

Elementary School Division 2008 Awesome Buddhist Learning Review!

What is Buddhahood?

Karyn Harvey, Fallston, Md.

Sometimes we may wonder why people chant. Why do they go to SGI meetings? Why bother with all of this? At the meetings, we may hear about good things that happen to people, but we may also wonder if those things wouldn't have happened anyway. Or we may know about bad things happening to people or hard times that they are going through and we may think, Why is this happening if they chant? In other words, what is the point here?

Nichiren Daishonin explained to his disciples that they can become extremely happy people through their Buddhist practice. Not the kind of happy like when you win the lottery, but the kind of happy when you are filled with strength, a sense of being free, a total understanding of things and an unshakable happiness that just won't go away, no matter what goes on. This is Buddhahood. And we can have this kind of happiness if we continue to chant throughout our lives.

In the letter "Winter Never Fails to Turn to Spring" Nichiren wrote: "Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring. Never, from ancient times on, has anyone heard or seen of winter turning back to autumn. Nor have we ever heard of a believer in the Lotus Sutra who turned into an ordinary person. The sutra reads 'If there are those who hear the law, then not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood'" (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 536).

Remember, to attain Buddhahood means to have that joyful, free, strong state of happiness inside, no matter what goes on on the outside. For us, "winter" might be family problems, problems at school, bad feelings we have about life, others or even ourselves. If we try our best to chant and participate in SGI activities we will definitely overcome all these problems. The most important thing is that we never give up our Buddhist practice, no matter how hard things may be.

President Ikeda explained in For Today and Tomorrow: "Once we have attained Buddhahood, we will be Buddhas in lifetime after lifetime. We will enjoy a state of absolute freedom throughout eternity. The Daishonin's golden words say so. This is

the reason we practice faith” (p. 313).

So, even if we have ups and downs or see others having ups and downs, it is important to continue our Buddhist practice so that we can experience this great state of absolute freedom and happiness on and on and on: forever!

It's coming as long as we don't give up.

Karma and You

By Karyn Harvey, Michael Petkov
and Chrys Ruybal

Did you ever wonder why you have the parents you have? Or why your friends have parents who are really different from yours. Maybe you have problems that others don't have. Maybe you struggle with schoolwork and someone else you know is great at school, but can't make friends as easily as you can. Why are people so different, and how do we change the situations we're in? We have all wondered about these questions from time to time. In Nichiren Buddhism we can answer them. The answer is karma.

Have you ever heard the word karma? One way to explain karma is to say it's cause and effect. We have said, thought or done things (or made causes) and because of that, other things happen (or we can say we got the effects). The word karma means action. So, it's a result of all of our actions or causes we've made in the past and present. Buddhism teaches that we are who we are right now because of the causes we made in past lives and in this life.

Karma is also about how we create our future. We do that by making those causes now to get the effects we want to see in the future.

In a letter to one of his followers, Nichiren Daishonin shared this: “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 279).

This means that how we are right now is the result of what we did before, and how our life will be in the future depends on what we do right now.

OK. So, maybe you have something you really don't like about your life. Think of something... Got it? Now, where did that come from? What cause did you make in the past that made your life that way? It's really hard to know for sure. Even if we did know, that wouldn't change the problem. So, maybe that's not the best question to ask. A better question to ask might be, "What cause can I make to change this?" What's the highest cause you can make? That's right. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Through chanting, you bring out wisdom from your life. Then you can know what action you have to take to change that situation for the future. The future might be a minute from now, a long time or sometime in between. Either way, the way to get there is to keep chanting.

Another thing about Nichiren Buddhism that is really great is that no matter what you did in the past you get to start fresh from this moment. Because chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the highest cause you can make, the effect of all that stuff you did that might not be so great now can change. Maybe sometimes you feel stuck. You don't have to. You can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and change anything.

WORD SCRAMBLE

By Chrys Ruybal

Unscramble the words below. Then rearrange the letters in the circles to see what we get when we change our karma.

MAARK

SAUCE

CFEETF

RICHNIEN

CREACTIP

SHIMBUDD

THINGCAN

GEANCH

PHAPY

ISTOPIVE

Letter to the Brothers

By Chrys Ruybal

SGI-USA ESD Leader

Last month, we studied this line from “Letter to the Brothers”: “The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life revealed in the fifth volume of Great Concentration and Insight is especially profound.” The next two lines of this letter say: “If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. If they did not, there would be no way of knowing that this is the correct teaching” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 501).

To propagate means to spread. So, what does “devils will arise” mean? Wait a minute. Is Nichiren Daishonin saying that if we tell people about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, then scary creatures are going to come after us? No, of course not.

One of the very important things that Nichiren did was to make the practice of Buddhism available to all people. When Nichiren wrote letters to his followers in his time, he used words and examples that they could understand. So, when he wrote about devils, he was writing about obstacles.

He is saying that if we practice Buddhism correctly, we will have obstacles, or things that seem to get in the way of what we want to do or where we want to go. These obstacles are proof that we are practicing correctly. This is the main point of this letter. Nichiren teaches us this point again and again in his writings.

It can seem that we have to deal a lot with obstacles. In our lives, we are always facing challenges and overcoming them. Everyone has obstacles. They are a part of life. SGI President Ikeda talks a lot about obstacles. He once compared them to a wall we might encounter on a journey. He wrote: “When you encounter a wall, you should tell yourself, ‘Since there is a wall here, a wide, open expanse must lie on the other side.’ Rather than becoming discouraged, know that encountering a wall is proof of the progress that you have made so far” (For Today and Tomorrow, p. 308). As our lives grow, we naturally hit limits. Sometimes these limits have to do with our

abilities or our situations. Many times, our limits have to do with the negative things we think and feel about ourselves. When we push against these limits, we can feel uncomfortable, but if we're going to get to that wide, open place, we've got to push. Think of a balloon. As you blow air into it, it gets bigger and bigger. If you keep blowing air into it, it will grow so big that it pops. Sometimes people think their lives are the balloon, and they are afraid they will pop. But really our lives are like the air. The balloon is the limit or obstacle. When we break through the limit, our lives are as big as the whole universe.

The worst thing about an obstacle is that it can cause us to forget that we are Buddhas. It can even make us wonder if chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is really worth it. On the other hand, the good thing about an obstacle is that it can make us try harder, chant more, ask questions and study to better understand how Nichiren Buddhism works in our lives. Whether the obstacle is a good thing or a bad thing isn't up to the obstacle, it is up to us. Some people think that winning over an obstacle happens when we change the problem or get the benefit. Actually, winning over the obstacle happens when we decide to use our Buddhist practice instead of giving up. That's why Nichiren wrote that when faced with obstacles, "The wise will rejoice [be happy] while the foolish will retreat [run away]" (WND-1, 637).

So, the next time you feel like you have a lot of problems, and life doesn't seem to be going your way, remember that you are probably feeling the limits of that balloon. Take a deep breath, chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo a little harder and pop through.

Many in Body

By Chrys Ruybal

SGI-USA ESD Leader

Last month, we learned about unity in Nichiren Daishonin's letter "Many in Body, One in Mind." We focused on the one in mind part, which is SGI members' goal to become happy, help other people to become happy and create world peace. This month, let's look at the many in body part.

Many in body means lots of different kinds of people. It is easy for people who are all

the same to agree on the same idea. But when a lot of people who are different from each other and who have their own ideas about things can agree—that is awesome. Even though SGI members may be very different from each other, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to become happy and create world peace is a great idea that we can agree on.

Because we are all different, each person of the many in body will have something unique [only one of a kind] to contribute to the one in mind goal. Think about the Fantastic Four. They each have a different superpower. When there's a problem, they combine their different powers to work together to fight the bad guys. If they all had the same power, say invisibility, then who would move the heavy stuff? If all four had the same superpower, they might not be so fantastic.

Nichiren Daishonin's determination was that all people become happy. The practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reciting the sutra is something that can be done by anyone because Nichiren Buddhism is for everyone.

Our SGI organization is a many in body gathering of lots of different people. We have different amounts of money and education and different lifestyles. We don't eat the same food, wear the same clothes or have the same hairstyle. We have different ideas and different skills. But we can all agree that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo makes our lives better. We can all agree that sharing our Buddhist practice with others is a good cause to help them to become happy. And, we can agree that world peace is an important one in mind goal to work toward.

How to Make a Peanut-Butter-and-Jelly Sandwich

By Chrys Ruybal

SGI-USA ESD Leader

If you want to make a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, you need three things: bread, peanut butter and jelly. But some people don't like jelly with their peanut butter, so they skip that part. Other people may not care for peanut butter, so they skip that and just have bread and jelly. I know people who just eat peanut butter out of the jar with a spoon, skipping the bread and the jelly. (I'll bet there are even people who only like

the jelly).

Those different ways are OK, and they all include part of the ingredients. But, strictly speaking, if you want to make a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, you need to use bread, peanut butter and jelly.

Nichiren Daishonin explains that there are also some necessary ingredients in Buddhist practice. He writes: “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” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol.1, p. 386). Practice includes practice for ourselves (chant-ing Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reciting the sutra) and practice for others (sharing Buddhism with others). Nichiren also says study is important. Some people may have difficulty with one or more of these. Some people may skip the parts that are hard and just do the parts that are easier. Each part—chanting, sharing with others and study—is a good cause by itself. But to practice as Nichiren Daishonin taught, we need to do all three things.

Studying things helps us learn how they work so we can make the best use of them. If we practice and study as Nichiren taught, we learn how to use our practice to become happy. SGI President Ikeda wrote, “Disregarding the ways of practice and study is like flying an airplane with no idea of your course, altitude or destination, and no means of refueling” (Sept. 8, 2006, World Tribune, p. 7). That’s not a trip you probably want to take.

It can be hard to study on your own. You may have a lot of questions. Our SGI-USA organization helps us do the parts of our practice that are difficult to do by ourselves. At meetings, we can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and learn how to recite the sutra with other members. Then we might share our experience of practicing Nichiren Buddhism or hear someone else share theirs. This can help us get the courage to talk with our own friends about this practice. And usually, at each meeting, there will be some type of study presentation that will be interesting enough so that we will want to learn more by studying ourselves.

To further help us make a habit of studying Nichiren Buddhism, we have a Buddhist Learning Review each year. The Review can be a chance to have fun with our Buddhist friends while we learn. The material for the Review for ESD members will

soon be posted on the sgi-usa.org Web site. Perhaps you can study that with your family or at your meetings. Even if you haven't read all of the material, you can still learn from other members by taking part in the Review.

President Ikeda encourages us to "Read Nichiren Daishonin's writings, even if only one sentence" (Sept. 8, 2006, World Tribune, p. 7). Each part of practicing Nichiren Buddhism is a step that we can make a habit of doing daily. This month, let's make study a habit.

The Ten Worlds

By Michael Petkov

You're asleep having a wonderful dream. You've just won the famous Nobel Prize for science. Everyone is clapping for you and telling you how brilliant you are. You've never felt happier. Suddenly you hear this loud buzzing and you realize it's your alarm clock and you have to get up for school. You jump up because you want to tell your friends about your prize. You're so excited. Then, you realize it was just a dream and you're disappointed. You get out of bed and suddenly remember that you were supposed to study last night for a big science test. "Oh no!" you scream, and you run downstairs. You've never felt worse. You run to your backpack and get your science book and start reading, trying to learn what you need to know. After 10 minutes of this, you decide it's impossible and throw the book across the room in anger. Panicked, you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Then you realize you never should have waited until the last minute. At least I've learned something from this experience, you think. You look out the window and see that it snowed last night. You turn on the radio and hear that your school is closed because of the snow. You sigh a deep, happy sigh. You start to go back upstairs to sleep. You think again and sit down to study, but first... a snowball fight!

In the first half-hour of your day, you have been through so many different conditions. Buddhism talks about 10 different conditions that exist in people's lives. These are called the Ten Worlds. These worlds are not places far away. They are conditions within our own lives. Understanding the world we might be in at any moment can help us understand why we behave the way we do and show other ways we could

behave that might be better. Also, each world contains within it all the other worlds, too. So, for example, in the story above, when you threw the book, you were in the world of anger; you chanted because you were angry and you brought out the world of realization. Then you understood that the problem happened because you waited until the last minute. Through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo we can bring out our higher worlds, even when we're in one of the lower worlds. We practice Nichiren Buddhism in order to bring out our highest world: Buddhahood. Then, we have the power to change any situation into something valuable and help others do the same.

Name That World

By Chrys Ruybal

Choose one of the 10 worlds from the definitions on the right and fill in the blanks. You may use each word more than once. HINT: There may be more than one answer.

You chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and feel great.

You go into a candy store and your mom says, "Pick out anything you want."

Your friend's sad face makes you understand that your words hurt his feelings.

You help your friend find a missing toy.

Your teacher gives you 100 percent on your test.

You see a toy in the store and it is all you can think about.

You are reading. _____

You are arguing with your friend.
She thinks she is right. You know
you are right.

You see a puzzle and figure out how
to solve it.

You set the table before you are asked to.

You are afraid of a bully at school. _____

Definitions

Hell: We feel awful, and it seems that we will never be happy again.

Hunger: We always want something. We are never satisfied with what we get or have.

Animality: We bully people who are weaker than us. We are afraid of people who are stronger than us.

Anger: We think that we are better than everyone else.

Humanity (also called Tranquility): We aren't happy or sad, just OK, which can change if anything around us changes.

Heaven (or Rapture): We are really happy about fulfilling a wish.

Learning: We learn from what others have said or written.

Realization: We learn by thinking about things and figuring out stuff for ourselves.

Bodhisattva: Our happiness comes from helping other people.

Buddhahood: Wisdom, joy, compassion and strong life force. We realize our purpose in life is to be happy and help other people become happy, too.

Ceremony

By Chrys Ruybal

SGI-USA ESD Leader

At this time of year, there are a lot of graduation ceremonies taking place. Many schools, especially high schools and colleges, have ceremonies to celebrate students who are moving on to the next level. Maybe some of you participated in a ceremony to graduate from ESD into the junior high and high school division. If so, congratulations!

The dictionary says that a ceremony is an event to celebrate something special. Celebrate means to show happiness that something good or special has happened. So, at a ceremony, we show our happiness that something special has happened.

A long time ago there was a very special ceremony. Shakyamuni Buddha was teaching the Lotus Sutra. It was such a special teaching that Buddhas, bodhisattvas and other beings gathered from all over the universe. A special object, a treasure tower, appeared. It was golden and covered with jewels. The tower and all of the beings that had gathered at this ceremony rose up into the air. Can you guess what that ceremony was called? It was called the Ceremony in the Air.

What if you were at your community center and you and all of the people gathered at the center rose up into the air? Would that get your attention? Would you want to make sure you paid attention to whoever was speaking? Well, that is what happened at that ceremony. Through this ceremony, Shakyamuni was teaching about how great our lives are. He used the treasure tower to let us know that our lives are that awesome; they are as big and special as that treasure tower.

Nichiren Daishonin said that this ceremony happened in Shakyamuni's heart. In fact,

he said that this ceremony can happen in our own hearts, too. He wrote about this in a letter to one of his disciples, Abutsu-bo: “Those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are themselves the treasure tower” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 299).

We were all there. We all made a vow or promise at that time. We promised to come back at this time and have problems that we would challenge with our Buddhist practice. We also promised to help each other be happy by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Do you remember making that promise? Can you keep that promise, even if you don't remember making it?

Have you ever had a problem? Did you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to change the problem into a benefit? Great! You kept your promise.

Have you ever taught someone to chant? Or have you ever had a friend who had a problem? Did you tell that person to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo so that they could overcome the problem? If you did, you kept your promise.

There is another ceremony we can be part of each day. Do you know what that ceremony is? I'll give you a hint. We usually do it together at our meetings. Each time we sit in front of the Gohonzon and recite the sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we are participating in the Ceremony in the Air again. We say some of what Shakyamuni taught at that ceremony. We have a chance to remember our promises and see how well we are keeping them. And we can do this every day.

For the next few months, we will study a letter that Nichiren wrote. It is called “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life.” As we study this letter, we will learn more about the Ceremony in the Air, the treasure tower and our promises, or vows. We will even learn what the title of the letter means.

Learning From a Good Teacher

By Chrys Ruybal and Michael Petkov

SGI-USA ESD Leaders

When Nichiren was teaching people about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, there were some

people who wanted him to stop talking about it. People in charge of the country did things to try to make him stop—but he never did. One effort they made was to send Nichiren away to Sado Island, a far away place where people were often sent as punishment. The people who sent him there thought that he would die there. Instead, Nichiren spent his time writing letters to teach others about Buddhism and how life works. He also shared Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with many people living there.

One of those people was Sairen-bo. Sairen-bo had been a priest of a different form of Buddhism. He had studied many of the same things that Nichiren had studied, and he asked Nichiren many questions. When Sairen-bo asked his questions, Nichiren would write letters to answer them and explain more about how life works and how we can become happy by practicing Nichiren Buddhism. Asking questions is really important.

Anyway, one letter he wrote is called “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol 1, pp. 216–19). Sairen-bo asked what was the most important thing that Nichiren Daishonin was teaching and how people could understand it and make it their own.

To make it clearer, say you wanted to learn how to ride a bike. You could have someone tell you about how a bike works, how it’s made and who invented it. That’s all interesting information. But, what’s the most important thing you need to know in order to actually ride one, and how do you get that from the person who already knows how? There are certain things you need to do, or conditions that need to happen, in order for you to learn how to ride a bike.

Sairen-bo wanted to learn what conditions allow people to live as Buddhas and become happy based on Nichiren’s teachings.

Nichiren first praised Sairen-bo for asking such an important question. Nichiren knew how important good questions are. In his reply to Sairen-bo, Nichiren showed him how Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the basic Law of life and that through chanting, he could make the Law of life his own. He also wrote about having a true view of life and death and how important it is to learn from someone who has a correct understanding of the true teaching.

Nichiren also wrote about how our mission is to help others become happy and that we need to create unity with all people who are striving to become happy. These are very important ideas. Understanding them can change the way we live our lives so that we can use our Buddhist practice to become absolutely happy.

In the next few issues, we will be talking more about these ideas from “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life.”

Getting the Bigger Picture

By Michael Petkov
SGI-USA ESD Leader

How you see things is everything. Try this: Close your eyes. Now, what did you see? Nothing, right? Or maybe you saw black or those bright-colored blobby things that float across your eyeball. Either way, it's not much to look at. When you open your eyes, you can see a lot more. If you're outside, you can see the buildings around you, or your street. But what if you go up in an airplane? That really changes what you see. From up high, you can see how all the streets meet one another to make a town or city and how your town meets with the land around it. The higher you go, the bigger the picture you can see. Being up high lets you understand better how all those things (buildings, streets and towns) work together to make the world.

In the July 4 issue of Friends for Peace, Chrys Ruybal wrote about the Ceremony in the Air. That's the story from the Lotus Sutra when millions of bodhisattvas come together, and out of the ground comes this giant tower covered in jewels, as tall as half the Earth. Then the whole group and the treasure tower rise up into the air, and Shakyamuni teaches the Lotus Sutra, and then they all come down to the ground again. Shakyamuni was teaching how to understand our lives, that everyone is equal and that we all have a highest condition called Buddha nature. Up in the air, everyone gets a new way of looking at their lives. The bigger picture they get is that they are Buddhas. Then they come down to the ground, take all they learned and go use it in the world.

SGI President Ikeda wrote about how, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, “Ordinary

people, just as they are, can reveal their true and most supremely noble selves and in turn illuminate society with their radiance” (The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, vol.1, p. 98). Illuminate means to bring light.

We try so hard to win in our lives, and it can be really difficult. Every time we recite the sutra or chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, it’s like we’re at the Ceremony in the Air. We can go soaring up high and get a new way of looking at things, plus fresh energy and courage. Like being up in the airplane, we can see better who we are, how our problems work and what kind of action we need to take to win. Then we get to go out into the world and do things differently.

In this way we change ourselves, and we change the world.