

**YOUTH STUDY SEPTEMBER 2001
THE SHORTCUT TO HAPPINESS
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Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386)

Perhaps for you the word study conjures up images of late-night cramming before a test or endless hours of reading boring material about a subject you don’t care about. Coupled with all the other things to be done in a day, the idea of studying Buddhism might seem as appetizing as a bowl of Brussels sprouts. But just like those Brussels sprouts, study is good for you.

The definition of study, is to acquire knowledge and to understand. This means that study has two parts: taking knowledge in and knowing when to apply it. In the context of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, these two components are necessary if we want to positively change any situation.

Studying Buddhism changes our perspective, which can lead to practicing correctly, which leads to more benefits.

SGI President Ikeda is constantly encouraging us to study. In an essay, he wrote: “Leaders who are genuinely committed to realizing kosen-rufu will read the Goshō everyday, even if only a line or a paragraph, and make it a living part of themselves. I also hope that the youth division members, in particular, will study the Goshō thoroughly, as they strive to achieve their goals. I have found that those who don’t tend to be shallow and frivolous” (May 5, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

When we’re struggling with problems, we know that we should chant as much as we can and participate in SGI activities. But how many of us think: “This problem is driving me crazy. I think I’ll study and find out why”?

Let’s suppose we are in the midst of challenging any one of the many human difficulties that inevitably arise in our lives—perhaps a serious illness that doesn’t seem to be getting any better. We’re chanting Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō, but we need encouragement. We can pull out *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, flip to page 412 and there we will find this gem: “Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?”

Or let’s say we are having a hard time relating to someone in our lives such as a friend or boss. Even though we are practicing, things just don’t seem to be improving. We can take heart from the fact that, as long as we’re practicing, our circumstances are always moving in a positive direction. We simply have to continue chanting until we see a resolution to our problem. We should not give up, because as the Daishonin says in “Letter to Niike”: “Be diligent in developing your faith until the last moment of your life. Otherwise you will have regrets. For example, the journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?” (WND, 1027).

We could give examples ad infinitum of passages that get right to the point in encouraging us. The Daishonin's writings contain treasures—everything we need to practice correctly and move forward. The point is that, without study, we'll never find those treasures.

When first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was taken to the Tokyo Detention House—where he eventually died—he asked his family to bring him a copy of Nichiren Daishonin's writings. He requested one that he hadn't already written in so that he could get a fresh perspective on the Daishonin's writings. This clearly shows Makiguchi's commitment to study, despite his harsh circumstances.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda always lamented that the majority of his fellow members abandoned their faith when Japan's militarist government of World War II put pressure on them to show allegiance to the emperor. He attributed this to their lack of understanding of the Daishonin's teachings. He remarked: "Without study, the members didn't really understand faith. They became frightened and were defeated by persecution. It was very unfortunate" (Nov. 5, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 2). Had the members possessed a firm foundation of faith based on study, they would have understood that their persecution was undeniable proof of the correctness of the Daishonin's teachings.

One of the wonderful aspects of Buddhist practice is that we do it for ourselves, and we do it for other people. We might chant with a suffering member and send passages of guidance to them. Ultimately, we can help them by offering encouragement based on faith. But how can we do that if our own understanding of Buddhism is weak? Of course we would advise that person to chant, but that's not enough. Through the wisdom we tap into through study, we have the ability to set him on the right path.

We have to be able to give support based on a correct Buddhist perspective. And because of our efforts to help someone else become happy, it naturally follows that we become happy ourselves. We can see how study creates a wonderful cycle of joy in our lives.

Even if we don't understand everything we read when we're studying, we can still implant something in the depths of our lives. President Ikeda implores us to receive the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with our entire beings. He encourages us to study with the spirit: "Yes, that's exactly right. This is the shortcut to happiness" (*Faith Into Action*, p. 167).