SOKA SPIRIT
CHANTING SESSIONS

► PURPOSE

1) Chant Nam-myoho-rengyo 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-rena-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)
Intro: Shortly after being inaugurated as the third Soka Gakkai president, Ikeda Sensei, then 32 years old, departed for his first overseas trip to America on October 2, 1960, opening the way for worldwide kosen-rufu. As we approach the 60th anniversary of this significant day, we will study from volume 1 of *The New Human Revolution*, which describes this trip and includes timeless guidance shared with the pioneering members in America during that time. Sensei appears as Shin’ichi Yamamoto in the novel.

Context: Ikeda Sensei’s first stop in his journey was Honolulu. At the first local meeting, he held a question-and-answer session during which he offered guidance to a young woman who, unhappy with her life in Hawaii, wanted to return home to Japan. He refers to the Nembutsu [Pure Land] school of Buddhism, which teaches the erroneous view that only after death can we enter the Buddha land.

**Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance from* The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 43:** It must have been very hard for you. You must have really suffered. But you have the Gohonzon, haven’t you? Faith is the power to survive. ...

Whether you leave your husband and go back to Japan is something that you must decide for yourself. However, as you already know, happiness will not necessarily be waiting for you there. Unless you change your karma, your problems will follow you wherever you go. The idea that happiness exists somewhere else resembles the thinking of the Nembutsu [Pure Land] school of Buddhism, which teaches the existence of a distant pure land located billions of Buddha lands to the west.

Nichiren Buddhism, however, enables us to transform the place where we are now into “a land of Eternally Tranquil Light” and there construct a palace of happiness. To that end, you have to change the karma that makes you suffer from family discord. There is no other way than to dramatically transform your own life condition. When you change your state of life, your environment will naturally start changing as well. This is the principle of the oneness of life and its environment. A grand palace of happiness exists within your own heart. Faith is the key that opens the door to that palace.

**Key Point:** Similar to the Pure Land school teaching that happiness exists in the afterlife, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood emphasizes that we can only become happy through the power of a priest and by chanting to a “special” Gohonzon. Both schools disempower people and lead to escapism. In contrast, Nichiren Buddhism fundamentally teaches that, by courageously engaging in our Buddhist practice, we can transform our own life condition, thereby transforming our environment and constructing absolute happiness where we are now.

**Preparation and Presentation (5 minutes):** Please read the material, seek from seniors in faith about it and chant abundantly throughout the preparation. For the presentation, please read all sections above and conclude with a determination or about how Buddhism has impacted your perspective.

*Reminder:* The Soka Spirit curriculum can be found at [www.sgi-usa.org/monthly-downloads/](http://www.sgi-usa.org/monthly-downloads/)
September Curriculum: Week 2

**Intro:** Shortly after being inaugurated as the third Soka Gakkai president, Ikeda Sensei, then 32 years old, departed for his first overseas trip to America on October 2, 1960, opening the way for worldwide kosen-rufu. As we approach the 60th anniversary of this significant day, we will study from volume 1 of *The New Human Revolution*, which describes this trip and includes timeless guidance shared with the pioneering members in America during that time. Sensei appears as Shin’ichi Yamamoto in the novel.

**Context:** Following Honolulu, Sensei arrived in San Francisco, where at the Golden Gate Bridge, noting the massive number of thin wires holding up the bridge, Sensei discussed the power of unity.

**Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance from *The New Human Revolution, vol. 1, p. 107***: As they headed away from the city, San Francisco Bay unfolded off to their right. Soon, the Golden Gate Bridge with its magnificent red towers came into view. As they approached, its soaring structure seemed to loom above them. ...

A sign explained that the cable was thirty-seven inches in diameter and comprised 27,572 separate strands of wire. ...

“The cable is thick, but each wire is quite thin. How amazing that it can hold up the bridge!” exclaimed Katsu Kiyohara.

Nodding in agreement, Shin’ichi [Yamamoto] then spoke to Yukiko Gilmore and Chiyoko Taylor, who had been appointed respectively as the San Francisco District chief and women’s division chief the day before.

“It’s true that the individual wires are not very thick, but when bunched together in great numbers, they display incredible strength. This resembles the unity of many in body, one in mind. In the Soka Gakkai, too, though each person’s strength may be small, when that strength is combined and the members are firmly united, they can display unimaginable power. Unity is strength.”

**Key Point:** When we are united in the spirit of many in body, one in mind, we can bring forth even more strength to overcome any challenge. When the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood excommunicated the SGI and its members in 1991, we were able to persevere through that challenging and confusing time based on strong bonds of unity with Sensei and among the members. We triumphed over the priesthood’s authoritarianism, opening a global kosen-rufu movement that respects the dignity of each person. Likewise, we can win over our own challenges by seeking our mentor, reaching out to and uniting with fellow members.

**Preparation and Presentation (5 minutes):** Please read the material, seek from seniors in faith about it and chant abundantly throughout the preparation. For the presentation, please read all sections above and conclude with a determination or about how Buddhism has impacted your perspective.

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Context: During a discussion meeting in Washington, D.C., Sensei offers the following guidance to a woman struggling to reconcile Nichiren’s spirit of *shakubuku*—to refute erroneous teachings and beliefs—and the spirit of generosity toward others.

**Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance from *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 217–19:**

As disciples of Nichiren Daishonin, it is natural that we take a strict stance in clarifying what is true and what is erroneous in terms of the Law. At the same time, however, our interactions with others must be based on a spirit of tolerance and generosity. This is the true way of life for a Buddhist. …

[Nichiren’s] struggle, however, took the form of dialogue known as *shakubuku*. From beginning to end, his struggle was based on the power of speech and the written word. And despite being subjected to life-threatening persecutions, he upheld the spirit of nonviolence. …

For that reason, there is no contradiction between the spirit of shakubuku—that of “refuting the erroneous and revealing the true”—and true friendship. The spirit of compassion is fundamental to both. Consequently, it is the Buddhist ideal that the more we exert ourselves in faith, the greater the generosity with which we can embrace our friends and deepen our friendships. Because shakubuku is an endeavor to touch others’ lives through dialogue, trust and friendship are essential.

Please become a person who transcends differences of religion and prays for the happiness of her fellow human beings, who forges deep ties of friendship with many people. Your doing so will also testify to the depth and breadth of Buddhism.

**Key Point:** While the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood distorted Nichiren’s teachings to protect their religious authority, Soka Gakkai members, diligently striving alongside the three founding presidents, have continued engaging in dialogues to awaken and empower people to take responsibility for their lives and improve the world. By boldly engaging in dialogues, which can sometimes be difficult, we can cultivate our humanity and abilities to build bridges with anyone, no matter our differences. Resolute prayer based on the mentor-disciple relationship is the source of vitality to sustain such efforts.

**Preparation and Presentation (5 minutes):** Please read the material, seek from seniors in faith about it and chant abundantly throughout the preparation. For the presentation, please read all sections above and conclude with a determination or recent experience related to dialogue.

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**Context:** At the historic meeting establishing Los Angeles Chapter, Shin’ichi appointed Kiyoko Kuwano as chapter women’s leader, and Kazuko Ellick as women’s district leader—although she felt she should have been appointed chapter leader. Shin’ichi gave the following strict guidance to both women.

**Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance from The New Human Revolution, vol. 1, pp. 303–04:** The Soka Gakkai is, first and foremost, an organization of faith so that we can advance just as the Daishonin teaches. Voicing discontent because you’re not appointed the central figure is not an action based on faith. It is nothing but vanity; a sign of selfishness. All it does is undermine the unity of the Soka Gakkai, which has appeared in accord with the Buddha’s will and decree. Irrespective of the great achievements they may have attained in their past endeavors, those who behave this way have allowed emotionalism to prevail over faith. ... The Daishonin urges, “Become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you” (WND-1, 486). America is a land of freedom. But freedom doesn’t mean that we can do anything we please in the practice of faith. If we lose sight of the essential point of self-discipline, our hearts and minds will grow muddled and confused. And that means unhappiness. Our human revolution only truly begins when we resolutely determine to fight and live for kosen-rufu based on the Buddhist Law, instead of basing ourselves only on our own minds.

**Key Point:** Those who give in to emotionalism can easily undermine unity in the Soka Gakkai. We must master our minds based on faith to truly become happy. It is only through chanting abundantly, carrying out our human revolution and resolving to live for kosen-rufu that we can overcome our lesser selves and negative tendencies.

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