

Preface

Can Buddhism help improve your life? What are the keys to a successful prayer? What does Nam-myoho-renge-kyo mean? What is karma, and is it something you change for the better? In *An Introduction to Buddhism*, you will find the answers to these and many other questions.

Studying Buddhism and embracing its empowering concepts help us develop our faith and establish a regular daily practice. But finding time to study isn't always easy, so we can all benefit from some inspiration on why Buddhist study is so crucial. Hence we've chosen to begin this book with some encouraging words of Daisaku Ikeda, the president of the SGI. He succinctly explains how understanding the Buddhist viewpoint—an understanding gained from study—can help you develop deeper joy and appreciation in your everyday life.

You can read the subsequent five chapters in order or feel free to jump around and read whatever piques your interest. Each chapter is self-contained and offers great insights into this Buddhist practice.

The selected topics will appeal to both new and longtime practitioners, and the book itself will serve several purposes as:

- A catalyst for more in-depth discussions about core Buddhist ideas and historical events.
- A reference for presentations at SGI-USA study and discussion meetings.
- The official study material for the SGI-USA Introductory Exam, administered through the organization from time to time.

No matter how long you've practiced, we trust this book will allow you to discover new ideas, deepen your understanding and inspire you to learn even more about the vast realm of Nichiren Buddhism and how it can bring happiness to you and your friends.

SGI-USA Study Department

Study in Nichiren Buddhism

*The following are excerpts from
SGI President Ikeda's writings.*

A member once said to second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda that though she found lectures on Nichiren Daishonin's writings very moving, by the time she got home, she had forgotten what was said. Mr. Toda replied with a reassuring smile: "That's all right. No matter how many times you forget, if you keep attending and listening to such lectures, something indelible will invariably remain in your life. That intangible accumulation will eventually become a great source of strength for you."

The important thing is to continue making efforts to study the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, even a little every day. Taking the entrance exam is the starting point of your lifelong pursuit of Buddhist study. There's no need to feel anxious about or pressured by the exam. It is OK if you don't understand certain points or concepts right away. When you do finally come to grasp them, your joy will be all the greater. (February 25, 2011, *World Tribune*, p. 5)



Studying to deepen our understanding of Buddhism is part of our practice for attaining Buddhahood. It is something that goes beyond

merely trying to pass an exam. I hope that our youth division members will ponder the significance of this fact, and challenge themselves in their studies with courage, wisdom, tenacity and perseverance, in a way that is true to themselves as youth and as young successors of the Soka Gakkai.

Our noble efforts to study and practice the great teaching of Nichiren Buddhism will definitely bring us boundless and immeasurable benefits that also will flow on to our descendants. (December 16, 2011, *World Tribune*, p. 8)



Faith means strong conviction and belief—namely, absolute faith in the Gohonzon. Practice means chanting for the happiness of ourselves and others, and sharing Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings with others. Study means engraving in our lives the Daishonin’s writings, which pulse with his powerful spirit to lead all people to enlightenment and to withstand any hardship to propagate the Law.

Making continuous efforts in faith, practice and study is the most fundamental way to develop our movement for kosen-rufu.

Faith is for a lifetime, and study enables us to deepen our faith for that purpose.

Through Buddhist study, it is important that we gain a deeper sense of joy and conviction in the greatness of Nichiren Buddhism; that we develop a more profound attitude toward reciting the sutra morning and evening, and chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo; that we are able to recall the Daishonin’s teachings and summon forth invincible courage when we encounter problems or difficulties; and that we come to advance with pride and confidence, knowing that we possess a noble mission to strive for kosen-rufu in unity with our fellow members. (December 2, 2011, *World Tribune*, p. 5)



The essence of Buddhist practice, unchanged since Nichiren's time, lies in fellow practitioners gathering to study Nichiren's writings, deepen their faith and renew their determination to carry out kosen-rufu and their own human revolution.

The Daishonin often urged his followers to read his letters together. For instance, he writes, "I want people with seeking minds to meet and read this letter together for encouragement" ("Letter from Sado," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 306). And in another writing, addressed to followers closely acquainted with each other (the lay nun of Ko and the lay nun Sennichi), he writes, "Since you two are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you and listen to it together" ("Letter to the Lay Nun of Ko," WND-1, 595).

The model of friends in faith gathering and reading Nichiren's letters aloud, studying their significance, encouraging one another and resolving to triumph in life by following his teachings is exactly what today's discussion meetings are about. Discussion meetings are Soka Gakkai activities that, brimming with friendship, goodwill and inspiration, are in complete accord with the formula outlined in Nichiren's writings. (September–October 2010 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 13–14)



Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda said that there were two kinds of Buddhist study—one that delved into the teachings academically and the other that explored the teachings through faith. United by the deep bonds of the oneness of mentor and disciple, Mr. Toda and I waged all our struggles for kosen-rufu based on Buddhist study that explored the teachings through faith. That is why the Soka Gakkai has triumphed. Through studying the Daishonin's teachings while actively exerting themselves in efforts to advance kosen-rufu, our members have achieved one brilliant victory after another. (December 16, 2011, *World Tribune*, p. 5)



Nichiren's writings are a wellspring of hope, a melody of joy, a jeweled sword of courage, a banner of justice and a beacon of peace. They are teachings for mentors and disciples in faith to achieve everlasting victory.

The Daishonin cites a passage from *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, "One accepts [the Lotus Sutra] because of one's power of faith and continues because of one's power of constant thought" ("The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith," WND-1, 471). To accept and uphold the correct teaching of Buddhism is the noblest commitment of all.

When we learn the sound life philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, we have nothing to fear. When youth stand up with the resolve to establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land, they are invincible. Nothing can stop the advance of our gathering of ordinary people who have engraved the Daishonin's writings in their hearts and are striving with powerful conviction in faith. (December 17, 2010, *Seize the Day*, p. D)



*Study the writings of Nichiren Daishonin
and practice as they teach,
with a pure heart,
regarding today's efforts
as a cause for eternal happiness.*

(September–October 2010 *Living Buddhism*, p. 12)