

**BEGINNING THE JOURNEY OF FAITH  
IMPROVING GONGYO: A MODERATE APPROACH  
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*Gongyo* means assiduous practice, which I have always assumed meant regular or continuous. Looking it up, I found that it does mean diligent and persevering. It can also mean attentive, hard-working or painstaking.

It is by taking all of these meanings to heart that Cyndy Carallo of Bayridge District in Brooklyn South Area has been conducting monthly gongyo workshops for the past several years. She believes people suffer when they struggle with gongyo. She would rather people enjoy their practice by being able to do a good gongyo. This is what motivated her to start the workshops.

Designed for anyone who wants to improve his or her gongyo, the workshop is intended for participants who are doing gongyo on a regular basis. By supporting members to pay close attention to the details of pronunciation and rhythm, they improve their gongyo. Cyndy has a great deal of respect for any SGI member who has the courage to say: "For years I've been faking it. Now I want to learn gongyo correctly." For people who have real difficulty, Cyndy will always make time for extra sessions.

The workshop differs from "slow gongyo," which is appropriate for beginners. At the workshop, gongyo is done at a moderate pace to keep up the rhythm and interest. This moderate pace allows Cyndy to hear places where participants need help. When gongyo is over, participants are usually ready to discuss their weaknesses. For some, it's only one line, while others may constantly be mispronouncing the same word or vowel. Some people only need help with timing. The participants all listen to one another's areas of difficulty and then work on helping each other with the correct pronunciation until it sounds perfect.

Cyndy will often suggest what someone may work on at home until the following month's meeting. She says: "When members return to the next session there is always progress. The smiles on their faces when they have succeeded at improving are priceless."

Cyndy takes the workshop seriously because it works. People who voluntarily participate want to hear constructive criticism. They want to improve. Also, the workshops are a "safe" place. No one ever laughs at another person and no question is considered stupid. "We laugh a lot, but with each other," Cyndy says.

Following are some additional suggestions Cyndy has offered her fellow members based on her experience with the gongyo workshop.

*In the course of our lives as common mortals, gongyo, along with daimoku, represents a most solemn encounter with the original Buddha. It is a ceremony that brings forth our state of Buddhahood and allows us to reveal the Gohonzon in the depths of our lives. For this reason, our practice should be invigorating and filled with joy. Gongyo should leave us feeling refreshed and revitalized.*

—Daisaku Ikeda, "Selected Speeches," p. 38

**HELPFUL TIPS  
BY CYNDY CARALLO  
BAYRIDGE, BROOKLYN**

***Help each other improve.***

In the “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386). At the workshop, we all help each other improve our gongyo and our joy of practicing.

***Use the pronunciation guide.***

At the front of the gongyo book, *The Liturgy of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*, there is a guide to pronunciation. It also explains the rhythm of gongyo by showing how Chinese characters in the sutra book relate to beats while reciting gongyo. The beauty of gongyo is that no matter what your language, we all sound the same when we recite it together.

***Be determined and have a seeking spirit.***

Everyone, including SGI President Ikeda, had to learn gongyo just as you are doing so now. Mistakes and slips are ok. The main thing is having the attitude to improve and to enjoy.

***Enjoy gongyo.***

I emphasize enjoying gongyo because it is such a great cause for our happiness. In a Q and A session on gongyo, President Ikeda explains: “The Gohonzon is called the mirror of your life. In the Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin states, ‘When you bow to a mirror, the image in the mirror bows to you.’ So by carrying out a strong and vibrant gongyo, you are showing yourself and those around you ultimate respect” (Sept. 26, 1994 *World Tribune*, p. 6).

***Set aside time.***

When you first begin to practice gongyo, it is natural to want to do a full gongyo (five prayers in the morning and three in the evening) right away, but this may prove to be too time-consuming and difficult if you have a busy schedule. It will take time to learn. New members may want to give themselves a certain amount of total time for gongyo (20 or 30 minutes, for example), and then divide that time between reciting the sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. As you improve, you will be able to recite more and more of the sutra during your gongyo. The main thing is trying to be consistent on a daily basis.

***Perfect one page at a time.***

Most people learn parts A and C first and then work on part B later. (A includes pages 1 to 5; B is from page 6 to 27 (to “ge gon”); and C is from “Ji ga” on page 27 to 38.) Trying to perfect the whole book each time you recite gongyo can be a little overwhelming. If you are a beginner, perfect one page at a time, performing your recitation at a slow and steady pace.

### ***Practice on your own.***

It's important to find time to practice in addition to the monthly discussion meetings and the gongyo you do every day. At these practice sessions, you can find a quiet place and go over those words you struggle with the most. If you can't figure it out, make a note so you can ask someone later.

### ***Listen to others when doing gongyo.***

By listening to the central figure, we can all do gongyo together. There is no need to chant loudly. Chanting softly will enable you to hear others doing gongyo. When you get to a part you are having trouble with, it is ok to be silent and listen so you can learn the correct pronunciation. Then you can rejoin the group as soon as you are comfortable. I believe this can prevent bad habits from forming.

### ***Note problem spots.***

I found it useful to earmark the corner of the page (either the top or the bottom of the page depending on where I had difficulty) where I stumbled, while I was doing gongyo. This way I could keep up my rhythm and not have to stop. After gongyo, I'd go back over these passages several times until I felt comfortable.

### ***Use the sutra book.***

Doing gongyo correctly does not mean you have to memorize it. By using the sutra book at least once during each gongyo, you will refresh your awareness of correct pronunciation. If you stop using it, you may eventually start making errors.

### ***Keep a steady pace.***

Eventually you will want to do gongyo at the same pace as other members. While learning, however, it is important to do it at a steady pace that is comfortable for you so that you can pronounce the words correctly. By clearly pronouncing the words correctly and accentuating your timing at a moderate speed, you will still be sharp and clear as you pick up speed.

### ***Ask for help.***

Many people still get stuck in one or two spots. Or they may have learned to say a word incorrectly, even though that was how they were taught. There is no shame in asking someone to clear it up for you.

### ***Have a good gongyo!***