

# The Brighter Society Movement of Risshō Kōsei-kai: A New Application of the Bodhisattva Way

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In recent years, the characteristic feature of most religious organizations that have been in existence for a considerable period of time or developed a stable organization with a core membership (in its country of origin or elsewhere), is to be “engaged” or active in those areas or concerned with issues which conventionally would not have been regarded as the activities or concerns of religious organizations. These “activities” or “concerns” of religious organizations have been variously labeled as “welfare activities”, “social work”, “philanthropy”, etc. Undoubtedly, the history of the involvement of religious groups in social activities is quite long, for example even in 19<sup>th</sup> century, the European religious leaders proselytizing in Asian or African colonies, combined missionary activities with welfare services. But, what is new about the contemporary engagements of religious groups is the scope of the activities, sincere concern or initiative shown in addressing various social, political or environmental issues rather than regarding them as a corollary to proselytization activities and the leadership demonstrated in initiating these activities or creating a social awareness about them.

However, being active in social or welfare activities is not a peculiarity of religious groups, since there exists a wide spectrum of welfare activities that are being carried out by the NGOs, NPOs and various other non-religious organizations. What then can be regarded as the characteristic feature of the involvement of these groups in welfare or social activities? This paper tries to throw light on some of the characteristic features and styles of functioning of religious groups through a study of the social activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai, one of the major new religions of Japan. Among the various social activities and voluntary services carried out under the aegis of Risshō Kōsei-kai, the one that is the subject of study here is called The Brighter Society Movement or *Akarui shakai zukuri undo*. The movement is more commonly known by its abbreviated Japanese title of *Meisha undo*. This movement was proposed in 1969 by the late Niwano Nikkyo, the founder of Risshō Kōsei-kai.

## **Risshō Kōsei-kai and the Brighter Society Movement**

First, I would like to give a brief sketch of the history and teachings of Risshō Kōsei-kai, which will help us in understanding the Brighter Society Movement in the historical and doctrinal context of Risshō Kōsei-kai.

Risshō Kōsei-kai, is a lay Buddhist new religion, which was founded in 1938 in Tokyo, by Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957) by seceding from another new religion called Reiyukai of Nichiren Buddhism. In the

homepage of Risshō Kōsei-kai, the sixty years of its history are divided into three periods.<sup>1)</sup> The period from its founding until the death of Naganuma Myoko is called the Age of Skillful Teaching (1938–1957). The second period is called the Age of Manifestation of the Truth (1958–1977) when it ceased shamanistic practices and Niwano declared the Lotus Sutra the doctrinal basis of the organization. The third phase is the Age of Unlimited Compassion (1978–1997) when Risshō Kōsei-kai as an established large organization, further expanded its activities into the social and political arena, inter-religious dialogue, and the international peace movement.

### **The Bodhisattva Way**

Like all religious groups of Nichiren affiliation, the doctrinal basis of Risshō Kōsei-kai is the Lotus Sutra or *Hokkekyō*, but what is distinctive about its teachings is that it combines the emphasis on helping others achieve salvation, which is characteristic of the Lotus Sutra and Mahayana Buddhism with the principle of the Four Noble Truths (*shitai*) of Early Buddhism which emphasizes on one's own salvation. The teachings of the Four Noble Truths aim at making people understand human sufferings and the way of freeing oneself from them.<sup>2)</sup>

Risshō Kōsei-kai preaches the practice of the Bodhisattva Way, i.e. perfecting one's personality through the realization and cultivation of the Buddha nature and saving others by leading them to the faith. In Mahayana Buddhism, the "Bodhisattva" is a being destined for enlightenment, but instead of becoming a Buddha immediately, he vows to save all sentient beings and works with compassion for suffering beings. In other words, the "Bodhisattva" indicates one who practices the teachings of Buddhism in the other worldly as well as in this worldly secular ways of life.

In the teachings of Risshō Kōsei-kai, too, the "Bodhisattva" is a person who has awakened to himself as a member of society, and strives to be enlightened together with others. "In other words, the concept of Bodhisattva comes from the consciousness that the enlightenment of self cannot be acquired without the enlightenment of others."<sup>3)</sup> Therefore, striving to benefit oneself and others is characteristic of the Bodhisattva Way.

### **Forerunner to the Brighter Society Movement**

Before we go into the details of the Brighter Society Movement, it is essential to see the events in Risshō Kōsei-kai antecedent to the start of this movement.

One of the major emphases of the Brighter Society Movement is the promotion of inter-religious dialogue and sponsoring various peace activities at the community level. However, if we look back into the history of Risshō Kōsei-kai, the organization was already involved in inter-religious cooperation, since 1951 when it became a founding member of *Shinshuren* (The Federation of New Religions Organizations of Japan). From the early 60s, the founder Nikkyo Niwano had started attending various international religious and peace conferences. In 1963, he traveled to Europe and the United States as the sub-leader of the Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons. In 1969, he was appointed the chairman of the Japan Religious League. Also from 1969 (at the same time as founding of the Brighter Society movement), Risshō Kōsei-kai became an active member of the World

Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). In 1970, when the first assembly of the WCRP was held in Kyoto, Nikkyo Niwano served as its cochairman. It needs to be mentioned here, that from 1970, the international voluntary activities of various NGOs and religious organizations of Japan became particularly conspicuous, mainly because of the Vietnam War and the subsequent problem of Indochinese refugees. Religious as well as non-religious voluntary groups from Japan were active in providing relief to these refugees.<sup>4)</sup> Even Nikkyo Niwano paid a fact-finding visit to South Vietnam and donated relief goods to the Vietnamese.

It should be noted that the 70s Japan experienced a postwar economic boom in which the standard of living of average Japanese grew considerably. In many ways this economic development also had its impact on Risshō Kōsei-kai. Generally speaking, not only did it result in an increase in the standard of living of its members, but more importantly, the motivations for joining a religious groups or participating in religious activities, and the kind of gratification that was sought from religion also underwent a change. Scholars of Japanese religion such as Takagi Hiroo or Niell MacFarland<sup>5)</sup> explain that the proliferation of new religions in the immediate postwar period was in response to the physical or material hardships and social crisis of that period. Risshō Kōsei-kai, too, states in its publications that in the initial period of its development, physical illness and economic hardship. were the main motivations for its members to join the organization. But, since the late 60s, problems such as psychological distress or strained familial or interpersonal relations were cited by its members as reasons for participating in religious activities or seeking advice in *hōza*, the group counseling session of Risshō Kōsei-kai.<sup>6)</sup>

In other words, Risshō Kōsei-kai's increasing international involvement and Japan's postwar economic prosperity combined with changes in the motivations of Risshō Kōsei-kai members' for participating in religious activities are some of the events or factors antecedent to the start of the Brighter Society Movement.

This is also evident from the speeches and writings of Niwano regarding this movement. His speeches in the inaugural and other initial conferences of the Brighter Society Movement were titled *Mono no Sekai to Kokoro no Sekai* ("The World of Things and the World of the Heart"). The main ideas can be summarized as follow — While Japan had become materially rich, it was still spiritually impoverished. People, in their single-minded pursuit of material wealth had become self-centered and narrow-minded. This was the cause of the various social problems that Japanese society was facing.<sup>7)</sup> It can be inferred that this perception of the Japanese society and its problems by Niwano was to some derived from the experiences of Risshō Kōsei-kai in tackling the problems of its followers (in the *hōza* or group counseling sessions) who in spite of being materially well-off were suffering from psychological distress.

Niwano felt that in order to tackle this problem of egoism and narrow-mindedness, it was essential for people to cooperate in the spirit of fellowship and make joint efforts to solve the problems of their local community and society at large. For this purpose he proposed the Brighter Society Movement. He appealed not only to the members of Risshō Kōsei-kai, but to all people, whether affiliated with a religious organization or not, government as well as autonomous or self-government bodies, local leaders,

politicians etc. to join the movement. He claimed that his appeal was based on the basic idea that to live peacefully in a better society is the fundamental desire cherished by all.

According to Niwano, there was also another objective behind proposing this movement. That was to 'create leaders' who could represent Japan in international religious and peace movements. However, for Japan to acquire a leadership role in the international arena it was essential that it first "create a brighter society" in its own country.<sup>8)</sup> This shows that the objectives of the Brighter Society Movement were in a major way determined by Risshō Kōsei-kai's increasing involvement in international religious and peace movements.

### **The Brighter Society Movement and its Activities**

On April 27<sup>th</sup> 1969, the first conference to promote the Brighter Society Movement was held in Shikoku. In that conference, Niwano Nikkyo stated that the objective of this movement was to "Create a Brighter society through the goodwill and services of large number of people".<sup>9)</sup> Risshō Kōsei-kai calls this movement a *chiiki undo* or community based movement. As the name of this movement suggests, the objective is to create a brighter community life based on the spirit of cooperation, mutual assistance and community service among the members of a locality or community. This movement tries to address itself to various civic problems or social concerns that are common to the members of a local community, and through the means of finding solutions to common problems, it strives to transcend the egoism or divisions based on political and religious affiliation and encourage social solidarity, cooperation and fellowship among the members of a community or locality.

### **Major Activities**

It appears that a whole range of activities are carried out under the aegis of the Brighter Society Movement. The activities can be broadly classified as follows —

1. Social service activities — environmental protection related activities, collection and disposal of garbage during festivals or major events, welfare activities for the handicapped and aged, traffic safety campaigns, blood donation, etc.
2. Community activities — charity shows, bazaars, *aisatsu undo* (greetings movement), recycling campaign, cleaning movement, beautification of cities, etc.
3. Socio-cultural activities — Symposium, sports festival, study courses, promotion of traditional art and culture, etc.
4. Peace activities — contributing to the UNICEF funds, relief activities for refugees, exchanges with foreign students, interaction with local authorities, etc.
5. Inter-religious cooperation activities — memorial services for the war dead and accident victims, participation in local festivals, praying for peace with different religious groups.

However, in reality these activities overlap with each other and their content varies from locality to locality, incorporating the social problems, political activities or cultural characteristics of the locality.

6. *Takujuku* — As mentioned above, besides sponsoring various social-welfare activities, another objective of the Brighter Society Movement, is to train people

who could serve as leaders for its activities. For this purpose *takujuku*, a center to train leaders was established in 1988 and later regional branches were opened across Japan.<sup>10)</sup>

### **The Brighter Society Movement as a “Non-Religious Organization”**

The Brighter Society Movement claims to be an organization distinct from Risshō Kōsei-kai. At present it is seeking incorporation as a nonprofit organization (NPO). As mentioned above, Risshō Kōsei-kai calls this movement a *chiiki undo*, i.e. a community based movement. The headquarters or the National Council of this movement is called *Akarui shakai zukuri undo zenkoku kyogikai* and is located in Tokyo. The National Council only provide overall direction and various kinds of support to the movement, but it is practically formulated and implemented at the local community level. In fact it is left to the local (*Meisha*) movement leaders to conceptualize the activities of this movement according to the needs of the locality. As mentioned before, this movement is extremely diverse and varies from locality to locality. The objective of this movement is not only to engage Risshō Kōsei-kai members in welfare activities, but also to increase the scope of interaction between Risshō Kōsei-kai and other religious organizations, NGOs, as well as with local leaders, politicians, writers or other prominent personalities. Therefore in order to make itself acceptable in the local community, especially among non-Risshō Kōsei-kai members, it was essential for this movement to give up its religious apparel and present itself as a “secular” organization. For instance, since its founding, the presidents of the Brighter Society Movement have been non-Risshō Kōsei-kai persons. Moreover, these presidents were personalities with power and influence, which has helped the Brighter Society Movement to mark its presence in the socio-political arena as well as in the media.<sup>11)</sup>

### **Application of the Bodhisattva Way**

Despite the conscious attempt made by the Brighter Society movement to present itself as a non-religious social-welfare movement, the fact that it was originally proposed by Risshō Kōsei-kai and even now (after 30 years since its founding), Risshō Kōsei-kai remains its chief sponsor, means that the “religious aspect” of this movement cannot be overlooked.

Generally speaking, when a religious organization is mainly involved in proselytization or missionary activities, its concern is limited to its followers or potential converts. But, when a religious group enters into large scale social or welfare activities that aim to benefit, then its concerns, field of activity and the impact of its activities may not be limited to its followers only, but might extend to the entire society.<sup>12)</sup> Therefore, when we speak of social activities of religious groups, it is essential to see how they justify their involvement in social welfare activities, and in what way the teachings or practices characteristic of that religious group are reflected in the manner in which they carry out their activities.

Risshō Kōsei-kai has a Members’ vow or oath called *Kaiin Koryo* (會員綱領). This oath is read aloud jointly by its members whenever they gather to carry out some activity such as after the morning prayers at the branch church or before the group counseling sessions.<sup>13)</sup> The final lines of the oath read as follows — “And we pledge

ourselves to follow the bodhisattva way to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries and the world.”<sup>14)</sup> An outsider, i.e. a non- Risshō Kōsei-kai person, might interpret this as meaning that Risshō Kōsei-kai views the people of other communities or countries as potential converts. But, as stated above, in Risshō Kōsei-kai the purpose of practicing the Bodhisattva Way is not only to benefit oneself, but extends to seeking the welfare of all of society and of the world. As it will become clear below, conceptualization of its role in society in this way has a bearing on social or welfare activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai.

First, let us examine how Founder Niwano Nikkyo and President Niwano Nichiko<sup>15)</sup> have tried to explain the necessity and significance of the Brighter Society Movement. Niwano Nikkyo explained that Risshō Kōsei-kai, during the 30 years since its establishment has sought the salvation of the individual through faith but, from now on (especially since the declaration of the Age of Unlimited Compassion), in addition to salvation of the individual, it should seek the salvation of society through active participation in social activities. Therefore, instead of single individuals being the unit of proselytization (called *michibiki* in Risshō Kōsei-kai) and salvation, the entire society is now the unit of salvation. Niwano justifies the involvement of Risshō Kōsei-kai in social activities as going back to the “spirit of its foundation.”<sup>16)</sup> The spirit, or the real objective, is “to salvage the suffering individuals and create a peaceful society by spreading the true teachings of Buddhism.”<sup>17)</sup>

In fact, the speeches and writings of the Founder and the President regarding this movement are replete with Buddhist terms, which they use extensively to motivate members to actively participate in the movement and also to make it appear as a new way to practice the Bodhisattva Way. One of the most frequently used Buddhist terms/teachings is *issaishūjō-shitsuu-busshō*, “all living beings possess buddha-nature.” In other words, since all human beings possess the same buddha-nature and have the potential to become Buddha, it is the mission of the Buddhists to help and save other human beings. Similarly, the term *jiri tari ittai* which means “self benefit and other’s benefit are one,” is also used to cultivate altruism and the spirit of service. It is a well known fact that such teachings are frequently used by religious groups to justify their social activities.<sup>18)</sup>

Next, if we observe the manner in which the various activities of the Brighter Society Movement are carried out, even there we find a strong resemblance to *hōza*, which is the most vital activity in Risshō Kōsei-kai. *Hōza*, as briefly explained before, is of group counseling or group discussion circle which takes place at branch churches, houses of members or any other appropriate place, under the leadership of one person who acts as *hōza* leader (called *hōza shu*).<sup>19)</sup> In *Hōza*, members present their personal or daily life problems to the group and all participants are expected to treat those problems as their own and strive to find solutions to them. The characteristic feature of *hōza* is that through group discussions, that involve the “concerned participation” of the members and by applying the teachings of Lotus Sutra and the Four Noble Truths, the *hōza* leader tries to find the cause of that problem and give a possible solution to it. In Risshō Kōsei-kai, the *hōza* session is seen as the best application of the Bodhisattva Way because here the teachings are practiced through its practical application to the daily life of the people.<sup>20)</sup>

However, the *hōza* is more than a place to solve problems through group counseling. More importantly, through the means of problem-solving, the *hōza* helps to establish and cultivate links of interpersonal human relationships (*ningen kankei*) and create a sense of community on which Risshō Kōsei-kai is built. In Risshō Kōsei-kai, such human relationships (modeled after the parent-child relationship) are extremely valued.<sup>21)</sup>

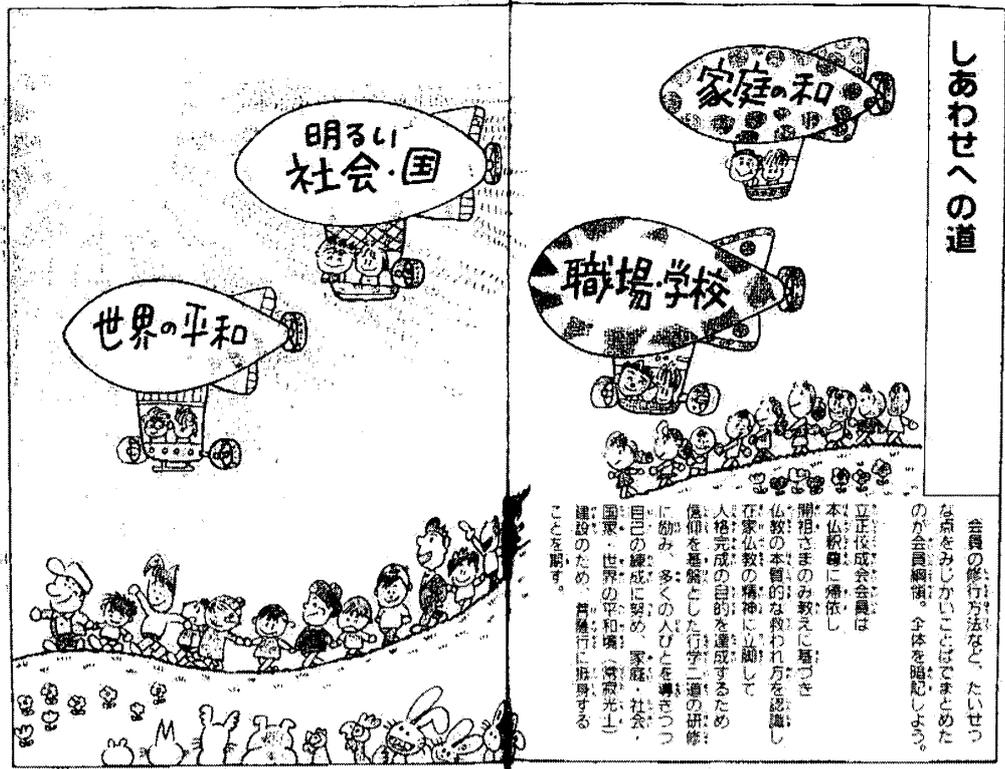
The two major characteristics of *hōza* — problem solving as a group activity (i.e. involving the “concerned participation” of all) and establishment of interpersonal human relationships through such activity — are also found in the Brighter Society movement. This becomes evident if we consider some concrete cases. For example, the Brighter Society Movement of Saitama Prefecture volunteers to dispose of garbage during festivals or any other major events. As we have already seen, environmental protection, beautification of the city, garbage disposal, and recycling are major agendas of this movement. At various places the participants of the movement volunteer to clean roads, temples, parks, stations and other public spaces. The Brighter Society Movement views garbage or environmental pollution as a problem that has resulted from the excessive consumerism that characterizes contemporary urban lifestyle. As already mentioned, Niwano proposed the Brighter Society Movement in response to the growing materialism and spiritual impoverishment of the modern man. (Also evident from the comic strips, a clean environment is seen as an essential requirement for creating a brighter society.) In other words, the movement views garbage as a problem that concerns all and thus requires group action.<sup>22)</sup>

However, garbage and its disposal are also seen as problems by local Saitama authorities and the organizers of these festivals. Therefore, they seek assistance from various voluntary groups. The Brighter Society Movement of Saitama Prefecture (drawing its volunteers mostly from the Risshō Kōsei-kai members of that area) join hands with other voluntary organizations and government agencies in the collection and disposal of garbage.

Usually before any major events, committees are formed which include prominent personalities and important organizations active in the local. The Brighter Society Movement, by virtue of its contributions to community activities (and also because of the vast manpower and resources of Risshō Kōsei-kai that it is able to access) is included in such committees. In this way, Risshō Kōsei-kai, through the Brighter Society Movement, is able to mark its presence in the local community and widen its network of relationships among influential people many of whom may not be Risshō Kōsei-kai followers.

Similarly, the problem of peace and inter-religious cooperation has helped the Brighter Society Movement establish contacts with various Shinto, Buddhist and new religion groups; problems concerning the handicap or aged have forged links between the Youth Groups of Risshō Kōsei-kai branch churches and various welfare organizations.

Therefore we find that like *hōza*, the Brighter Society Movement too, through “concerned participation” in various civic, social and national problems, and by cooperating with various individuals as well as organizations that have similar “concerns” or interests, tries to find solutions to those problems. Through this process



しあわせへの道

会員の修行方法など、たいせつな点をみしかりたいことは、まとめたのが会員綱領。全体を随記します。

立正佼成会会員は、本仏教に帰依し、彌陀さまのみ教えに基づき、仏教の本質的な救われ方を認識し、在家仏教の精神に立脚して、人格完成の目的を達成するため、信仰を基礎とした行学二道の研修に勤み、多くの入ひとを導きつつ、自己の練成に努め、家庭・社会・国家・世界の平和境（環境・光土）建設のため、善行に励むことを期す。



明るい社会づくり運動

物が豊かにならなければ平和な社会とはいえない。明るい社会づくり運動は、人びとの奉仕の心、思いやりの心、善悪の心を結集して、任みよい社会を築き出すという運動で、佼成会も参加している。

昭和四十四年に、開祖さまが提唱されて、はじまった。

これまでに多くの人々が、献血や社会奉仕、清掃、緑化、交通安全推進などさまざまな活動に参加、推進してきて、いまは全国的な運動になっている。

とんぱに小さなごときも、よいことをたゆまずつづけて、明るい社会を築きます。

“The Brighter Society Movement” from a comic (manga) introducing Risshō Kōsei-Kai.  
 Source: Risshō Kōsei-Kai, *Manga Risshō Kōsei-Kai Nyumon*, (Kōsei Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 136-137, 204-205.

of interaction and mutual help, they are able to develop interpersonal relationships with people and groups beyond their own religious or organizational affiliations.

At present, this movement consists of prominent politicians, local leaders, religious leaders of different religious groups, school teachers, etc., in addition to Risshō Kōsei-kai members who constitute an overwhelming majority.

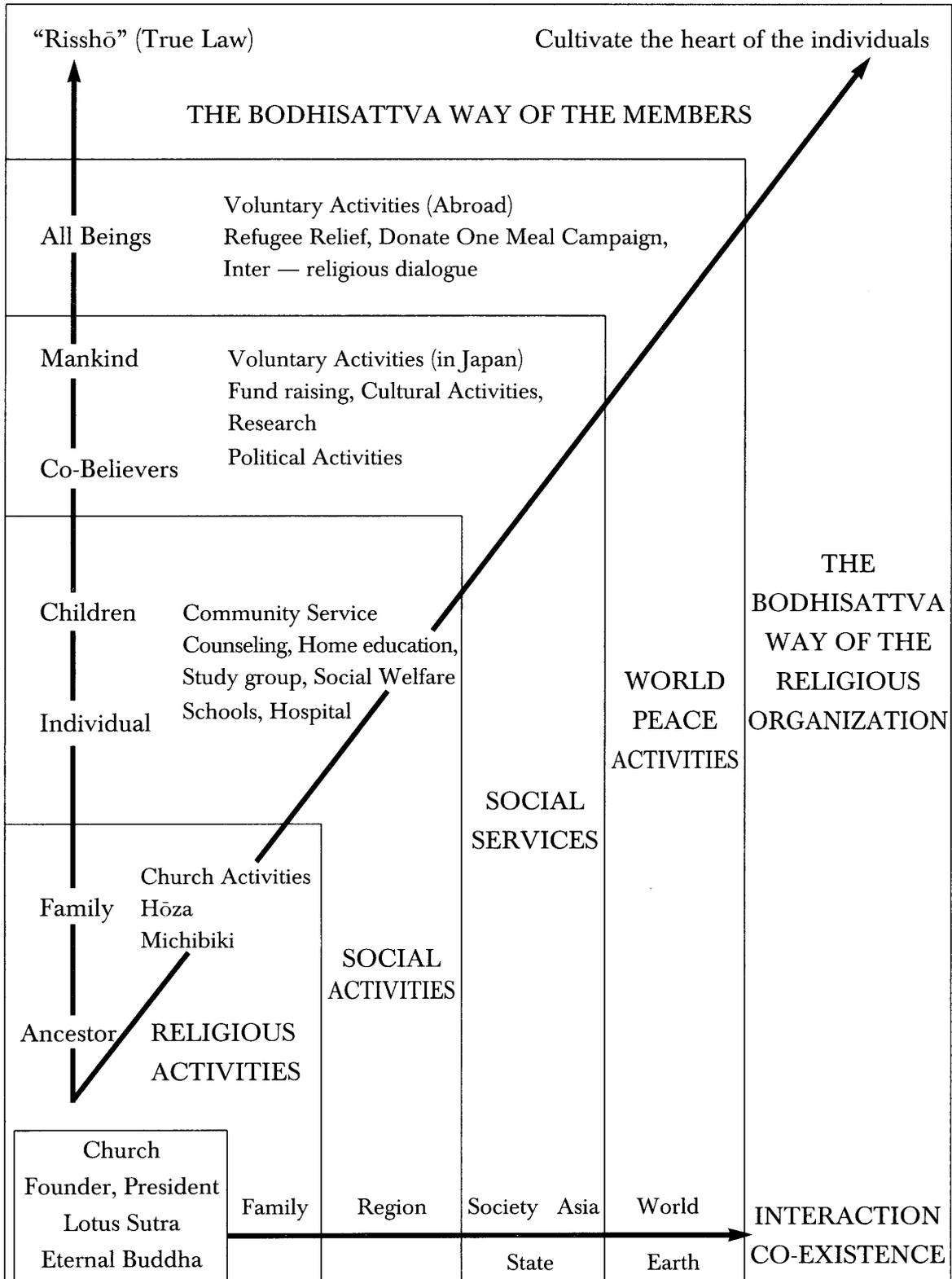
### **The Brighter Society Movement as a Practice of the Bodhisattva Way**

In what way does Risshō Kōsei-kai conceptualize the relationship between its religious or church related activities like proselytization (*michibiki*) and *hōza* and the various social and welfare activities carried out under the aegis of the Brighter Society Movement? It will become clear through an examination of the following two diagrams.

Figure 1, is derived from an article, titled *Risshō Kōsei-kai no heiwa shakai katsudo* (The peace-social activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai) in *Kōsei Shinbun* (the newspaper of Risshō Kōsei-kai). This article was based on the lectures (*hōwa*) of President Niwano Nichiko.<sup>23)</sup> The diagram, titled as *Kyodan katsudo no ryoiki to torikumi* (The sphere of activities of the organization), give an outline sketch of the activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai and its members. The activities of the organization are termed the “Bodhisattva Way of the Organization” and that of its members are called the “Bodhisattva Way of the Members.” From the figure, it is evident that whether it is the activities of the organization or its members, whether it is the so called “religious” activity or so called “non-religious” or “secular” activity, both have the same origin or doctrinal foundation, which in the case of Risshō Kōsei-kai is the Lotus Sutra (*Hokkekyō*) as interpreted by Founder Niwano Nikkyo, and both lead to the same end, i.e. to cultivate the heart of individuals or foster spiritual richness. The inspiration for all the activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai — whether proselytization and other religious activities, or social service and peace movements — lies in its teachings, therefore the base of the diagram is represented by the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni,<sup>24)</sup> the teachings of Lotus Sutra, followed by the Founder, the President and the church. Here, the social activities carried out within the country and subsequently world peace activities, and inter-religious co-operation or voluntary activities at the international level are seen as an expansion of the religious or church-based activities. In other words, the social activities are carried out in the same spirit as religious activities, and have the same objective, i.e. to save the people and create a better society. The religious as well as social activities lead to peaceful coexistence; both mean following or standing on the correct law (*Risshō*) and are seen as two alternative ways to practice the Bodhisattva Way.

In Figure 2, the underlined portion clearly states that the practice of Buddhism and participation in the Brighter Society Movement are *not* separate activities. This diagram is from study material given to the participants of the Brighter Society Movement in Ibaraki Prefecture, in order to explain to them the inter-relationship between the activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai and those of the Brighter Society Movement. (The participants were predominantly members of the branch church of Risshō Kōsei-kai in Ibaraki Prefecture). The activities of Risshō Kōsei-kai members and of the members of the Brighter Society Movement are shown as circles that overlap with

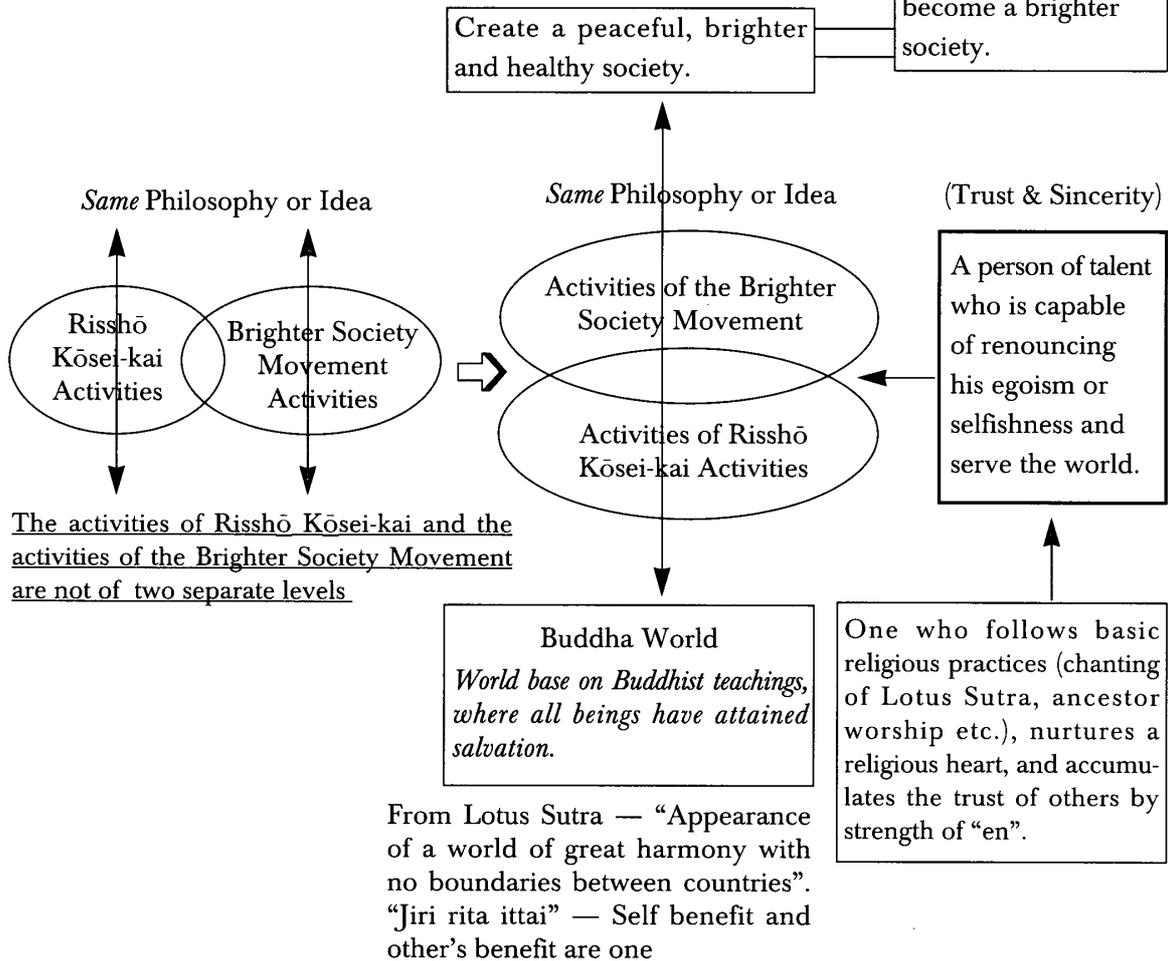
*Kyodan katsudo no ryoiki to torikumi*  
**(The Sphere of Activities of the Religious Organization)**



**Fig. 1:** Niwano Nichiko, “Risshō Kōsei-kai no heiwa shakai katsudo”, *Kōsei Shinbun*, 1. 21. 2000.  
 (An approximate translation of the original Japanese diagram by the author.)

***The Relationship between members of the Brighter Society Movement and  
Risshō Kōsei-kai members***

Niwano Nikkyo — When one participates in activities, one realizes that in order to mobilize people it is important to get the cooperation of the intellectuals. At that time, there is the Buddhist term “en” (*meaning connection, affinity, destiny, causal or Karma relationship*) which includes the nuance of “certification of trust and sincerity”. Therefore, in order to obtain the “en” of the intellectuals we must prove our trustworthiness and sincerity. Hence, the practice of the Buddhist Way and Meisha are not things of two different levels. (7<sup>th</sup> October, 1994. On 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Brighter Society Movement.



**Fig. 2:** Source: Ibaraki-ken Chuo Block Akarui Shakai Zukuri Undo Renraku Kyogikai “Meisha kaiin to Kōsei kaiin to no kankei” (Relationship between the members of the Brighter Society Movement and the members of Risshō Kōsei-kai), *Meisha Suishin In Kennshu Shiryō* No. 2, 1999. 5. 22. (From the study material for the members of Chuo-Block, Ibaraki-ken Brighter Society Movement. This is an approximate translation of the original Japanese diagram. The italic portions are explanations by the author and did not exit in the original Japanese text.)

each other. The overlapping portion represents a person (rather a capable man or man of talent) who is able to renounce his egoism and selflessly serve the world.<sup>25)</sup> In Risshō Kōsei-kai's terminology such a man will be called "Bodhisattva."

Here we find a new interpretation of the concept of "Bodhisattva." As mentioned earlier, a "Bodhisattva" is one who strives to lead others to salvation. But, for a Risshō Kōsei-kai member, the way to salvation, i.e. the means by which he could lead others to salvation, is not restricted to leading non-believers into the faith by proselytization. The various social-welfare activities carried out under the aegis of the Brighter Society Movement also strive to ameliorate the suffering of the people, and thus it is seen as an alternative way to lead people to salvation, i.e. to practice the Bodhisattva Way.

Therefore, we find that, although the Brighter Society movement claims to be a "secular" organization distinct from Risshō Kōsei-kai, its various social and welfare activities, are in fact a representation of the teachings and religious practices of Risshō Kōsei-kai in a "non-church" setting or in the public sphere. In reality, the movement makes use of the nationwide network of Risshō Kōsei-kai branch churches and is dependent on Risshō Kōsei-kai members to implement the movement at the local level. Most of the people who go to attend training courses at *takujuku*, are Risshō Kōsei-kai members.

### **Implications of the Brighter Society Movement**

What could be the possible implications of the Brighter Society Movement (or for that matter any other social-welfare movements sponsored by religious organizations) for the wider society? In order to comprehend the impact of such movements, it is essential to observe it from two standpoints — first, what positive contributions do these movements make to society and second, in what way the wider society influence the form, content and style of functioning of these movements.

One of the major contributions of these movements is that they generate tremendous amounts of "social capital."<sup>26)</sup> These movements connect people through networks of communication and mutuality that are derived from participation in common social activities. They inculcate voluntarism, enhance social awareness and increase political activism among members. The Brighter Society Movement, too, gives opportunity to its members to participate, as well as act as leaders, in a variety of social activities ranging from campaigning for political candidates to voluntary activities in Bosnia, Africa, etc.

In addition, by taking up social issues, the religious organizations add some kind of "sacredness" to it. In other words, they redefine these issues in religious symbols or expressions which are readily understood and responded to by the people. This explains why the leaders of Risshō Kōsei-kai use Buddhist terms (such as Bodhisattva Way) and religious expressions to explain the necessity and objective of the Brighter Society movement. This has been variously defined by using terms such as de-secularization, resacralization, or public religion. American sociologist Robert Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred*,<sup>27)</sup> states association of the sacred with social causes has led to the expression of the sacred in the public sphere which runs counter to the largely privatized definitions of spirituality or religiosity that is said to characterize modern society. This is also true in case of Risshō Kōsei-kai and the Brighter Society

Movement. Risshō Kōsei-kai, by justifying its participation in social activities as a practice of the Bodhisattva Way, has expanded the range of application of its teachings beyond church based religious activities, into the arena of politics, social-welfare services, and cultural activities which are carried out at the local, national or international levels.

Regarding the influence of the wider society on the activities of religious groups, the foremost influence are the prevalent social conditions which decide the kind of social issue to be raised by the religious group. Furthermore, the manner in which it should be treated is also to a very large extent determined by the way the masses perceive such issues. The involvement of Japanese religious groups in peace movements was in tune with the pacifistic stance of the postwar Japanese state and anti-war sentiments of the Japanese public. Similarly, their involvement in international voluntary activities is influenced by the general trend in Japan towards globalization and greater international understanding.

Religious organizations are also influenced by the secularized and rationalized character of contemporary society. Today religious groups have to operate in a social environment where, on the one hand the ideal of the separation of state religion (*seikyo-bunri*) is still widely upheld and on the other hand the “public” or “social” roles of religious groups are not well-defined and often looked upon with suspicion (which is quite the case in Japan). Therefore, to perform successfully in this environment religious organizations such as Risshō Kōsei-kai prefer to put up a “secular” front that give them the leverage to interact with government agencies or other religious organizations. This explains why the Brighter Society Movement is trying to get itself incorporated as a nonprofit organization (NPO). Moreover, the movement, in order to get itself registered as a NPO, has to follow state regulations regarding incorporation, which sets limits on its organizational pattern as well as style of functioning. (How the process of incorporation, i.e. recognition as a legal body formalizes a social-welfare movement is an aspect that requires further study.) Thus, the Brighter Society Movement could be seen as a case where a religious group, inspired by its teachings, tries to make a positive contribution to the society, and on the other hand the style of functioning, form and content of its social activities may be conditioned by the norms of the wider society.

It cannot be denied that the “social engagements” or social-welfare activities of religious groups reflect their strength as established institutions. Religious organizations like Risshō Kōsei-kai by virtue of their membership, organizational and financial strength have the capability to take up the challenges presented by the secular world, as well as the resources to initiate positive actions in the form of social-welfare movements such as the Brighter Society Movement. This explains Risshō Kōsei-kai’s involvement in “secular” issues from 60s, by which time it had established itself as a major religious organization in Japan. On the other hand, by incorporating “secular” features, the religious organizations are able to widen their scope of activity beyond “conventional” religious functions.

## Notes

- 1) Homepage of Risshō Kōsei-kai — <http://www.Kōsei-kai.or.jp>
- 2) *Risshō Kōsei-kai*, Kōsei Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1966. pp. 34–82.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 4) Hata Tatsuya “Hotoke no kokoro to kokusai Borantiya” *Bukkyo ga Wakaru*, AERA Mook, Asahi Shimbun Extra Report and Analysis Special, No 56, 2000. pp. 116–117.
- 5) Tagaki Hiroo, *Nihon no Shinko Shukyo* Tokyo, Iwanami-shoten, 1959.  
H. Neill McFarland, *The Rush Hour of Gods*, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1967.
- 6) Oshima Hiroyuki, “Risshō Kōsei-kai ron — Hōza, Akarui shakai zukuri undo, Sekai shukyosha Heiwa Kaigi o chushin toshite” *Gendai Shukyo*, No. 2, 1975. pp. 231–232.  
Even from my study of *hōza* (the functioning of *hōza* is explained later), I have come to similar conclusions. During my fieldwork, when I asked the participants of *hōza* or senior Risshō Kōsei-kai members what changes they had witnessed over last 30–40 years in the form, content or style of functioning of *hōza*, the most frequent reply was that the nature of problem being discussed has undergone a change at *hōza*. The problems of the *hōza* participants seem to have shifted from sickness or economic hardship to problems more psychological in nature, resulting from stresses of modern lifestyle or strained interpersonal human relationships at home or workplace.
- 7) Akarui shakai zukuri undo zenkoku kyogikai, *Akarui shakai zukuri undo: dokuhon*, Kōsei Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1996. pp. 10–18.
- 8) *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 10) *Ibid.*, pp. 181–191
- 11) The first president of the Brighter Society Movement was Yoshinori Maeda, former president of NHK. He was succeeded by Masaru Ibuka, honorary chairman of Sony Corporation, and then by Takeo Fukuda, a former prime minister. The present president (i.e. in the year 2000) is Ishihara Shintaro, the Governor of Tokyo (also a well known writer) and a member of another new religion called Reiyukai.
- 12) Although it cannot be denied that proselytization activities might have an impact on the entire society, and the impact of welfare activities of a religious group might be limited to its members.
- 13) To be explained later.
- 14) *Risshō Kōsei-kai and Peace Activities: Living Buddhism in Action*, Kōsei Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1994.
- 15) Niwano Nichiko is the eldest son of Niwano Nikkyo and in 1991 took over as the second President of Risshō Kōsei-kai. Niwano Nikkyo is now designated as the Founder (*kaiso*) of Risshō Kōsei-kai.
- 16) Kyodanshi Hensan Inkai, ed. *Risshō Kōsei-kai shi*. Vol. 1, Kōsei Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1982. pp. 349–354.
- 17) *Ibid.*, pp. 352–353
- 18) Such references are found in many of the books, writings or speeches of Niwano Nikkyo and Niwano Nichiko. See Niwano Nikkyo, *Kono Michi: Ichibutsujyo no sekai o mezashite*, Kōsei Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1990, pp. 152–155.
- 19) For a detailed study of the *hōza* of Risshō Kōsei-kai., see Kenneth J. Dale and Akahoshi Susumu, *Circle of Harmony : A case study in Popular Japanese Buddhism with Implications for Christian Mission*, Seibunsha, Tokyo, 1975.
- 20) Based on my fieldwork on Risshō Kōsei-kai *hōza*.
- 21) *Hōza* are often credited for Risshō Kōsei-kai’s large membership and its popularity, especially among middle class or lower middle class urban housewives. It is because of the importance of *hōza* for *Risshō Kōsei-kai* that founder Niwano Nikkyo has called *hōza* the *inochi* (life) of *Risshō Kōsei-kai*.
- 22) Based on my study of the Brighter Society Movement in Saitama Prefecture.
- 23) Niwano Nichiko, “Risshō Kōsei-kai no heiwa shakai katsudo”, *Kōsei Shinbun*, 1. 21. 2000.
- 24) The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni is the main object of worship of Risshō Kōsei-kai.
- 25) Ibaraki-ken Chuo Block Akarui Shakai Zukuri Undo Renraku Kyogikai “Meisha kaiin to Kōsei-kaiin to no Kankei” (“Relationship between members of the Brighter Society Movement and Risshō Kōsei-kai members”), *Meisha Suishin In Kennshu Shiriyō* No. 2, 1999. 5. 22. ( From the study material for the members of Chuo-Block, Ibaraki-ken Brighter Society Movement )

- 26) The term social capital has been variously defined by Robert Putnam (1995), John A. Coleman (1998) and others. But here the term “social capital” means human resource or people who are “socially active,” i.e. available to perform various activities that contribute to the overall improvement of the society.
- 27) Robert Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred: An Essay on Public Religion*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1994, p.100.

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