SOKA SPIRIT CHANTING SESSIONS

► PURPOSE

1) Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land.

2) Hone our abilities to recognize devilish functions internally and externally.

3) Learn the essential spirit of President Ikeda and the SGI.

4) Unite around the current SGI-USA direction and focus.

► SUGGESTED AGENDA

- Daimoku and gongyo led by central figure (1 hour)
- Study presentation by youth member (5 min)
- Encouragement by region–national line leader (7–10 min)

► RESPONSIBILITIES

- Fukudoshi
  Two–three youth should be assigned to support daimoku as fukudoshi for 20–30 minutes each. For tips on being fukudoshi, please see p. 2.

- MC
  One youth emcee, with the support of seniors in faith, should be assigned to welcome the members and move the meeting along. For tips on being emcee, please see p. 2.

- Study Presentation
  One youth, with the support of seniors in faith, should give a well-prepared study presentation (5 min) based on the Soka Spirit curriculum. Please see the Soka Spirit study guide.

- Encouragement
  A region–national line leader of any division should share encouragement related to the current organizational focus and convey the spirit of the week or month.

Note: The Soka Spirit toso is a wonderful training opportunity for the youth. If there are no youth for the responsibilities above, please work with the region or zone to find youth support.
TIPS ON BEING EMCEE

- 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” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 25, p. 187).

- 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” (NHR-25, 189–90).

- 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” (NHR-25, 191).

- Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo prior to the meeting.
  “It’s 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” (NHR-25, 192).

TIPS ON BEING FUKUDOSHI

- Maintain a consistent and dynamic rhythm together with the person leading.
  “You must first listen carefully to the voice of the person leading gongyo and stay in rhythm with it. It’s important to neither get ahead nor fall behind. In addition, you should try to ensure that the rhythm of gongyo is dynamic and exhilarating like a fine steed galloping across the open plains” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 25, pp. 192–93).

- Avoid slowing down.
  “When a large number of people are participating, both the sutra recitation and chanting tend to gradually slow down, but you mustn’t allow yourself to be dragged along. You should try to lead everyone at a lively tempo” (NHR-25, 193).

- Pronounce the words in the sutra clearly.
  “It’s also necessary to pronounce the words in the sutra recitation clearly. You should strive during your own daily gongyo to do your very best at all times, making sure you aren’t slipping into sloppy pronunciation habits, and that you’re breathing in the appropriate places” (NHR-25, 193).

- Strive for a resonant, clear, powerful, refreshing gongyo. (NHR-25, 193)
April Curriculum: Week 1

**Material:** www.worldtribune.org/article/40-years-since-stormy-april-24-1979/

**Context:** The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood states in their publication: “A priest who wears this robe is special and different from lay believers. He is always seated with the Gohonzon behind him, but whatever the priest may do on other occasions and no matter how luxuriant his lifestyle, it is totally all right.”

In response to such outrageous doctrines of the priesthood, President Ikeda clarified the true meaning of clergy in Buddhism, ensuring that members could clearly delineate right from wrong. The following excerpt can also be found in *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 24, p. 161.

**Key Excerpt:** The original word for monk, priest or clergy in Buddhism is *shramana*, or *shukke* in Japanese. It literally means “one who has renounced secular life,” referring to leaving behind concerns for fame and profit, and distancing oneself from obstructions and defilements standing in the way of the pursuit of enlightenment. ...

A bodhisattva is a being who practices for the salvation of all living beings. He does not simply become a monk by shaving his head. What is it that makes him a monk? He is a monk when he renounces the secular world to wholeheartedly dedicate himself to relieving the sufferings of all living beings. This is what it means for a bodhisattva to renounce the world. ... Merely donning clerical robes does not make one a monk, either. One becomes a monk by giving one's all to eradicating the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness that defile the minds of living beings.

**Key Point:** By claiming infallible superiority based on their clerical status, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood have deviated from the original purpose of Buddhist clergy. On the other hand, we, as mentor and disciples of SGI, strip away all formality and authority and dedicate ourselves to the happiness of all living beings. In this way, the members of the SGI have returned to the original spirit of Buddhism, serving as the true practitioners in modern times.

**Presentation (5 minutes):**

- Read the reference material and seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
- Read the context, key excerpt and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
April Curriculum: Week 2

**Material:** www.worldtribune.org/article/40-years-since-stormy-april-24-1979-part-2/

**Context:** In the late 1970's, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood grew increasingly authoritarian, making false claims about the Soka Gakkai and harassing its members out of jealousy toward President Ikeda. The “Justice” chapter of *The New Human Revolution*, volume 27, details these claims by the priesthood, as well as the Soka Gakkai’s rebuttal. President Ikeda appears as Shin’ichi Yamamoto in the novel.

**Claim:** Nichiren Shoshu claimed that the Soka Gakkai taught that its president was the true Buddha.

**Rebuttal:** “The Soka Gakkai had never said that its president was the true Buddha or anything of the sort. It was a criticism based on misinterpreting and twisting the intent of statements of certain leaders that perhaps invited misunderstanding.

“Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda, had directly rebutted any who called him a ‘living Buddha’ or ‘lord of teachings.’ He always declared that he was just ‘a proud common mortal.’

“Shin’ichi Yamamoto was Mr. Toda’s disciple. He always described himself as ‘the son of a poor family of seaweed harvesters in Tokyo’s Ota Ward, one of the common people.’”

**Key Point:** The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood believes priests are superior to ordinary people. They teach that the high priest is the modern-day Nichiren Daishonin and possesses the function of the Gohonzon.

The SGI believes that each and every person possesses the Buddha nature. While there may be various organizational positions, everyone is fundamentally equal in their ability to transform themselves, become absolutely happy and help others do the same. The mentor, in this sense, serves as a model for how we can effectively practice Buddhism and constantly reminds us of the potential we each possess.

**Presentation (5 minutes):**

- Read the reference material and seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
- Read the context, claim, rebuttal and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
April Curriculum: Week 3


Context: Third Soka Gakkai President Ikeda was forced to step down on April 24, 1979, when the Nichiren Shosu priesthood colluded with corrupt Soka Gakkai leaders to take control of the organization for personal profit. Observing these leaders, President Ikeda lists four common traits of individuals who betrayed and attempted to destroy the Soka Gakkai for their personal ambition.

Key Excerpt: “First, they are cowardly. They pretend to be firm of heart, but when actual persecution takes place, they forget their teacher’s instructions and flee in terror.

“Second, they are unreasoning, or unheeding. They listen to the important guidance offered by their teacher as if it applies to others but not to themselves, and quickly forget it. This arises because they lack the faith to earnestly seek their teacher’s guidance.

“Third, they are greedy. They strongly crave worldly pleasures, power and acclaim. Forgetting the great vow of mentor and disciple for kosen-rufu and focusing solely on their own immediate interests, they stray from the correct path of faith.

“Fourth, they are doubting. They doubt their teacher’s instruction and fail to properly understand it.

“When all is said and done, the common feature of all who abandon their faith is that they do not center their lives on the Law, which should be their foundation, or the teacher who instructs them in that Law. Instead, they are centered on themselves. They are selfishly arrogant and ungrateful. That is the essence of those who abandon faith in the Mystic Law.”

Key Point: People are not fated to be evil simply because they have an arrogant or self-serving nature. Regardless of an individual’s shortcomings, if they sincerely continue practicing Buddhism and make efforts for kosen-rufu with the Soka Gakkai, they will be able to do their human revolution and transform their base life condition. Therefore, President Ikeda is teaching us that no one is destined to be evil. Rather, functioning as good or evil is our choice.

Presentation (5 minutes):

• Read the reference material and seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
• Read the context, key excerpt and key point. Conclude with a personal experience and how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
April Curriculum: Week 4


Context: In the late 1970’s, out of jealousy toward President Ikeda and the Soka Gakkai, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood grew increasingly abusive toward the members. To shield the members from such abuse and alleviate the tensions, President Ikeda contemplated stepping down as president. When leaders were asked if his resignation would resolve the issue, one leader responded, “You can’t go against the flow of the times.” What disappointed President Ikeda wasn’t the fact that he might have to resign, but the leader’s cowardice in being swept along by circumstances and the lack of determination to protect the members.

On April 24, 1979, President Ikeda stepped down. That night, he met with youth leaders, empowering them to stand up as genuine disciples. Shin’ichi Yamamoto represents President Ikeda in The New Human Revolution.

Key Excerpt: “No matter what situation I may be placed in, as long as the youth strive in earnest, a bright future lies ahead. The true test for disciples is not when they are striving while receiving daily guidance and instruction from their mentor. That’s a period of training. Their real test is when their mentor is no longer directly taking leadership. But when the mentor steps back, some disciples take advantage of it to do as they please and forget the Soka Gakkai spirit. The same happened when Mr. Toda stepped down as general director. You mustn’t be like that. Stand up resolutely in my stead! You must each become a ‘Shin’ichi’!”

Key Point: Immediately after stepping down, President Ikeda initiated a new struggle for kosen-rufu, visiting countless members, putting even more energy into developing the Soka schools and encouraging members overseas. With his entire life, President Ikeda has shown us that no matter what adversities we face, the way of the mentor and disciples of Soka is to strive for the happiness of all people and, with faith in the Gohonzon, never give up.

Presentation (5 minutes):
• Read the reference material and seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
• Read the context, key excerpt and key point. Conclude with a personal determination of how you would like to apply this guidance to your life.
Note: Pleasechant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.