

WHAT'S THE SECRET OF LIVING? AN INTRODUCTION TO NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM

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Have you ever wondered why you were born and how you can become happy? Many of us move through life without understanding why we experience the things we do or how we might create the type of life we'd like.

If you were to look up the word *life* in any dictionary, chances are you'd find a few variations on a biological definition. Explanations like these, while technically accurate, don't truly answer the most basic questions about the meaning of our existence. If we don't understand the meaning of our life, how can we hope to lead a happy one?

Through this brief article, we hope to shine a light on how Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism understands life and how SGI members use this understanding to lead happy lives.

Nichiren Daishonin and the Buddhist View of Life

Nichiren Daishonin, a thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist teacher and reformer, founded the school of Buddhism practiced by SGI members. The Japanese people of that time faced a series of disasters — frequent earthquakes, floods, widespread starvation, disease, political unrest and enemy invasion. The Daishonin spent his youth in search of a way that would help all people lead happy lives and change the destiny of the nation.

He described life as a dynamic whirlpool of ever-changing reality. On a basic level, human beings experience life's transient nature through changes in what Buddhism refers to as life-conditions. Our individual life-conditions are the states of our inner realm in which we live from moment to moment — a combination of the environment we find ourselves in (the place, the people, the situations) and the perceptions we have of that environment (feelings, interpretations). A person's life-condition is subject to change from moment to moment, and can be affected by external and internal events. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to develop a life-condition that enables us to respond positively to even the most difficult situations.

Nichiren Daishonin taught that the strongest possible life-condition is called Buddhahood (enlightenment), and he proved that every single one of us has that potential.

What Is Buddhahood? How Does one Manifest it?

Buddhahood is not a supernatural state of being. Rather, it is a condition in which a person experiences the greatest wisdom, compassion, vitality, courage and good fortune. It is a condition in which a person finds fulfillment in daily activities and comes to understand his or her purpose in being alive. In other words, Buddhahood means fully enjoying the ever-changing nature of life. When we experience this state, the courage and compassion we gain inevitably helps us lead others to the same state of indestructible happiness. These traits make a Buddha the most human of beings.

Nichiren Daishonin studied a wide range of Buddhist teachings or sutras. Hidden in the Lotus Sutra he found the universal Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. By embracing this Law and living in accord with it, we can unlock the hidden potential in our lives and achieve perfect harmony with the environment. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essence of all life and the

universe itself.

The literal translation of the phrase *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is “devotion to the Mystic Law of cause and effect through the Buddha’s teaching.” Each syllable stands for a principle that describes the workings of life.

The character *nam*, for instance, is derived from the Sanskrit word for “devotion to” or “to derive wisdom from.” Among other things, this character reminds us that the things we devote our lives to become the source of our power.

Myoho stands for Mystic Law. Mystic does not mean magic, but the reality that life is beyond intellectual thought or verbal explanation. Simply put, *myoho* stands for the functions of the universe that are always present but invisible to the scientific eye and beyond the comprehension of our minds.

Renge literally means lotus flower. The lotus flower seeds and blooms at the same time and, for that reason, it signifies the simultaneous occurrence of cause and effect. This principle is very important in Buddhism because it makes us aware that our actions in the present instantly determine consequences in the future.

Another aspect of the lotus flower is that it blooms in muddy water. The muddier the water, the more nutrition the lotus flower receives, allowing it to grow stronger and thrive. In the same way, our problems become a source for happiness through the practice of Buddhism. We do not separate ourselves from the difficulties that life may bring — in fact we are able to use all our difficulties as a source of growth.

Kyo means sutra or teachings. It can also be interpreted to mean the rhythm of life, or sound.

Nichiren Daishonin gave this universal Law concrete form by inscribing a mandala in Chinese characters called the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon is a scroll that has *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* written down the middle. Surrounding that phrase are characters that represent all the various conditions of human life. The Gohonzon’s layout depicts the truth that enlightenment is possible when *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* illuminates all our life-conditions. Chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* to the Gohonzon is the fundamental cause that enables us to manifest our Buddhahood and attain enlightenment.

The Basics of Buddhism in Daily Life: Faith, Practice and Study

There are three intertwined components to our practice: faith, practice and study.

We may wonder how we can believe in something that we have never experienced before. In starting out, faith is nothing more than an expectation or desire to improve our lives. Naturally, in trying Buddhism for the first time, we may have doubts, but through practice, through the trial of seeing results, we will confirm the power of our own Buddha nature.

Practice involves chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra. This is what we call our morning and evening prayers. In addition, we attend discussion meetings at one another’s homes and larger gatherings at SGI-USA community centers. By interacting with fellow practitioners, we form a network of friendly support. We call upon this very powerful camaraderie to inspire us and help us win in our daily lives.

Study is crucial to the development of our faith. We study *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. This is a collection of essays and letters he addressed to his followers more than 700 years ago. By studying the teachings, we deepen our understanding of how life works and our role as human beings. His writings are a prime source of insight into how we can challenge inner conflicts and emerge as vibrant, powerful people who can contribute to society. We also study the speeches of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda to provide a perspective on the application

of the Daishonin's teachings in the modern world.

Human Revolution — Restoring Our Humanity and Changing the World

No one is a stranger to problems. Even the healthiest, wealthiest people face hardships. Living well does not mean avoiding problems, but challenging and overcoming them. Imagine being able to take your negative circumstances and not only transcend them, but ultimately utilize them as a source for growth and triumph. This is the way of Buddhism. As each one of us reforms the conflicts from within, we experience a “human revolution”—a transformation of our inner life. The most wonderful aspect of human revolution is that a significant change in just a single person has the profound power to influence the entire world.