In this chapter, the merits of the first rejoicing over the Buddha’s teachings are described in detail. Such rejoicing over the teachings is an essential element for religious faith.

Maitreya Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, “If there is someone who, hearing this Dharma Flower Sutra, responds with joy, how many blessings will he or she gain?”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “If those who hear this sutra respond with joy, and go somewhere to preach what they have heard according to their ability to those who will hear, then all those who have heard it will respond with joy as well, and go on to share the teaching with others. This will continue in turn to the fiftieth person. The blessings of that fiftieth person who hears the Dharma Flower Sutra, and who responds to it with joy, are indeed innumerable, unlimited, and countless.”

Also, the World-honored One said, “Suppose that there someone who wished to make all living beings in this universe happy, and gave them all kinds of things according to their desires for a full eighty years. And, suppose he taught them the Dharma, which enabled them to attain the state of exhausting their faults and being totally free. But the blessings the giver of this great gift gains do not compare with the blessings of that fiftieth person who, hearing just a single verse of the Dharma Flower Sutra, responds to it with joy. They are not equal to one hundredth, or one thousandth, or one part in a hundred thousand billion. Neither calculation nor parable can express this. The blessings of that fiftieth person who hears the Dharma Flower Sutra and responds to it with joy are indeed innumerable, unlimited, and countless.”

Moreover, if anyone says to another, ‘There is a sutra named the Dharma Flower. Let’s go and listen to it together.’ And if those who are so persuaded go and hear it, even for a moment, the blessings of those who have done the persuading will be such that when they are reborn they will be born in the same place as bodhisattvas who have attained powers of incantation. They will be sharp and wise. They will have all the features proper to a human being. Whenever they are born, they will see the Buddha, hear the Dharma, and accept and believe the teachings.

The blessings obtained from persuading one person to go and hear the Dharma are like this. How much more greater they will be for someone who wholeheartedly hears, teaches, reads, and recites the Dharma, and analyzes it for the people in the great assembly, and practices according to its teaching.”
Suffering Transformed into Joy

As nearly everyone knows, water is chemically composed of hydrogen and oxygen. Well, then, how is the human body formed?

I will leave the scientific answer up to specialists, but as we are nourished by the lives of various plants and animals, I think the right answer is that our bodies are formed thanks to innumerable other things. In other words, we are able to live thanks to the uncountable blessings we receive and thanks to each and every one of those connections. We could say at the same time that every human being serves as a connection to support other lives.

We usually do not think about such matters, however, and we are apt to complain or express resentment over even minor things. Although this is obvious in the light of the law of impermanence, when we cannot accept changes that we find disagreeable, we take them on as suffering.

Buddhism teaches us that, “All forms are themselves emptiness.” That is, phenomena themselves are neither positive nor negative, they are zeroes—”emptiness.” When we reset the mind that is thinking of hardship, sadness, or suffering to zero and make a fresh start, we can take a new view of the phenomena occurring before our eyes and see them for what they are, thereby finding a way to calmly accept them. For instance, suffering leads to joy and a reason to live, sadness gives the heart room to grow, and we can transform our hearts and minds in such a way as to say “thank you” even for a grudge that we hold. Because the root of such transformation is awareness of the truths of dependent origination, impermanence, and emptiness, we could even say that through our study of the truth, our sensitivity to joy increases.

Gratitude in Action

With the last days of the year fast approaching, there will be many opportunities to reflect on the passing year. When we do so, we should take a neutral viewpoint by avoiding the tendency to see things as fixed and static, so that we can find many seeds of gratitude for which to express our thanks and welcome the new year.

The Edo period poet Tachibana Akemi (1812–68) wrote many poems that began with the words, “How pleasant,” such as these:

“How pleasant / To get up in the morning and see / A flower that was not there the day before has bloomed.” “How pleasant in the autumn, / When the rice bin is full, / To know that the coming month will be all right.” As these poems
saying, “Think of others and they think of you,” whatever we send forth definitely will come back to us.

Saying “thank you” and showing gratitude through our actions makes people happy, and in turn leads to gratitude being shown to us. Because such interactions fill our own hearts and those of the people around us with warmth, they make our lives happier and more meaningful. The practice of benefiting others through sharing the Buddha’s teaching in particular has the great power of creating cheerful lives. The reason is that, as I have noted, the Buddha’s teaching shines a bright ray of light called gratitude, even into the heart of a person that is submerged in darkness.

In any case, when we remember our blessings, let us begin by calling to mind those who are nearest to us. Watching a grandchild grow—how grateful one is. And being able to think so—how grateful for that. Indeed, we could say that everything in life comes from these small sources of joy and happiness that can be found in everyday life.

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Our Thrifty Young Daughters

“Mrs. Niwano, do you think you could buy a jump rope for your younger daughter too? I believe you can get one at a hundred-yen shop.* . . .”

“Pardon me? A jump rope?”

It was my first individual meeting with our second daughter’s home room teacher, and this request came as a complete surprise. It was the end of the first term of her first year in primary school, just before summer vacation.

“Of course, if she needs one we’ll buy it!” I said.

According to the teacher, for the entire first term our younger girl had been sharing the jump rope of her elder sister, who was in the third grade.

Because the first-year and third-year pupils used the gymnasium at different times, the girls had organized things so that each could use the same jump rope when necessary.

However, on one particular day there was a change in the class schedules and when the younger girl went to borrow the jump rope, her sister was using it. Thus the younger had to explain to her teacher that she did not have a jump rope because she and her sister had decided to share the same one, having agreed that buying another one would be wasteful, and had been using the same jump rope until that particular day.

In fact, I had not been monitoring our new first-grader’s homework—I had not even checked to see what her class schedule was like.

The truth was I had been tending to concentrate on the older girl—our first-born—and on our third daughter who had just started in nursery school. I was completely unaware that our second daughter was the only child in her class who did not have her own jump rope until that day. Our fourth child was due to be born in about two months, and I felt awful that I had not been paying sufficient attention to our middle child, and embarrassed by what the teacher might have thought.

When I got home I lost no time in announcing to our girls that we would be buying a second jump rope. In unison they declared that they didn’t need another one, it had been an unusual day at school, and buying another one would be wasteful.

* Variety stores that sell miscellaneous items all priced at one hundred yen.
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, she is mother of one son and three daughters.

So far it had been our custom to hand down things from the elder sister to the younger, including school uniforms, the harmonica that all children in their school need in the first grade, and even the necessary kanji character workbooks.

Of course the clothes and schoolbag being used by our youngest girl in nursery school were hand-me-downs from her sisters. The older girls always took care not to soil anything too much because they knew it would be going to their younger sisters, and the younger girls never complained and received their hand-me-downs quite happily.

This was the way we had been getting along and this time the two sisters thought one jump rope was enough for the two of them. This was very touching in one way, but at the same time to think of the girls being so decisively thrifty at such a tender age struck me as rather amusing.

So I decided to ask their indulgence.

“Thank you, girls, both of you. But I think I would like you both to have your own jump ropes. Won’t it be OK to go and buy another one?”

To this they agreed, deciding to let me have my way.

Our second girl began to look forward to what color she would choose, and her elder sister also seemed just as excited about that.

“I think we should definitely get it at a hundred-yen shop,” said the younger.

No matter how decisively thrifty they might be, buying something new was still an occasion for joy.

The next day we went down to get the jump rope at a hundred-yen shop. The combined bus fares came to four hundred and twenty yen.
On June 6, 2004, I served as photographer at the Gohonzon presentation ceremony held at the Brazil Dharma Center; it was my first duty there. While taking pictures, I was moved very much when I saw people receiving Gohonzon. It was clear how important the Gohonzon was to those who received them. After the ceremony, I told Ms. Hiromi Muramatsu, who was the Dharma instructor (and in a relationship with me), that I would like to receive Gohonzon someday.

Several years later, I married Ms. Muramatsu. Rev. Kazuya Nagashima, minister of the Brazil Dharma Center, asked me several times, “Why don’t you receive Gohonzon at the Great Sacred Hall?” But each time, I declined his offer. I wished to receive Gohonzon, but I didn’t feel like going all the way to Japan to do so.

Thanks to the connection with Rissho Kosei-kai, various good things began to happen around me. I learned a lot about the teachings and tried to put what I had learned into practice in daily life. My relationship with my family and relatives improved, and things began to go more smoothly in that regard. Through donating money, my income gradually increased. Moreover, we were blessed with triplets, which made a huge change in our life and brought us much happiness.

This year, Rev. Nagashima asked me again to receive Gohonzon. Thinking my main priority was caring for my children and my business, I felt deep down that it would be best if I decline it again. This time, however, the light in my wife’s eyes said something different. Her face looked as if she would like to receive Gohonzon, whatever might happen. While she repeatedly mentioned receiving Gohonzon to me, I began to get the feeling that it would indeed be the best time to receive it. Finally, I decided to receive Gohonzon. My wife was very delighted, and bubbled over like a child with joy. From that point, she talked about the shape, size, and color of Gohonzon every night. She was more full of joyful anticipation than I was. She would have boarded a plane and traveled to the Great Sacred Hall with me if she could have.

I prepared to fly to Japan, and the day of the departure finally came. Rev. Nagashima also traveled to Japan to receive Gohonzon of Mogi das Cruzes branch. Mr. Hideo Kishi, head of general affairs, also traveled to Japan to receive Gohonzon for his family. Thus the short but seemingly long trip of three men, including me, began.

Traveling by plane was really hard for me. By my nature I can’t sleep in a plane. Furthermore, the sound of the monitor in front of my seat didn’t work. Eventually I had to watch a in-flight movie without any sound from San Paulo to Dallas in the U.S. At Dallas Airport, the connecting flight was delayed for three hours and the monitor for my seat didn’t work from the main menu to another. Not knowing what to do, I spent time observing the internal design of the plane and reading the instructions in case of emergency. I remember that I envied Rev. Nagashima and Mr. Kishi because they were sound asleep.

I understood that I would be exhausted after a long journey, but it was more than I expected. Because we stayed in Japan for only four days, we had to go back to Brazil before we recovered from the fatigue of our
journey. When I thought of the preciousness of the Gohonzon I had received, however, I was grateful to make my small effort, and use my physical discomfort while traveling as religious practice. When I thought things that way, my joy doubled, and I felt that I would have been happy to stay on the plane one more day and night if needed.

The day of the invocation ceremony for Gohonzon was May 13, Mother’s Day. When I walked the Haramitsu bridge to the Great Sacred Hall, my heart began to beat faster, and I was excited like the day of my wedding ceremony.

My seat in the Great Sacred Hall was right in front of the Gohonzon. I felt as if the Buddha was looking at me and saying, “Finally you came!” Looking down, I found a big lotus flower drawn on the floor; a small silver ring was in the center of the flower. This mark shows the center of the hall, and I was sitting at the center. At that moment, I remembered my Buddhist name Rinyu given to me by President Nichiko Niwano. (The letter L is pronounced R in Japanese.) The Japanese rin in Rinyu means “ring” or “circle,” and yu means “to exist” or “to be.” So Rinyu means “to be with people who talk about the Dharma in a circle of harmony.”

I hadn’t ever stood on the sacred stage of the Great Sacred Hall, so I wished to see the Gohonzon and its Buddhist fittings from a close distance. When I began to go up the stairs to the stage, my heart began to throb, so I prayed that I would not make any mistake, and would keep control of my mind. But when I became aware of what had happened, I had already descended from the sacred stage. I hadn’t seen, and I couldn’t remember who handed me the Gohonzon. I came to myself when I returned to my seat, being cerebrated by others like a Hollywood star who has won an Oscar.

I really felt that everyone was congratulating me from the bottom of their hearts, not superficially, for receiving Gohonzon that would be enshrined in my family. I remembered learning the words “Everyone has the inherent Buddha-nature, though it is invisible.” I think Gohonzon is like a mirror, and it reflects our Buddha-nature during sutra recitation.

After the ceremony, Rev. Shoko Mizutani, director of Rissho Kosei-kai International, and its deputy director, Rev. Yukimasa Hagiwara, gave us guidance. Rev. Mizutani told us about chapter 22 of the Lotus Sutra, “Entrustment.” He said, “At that time Shakya-muni Buddha rose from his Dharma seat and displayed great divine powers. Laying his right hand on the heads of the innumerable bodhisattvas, the great ones, he said: ‘For incalculable hundreds of thousands of billions of eons, I have studied and practiced this rare Dharma of supreme awakening. Now I entrust it to you. You should wholeheartedly disseminate this Dharma, making its benefits spread everywhere.’”

Looking up at the Gohonzon in the Great Sacred Hall, I felt that the Buddha, with his right hand raised, was entrusting to us with his wish: “Let us impart the Dharma to many people. Let us walk the way of the Dharma.”

The day before the ceremony, Rev. Hagiwara said to us, “If you receive Gohonzon, your life will be changed,” and told us about the car accident he had experienced just after he received it. In my case, the refrigerator and microwave oven were broken, and something went wrong with the brakes, tire, and suspension of my car. When I coped with my car problems, without thinking of them as bad luck, they turned out to not be very serious, thanks to the Buddha’s blessing. As to the home appliances, I was able to buy the newest models because my work had increased. Thanks to my encounter with the Buddha’s teaching, I was able to learn a perspective different from before, and I came to accept gratefully any phenomenon that seemed to be bad on the surface.

On the occasion of receiving and enshrining Gohonzon in my family, I would like to impart more about the Dharma to more people around me so that they will be as happy as we are. Now I pledge to the Eternal Buddha Shakya-muni, Founder Nikkyo Niwano, President Nichiko Niwano, and everyone here that I will make more diligent practice.
Deepening a Sense of Gratitude

GRATITUDE attracts happiness.” I often hear these words, and I am convinced that they are true. Shakyamuni awakened to the truth known as dependent origination. When this truth is applied to human beings, it follows that each of us is sustained by all that exists. When we awaken to this fact, gratitude naturally wells up within us. When we live with gratitude, we attain peace and happiness, because such living is in accord with the Dharma.

Repeatedly practicing the feeling of being grateful allows us to deepen our inner sense of gratitude. Complaining requires no effort, but nurturing gratitude needs active practice. The idea is to feel gratitude for the blessings of nature, our physical body, our family, and everything we encounter. Let us in all ways feel indebted for all things, express our feelings in words, and even write them down in a dairy. Through refining the power of gratitude and making a habit of feeling a sense of gratitude, let us all become happier people.

REV. SHOKO MIZUTANI
Director of Rissho Kosei-kai International

A Courageous and Flexible Mind

WHEN a high-rise building is constructed, it is not enough to simply make it solid and sturdy. It should also be built to be somewhat flexible, in order to compensate for a certain degree of shaking.

The same is true of airplane wings. If they were built to simply be firm, with no pliability at all, they would be broken much more easily. When you experience some turbulence during a flight, you see the wings of the airplane moving up and down; this can make you feel uneasy, wondering if the wings are all right. But that flexibility is important.

When it comes to the diligent practice of the Dharma, some people push themselves to the limit, but their resolve doesn’t last long. Needless to say, it is important to have a fervent belief in the teaching and practice it diligently. But an overly rigid and unbending attitude will make your practice oppressive. Like an airplane’s wings, it is important to have both firmness and flexibility at the same time.

When you diligently practice the Dharma with a courageous mind, you will learn to honor your limitations and be aware of what qualities you may lack. And you can be more humble and more flexible. It may seem that a courageous mind and a flexible mind are opposites, but this is never so.
Anniversary Day of
Shakyamuni’s Attainment of Enlightenment Ceremony

December 8 is the Anniversary Day of Shakyamuni’s Attainment of Enlightenment.
We will broadcast the ceremony at the Great Sacred Hall both in English and Japanese to the overseas branches through the Internet.
Everyone can participate in it from your location. Please join the ceremony through the Internet!

Date and Time: Saturday, December 8, 2012
From 9:00 a.m. (Japan Time)

E-mail address: yoshihiro.nakayama@kosei-kai.or.jp
HOW TO JOIN THE WEBEX

   The site named “Rissho Kosei-Kai WebEx Enterprise Site” shall be opened.

2. You can find two topics of meeting in the “Browse Meetings” in this site.
   We prepare two meetings for Japanese and English.
   Choose whichever you want to join and click “Join.”
Please provide your information; 1. Your name, 2. Email address, 3. Meeting password.
The meeting password is “enlightenment” for the ceremony.
And then, click “Join Now.” And click “Yes” if the security warning dialog box appears.

3. When the meeting starts, the dialog box of “Join Integrated VoIP” appears.
   Please click “Yes.” You can hear the sound and voice.

4. You can find a video in the window. Right top button is for “View in full screen mode.”
   If you want to watch the video in large size, please click the icon.
5. Right side of the window of this meeting, you can find the panel of “Chat.”
   If you have any troubles or questions in the meeting, please let us know through the chat.
   We will reply soon through chat.