Japanese members, because they are the roots and history of the New York Dharma Center, conveying the teachings of the Buddha to the American members. Moreover, as Mayor Eric Adams requested, I hope to continue to work with other Buddhist sangha members to help disseminate the Buddha’s teachings in New York, thereby transforming New York City and even the world.



Rev. James Lynch (front, third from right) with members of the New York Dharma Center at the inauguration ceremony for the new minister.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Becoming Members of Rissho Kosei-kai

The Three Treasures

The Buddha teaches us to value the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Having faith in the Three Treasures is fundamental practice, and it is also the foundation for becoming faithful Buddhists.

“The Buddha” means the Original Buddha: the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One. “The Dharma” indicates the teachings of the Buddha. “The Sangha” means a community of people who follow the Buddha’s teachings and practice them.

If we practice the teachings, cherishing the Three Treasures as our foundation, we can lead happy lives.



Did You Know?

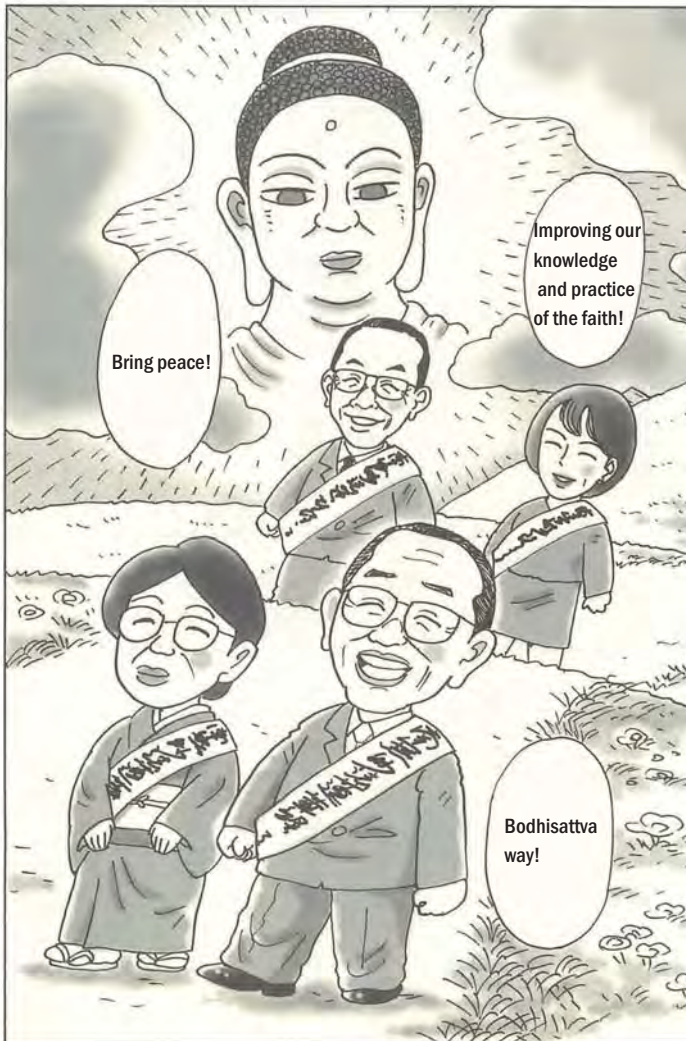
It is considered fundamental practice for Buddhists to take refuge in, or wholeheartedly devote themselves to, the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Rissho Kosei-kai also places importance on this.



Members' Vow

In the members' vow, the spirit and purpose of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, and the goal of the practice, are stated in simple words:

We members of Rissho Kosei-kai
Take refuge in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni
And recognize in Buddhism a true way of liberation,
Under the guidance of our revered founder, Nikkyo Niwano.
In the spirit of lay Buddhists,
We vow to perfect ourselves
Through personal discipline and leading others
And by improving our knowledge and practice of the faith,
And we pledge ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way
To bring peace to our families, communities, and countries, and to the world.



Did You Know?

“Improving our knowledge and practice of the faith,” mentioned in the vow, means putting the teaching of the Lotus Sutra into practice. Only after practicing it can we realize there is more to learn and understand the importance of improving our knowledge. When we learn something, we practice it, and vice versa. Learning and practicing are just like the two wheels of a cart.



Chapter 1
Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

You Awaken Yourself by Teaching the Dharma to Others

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



Helping All People Attain Buddhahood

The Lotus Sutra teaches that “expounding” the sutra is the fourth of the five practices of Dharma teachers. Expounding the sutra is a proactive practice that is a step beyond the somewhat more receptive practices of “receiving and embracing,” “reading,” and “reciting” the sutra. I believe that expounding the sutra is the most important of the Dharma teacher’s five practices.



There are two reasons for this. The first one is that although the Lotus Sutra is the ideal teaching to lead all people to buddhahood, even if you attain liberation for yourself by receiving and embracing, reading, and reciting the sutra, from the standpoint of the aspiration that motivated the Buddha to teach the sutra, you still have a long way to go.

The second reason, speaking of attaining buddhahood, is that I think most people are inclined to feel like giving up, assuming that becoming a buddha is totally beyond their reach. But that's not the case. The word "buddha" means "awakened one." Any person who has opened their eyes to and realized the truth of the universe and of human life is a buddha.

But if so, why is it necessary to guide people to buddhahood? In order to make a long story short, I think it might be a good idea to honestly contemplate the current state of the world and envision humanity's near future.

Currently, humanity as a whole is consumed by voracious desire. The result of this is the destruction of the environment, the depletion of natural resources, and great famines caused by human-induced climate change, and some scientists predict that if the current situation continues, it will result in the demise of most of the human race within a hundred years. Our earth today is undoubtedly the burning house described in the "A Parable" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It is an enormous mansion engulfed in flames. And there is only one way out of this burning house.

In the "A Parable" chapter, it says the house "while spacious and large, had only one doorway." This one doorway represents the practice of restraining selfish desire, of returning to a life of contentment with few desires. However, this is easy to talk about but difficult to put into practice. All of you must have experienced this firsthand.

So, what should we do then? The chapter's "Parable of the Burning House" teaches us to run out of the burning house seeking either the "goat cart" (the awakening of a shravaka), the "deer cart" (the awakening of a pratyekabuddha), or the oxcart (the awakening of a bodhisattva) that the Buddha has prepared just outside the gate.

In other words, there is no path to liberation for us besides seeking the way to become an "awakened one." To put it differently, the quest to become an awakened one means revealing to all people their inherent buddha nature. If you can achieve this, selfish desires will naturally disappear before you know it. The one doorway out of the burning house is none other than revealing people's buddha nature to them.

Bodai no me o okosashimu (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 41–43



Director's Column

My New Year's Pledge to Purify My Mind

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

I wish you a very happy New Year!

This year marks the fourth year since I began writing the “Director’s Column.” Through the column, I would like to continue studying Buddhism and having a dialogue with you, my valued readers.

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, “Cultivating the Fields in Our Hearts and Minds” was established as an objective of the organization. A quarter of a century has passed since then. This phrase is said to have its origin in an anecdote in which the Buddha says to a brahman “You cultivate the land, but I cultivate the fields of people’s hearts and minds.” Since last year, in his Dharma talks, President Niwano has continuously emphasized the importance of “practicing the Dharma cheerfully,” and I believe that this can only be realized when the fields of our hearts are cultivated abundantly.

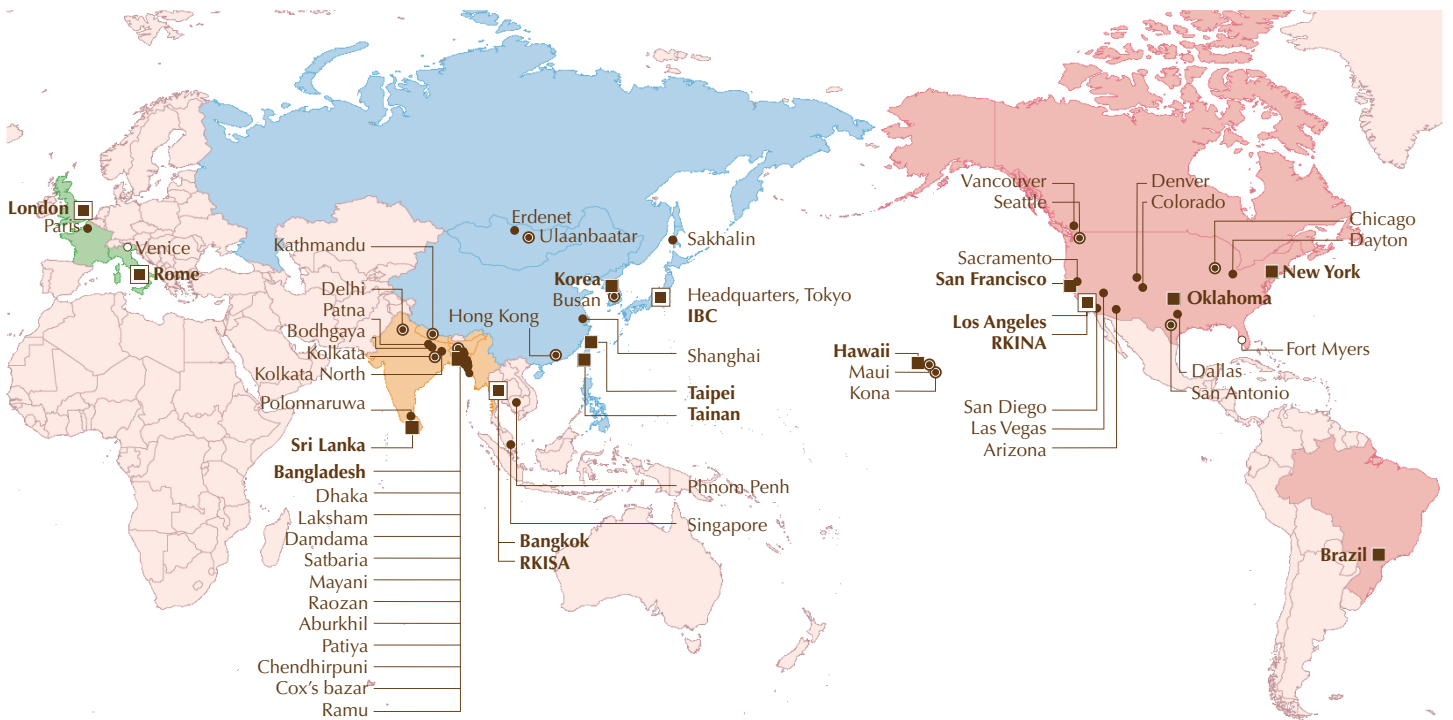
I would like to focus on purifying my mind as taught in the verse of precepts of the seven buddhas of the past, which contains the basic precepts for Buddhists. I would like to ask myself whether I am living by following the wishes of the Buddha, and whether I am ever viewing things in a self-centered way, by reflecting on my mind, which is changing moment by moment. I would like to continue to devote myself to practicing the basics of living as a Buddhist and to work together with all of you so that we can live our lives with peace of mind and hope. I look forward to your continued guidance and support in the new year.



Rev. Akagawa (center) attends the inauguration ceremony for the new minister of the San Francisco Dharma Center, on December 17, 2023.



🌸 *A Global Buddhist Movement* 🌸



Information about
local Dharma centers

facebook

twitter

