



# Saying “Thank You” with Sincerity

President of Rissho Kosei-kai Nichiko Niwano

## Respecting Ourselves, Revering Our Ancestors

July is the season of the Bon festival, when many Japanese return from the cities to their hometowns and visit family graves.

The age-old Japanese custom of visiting the family grave is an expression of our debt of gratitude, since we recognize that it is thanks to our ancestors that we exist here and now.

The agricultural expert Ninomiya Sontoku (1787—1856) of Japan’s late Edo period (1603—1868), struck by the continuity of life traced down through his ancestors, wrote the following short didactic poem: “My mother and father, and their mothers and fathers, too, reside in me. So I respect myself, and revere myself.” He teaches us in these words that the best way to express gratitude to deceased parents and ancestors is to revere and respect our own lives.

As our way of showing that we are grateful for being given life as a link in a long chain of lives from our ancestors, there is certainly no higher expression of this than respecting and revering our own lives—the most recent link of succession from their lives. When we think in this way, the time for remembering and honoring our ancestors gives us an opportunity to take a fresh look at our own lives.

Visiting the family grave and expressing gratitude to those ancestors is, thanks to established custom, comparatively easy to do. Yet for many people it seems to be very difficult to utter even the words “thank you” to living family members who are before their very eyes.





## Take the Initiative in Saying “Thank You”

People are not always able to say “thank you” sincerely, even when they receive an act of kindness or an expression of goodwill from someone, if they are experiencing some trouble or their minds are occupied with something else. Once we have rid ourselves of self-centeredness, of a desire to show off, or of suspicions and distrust, words of gratitude will then come naturally, and from being grateful harmony with others will develop.

Furthermore, offering words of gratitude is a way of showing respect for other people and acknowledging their humanity. This is one and the same with the feeling we demonstrate by putting our hands together reverently before other people. So when someone does a favor for us, we should immediately acknowledge it by saying “thank you” to them.

To accept someone’s kindness and goodwill gratefully can be said to be an embodiment of the minds of the Buddha and the bodhisattva. That our words of gratitude can put a situation at ease is due to the praise of the gods and the buddhas, who proclaim “good! good!” Therefore, regardless of what we may personally think in certain circumstances, it is important that we always say “thank you,” because doing so brings happiness to others.

Moreover, when we find ourselves the target of angry or unpleasant words, if instead of responding in the same way we could say, “Thank you for saying so,” the atmosphere might change completely. We would feel more relaxed and be able to comfortably accept the situation.

In this regard, the single Japanese word to express thanks, *arigato*, truly has extraordinary

power. The origin of the word is the expression used by people from ancient times to thank the gods and the buddhas for bringing about something that seemed impossible, *arigatashi*. For this reason we can say that the Japanese word *arigato* has a greater depth of meaning than most words to express gratitude in foreign languages.

In this world that functions according to the law of dependent origination, many things remain unknown and mysterious to us. And yet our gratefulness to the gods and the buddhas continues. Furthermore, as propounded in Zen Buddhist tradition by the term “Beyond the Buddha,” we human beings must never forget our feelings of gratitude and humility for being able to walk the infinite path leading to the wisdom of the Buddha.

According to the Suttanipata, Shakyamuni said, “To be humble and polite in manner, to be grateful and content in a simple life, not missing the occasion to learn the Dharma this is the greatest happiness.” He is telling us that there can be no greater joy than respecting the lives of ourselves and others, aiming to improve ourselves while never forgetting to be humble, and accepting whatever may occur with a smile and “thank you.”

Even among members of a single family and in different organizations, large and small, relations among people these days often seem to be characterized by friction and discord, leading to feelings of helplessness. Just remembering to always say “thank you” can release feelings of warmth and tenderness. Let us all agree to take the initiative in making this a regular practice.



# *In the Footsteps of the Founder*

KAISO-SAMA NI NARAITE

President-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai **Kosho Niwano**

The following begins a new series of English translations from the Japanese-language book *Kaiso-sama ni Naraite* (In the Footsteps of the Founder) by Rev. Kosho Niwano, president-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai.

## Repentance: Discovering the Buddha-nature

**“The most deeply fundamental repentance arises from a keenly felt recollection of the fact that we are being sustained to live by the Buddha. This recollection leads us to reevaluate what we have done and reflect, ‘I am being sustained to live by the Buddha, but have my actions been consistent with this fact?’”**

*(Niwano Nikkyo Howa Senshu [Selected Sermons of Nikkyo Niwano],  
special volume, p. 158)*

Founder Nikkyo Niwano said, “Nothing is more precious than sincere repentance. People who can sincerely repent soon find liberation.”

Repentance does not mean simply looking back on your past actions and feeling regret; it means repenting the fact that you were unable to see reality as it is, thus failing to perceive what the Buddha was expecting from you at the time. This is what repentance means for people on the Buddhist path.

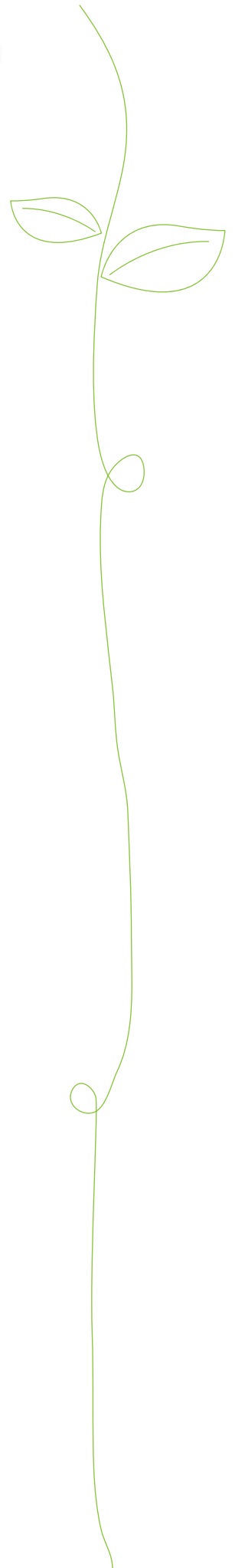
With true repentance, the real reason why a problem occurred becomes apparent. The real reason is not the cause of the problem but rather the *purpose* of the problem.

**“Here we are clearly told that the highest form of repentance is to perceive things as they really are—to realize the true aspect of all things.”**

*(Shinshaku Hokke Sambu-kyo [New Commentary of the Threefold Lotus Sutra],  
vol. 10, p. 172)*

When we are unable to draw close to the Buddha is when we are seeing things in simple terms of black and white, or right and wrong. It is important for us to seek greater happiness, and try to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again.

However, the world of the Lotus Sutra is not one in which we see things in terms of right or wrong, and try to change what we perceive as evil in ourselves. When we



can realize the Buddha's wish that transcends questions of right and wrong, our spirits are released from suffering and we awaken to the feeling: "Oh, so that is it! This is the purpose for which I am living." With that realization, where we are living in the here and now is transformed into the world of the Lotus Sutra, a world that is like the blossom in the sutra's title, growing out of the muddy water and bursting into bloom.

**"Repentance in Buddhism involves strict and constant scrutiny of the preciousness of your true nature as well as of your actual imperfections."**

*(Niwano Nikkyo Howa Senshu [Selected Sermons of Nikkyo Niwano], special volume, p. 156)*

I once knew of a young woman whose general health was so poor that she often had to go to the hospital to receive an intravenous drip. Unfortunately, her veins were too small in diameter to easily accommodate the needle. The physician always had to search for a suitable blood vessel and try several times before he was able to insert the needle successfully. This was a painful process, and the young woman soon felt angry at the doctor every time she had to receive the treatment.

One day when she was attending a Risho Kosei-kai meeting, she burst out with an angry remark about her situation, asking, "Does my doctor always have to put me through this pain? He must not be a very good doctor; isn't there another one who could do a better job?"

Learning of this outburst, the founder met her and said, "Your physician is also having a hard time every time he gives you the intravenous treatment. Don't you think you are lucky to have a doctor who is willing to go to that much trouble for you? If putting the blame on him could help to cure you, that would be a good thing. But that is not what faith teaches us."

The young woman caught her breath. She realized in her heart that she had been displaying the wrong attitude, because she understood that her sessions at the hospital also had the purpose of teaching her how to venerate all people. After this realization, she then always was gracious and spoke politely to her doctor while he was treating her.

The founder's words enabled her to repent, and so her displeasure could turn into gratitude. She then became able to recognize her situation as advantageous, and could be happy.

The more often we turn our gaze toward the precious gifts we are receiving, the more joy we feel and thus are able to live happier and richer lives. To repent means to recognize in what spirit we should be leading our lives. This involves our realization that we should be communicating with words that originate from our buddha-nature. That is why it is said that "repentance is joy."

## President-designate Kosho Niwano

President Nichiko Niwano's oldest daughter, Rev. Kosho Niwano was born in Tokyo. After graduating with a degree in Law from Gakushuin University, she studied at Gakurin Seminary, the training institution for Rissho Kosei-kai leaders. Presently, as she studies the Lotus Sutra, she continues to act as President-designate, making speeches for participants in the main ceremonies of Rissho Kosei-kai, and handling activities for interfaith cooperation at home and abroad. Married to Rev. Munehiro Niwano. Mother of one son and three daughters.



**“When our hearts repent and we feel purified, our hearts become responsive to the heart of the Buddha in an instant.”**

**(Founder’s Dharma Talk at Fumon Hall, Tokyo, on September 23, 1973)**

What the Buddha wishes for us is that we realize our buddha-nature. We repent not in order to solve our problems, but rather to recognize our own buddha-nature. When we do so and our point of view shifts to that of the Buddha, which sees the world of liberation, we realize that our suffering occurs to lead us along the path to the attainment of buddhahood. For that we can rejoice.

Because the problems we face are in fact placed on our path to liberation by the Buddha, when we realize this we can begin to overcome those problems. When we recognize the Buddha’s wish and open ourselves up to our own buddha-nature, bad situations have a way of reversing themselves and our problems begin to disappear. Repentance as described and taught in the Lotus Sutra equals the attainment of buddhahood by ourselves together with others.



# The Gift That Cancer Gave Me Part 3

by Rev. Koichi Kawamoto, Minister of Takefu Dharma Center

\* This personal testimony was shared at the monthly ceremony for the Founder's memorial day on April 4 in 2010 at the Great Sacred Hall. This is the third of three installments.



When Ms. A asked her father (who had suffered a stroke), “Is your meal is OK like this?” he replied “Thank you.” These were unexpected words to Ms. A. Before then, she thought her father was the kind of person who could not express his gratitude. But in fact, he was. She recognized her father was willing to pitch in help to renovate their house and to say thank you. Ms. A felt very sorry for him.

In addition, through the practice of guiding other members to religious activities, she began to reflect on herself. She gained new understanding in a conversation with her son. Gradually she became aware that she didn’t listen to her son or pay attention to how he felt. Around that time, her son said to her, “You are doing the same thing that Grandpa does. You don’t really listen to others. You are selfish.” She thought to herself, “That’s true,” and she said to him, “I’m sorry. I’ll try. Expect me to be better.” Her son responded, “OK.” She eventually came to think, “My husband is a good person,” through her practice of guiding a married couple who had been quarreling.

The head of the chapter taught Ms. A, “Ask your husband to go to headquarters to receive the Gohonzon.” She was troubled by what she had to say to her husband, who was opposed to Rissho Kosei-kai. Finally Ms. A asked her husband, “Tomoko now has a boyfriend. Could you go to headquarters for our daughter?” and he said, “OK, I will.”

True to his words, he went to the headquarters to receive the Gohonzon and brought it home. Strangely enough, from the next day forward, their son (who had shut himself up in his room for eleven years) started to go out for work.

After Ms. A decided to receive the Gohonzon, she reflected on herself, and gradually became aware of the state of her own mind in the practice of being humble to her father and husband. She honestly reflected on this, decided to correct her own attitude, and gradually changed. When her way of thinking changed, her son began to candidly complain about Ms. A. That means that Ms. A had been transformed into a person whom her son was willing to share complaints with! She was also aware of how deeply her husband cared about their son. Ms. A had a true experi-

ence of her world changing.

Through being involved in guiding Ms. A (together with the chapter head), I felt how wonderful guiding members to the faith truly was. I was capable of changing my perspective on things and people, if I reflected on myself through the practice of guidance. After Ms. A received the Gohonzon, things around her gradually became more harmonious. I also reflected on whether I had been interacting with people with a genuine heart and mind. These insights came to me when I saw the attitude of the two people through their relationship: the chapter head was trying very hard to be sincerely involved with Ms. A for her happiness, while Ms. A was honestly trying to respond to the chapter head.

Ms. A is now full of joy and gratitude, which provides a positive influence on

her neighborhood group leaders. They are involving themselves in the practice of guiding both members and non-members to the teaching. Ms. A really wants the leaders to receive the Gohonzon and become more happy. I really do think all my members are wonderful.

We are taught that the world around us will change according to how much we sincerely listen to another person, and what sort of attitude and words we have toward him or her. We can see that the realm of the Buddha manifests itself according to how we relate to others.

I would like to take this opportunity to pledge to devote myself with diligence to the practice of being truly useful to members.

Thank you for your kind attention.

## An Attitude That Brings You Blessings

Sometimes I think about how I could have come this far in life without making huge mistakes, even in the midst of such hard work.

During the time when I was founding Rissho Kosei-kai, each day flew by as I was completely absorbed in delivering bottles of milk, conducting hoza sessions, guiding others to the Way, and enshrining the symbol of the faith on members' home altars. Once in a while, I would have a free schedule, and could look forward to some time to relax; but usually, some members would abruptly call me because of a sudden illness or a quarrel between husband and wife. So I had to leave everything behind and rush to help them. It is no wonder that my wife was not happy with this kind of situation, since her husband was

## The Teaching of Founder Nikkyo Niwano

neglecting his family affairs.

However, I had been so lost in performing those activities that I could not be completely self-centered. This was voluntary service of total selflessness. So, I had no time to think about myself, and instead I concentrated on the members, with the desire that they would understand the teaching and attain happiness. When I told them exactly what I felt by intuition, it always hit the mark. The members would put my guidance into practice and then become happy.

Those experiences of mine that I had over many years helped me to imprint this thought in my mind: "An attitude of thorough selflessness brings you blessings from the Buddha."

From *Kaisozuikan 4* (Kosei Publishing Co.) p.190-191 Translated by Rissho Kosei-kai International

### \*\*\* Column \*\*\*

Beginning June 12th, I spent several days visiting the Tzu Chi Foundation as a member of the mission from Rissho Kosei-kai. Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who established the foundation and has been the spiritual leader of its members, was awarded with the 24th Niwano Peace Prize.

She has been teaching members with the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, and they have developed an amazing capacity for action. Their quick and speedy international

relief activity is highly valued in Taiwan and overseas. The source of their selfless activity is the bodhisattva mind, which is emphasized in the Lotus Sutra. Specifically, their desire is to embody the bodhisattva Kannon, as Founder Niwano also taught us to do. The Tzu Chi Foundation members are striving to be Kannon through their volunteer work. A variety of kinds of bodhisattvas appear in the Lotus Sutra. What type of bodhisattva are you trying to be?  
(Kotaro Suzuki)

## Rissho Kosei-kai

Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization whose holy scripture is the Threefold Lotus Sutra. It was established by Founder Nikkyo Niwano and Co-founder Myoko Naganuma in 1938. This organization is composed of ordinary men and women who have faith in the Buddha and strive to enrich their spirituality by applying his teachings to their daily lives. At both the local community and international levels, we, under the guidance of the President Nichiko Niwano are very active in promoting peace and well-being through altruistic activities and cooperation with other organizations.



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