

The Spirit Behind Our Daily Practice
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NICHIREN Daishonin's Buddhism consists of three major elements: faith, practice and study. Gongyo and daimoku fall under the category of practice. Daimoku is the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Gongyo is the recitation of a portion of the "Expedient Means" (second) and "Life Span" (sixteenth) chapters of the Lotus Sutra and offering five prayers in the morning and three prayers at night, one prayer at the end of each recitation of the sutra. The ceremony of gongyo is followed by the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

This form of gongyo was first introduced by the 26th high priest, Nichikan. It was not until President Toda's day that gongyo was introduced to the laity. Nichiren Daishonin himself recited the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters. It is unknown though how many times he did so throughout the course of a day and at what times of the day it was done. What we do know is that the Daishonin proclaimed the importance of the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters. These chapters were seen by the Daishonin to be so important because they were the essence of the sutra. He said:

"No chapter of the Lotus Sutra is negligible, but among all the twenty-eight chapters, the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters are particularly outstanding. The remaining chapters are in a sense the branches and leaves of these two chapters. Therefore, for your regular recitation, I recommend that you practice reading the prose sections of the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters." (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p.10)

The words that we silently voice during our silent prayers reflect our genuine thoughts. The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, said: "During the silent prayers, we express the thoughts in our minds to the Gohonzon. If, while silently voicing [the words of the silent prayers], our minds are occupied with other thoughts, then these thoughts become our actual prayer." (*The Collected Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 5, p. 433) Therefore when we are offering our silent prayers, it is important to keep a clear head and express our most heartfelt thoughts to the Gohonzon.

Gongyo itself means assiduous practice. It is easy to view the practice of gongyo as both easy and difficult because at first glance we may feel as though anybody could do it, however to do gongyo every day, morning and night, with an attitude of joy and appreciation is a very difficult task. And yet, for maximum effect it should be viewed as a privilege, rather than an obligation. We have the opportunity to develop a profound state of life and become happy.

At the same time, Buddhism is based on reason, based on common sense. President Ikeda has spoken often on the flexibility of gongyo based on different circumstances. In today's society schedules are increasingly more demanding, exhibited by people working longer hours at their jobs in addition to caring for

their families. To push oneself unreasonably to carry out a perfect practice of five prayers in the morning and three prayers in the evening may not always be prudent.

President Ikeda said:

There may be times when, depending on your physical condition, [instead of doing a complete gongyo] it is more valuable to just chant daimoku for a little while, or even just chant three daimoku, and then get some rest. This is something we must determine for ourselves. (*Selected Speeches—On the Basics of Buddhism*, p. 37)

Along the same lines, the Daishonin says: “If you feel so inclined, then dispense with the reading of the sutra and simply recite Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” There will be times when we are ill in bed, or when we are traveling and cannot face the Gohonzon. The Daishonin therefore shows the flexibility of the “formalities” of this practice, stating, “Faith alone is what matters.” We can say then that the Daishonin is teaching us that rather than getting caught up in the formalities of gongyo, what is essential is the spirit behind it.

It would not be reasonable to force ourselves to do evening gongyo out of guilt and wake up the next day tired, without energy. To chant daimoku even three times and wake up fresh the next day with the determination to do a great morning gongyo would, in such circumstances, make more sense.

This is not to say that we should let our lazy nature allow us to miss gongyo regularly. As this is a practice, ultimately we must strive for perfection.

What then, should be our spirit and attitude when doing gongyo? As the Daishonin states, “The voice does the Buddha’s work.” Ideally, therefore, our posture should be one of respect for such an understanding, sitting upright with our hands pressed together. Above all, when we chant to the Gohonzon, we will be most effective if we do so with a joyful and appreciative attitude.

President Ikeda explains: “The voice of gongyo and daimoku directed to the Gohonzon, whether we understand it or not, reaches all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and heavenly deities. They hear it and say, ‘Excellent, excellent!’ in response, rejoicing and praising us, and the entire universe envelops us in light.”

The reason we started this practice is to become truly happy. Only our pure-hearted and steady faith like water allows us to attain this indestructible happiness. The practice of gongyo and of chanting daimoku can be considered the starting point for attaining enlightenment in this lifetime. □

**From Daisaku Ikeda's "Lectures on the 'Expedient Means'
and 'Life Span' Chapters of the Lotus Sutra" (Vol. 1)**

The benefit from carrying out the primary practice is immense. When you also recite the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters, it has the supplementary function of increasing and accelerating the beneficial power of the primary practice. Our basic way of gongyo is to chant daimoku as its primary component and recite the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters as the supplementary. (p. 17)

When we do gongyo and chant daimoku, we conduct a ceremony in which we praise the Gohonzon and the great Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. On one level, it could be said that gongyo is a paen or a song of the highest and utmost praise for the Buddha and for Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the fundamental law of the universe. At the same time, when we do gongyo, we also praise the eternal life of the universe, and the world of Buddhahood in our own lives. (p. 21)

Gongyo is an invigorating "ceremony of time without beginning" that revitalizes us from the very depths of our being. Therefore, the important thing is to do gongyo each day filled with a feeling of rhythm of cadence—like a horse galloping through the heavens. I hope you will do the kind of satisfying gongyo that leaves you refreshed and revitalized in both body and mind. (p. 22)