

**WHAT TO DO WHEN CHANTING BECOMES A CHORE?  
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**You may think you offered gifts to the Treasure Tower of Taho Buddha, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself. You, yourself, are a true Buddha.... You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 30)**

It just happened again. I sat down to chant, ready to challenge myself and expand my life, and minutes later I was watching the clock. Why does this happen? Often I begin really focused, and later discover myself studying the incense burning, rearranging my altar or contemplating take-out dinner menus.

Ahhhh! What happened to changing my life?

Earlier in my practice, I recall telling my leaders with great excitement, “I chanted an hour today!” I would neglect to tell them that during that time I also vacuumed, did a load of laundry and read the TV guide — all while chanting. Why is it still sometimes so difficult to chant? What is this resistance that wells up from my life?

In “On the Treasure Tower,” Nichiren Daishonin explains to Abutsu-bo the proper attitude to have while chanting. He tells him to chant with the conviction that he himself is a Buddha, and that the Treasure Tower (the Gohonzon) is, in essence, his own life. Therefore, I may think I am avoiding chanting to the Gohonzon, but I am really avoiding myself.

Wanting to challenge this tendency, I did an experiment. I agreed to lead a chanting session at the New York Culture Center twice a month. Can you really chant like it’s the last moment of your life? Is that really possible? I was determined to find out.

I sat forward in my seat, took a deep breath and let it rip. Every time a resistance rose out of my life — the critical voices that seek to create doubt, the impulse to watch the clock, the self-conscious feeling of leading the chanting — I locked my gaze on the Gohonzon and chanted with increased energy.

The first thing I noticed was sweat. Lots of it. Then, after about half an hour, a sense of empowerment. Then a sense of freedom. My pressing problems seemed less troubling. My life-condition was clearly raised.

By challenging my fundamental resistance to chanting and staying focused, I discovered a clearer sense of intent and purpose in chanting.

Like the children in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, sometimes I refuse this “highly effective medicine” of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, even though I know from experience that when you take it “you will quickly be relieved of your sufferings....” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 228). The choice is clearly my own.

Will I be a victim of my environment, rejecting the medicine and prolonging my own suffering, or will I accept it, take responsibility and set my life in the direction I want it to go?

So for all you folks out there resisting focusing on the Gohonzon, watching the incense burn or contemplating take-out dinner menus while chanting (and you know who you are), I leave you with two definitions from the American Heritage College Dictionary: *resistance*, “a force tending to oppose or retard motion”; *breakthrough*, “an act of overcoming; a major achievement or success that permits further progress.”

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