GREAT WAYS TO PREPARE BEFORE EVERY DISCUSSION MEETING

SGI President Ikeda, from *The New Human Revolution*

1. **Call to confirm members and guests.**

   “In preparing for a meeting, leaders should share responsibility for communicating to the members and encouraging them to come to the activity, doing their utmost to ensure 100 percent participation.” (vol. 13, p. 148)

2. **Pray sincerely for the meeting’s success and to convey unshakable conviction in faith to the members.**

   “It is essential that leaders in charge of a discussion meeting pray sincerely to the Gohonzon for its success, and that they attend the meeting filled with unshakable resolve and confidence. No matter how interesting their speeches or presentations may be, if their words lack conviction in faith, they will fail to touch the participants’ hearts.” (vol. 13, p. 149)

3. **Visit and encourage members before the meeting, especially those who cannot regularly attend activities.**

   “Promoting activities together with those who regularly attend meetings is simple, but this in itself will not enable Nichiren Buddhism to spread . . .

   “The network of life-to-life bonds that is the Soka Gakkai was built through the efforts of individuals to visit and personally encourage their fellow members. Just as a broad interwoven nexus of roots that sink deep into the earth supports a mighty tree, it is the consistent and painstaking actions of members to offer personal guidance at the grassroots level that hold up the Soka Gakkai.” (vol. 8, p. 91)

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THE CORE ELEMENTS OF A DISCUSSION MEETING

A 1-hour meeting format provides enough time for dialogue that includes:

- Addressing further questions and encouraging guests on an individual level.
- Catching up with members who haven’t come out in a while, and making plans to visit or meet again.

EXPERIENCE

The main purpose of an experience is to illuminate the process of human revolution that we undergo when we challenge our obstacles and dreams based on faith, practice and study.

An SGI leader should meet beforehand with the person who will be sharing their experience to review content and chant with them to instill in the members and guests conviction in faith.

STUDY PRESENTATION

The purpose of a study presentation is to ground the participants in the principles of SGI Nichiren Buddhism.

Each month, Living Buddhism provides various study articles for use at discussion meetings, including SGI President Ikeda’s monthly message, “Good to Know” and “Fundamentals.”
HOW TO SHARE A GREAT FAITH EXPERIENCE

Someone once asked SGI President Ikeda if there was a special secret to holding lively, hope-filled discussion meetings. He answered that while there was no special secret, a meeting’s success lies in sharing experiences in faith: “People who share their experiences brim with joy and energy. That feeling communicates to everyone else, and the joy spreads until the entire meeting becomes positive and vibrant” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 18, p. 256).

1. Before a meeting, an experience should be warmly but thoroughly reviewed for both timing (5–7 minutes) and content (encouraging and to the point) by one of the leaders responsible for the meeting.

2. The key to an effective experience is sharing the human revolution that you underwent that led to the benefit being received, as much as the benefit itself.

3. As much as possible, avoid referring to specific lengths of time chanted (so as not to give the impression to guests and new members that physical austerities such as many-hour chanting sessions are a requirement of the practice).

4. Also, refrain from stating specific dollar amounts in an experience to avoid misunderstandings (e.g., “I chanted for this amount of money”) or sharing the names of specific companies, organizations or products. The focus should be on the faith breakthrough itself.

5. Conclude with a personal determination toward the future.

6. It’s a great idea to practice reading it beforehand with a senior in faith. Pace yourself; don’t talk too fast or too slowly! Please stick to your script, since ad-libbing may cause you to skip crucial points or go overtime.

7. Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the determination that your experience will instill hope in others and inspire them to persevere in faith.

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Every week, districts throughout the country host chanting sessions for the unity of the district and to call forth many more Bodhisattvas of the Earth. When the members chant, they do so envisioning each Nam-myoho-reng-kyo penetrating the entire community, spreading ripples of harmony throughout their city.

In the Lotus Sutra, countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions assemble around Shakya-muni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha at the Ceremony in the Air. Their ultimate aim: “To provide a way for all of us living beings to attain Buddhahood” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 386).

In the same way, SGI President Ikeda has referred to SGI members as the harmonious community of believers, the network of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who have inherited Nichiren Daishonin’s vow to propagate the Mystic Law and lead all people to enlightenment. As such, our discussion meetings, humble as they may at times seem, take on profound significance as present-day manifestations of the Ceremony in the Air (see The World of Nichiren Daishonin’s Writings, vol. 4, p. 157).

President Ikeda elaborates: “These meeting places—where members seek Buddhism, share stories of gaining benefit and rededicate themselves in faith—are contemporary equivalents of Eagle Peak and the Ceremony in the Air depicted in the Lotus Sutra. These meeting places can be likened to the treasure lands referred to in the sutra, where people go to revitalize their lives (The New Human Revolution, vol. 21, p. 203).

The district is the place where comrades in faith rally together and reconfirm their mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth to advance kosen-rufu. When we come together in friendship, study Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and President Ikeda’s encouragement, brimming with joy and seeking spirit, our meetings become “the assembly on Holy Eagle Peak which continues in solemn state and has not yet disbanded” (The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, p. 135).

This rhythm of gathering and parting—of coming together in the district and affirming our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and returning to our lives and society to demonstrate the principles of Soka humanism—serves as the dynamic engine propelling the American kosen-rufu movement forward.

With great pride and a renewed sense of mission, let’s hold discussion meetings that illustrate their great significance.
My youthful struggle of human revolution began from a discussion meeting—the meeting where I first met my mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda, and learned from him the correct way of life.

Since then, wherever I have gone and whatever the times, discussion meetings have been the starting point for embarking on new challenges in the kosen-rufu movement together with my fellow members.

I am delighted to see the inspiring chain reaction of human revolution that continues to arise and spread today from discussion meetings around the world.

In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni declares his hope “to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us” (The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p. 70). In other words, he wishes to elevate all people to the same life state of Buddhahood that he has attained.

Discussion meetings are unsurpassed gatherings where this great wish of the Buddha comes to life. At discussion meetings, everyone plays a starring role. Discussion meetings brim with prayers and encouragement, equal to those of the Buddha, so that each and every participant can move forward happily, in high spirits and with bright smiles.

Nichiren Daishonin writes:

What could any of you have to lament? Even if you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should all perform a dance. Even if you are not Shariputra, you should leap up and dance. When Bodhisattva Superior Practices emerged from the earth, did he not emerge dancing? (“Great Evil and Great Good,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 1119)

In our Soka Gakkai discussion meetings, which embody the same spirit as Nichiren, we find an irrepressible optimism that cannot fail to dispel even grief and sorrow caused by great disasters or tragedies. Discussion meetings provide a venue where everyone can come together to return to their original vow from time without beginning and set off joyfully once again to fulfill their mission. This is proof that the Soka Gakkai is actually carrying on the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

Mr. Toda encouraged us, saying: “Bodhisattvas suffering from poverty and illness are all still Bodhisattvas of the Earth. When you strive together with your fellow members, all problems will turn into benefit. You’ll attain a state of life that allows you to declare: I have won!”

In today’s world, where developing real human relationships seems to be growing more difficult, our discussion meetings are beautiful, almost miraculous, gatherings of joy and harmony. Each meeting is a truly precious part of our Buddhist practice.

Let us chant and bring forth the “wisdom of the truth that functions in accordance with changing circumstances” (The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, p. 189) to make our local discussion meetings the most enjoyable in all the world. Confidently calling on new Bodhisattvas of the Earth to emerge and join us, let us continue to send the light of human revolution to those around us!

Soka discussion meetings are the path to peace, opening the way to unite even the entire world in solidarity.

SGI President Ikeda’s monthly message from the October 2018 Living Buddhism, pp. 4–5.
“Advance preparation is very important. Whether you are heading out for a discussion meeting or to introduce Buddhism to others, or whether you are going to work, it is the person who prepares in advance who succeeds . . .

“The person who prepares in advance has the advantage. To succeed, we must make preparations with all our might and in the way that best suits each of us. No one can match a person who is prepared and who is determined to win.”

—SGI President Ikeda, from the April 8, 2016, World Tribune, p. 3

The planning meeting is key in preparing for the discussion meeting. It provides an opportunity for the members to come together and discuss how to create a vibrant, hope-filled meeting rooted in faith. What type of meeting should we aim to have? SGI President Ikeda writes, “Make each discussion meeting so satisfying that people regret when it comes to an end and wish it could go on a bit longer” (July 14, 2006, World Tribune, p. 2).
Some points to consider:

- The planning meeting may be open to all district members or left up to district leaders. The point is to have an effective planning meeting that gives everyone involved time to prepare in advance. President Ikeda writes: “Earnest prayer, excellent planning and dynamic action are the keys to certain victory. It is faith in the Mystic Law that enables us to effectively harmonize these three aspects” (August 20, 2010, World Tribune, p. 5).

- Ensure that the agenda lends itself to enabling the members to participate without one person dominating the conversation. President Ikeda encourages: “Create an atmosphere where everyone can pleasantly exchange ideas and participate harmoniously and constructively. That’s how discussion meetings should be” (July 14, 2006, World Tribune, p. 3).

- Find ways to include new members and even returning guests on the agenda, such as through sharing an introduction to Buddhism or a benefit in faith. This will reinforce for them the joy of attending discussion meetings.

- Leave enough time for ample Q&A with the central figure, so members and guests can ask questions about the practice. The SGI-USA’s 1-hour meeting format was created to give enough time after the meeting to engage in meaningful dialogue with members and guests.

- Ensure the content for the meeting is based on Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and President Ikeda’s encouragement. President Ikeda writes: “And whatever subject leaders may decide to speak about, the important thing is that their words brim with the intention to communicate the true Soka Gakkai spirit. That’s the kind of speech people want to hear” (July 14, 2006, World Tribune, p. 3).

- Have each person presenting at the meeting prepare their words in advance. President Ikeda writes: “Keep your talk on track with Nichiren’s message and speak clearly and succinctly. This makes all the difference in conducting fulfilling meetings and promoting the growth of our organization” (July 14, 2006, World Tribune, p. 3).

- Not every idea can be incorporated into the final plan, but everyone who attends the planning meeting should have an opportunity to have his or her ideas considered.

- Try to have the discussion meeting thoroughly planned by the end of the planning meeting and send out the agenda to the central figure in advance, so he or she can prepare their closing encouragement.

- In addition to the discussion meeting itself, it’s great to make an action plan to reach out to and visit those who missed the last discussion meeting or haven’t attended activities in a while. Over time, such inconspicuous efforts will definitely bear fruit in the form of better attendance and stronger bonds as a Soka family.
READING THE GOSHO ALOUD

When we read Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, we should do so with the profound conviction that we are reading the truth.

Shin’ichi Yamamoto then opened the Gosho and began to talk about the overall significance and background of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, Nichiren Daishonin’s commentary on the Lotus Sutra. The participants: representatives of the student division, whom he sought to train as future leaders of the Soka Gakkai, while at the same time making Nichiren’s profound philosophy accessible in contemporary terms. In volume 6 of *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda addresses the student division members on the significance of reading Nichiren Daishonin’s writings aloud. He appears in the novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto.

The Orally Transmitted Teachings state, “Namu derives from Sanskrit and here [in Japan] it means devotion...” (*Gosho zenshu*, p. 708)

When the reader finished, Shin’ichi said with some severity: “What lackluster reading! When we read the Gosho, we should do so with the profound conviction that we are reading the truth, the absolute truth—that this is exactly how it is. In other words, we should read with faith, seek with faith and understand with faith.

“Western philosophy may begin from doubt, but when we are studying Buddhism, we must begin with faith. Even Shariputra, who was said to be foremost in wisdom among Shakyamuni’s disciples, attained enlightenment not through his knowledge or intellectual powers but through faith.”

A solemn atmosphere pervaded the room. With serious expressions, everyone sat up straight and listened to Shin’ichi Yamamoto.

“The Gosho is scripture, a compilation of the Buddha’s words,” he continued. “Each word and phrase is important. And especially when it comes to *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, if we seek to understand it deeply, we should first read it aloud again and again in a clear, strong voice—to the point where we have practically memorized it.

“Also, we should read the Gosho in action, word and thought. This means resolving to live according to it, sharing its philosophy with others and practicing its teachings ourselves. Our actions must match our convictions. That is the attitude with which to approach the study of Buddhism, and it is also a basic premise of Eastern philosophy.” (*vol. 6, pp. 280–82*)
TIPS ON BEING EMCEE
Practical points on the crucial role of the emcee at meetings and events.

As a youth, SGI President Ikeda served as the emcee at various meetings and events, including the Otaru Debate, on March 11, 1955, at the Otaru Civic Hall in Otaru, Hokkaido, and the last event second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda attended, on March 16, 1958, in which he entrusted the future of kosen-rufu to the youth.

In volume 25 of *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda offers the following points regarding the crucial role an emcee plays in determining a meeting’s success.

1. The emcee’s voice should be stirring, powerful and brimming with life force. "Emcees must have the determination to bear full responsibility for the meeting and use their voices to transform the atmosphere into a place of joy in seeking the Law, a true Buddhist assembly" (June 2013 *Living Buddhism*, p. 36).

2. Get a good night’s sleep and eat a proper meal. “An emcee needs to enunciate, so that everyone can hear and understand what is said. Facial expressions are also important. An emcee mustn’t look tired or unwell. When you’re going to take on the crucial role of emcee, you need to get a good night’s sleep the day before” (p. 36).

3. Pay special attention to timing during the meeting and be able to respond quickly. “There are times when you need to jump right in and speak to keep the tempo upbeat, and times when you need to take a breath and pause. If you lack that crucial sense of timing, you can possibly ruin the meeting’s mood” (p. 38).

4. Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo prior to the meeting. “It is vital that you chant with strong determination to make the meeting you’re moderating a success. The purpose of Soka Gakkai meetings is to advance kosen-rufu, and they are the contemporary versions of the assembly of the Lotus Sutra. As such, serving as an emcee at a meeting is to carry out the noble work of the Buddha” (p. 39).
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-renge-kyo 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-renge-kyo, and just below this appear the characters for “Nichiren.” Nichiren put his own name below Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to proclaim that ordinary people and this great law of Buddhahood are one and the same. To the left and right of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo 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-renge-kyo), 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.”
THE SPIRIT OF Q&A IN BUDDHISM

The following encouragement is from *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 7, pp. 160–64.

Shin’ichi Yamamoto strove wherever possible to open the floor for questions. This was to ensure that the meetings weren’t always just one-sided affairs with the leaders doing all the talking. He would then give detailed guidance in response to the members’ actual problems and concerns.

In such exchanges, the character and substance of the person answering are truly put to the test. If the leader isn’t trusted by the participants or has an authoritarian air, people won’t even want to raise their hands. The unpredictability of the questions also demands that the leader study Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings thoroughly and be able to give appropriate guidance in response to any question.

Equally essential is the ability to provide clear answers in a limited amount of time. If the leader cannot give a clear response to every question asked, instead trying to palm people off with vague, unsatisfactory answers, it will only sow distrust in their hearts.

Of course, that doesn’t mean that leaders have to have all the answers. It’s only natural that there will be things that they don’t know. But in those cases, it is important that they later consult with an appropriate person about it or, if it’s a study point, go research it and then get back to the questioner and sincerely try to answer the question.

There may be questions that aren’t to the point. When fielding such a question, a leader should try to help clarify and organize the questioner’s points, aiming to identify exactly what he or she is trying to say and wishes to know.

There may also, on occasion, be someone who asks questions specifically designed to embarrass the leader or put him or her on the spot. Or someone who asks questions out of the desire to criticize and attack the Soka Gakkai and the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Such situations sometimes call for the leader to boldly refute the questioner’s claims.

Another crucial challenge of a question-and-answer session is to ensure that one’s answers not only satisfy those who ask questions but are also understood and accepted by everyone gathered, serving to inspire everyone to stand up in faith. Leading a question-and-answer session therefore requires qualities like strong conviction in the power of faith; clear, logical thinking; and the flexibility to respond to all sorts of situations.

Leaders must never forget that if they do nothing but issue activity directives or give one-sided guidance, they will end up alienating people.

Question-and-answer sessions have been a tradition in the Soka Gakkai since the time of the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. In his day, Makiguchi
Josei Toda, his successor, also devoted as much time as possible to fielding questions from the audience at meetings or while giving lectures. He often remarked that the Buddhist sutras—except for the Lotus Sutra’s “Expedient Means” chapter, which is termed an “unsolicited and spontaneous teaching”—are all essentially records of question-and-answer sessions.

Mr. Toda drew a parallel between the four kinds of people present in the assemblies where the Buddha preached and the participants of Soka Gakkai question-and-answer sessions, using a question about illness to make his point:

The first kind of people present are those who ask the Buddha to expound the teaching. They are the people at Soka Gakkai question-and-answer sessions who ask questions on behalf of everyone. The second kind are those who praise the Buddha’s teaching. They correspond to people who, after hearing guidance in response to a question about illness, for example, accept it and are certain in the knowledge that they too can recover from illness through faith. The fourth kind are those who attain no immediate benefit but nevertheless form a bond with the Buddha’s teaching and benefit from it at a later time. These are like people who, after hearing guidance at a question-and-answer session, decide to take faith and to deepen their understanding of Buddhism.

Of these four kinds of people, Mr. Toda stressed that the first—those who ask questions—play the most important role. To ask a question in front of a large number of people requires courage and a strong seeking spirit. A question-and-answer session cannot proceed, nor can guidance be given in response to people’s questions, unless someone speaks up and asks. That is why Mr. Toda was unstinting in his praise and appreciation of those who asked questions. Whenever someone asked a pertinent question of interest to everyone or a question that provided an opportunity to explain a profound Buddhist principle, he would say: “That’s a very good question! Thank you!”

Josei Toda was a virtuoso of the question-and-answer session, a master of the discussion meeting. He would explain difficult Buddhist concepts using simple, everyday examples. He would inject humor and wit into his guidance, evoking laughter from his audience and opening their hearts, so that the precious wisdom of his words would penetrate their lives.

Shin’ichi Yamamoto also highly valued such question-and-answer sessions, regarding them as a wonderful Soka Gakkai tradition. Question-and-answer sessions consist of dialogue, and dialogue produces understanding, which fuels dynamic faith and inspires fresh progress.
GIVING A POWERFUL STUDY PRESENTATION

In volume 26 of *The New Human Revolution*, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda calls on the young Shin’ichi Yamamoto to support Kawagoe District in Saitama, Japan, and help the members there deepen their faith and grow as individuals through studying Nichiren Daishonin’s writings. Mr. Toda said at the time:

> “Each lecture is decisive. Thinking to yourself that you may not have another chance to go to Kawagoe again, treasure each opportunity as a unique encounter.

> “Lectures should be serious, full of conviction, and clear and logical. Your challenge is whether you can awaken in your listeners the joy of having encountered Nichiren Buddhism and of being able to dedicate their lives to kosen-rufu.

> “Lectures should be profound. By ‘profound’ I don’t mean using difficult terms and complex reasoning. Rather, your lectures need to be easy to understand, giving your listeners a fresh eye-opening perspective, helping them grasp the significance of the writing as well as deepening their conviction in faith.

> “In other words, a truly profound lecture is one that deepens the listeners’ understanding and awakens them to their mission for kosen-rufu.” (NHR, vol. 26, p. 354)

The following are practical steps you can take to prepare for a study lecture.

**STEP 1:** Read the material
- Read the lecture several times to become familiar with its content and overall intent.
- Read the featured letter in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, including the background.
- Study for your own education and encouragement; note what you learned and found inspiring.

**STEP 2:** Prepare the background and context
- Prepare a brief explanation of the letter’s background to convey the context in which Nichiren wrote it.
- Review the lecture’s opening section, where President Ikeda often connects the content of the letter to the present.

**STEP 3:** Decide on your conclusion
- Determine your presentation’s end point—knowing where you’re going helps plan the route you’ll take.

**STEP 4:** Work on your main points
- Confirm the main points you intend to make in your presentation. We suggest highlighting two to three key points.
- Include memorable passages that participants can engrave in their hearts.
- Speak about content that excites or encourages you. This will convey your enthusiasm for study.
- Share an experience that illustrates how the material applies to daily life.
- Keep the cited passages brief.

**STEP 5:** Practice your presentation
- Practice your presentation several times. Read slowly while tracking the time.
- Does the presentation make sense to you? If not, more work is needed.

**STEP 6:** Chant abundantly
- Chant Nam-myoho-reng-cyo abundantly to be able to convey the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin and of President Ikeda through your presentation.

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When you chant to the Gohonzon, the door to your microcosm is opened to the entire universe, the macrocosm, and you experience a great, boundless joy, as if you were looking out over the entire cosmos. You feel great satisfaction and rejoicing, a great wisdom—as if you held the entire universe in your palm. The microcosm enfolds the macrocosm and reaches out to enfold the macrocosm in its own embrace. ([My Dear Friends, p. 48])

Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda likened the Gohonzon to a happiness-manufacturing machine, but only when we have correct faith can we benefit from the infinite powers of the Law and the Buddha. And the SGI teaches this correct faith. ([My Dear Friends, p. 280])

In Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, to “observe one’s own mind” means faith in the Gohonzon. Therefore, a mind-serving wealthy person is a wealthy person of faith. Such a wealthy person is one who perceives and believes that his or her life is itself the supreme treasure house and who opens this treasure house. ([My Dear Friends in America, p. 34])

Nichiren Daishonin taught that embracing the Gohonzon is itself enlightenment. Thus, by believing in and embracing the Gohonzon, which embodies the state of Buddhahood and the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds,” one can observe and manifest the world of Buddhahood existing in his or her life. ([My Dear Friends, p. 34])

The Gohonzon is the concrete manifestation of the very existence of Nichiren Daishonin, who taught kosen-rufu. Because of that, if you only do gongyo and chant daimoku and don’t take any other action for the sake of kosen-rufu or improving your own life, the Gohonzon will not have its true, full effect. ([My Dear Friends, p. 41])

Just as you look into a mirror when you make up your face, to beautify the face of the soul, you need a mirror that reflects the depths of your life. This mirror is none other than the Gohonzon of “observing one’s mind,” or more precisely, observing one’s life. ([My Dear Friends, p. 97])
Gongyo is a practice that calls forth and activates the infinite power that the microcosm inherently possesses. It transforms your fate, breaks through any apparent dead end and converts sufferings into happiness. It creates a transformation, a revolution of the microcosm. It is a diagram in miniature of kosen-rufu in our lives. (My Dear Friends in America, p. 40)

The language of gongyo and daimoku reaches the Gohonzon and the realms of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three existences and the ten directions. We might call it the language of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

That is why the voice of gongyo and daimoku directed to the Gohonzon, whether we understand it or not, reaches all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and heavenly deities. They hear it and say, “Excellent, excellent!” in response, rejoicing and praising us, and the entire universe envelops us in light. (My Dear Friends, p. 48)

Buddhism aims to make people free in the most profound sense; its purpose is not to restrict or constrain. Doing gongyo is a right, not an obligation. Because Buddhism entails practice, tenacious efforts are required, but these are all for your own sake. If you want to have great benefits or to develop a profound state of life, you should exert yourself accordingly. (My Dear Friends, p. 75)

When we carry out gongyo and chant daimoku before the Gohonzon, our individual existence is perfectly harmonized with the universe. Both the universe and our individual existence are the concrete manifestations of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, as is the Gohonzon. That is why when we do gongyo and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon, our existence and the universe mesh as perfectly as two gears and, with an initial creak, begin to work together. (My Dear Friends, p. 39)

The ceremony of gongyo is, in a sense, an exchange between the microcosm of our own lives and the macrocosm of the universe. Through the power of the Mystic Law, we are physically and spiritually invigorated from the very depths of our beings, our inner balance is restored, and we gain energy and vitality. We thus begin to sing life’s song of joy. (My Dear Friends, p. 109)

Gongyo and chanting daimoku are like starting the automobile’s engine every day and driving in the direction of happiness and truth. By doing so day after day, you will gradually attain perfect unity with the universe and the Law. That state is the state of the Buddha. (My Dear Friends in America, p. 40)

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Birds have their own language, their own speech. People do not understand it, but other birds do. There are many examples among humans, as well—codes, abbreviations or foreign languages are well understood by experts or native speakers but unintelligible to others. In the same way, the language of gongyo and daimoku reaches the Gohonzon and the realms of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three existences and the ten directions. We might call it the language of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. That is why the voice of gongyo and daimoku directed to the Gohonzon, whether we understand it or not, reaches all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and heavenly deities. They hear it and say, “Excellent, excellent!” in response, rejoicing and praising us, and the entire universe envelops us in light. (My Dear Friends, p. 262)

But how great is the difference between the blessings received when a sage chants the daimoku and the blessings received when we chant it?” To reply, one is in no way superior to the other. The gold that a fool possesses is no different from the gold that a wise man possesses; a fire made by a fool is the same as a fire made by a wise man. (“The Fourteen Slanders,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 756)

Chanting daimoku allows us to accumulate the supreme treasure of the universe in our lives day by day. The origin of the universe is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our lives are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the Daishonin’s name is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Chanting daimoku enables us to tap this supreme power in our own lives and, at the same time, make it resonate powerfully in our surroundings. Therefore, we need fear nothing. (My Dear Friends in America, p. 265)

From the moment we begin to pray, things start moving. The darker the night, the closer the dawn. From the moment we chant daimoku with a deep and powerful resolve, the sun begins to rise in our hearts. (My Dear Friends, pp. 463–64)

Hope—prayer is the sun of hope. To chant daimoku each time we face a problem, overcoming it and elevating our life-condition as a result—this is the path of “earthly desires are enlightenment” taught in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. (My Dear Friends, p. 464).

Only with the actual practice of chanting daimoku and taking action for kosen-rufu does one’s faith become true and correct and can one reap infinite benefit and blessings. (My Dear Friends, p. 299)