

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.

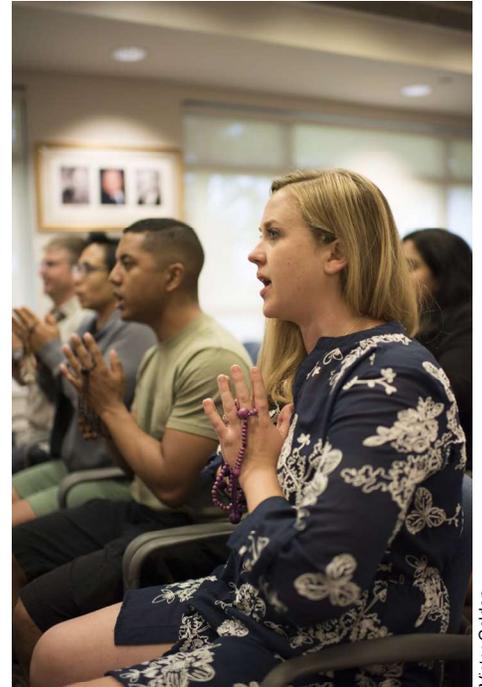
• Study Presentation

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.



Victor Golden

► 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-rence-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)

May Curriculum: Week 1

Material: “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 1000–01

Passage: “It is the heart that is important. No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other. ... Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered.”

Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance: Cowardice prevents us from seeing the truth, from seeing things as they are. It can cause even a minor hardship to seem like a huge, immovable obstacle and make even the door to a solution appear instead like a thick wall. Courage is, therefore, crucial. ...

In terms of Buddhism, courage indicates the soundest and most robust spirit that derives from our inherent Buddha nature, which could be described as our most “healthy state”; it means the fighting spirit to vanquish our fundamental darkness and instantly reveal our enlightened Dharma nature.

For us, courage means challenging the real-life issues confronting us right where we are with the belief that we ourselves are entities of the Mystic Law. This is the way to employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra and construct an indestructible history of victory and glory.

As a young man working under second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda, I battled various hardships. Whenever I reached an impasse, I would chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to break through. I would chant and challenge myself afresh. Determined to win victory for my mentor and for kosen-rufu, I fiercely pitted myself each day against one obstacle after another. And in the end, I triumphed over all adversity. (*The Hope-filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 144)

Key Point: Nichiren teaches that the key to victory is the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” which means chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo earnestly to the Gohonzon, mustering the courage to face our reality head on, implementing thorough preparation and taking the best action.

This Buddhism teaches that when we strive together with our mentor with the resolve to win for the happiness of others, we can bring forth even greater strength. May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, represents a time when we stand up once more with fresh resolve to strive for peace and the happiness of all people. As we celebrate May 3 in this significant year of 2020, and with face the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, let’s employ the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra” to achieve unprecedented victory in our lives together.

Preparation: Read the Goshō and background from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and seek from seniors in faith about the study material. Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.

Presentation (5 minutes): Read the passage, Ikeda Sensei’s guidance and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

May Curriculum: Week 2

Material: “Rebuking Slander of the Law,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 444

Passage: “I am praying that, no matter how troubled the times may become, the Lotus Sutra and the ten demon daughters will protect all of you, praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground. There are many other matters to discuss, but I will close here.”

Context: This passage in “Rebuking Slander of the Law,” was written by Nichiren Daishonin in 1273 when he was on Sado Island. Addressed to a husband and wife who were being subjected to intense persecution due to their efforts in faith, Nichiren expresses his earnest prayer to protect his disciples who have been diligently striving to spread his teaching amid great opposition.

Ikeda Sensei’s Guidances: It is a passage imbued with [Nichiren’s] fervent prayers for their safety in the midst of dangerous times. ... Nichiren’s prayer is based on a vow—a vow grounded in the belief that his inner determination could transform any circumstance. He was firmly resolved to break through every difficulty and protect all his disciples through his prayer” (November 2015, *Living Buddhism*, p. 42).

As we do our best for the welfare of others, we break out of our narrow lesser self that is focused only on personal concerns, and gradually expand and elevate our life state. The commitment to others’ well-being is what propels us to transform our life state and carry out our human revolution” (*The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace*, part 2, p. 15).

Key Point: Praying “as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground,” means to pray strongly to make the impossible possible. Nichiren’s prayer is characterized by such a powerful resolve and a vow to fight for the happiness of others. As we face the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is all the more crucial to rely on resolute prayer based on a vow. This kind of prayer guarantees that we can pull the wisdom and vitality to win over each challenge.

Preparation: Read the Goshō and background from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and seek from seniors in faith about the study material. Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.

Presentation (5 minutes): Read the passage, Ikeda Sensei’s guidance and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

May Curriculum: Week 3

Material: “Reply to Kyo’o,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 412

Passage: “A sword is useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith. Then one will be as strong as a demon armed with an iron staff.”

Context: Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Shijo Kingo and his wife Nichigen-nyo in response to the news that their year-old daughter Kyo’o became seriously ill. Nichiren assures his disciples that through faith in the Lotus Sutra, their daughter will be protected without fail.

Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance: Without courage, even the most outstanding wisdom or brilliant stroke of genius will come to naught. And the foundation of everything is firm faith, strong faith. For only through faith can we tap the boundless power of the Mystic Law and bring it to manifest in our lives in the form of wisdom, courage, life force, and the protection of the benevolent functions of the universe. Wisdom, courage, and faith—the Daishonin teaches that these are the cornerstones of victory.

With the heart of a lion king, the Daishonin himself fought one momentous battle after another, emerging triumphant each time. An unwavering determination also spurs the protective functions of the universe to action. (*A Foundation for Your Life*, p. 145)

Key Point: Especially at times when we face unprecedented difficulties such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is natural to feel fear or doubt. However, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with the determination to muster up courage and transform our doubts enables us to unleash the limitless power of the Mystic Law and mobilize the protective forces of the universe to not only transform, but also create value out of our current circumstances.

Preparation: Read the Gosho and background from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and seek from seniors in faith about the study material. Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.

Presentation (5 minutes): Read the passage, Ikeda Sensei’s guidance and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

May Curriculum: Week 4

Material: “On Persecutions Befalling the Sage,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 997

Passage: “Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage.”

Context: Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1279 during the Atsuhara persecution. Nichiren outlines the attitude that his followers facing persecutions and hardships should adopt as practitioners of the Mystic Law.

Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance: No matter how hard we have exerted ourselves until today, if we become arrogant and self-satisfied, we will create an opening for devilish functions to enter. Such influences are always trying to prevent us from improving ourselves, and to hinder and destroy the flow of kosen-rufu. The only way to win over such devilish functions is to keep moving forward, challenging and improving ourselves day after day. ...

Unflagging efforts in faith are the key to victory in life. Shakyamuni said that since attaining enlightenment, he had “never for a moment neglected [the work of a Buddha]” (*The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, p. 267). Nichiren delivers the same message, telling us, “Not once have I thought of retreat” (“The Great Battle,” WND-2, 465). ...

Devilish functions are essentially “robbers of life” and “robbers of benefit” (see “Opening the Eyes of Images,” WND-1, 87). The key to vanquishing them is found in a heart or spirit that grows stronger “day by day and month after month.” Ceaseless efforts to advance in Buddhist practice bring forth the life state of Buddhahood. (August 2016 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 45–46)

Key Point: Devilish functions seek to slow our progress. As we face unprecedented challenges, we should advance forward with the determination to not be swayed by devilish functions and strengthen our resolve regardless of our circumstances. Deepening our faith “day by day and month after month” is the foundation for victory in life, the key to building a self that is unperturbed by negative influences.

Preparation: Read the Gosho and background from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and seek from seniors in faith about the study material. Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.

Presentation (5 minutes): Read the passage, Ikeda Sensei’s guidance and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

May Curriculum: Week 5

Material: "The Three Obstacles and Four Devils," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 637

Passage: "There is definitely something extraordinary in the ebb and flow of the tide, the rising and setting of the moon, and the way in which summer, autumn, winter, and spring give way to each other. Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils* will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat."

Context: This was written to Nichiren's disciple Hyoe no Sakan Munenaga, the younger of the two Ikegami brothers, in 1277. Munenaga's father, who was a follower of the priest Ryokan of the True Word Precepts school, attempted to persuade Munenaga to give up his faith. However, by following Nichiren's guidance, Munenaga was able to uphold his beliefs, and ultimately help his father begin practicing Nichiren Buddhism.

Ikeda Sensei's Guidance: Difficulties arise because our practice is correct. As the Daishonin's words "The wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat" (WND-1, 637) indicate, the important thing is whether we courageously stand up to the challenges that arise in our path or shrink back in fear and run away from them. What matters is our attitude in faith at a crucial moment.

As we practice this Buddhism, things may happen that make us question or doubt the power of faith. But events that we cannot understand merely on an intellectual level can reveal important truths about our lives when viewed with the eye of the Buddha. From that perspective, life's various difficulties always have a profound significance. (March 2018, *Living Buddhism*, p. 41)

Key Point: With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, we may be faced with the death of a loved one or loss of a job, causing us to doubt or curtail our Buddhist faith. However, if we see this as precisely the time to rouse even more courageous faith and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can definitely turn poison into medicine.

Preparation: Read the Goshō and background from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and seek from seniors in faith about the study material. Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation. (*Please see "three obstacles and four devils" in the Dictionary of Buddhism at nichirenlibrary.org)

Presentation (5 minutes): Read the passage, Ikeda Sensei's guidance and key point. Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.