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-reng-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)
October Curriculum: Week 1

**Intro:** By the early 20th century, Buddhism in Japan had devolved into “funeral Buddhism,” focused on religious rituals and formalities. Amid this backdrop, founding Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda revitalized Buddhism as a humanistic and egalitarian practice focused on empowering the individual and establishing a peaceful society. Toward the Soka Gakkai’s 90th anniversary on November 18, let’s review the fundamentals of our practice that continue to be revolutionary. This week, we will focus on the practice of gongyo.

**Context:** While we may be accustomed to engaging in our daily practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra, prior to the Soka Gakkai, lay believers relied on priests to carry out such practices based on their misplaced belief in the superiority of priests over laity.

**Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance from The Heart of the Lotus Sutra, p. 15:** During Nichiren’s lifetime, both priests and lay people assiduously recited the sutra and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. For most people in Japan today, sutras have become something distant and remote, their only exposure to them being when they hear priests intoning them at funerals.

This tendency to depend on priests—which has come to be regarded as so natural that no one questions it—has produced a spiritual foundation of blind obedience to religious authority. It is the fundamental evil that allowed the clergy to grow arrogant and decadent.

Today, however, thanks to the Soka Gakkai’s development, people not only in Japan but throughout the world joyously chant the Mystic Law and recite the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters. This is a grand undertaking wholly without precedent in the history of Buddhism. It constitutes the great religious revolution of our time.

Nichiren Buddhism, the Buddhism of the people, is generating a great light of peace and happiness throughout the world. Millions are experiencing the beneficial power of the Mystic Law and acting out the wonderful drama of their human revolution. More than anything else, this fact attests most eloquently to the correctness of the SGI, which carries on the spirit of the Lotus Sutra in the present age.

**Key Point:** Through the efforts of presidents Makiguchi and Toda, the Soka Gakkai revived the practice expounded by Nichiren Daishonin, eliminating inequality between priest and laity. Through our twice-daily practice of gongyo, alongside persistent efforts in inner transformation and shakubuku, we SGI members inherit Nichiren’s spirit and unlock the ability to lead lives of victory.

**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 the importance of gongyo.

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

Intro: By the early 20th century, Buddhism in Japan had devolved into “funeral Buddhism,” focused on religious rituals and formalities. Amid this backdrop, founding Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda revitalized Buddhism as a humanistic and egalitarian practice focused on empowering the individual and establishing a peaceful society. Toward the Soka Gakkai’s 90th anniversary on November 18, let’s review the fundamentals of our practice that continue to be revolutionary. This week, we will focus on the importance of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings.

Context: Immediately after his 1951 inauguration as second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda and his disciple Daisaku Ikeda set out to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Nichiren Buddhism by compiling and publishing the complete writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance from June 26, 1998, World Tribune, pp. 1 & 5: Mr. Toda concluded that the only way to successfully carry out kosen-rufu was for each and every member to engrave the teachings of the Daishonin’s writings in their lives and thus establish unwavering faith. ...

At the time, Nichiren Shoshu did not have its own complete set of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, and Soka Gakkai members were forced to study using compilations published by other Nichiren schools. But those compilations did not contain a number of significant texts written by the Daishonin. ... So they did not communicate Nichiren’s true message accurately and completely.

Nevertheless, when Mr. Toda proposed that Nichiren Shoshu publish a volume containing Nichiren Daishonin’s complete writings, it rejected the idea out of hand. The head temple did permit the Soka Gakkai to go ahead with such a publication, but it wasn’t prepared to help with the project.

Mr. Toda later shared his feelings: “I knew that trying to publish the Daishonin’s complete writings would be an enormous undertaking, yet when the priesthood announced that it wouldn’t assist us, I felt an irreplaceable surge of anger ...” At the time, the priesthood was most interested in casting a new bell for Taiseki-ji [the head temple].

The Soka Gakkai, on the one hand, was determined to publish a complete edition of the Daishonin’s writings in order to communicate his spirit faithfully and accurately to others and advance the cause of kosen-rufu. The priesthood, on the other hand, gave top priority to increasing the physical grandeur and authority of their head temple. ...

Finally, on April 28, 1952, the new Soka Gakkai edition of the Daishonin’s writings was complete.

Key Point: The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood has long focused on maintaining its status, forgetting the vow for kosen-rufu. In contrast, the Soka Gakkai presidents strove to make Nichiren’s writing accessible to all people so that they could develop strong faith, awaken to their mission and overcome all obstacles.

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 study.

*Reminder: The Soka Spirit curriculum can be found at www.sgi-usa.org/monthly-downloads/
October Curriculum: Week 3

Intro: By the early 20th century, Buddhism in Japan had devolved into “funeral Buddhism,” focused on religious rituals and formalities. Amid this backdrop, founding Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda revitalized Buddhism as a humanistic and egalitarian practice focused on empowering the individual and establishing a peaceful society. Toward the Soka Gakkai's 90th anniversary on November 18, let's review the fundamentals of our practice that continue to be revolutionary. This week, we will focus on discussion meetings.

Context: Dating back to Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren Daishonin, disciples gathered and discussed their mentor's teachings. Similarly, President Makiguchi established discussion meetings to foster heartfelt and open discussions about Buddhism. Under strict watch of the wartime “thought police,” Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda resolutely continued holding discussion meetings.

Ikeda Sensei's Guidance from www.worldtribune.org/article/foundation-discussion-meetings/: “Let us discuss the question at length” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 7)—with these words, the Daishonin proclaims the start of the frank and open discussion that ensues in his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.”

This is the same spirit with which our discussion meetings are conducted. As such, they are free of cruel malice and contempt, intimidation, authoritarianism, discrimination or petty emotionalism. Our meetings are marked by a warm spirit of trust and support based on deep mutual respect. They are occasions where we confirm our shared conviction that everyone has the right to happiness and can become happy without fail, no matter what their problems. ...

Our discussion meetings are havens of harmony, where people share their joys and sorrows, transcending differences of race, religion and social standing. ...

It was Mr. Makiguchi's firm conviction that, no matter what the times or social circumstances, the Soka Gakkai would advance with discussion meetings as its foundation. His disciple Josei Toda, who went on to become the second president, faithfully inherited this spirit. ...

The Daishonin's Buddhism exists so that everyone can become happy, and the purpose of discussion meetings is to inspire each person in faith. The main focus of the discussion meeting should be on every single one of the participants.

Key Point: The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood asserts an air of superiority, teaching that people must rely on them for enlightenment. However, the Soka Gakkai since its founding has striven to empower Nichiren Buddhists in studying, discussing and sharing their understanding of Nichiren's teachings as they fulfill their mission to transform their lives and society. Thus, the central engine of our kosen-rufu movement is found in discussion meetings—the day-to-day efforts to engage in dialogue with others, do our human revolution and support one another in deepening our faith.

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.

*Reminder: The Soka Spirit curriculum can be found at www.sgi-usa.org/monthly-downloads/