

Living the Lotus 2

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Buddhism in Everyday Life

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Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok


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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.



To Live with Humility Is to Live Well

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Risho Kosei-kai

The Basis of Humanity

In Japan, the time of year when winter transitions into spring is called Setsubun* and is marked by the age-old custom of throwing roasted soybeans known as *fukumame*, “lucky beans,” inside the house while chanting “Demons out! Good fortune in!” We tend to feel unwell as the seasons change, so this prayer for good health wards off the demons of illness. We perform this ritual to rid ourselves of the demons of distraction—the greed, anger, and ignorance that delude our minds—as well as the demons of illness and to welcome each bright new spring day with a healthy mind and body.

Incidentally, the two Japanese characters for “mind” (*kokoro* [心]) and “demon” (*oni* [鬼]) form one compound character (*ki* [愧]) with the completely different meaning of “humility,” which is the kind of mind that we should never drive away, never lose. This is the remorse you feel when you realize that your words and deeds have been mistaken or insufficient.

The terms “remorse and humility” (*zangi* [慚愧]) also mean to feel sorry about something, but Shinran (1173–1263), founder of the Jodo Shin, “True Pure Land,” sect, interpreted it in an even deeper sense and in the context of faith. “Remorse” (*zan*) is feeling sorry about your own misdeeds, while “humility” (*gi*) is acknowledging your misdeeds before other people and feeling sorry about them. Furthermore, “remorse” means feeling sorry before other people, and “humility” means feeling sorry before the divine. Shinran, quoting the Nirvana Sutra, said, “Those who do not have remorse and humility cannot be called human.”

A person who lacks the mind of humility is no different from an animal that lives by instinct alone and cannot be called a human being. I think it is only by having the mind of humility that humans can live their lives with respect and in moderation, and this is how human relationships and societies thrive. In other words, we can say that having humility is a basic condition of humanity.

Being Liberated by Humility

In that case, what is it important for us to have humility about? Shinran said we should have humility for our misdeeds, but what sorts of things do all of you think are misdeeds?

Sometimes, when I hear people criticize others by saying “You should be ashamed of yourself,” I think those words should be directed back at themselves. If we quietly tell ourselves, “You should be ashamed of yourself,” we may find that we regain our humility and reflect on ourselves, considering whether we are the ones being arrogant right now or letting our own desires run wild. Or we may be deterred from doing something disgraceful by asking ourselves, “Will this make me unable to look my family in the face?”

Knowing humility can free us from the misdeeds we might unintentionally commit in the course of our daily lives. It stops us from making ourselves suffer and from hurting others.

“Human beings who nurture the mind of humility will be liberated.” These are the words of the philosopher Masahiro Yasuoka (1898–1983), and in my opinion, when people know humility, they are transformed into truly great human beings. Furthermore, since we all have the mind of humility, just as we all have the buddha nature, as long as we know humility, we will continue to evolve as human beings.

Humility is something to always bear in mind. Honen (1133–1212), founder of the Jodo, “Pure Land,” sect, teaches us this guideline: “Keep company with friends in the Dharma and you will always keep the mind of humility.” Shakyamuni said that friends in the Dharma are everything to the Buddha Way, and sangha members who are close to us, including our family members, are people who always watch over us. Therefore, our shameful behavior will surely be reprimanded, and we cannot lead lives that would be an embarrassment for our beloved family and friends. Thanks to our good friends, the sangha, we are naturally reminded of our own humility. And because the sangha is as one with the Buddha, our Buddhist hearts become cultivated, and we can maintain the mind of humility.

On the other hand, at present, society and the world seem to be in a precarious state, full of greed and hatred, as if people have forgotten the humility that makes them human. The origin of the character for “humility” is “awe,” and I strongly believe that it is important for people to be in awe of, and show respect for, the gods and the buddhas, and live their lives knowing humility.

* February 3 is the last day of winter, according to the lunar calendar.

From *Kosei*, February 2024



Interview

Let the Dharma Flowers Bloom All over Brazil

Rev. Maria Hiromi Sasaki
Minister of the Brazil Dharma Center

How do you feel now that you have been appointed as the minister of the Brazil Dharma Center?

To be honest, I am very nervous right now. But more than that, I am filled with excitement from a sense of anticipation as if opening a new door.

Brazil was the starting point of overseas Dharma dissemination for Rissho Kosei-kai because Founder Niwano visited there in 1958 for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Japanese immigration. On his way, he met Japanese members of Rissho Kosei-kai who had immigrated to the United States. It was the following year that Rissho Kosei-kai's first overseas branches were established in Hawaii and Los Angeles. Do you have any feelings in light of this?

In my family, my grandmother joined Rissho Kosei-kai first. My parents were also members, and I belong to the third generation of the faith. In 1958, my father graduated from Kosei Gakuen High School in Tokyo and immediately went to Brazil. That year, Founder Niwano came to Sao Paulo for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Japanese immigration to Brazil, and he went out of his way to visit the dormitory of the company where my father worked. I am grateful for this extraordinary event that took place



Rev. Sasaki at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Brazil Dharma Center.



Rev. Sasaki interprets for her predecessor, Rev. Nakahara, during a ceremony at the Brazil Dharma Center in 2023.

Maria Hiromi Sasaki was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1971. She is a third-generation member in the faith of Rissho Kosei-kai. She graduated from Mackenzie Presbyterian University in Sao Paulo. After graduating from Gakurin seminary of Rissho Kosei-kai in 1998, she served as an assistant minister at the Ota Dharma Center in Tokyo for two years and at the Brazil Dharma Center in Sao Paulo for twelve years. She served as the educational affairs director of the Brazil Dharma Center from 2012 and was appointed as its minister in December 2023. This interview took place at the headquarters of Rissho Kosei-kai in Tokyo on November 18, 2023.

before I was born. When I was appointed as minister, I thought I had been born and raised in Brazil because I had a role to play at the Brazil Dharma Center. I am deeply thankful for my grandparents and parents who

gave me life and enabled me to encounter the teachings of Founder Niwano and President Niwano. These facts make me reflect on my own karmic relations with Rissho Kosei-kai and my mission.

What did you learn from your parents' words and actions?

I learned many things from my father's actions, especially his practice of filial piety. He said that his mother had often told him when he was very young that he would become a child who is kind to his parents. In fact, my father respected and cherished his parents very much at home. I grew up learning from my parents' actions, and from the time I was young, I naturally began to understand the importance of filial piety and of having respect for one's parents. And I myself grew to love going to the Brazil Dharma Center every Sunday with my parents, as if the Dharma center were my playground.

What was it that led you to become an active member of Rissho Kosei-kai?

I first became involved in youth activities in 1993, when I participated in a summer seminar for university students held at the headquarters. At first, I was a little hesitant to participate because of the language barrier. But the minister at the time told me, "This is a great chance to really get to know Kosei-kai, and I am sure you will treasure your experience in Japan for the rest of your life." So I attended the summer seminar, and true to his words, I experienced many things there.

In particular, when I visited Suganuma, the birthplace of the Founder, I had the chance to perform the role of chanting leader for the first time. Back then,



Rev. Sasaki at a member's home with the sangha of the Brazil Dharma Center:



Sutra recitation at the Brazil Dharma Center in December 2013, during the inauguration ceremony for the new minister.

my Japanese was not very good, and I was anxious and nervous about reciting the sutras. But during the service, I heard the voice of the Buddha encouraging me, saying "Don't worry, it will be all right." It was a strange but very precious experience.

I also enjoyed and was thankful for my interactions with the Gakurin seminary students, which led me to want to study Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra more deeply. I joined the seminary two years later in 1995. During my time in the seminary, I sometimes had conflicts with my peers. These experiences, however, taught me the importance of reflecting on myself through day-to-day events that connected me to other people and things. I believe that my three years in the seminary were a time of introspection and awareness, during which I studied the Lotus Sutra, faced my own mind, and reflected seriously on my own thoughts, words, and actions.

What kind of activities have you been involved in through the Dharma center?

I have been a staff member of the Dharma center, mainly as an assistant minister and educational affairs director. I have also served as an instructor for workshops on basic Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra. Twenty years ago, in order to open the door wider to the general public, the minister of the Dharma center started the Buddhist seminars, and I served as an interpreter. In these seminars, we do not use texts that include Buddhist terminology. Instead, we use some of the Founder's Dharma talks, which are easy for

beginners to understand, on such topics as “Putting others first” and “Change yourself, and others will change accordingly.”

In addition, some leaders of the Dharma center have been leading an asthma treatment service for the past thirty years as part of the Dharma center’s social activities. There are so many children in Sao Paulo who suffer from asthma due to air pollution. Currently, five non-member osteopaths volunteer at the Dharma center to provide massage therapy on cervical acupuncture points to children, newborn to thirteen years old, with asthma. It is said that children up to thirteen years of age can be completely cured of asthma.

Then, every July, the Agricultural Harvest Festival is held at the Dharma center to promote understanding of both Brazilian and Japanese cultures and to further interaction with the local community. Mock stalls featuring *yakisoba* (Japanese stir-fried noodles) and tempura, as well as churrasco, a typical Brazilian dish, have been well received by the general public in the vicinity of the Dharma center.

Are there any phrases in the Lotus Sutra that support you?

I find my support in the phrase “to be safeguarded by the buddhas,” which is the first of the four requirements in chapter 28, “Encouragement from the Bodhisattva Universal Sage,” of the Lotus Sutra. I interpret the phrase for myself to mean that if we have

absolute faith that we are being kept alive and protected by the Buddha, no matter what difficult circumstances we may encounter in life, we can accept all phenomena and events with gratitude and a positive mind as learning opportunities and as the Buddha’s compassion. I take this part of the four requirements as the Buddha’s encouragement for us, the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, and I keep it as my spiritual support.

What do you hold dear to your heart in the teachings of Founder Niwano and President Niwano?

In my daily practice, I cherish Founder Niwano’s words “putting others first,” and President Niwano’s words “cultivating the fields in our hearts and minds.”

What are your aspirations and dreams for the future?

I would like to send many young members to Gakurin seminary and focus on nurturing the people who will be responsible for the Dharma center’s future activities. In addition, the Portuguese version of *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* is scheduled to be published next year, and this has been a long-held dream for Brazilian members. *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* sets the foundation for renewing dissemination in Brazil, and I would like to work together with all members of the Dharma center to widely share the Dharma for the happiness of many more people—to let the Dharma flowers bloom throughout the land of Brazil.



Rev. Sasaki (front row, center) with members of the Brazil Dharma Center, after the inauguration ceremony for the new minister.

An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

Becoming Members of Rissho Kosei-kai

Rissho Kosei-kai Children's Vow

The Children's Group takes the "Rissho Kosei-kai Children's Vow," which expresses the mindset of boy and girl members of the group:

**We, boys and girls,
respect the Buddha and gods,
vow to be kind to others,
polite at all times,
and respectful to our parents.**

In addition, there is the "Grace Before Meals," recited before meals by all members:

**For what we are about to eat and drink,
we are grateful to the Buddha,
to nature, and to many people.**

We recite it with gratitude for the meal.





To Build Harmony in Our Families

There are many family-related issues these days. Now is the time when we must reconsider the role of family again. In Rissho Kosei-kai, members work to implement the practice of *seika*, “putting family relationships in order,” which means creating warmhearted homes and building harmony in our families.

President Niwano tells us that building harmony in our families is the foundation for nurturing people, and it leads to the realization of world peace. He also teaches us the importance of building families that are centered on our home altars.

The Three Practices that were mentioned in the May 2022 issue under the heading “The Teachings of the President” are the specific actions for us to build harmony in our families.



Did You Know?

Seika appears in a passage of *The Great Learning*, one of the Four Books of Confucianism, which reads: “[A person] should make [the] mind right, cultivate [the self], then regulate the family, then govern the state, and finally lead the world into peace.”



Germinating the Seeds of Awakening

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



Teach the Dharma for People's Happiness

This may sound like a self-serving interpretation from those who are devoted to the Lotus Sutra, but that is by no means the case.

In 1975, in a congratulatory speech on the anniversary of the founding of Rissho Kosei-kai, Professor Shoson Miyamoto, who was one of the foremost figures of Japanese



Buddhist studies at the time, explained that “The reason the Lotus Sutra is the ‘King of All Sutras’ is because it quotes Shakyamuni Buddha’s ‘Declaration to Transmit the Way’ more than ten times. Other sutras don’t even touch upon it.”

The term “Declaration to Transmit the Way” refers to the proclamation made by Shakyamuni Buddha when, after delivering the first sermon to the five ascetics in Deer Park, the number of his disciples reached sixty. At that time, he expressed his commitment to conveying his teachings and propagating the way, declaring the following:

“Monks! I am liberated from all bonds, and you too are liberated from all bonds. Monks! You should travel around all the countries, propagating the Dharma for the benefit and happiness of the people. None of you should travel the same road together.”

Following his words, the disciples parted ways and set out on journeys to propagate the teachings and transmit the Way. As for Shakyamuni, he too set out alone toward the City of Royal Palaces in Magadha.

Along these lines, the Lotus Sutra repeatedly instructs, “Teach this Dharma for the sake of the people,” and “Teach this sutra and propagate it for the benefit of ages to come.” This is because it is through such bodhisattva practice that the liberation of the world and humanity is realized.

Rissho Kosei-kai inherited the “Declaration to Transmit the Way” and continues to fulfill it exactly as proclaimed by Shakyamuni Buddha. In many religious organizations, professional clerics explain the Dharma and propagate the teachings, but in Rissho Kosei-kai, the motto is “Everyone who joins our organization is a disseminator of the teachings,” and we practice “Each person guiding another.” This is how we faithfully put into practice Shakyamuni Buddha’s instruction that every one of his disciples should travel a different road.

In the early days of Kosei-kai, the main focus was on liberating people from poverty, illness, and conflict. However, at present, as I just mentioned, day in and day out we carry out the great enterprise of saving humanity. I hope you never forget this, even for a moment.

“Each person guiding another” means that every member shares the teachings and extends hands of liberation to those they encounter in their daily lives.

Mahayana Buddhism is a compilation of the numerous teachings expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha throughout his life, organized into a systematic framework by learned monks of later ages. Originally, however, those were teachings for real-life liberation, where Shakyamuni Buddha taught, guided, and liberated each individual he encountered from their suffering on a case-by-case basis.

So we too must not neglect the encounters and interactions we have with people every single day. It would not be an exaggeration to say that every person who appears before our eyes is a potential recipient of liberation.

Director's Column

Learning from Humility

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

In Japan, the New Year started with catastrophes—the massive Noto Peninsula earthquake on New Year's Day, followed by the collision between a commercial aircraft and a Japan Coast Guard plane at Haneda Airport the next day. I felt a sense of tightness in my heart every time I watched the TV images of collapsed houses and heard reports that many lives had been lost in the 7.6 magnitude earthquake. Rissho Kosei-kai has begun to respond, throughout the organization, to the damage from the earthquake and tsunami, and the circle of support is growing nationwide. I pray from the bottom of my heart for the repose of the souls of those who lost their lives and wish for the earliest possible recovery in the disaster-stricken areas.

President Nichiko Niwano explained the concepts of “reverence” and “humility” in his New Year's Guidance, and in his message for February, he takes up “humility” as his theme. For a quarter of a century, President Niwano has continuously addressed the importance of “cultivating the Buddhist heart.” This year, through his monthly messages, I expect he will elaborate further on that theme, especially the significance and the methods of cultivating our Buddhist hearts. The president points out that we all have the mind of humility, just as we all have the buddha nature. We should humbly accept these words and make the New Year a year of living the Lotus Sutra.



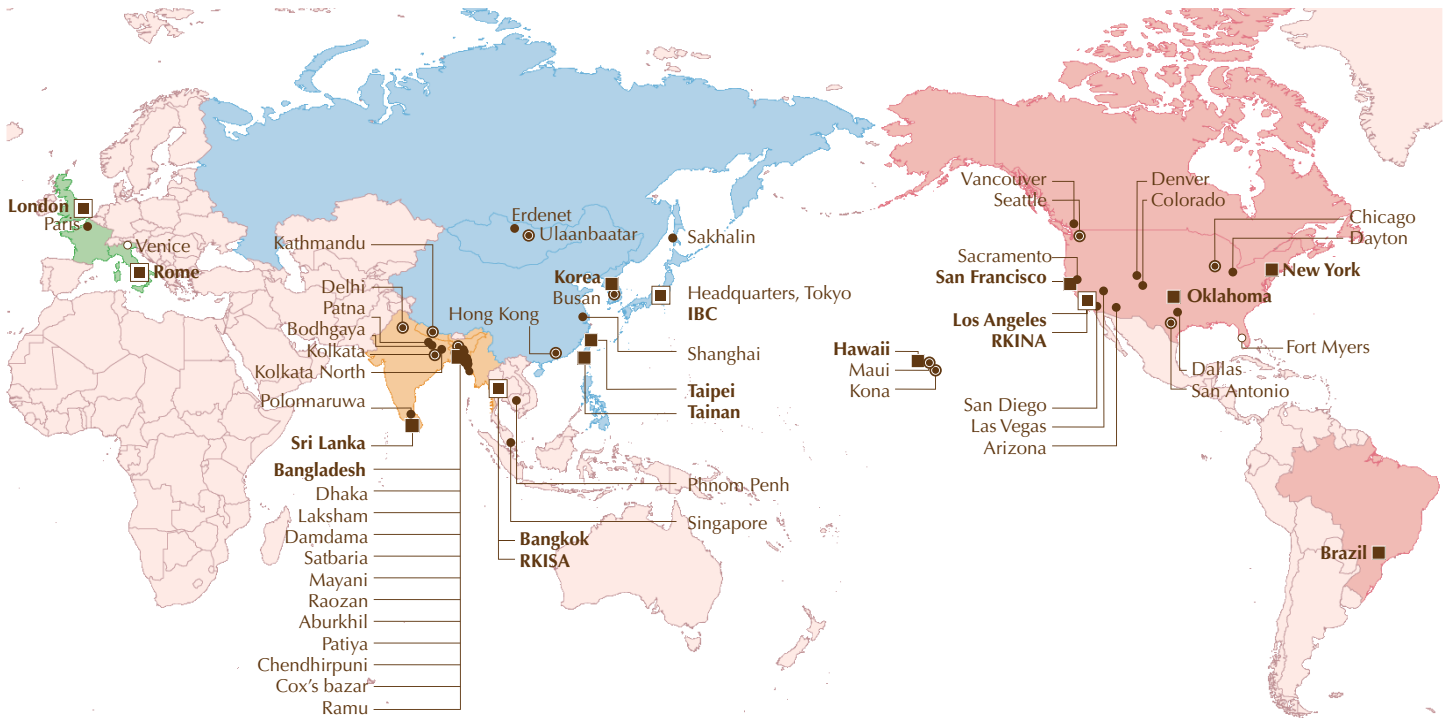
Rev. Akagawa (front row, third from right) attends an exchange meeting at the Busan chapter of Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea on January 10, 2024.

Rissho Kosei-kai International

Make Every Encounter Matter



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