What is the purpose of religion? To enable human beings to become happy. That is the goal of Buddhism as practiced in the SGI: to enable every single person to become happy without exception.

Nam-myoho-RENGE-KYO

The essence of Buddhism is the conviction that we each have within us the ability to overcome any problem or difficulty that we may encounter in life. This inherent potential is what we refer to as the Buddha nature, a state of life characterized by limitless courage, wisdom and compassion.

The founder of Buddhism, Shakya-muni, or Siddhartha as he is sometimes known, expressed this law of life in 'The Lotus Sutra' where he revealed that all people, without exception, possess this Buddha nature and are inherently worthy of respect.

In the 13th century, a Japanese Buddhist reformer named Nichiren Daishonin identified that the practice of chanting the Lotus Sutra’s title, “Myoho-renge-kyo,” together with the Sanskrit word “Nam,” which means “to devote oneself,” is itself the way to bring forth from within our Buddha nature.

As Nichiren describes: “The two characters that comprise the name Japan contain within them the people and animals and wealth in the sixty-six provinces of the country, without a single omission . . . When for the sake of brevity one mentions only the daimoku (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo) or title, the entire sutra is by implication included therein” (‘On the Four Stages of Faith,’ The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 788).

Simply put, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the name of this potential or Buddha nature within our life. To chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, then, is to call forth your Buddha nature. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda once wrote, “Daimoku (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo) is a universal language that is instantly understood by Buddhas” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 6, p. 296).

By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we awaken to the reality that within our life is unlimited reserves of courage, wisdom and compassion—that we are in fact Buddhas. Based on this conviction, we can transform any suffering, lead those around us to happiness, and create peace in our communities and the world. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is a declaration of the inherent dignity and power within the lives of all people.
The Gohonzon

Accepting and understanding this principle that all people possess Buddhahood can be easy; however, actually believing in and actualizing this potential each day can be very difficult.

For this reason, SGI members chant Nam-myoho-ренге-кё to the Gohonzon, which is the scroll that you see in the altar before you. Gohonzon can literally be translated as “Fundamental Object of Devotion.” However, on a deeper level, this object of devotion is revolutionary in that it is meant to serve as a mirror for our own lives.

Down the middle of the Gohonzon, in the larger, bold script are the characters for Nam-myoho-ренге-кё, and just below this appear the characters for “Nichiren.” Nichiren put his own name below Nam-myoho-ренге-кё to proclaim that ordinary people and this great law of Buddhahood are one and the same. To the left and right of Nam-myoho-ренге-кё are all the various states of life that a human being can have, both positive and negative. Nichiren declares, “Illuminated by the light of the five characters of the Mystic Law (Nam-myoho-ренге-кё), they display the dignified attributes that they inherently possess” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 832). In this way the Gohonzon reveals to us that we possess the great life condition of Buddhahood just as we are.

The Gohonzon therefore serves as a blueprint for our lives—it shows us clearly that we possess limitless courage, wisdom and compassion in our present form. As we practice it, we develop faith in ourselves, and in our ability to surmount any obstacles or suffering.

Those interested in Buddhism typically receive their own Gohonzon when they decide they want to start their own practice of Buddhism with the SGI.

The Soka Gakkai International

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a grass-roots Buddhist organization with 12 million practitioners in 192 countries and territories. Based on the Buddhist belief that all people equally possess Buddhahood, we have no priests or clergy. Rather we practice Buddhism as equals, encouraging one another to overcome life’s difficulties based on Buddhist principles while striving for our dreams and the peace of our communities.

A central activity for us SGI members is monthly discussion meetings in our local neighborhoods where we chant, study together and encourage one another.

The President of the SGI, Daisaku Ikeda, serves as a great example of actualizing the limitless potential that exists within each person’s life. He has dedicated his life to spreading a message of peace based on the dignity of human life, through countless meetings with ordinary people as well as world figures such as Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Mikhail Gorbachev. He has also received honorary doctorates from over 300 universities around the world.

His philosophy of peace can be summed up as: “When we change, the world changes. The key to all change is in our inner transformation—a change of our hearts and minds. This is human revolution.”