



1. REFRAIN from eating meals, as an SGI Zoom meeting constitutes a faith activity.

2. TURN CAMERA ON DURING ACTIVITIES which involve discussion and engagement.



3. MUTE WHEN NOT SPEAKING.



4. OTHER DISTRACTIVE BEHAVIORS: COOKING/CLEANING





The Power of Gratitude

SGI-USA May 2021 District Discussion Meeting

Gratitude Takes Practice

A UC Berkeley study stressed that expressing gratitude positively affected people who were struggling with anxiety and depression.

What lesson can we learn from this point?

That, perhaps, gratitude is not something to practice only when we are surrounded by fortunate circumstances, but something to practice at all times, as a way of life.

- See May 18, 2018, *World Tribune*, pp. 6-7



Its Ultimate Expression

“If you stop to consider, you will realize that, at one time or another in the past, all men have been your father and all women, your mother. ... And since this is so, you should help all of them to attain Buddhahood.”

- Nichiren Daishonin, “The Four Virtues and the Four Debts of Gratitude,” WND-2, 637





Chanting Makes Us Unbeatable

“When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, the sound of the Mystic Law reaches the realm of Buddhahood in the universe as well as the Buddha nature within us, unlocking its innate compassion, wisdom and courage. It fills us with the energy to face every difficulty, strengthens our life force and makes us unbeatable. It enables us to exercise our wisdom and intellect, sets us on a sure path leading to good fortune and benefit and allows us to advance toward victory. The true purpose of our Buddhist practice is to elevate our life state.”

- Ikeda Sensei, April 2021 *Living Buddhism*, p. 57

Enriching Our Lives to an Incomparable Degree

“The spirit of gratitude imparts ... immeasurable joy and vitality to our hearts, and as long as we have a keen sense of it, it serves as a wellspring that enables us to overcome every form of adversity and welcome true happiness into our lives. Gratitude enriches our lives to an incomparable degree.”

- Sensei, *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 22, pp. 79–80





Building an Unshakable Foundation

Two Types of Offerings in Buddhism:

- Offering of Goods: food, clothing, money and other goods
- Offering of the Law: spreading the teachings of Buddhism

“When we participate in Soka Gakkai activities and joyfully make such offerings of the Law, we will gradually be accumulating good fortune. Eventually this will manifest as great benefit. This is called inconspicuous benefit. Through this, we can build an unshakable foundation for our lives and realize a state of absolute happiness.”

- Sensei, NHR-26, 334

‘I Am Worthy of Such Goodness’

“Having a spirit of appreciation for someone from whose actions we benefit ... produces in our hearts a feeling of pride and self-esteem: “I am worthy of receiving such goodness.” It provides us with spiritual support to go on living.

“I once heard an episode involving a young man [who felt distressed and was considering self harm]. Someone trying to dissuade him from this course suggested that he first write letters to everyone to whom he owed thanks. When the youth thought about all the people he ought to write and realized how many had supported and helped him along the way, the power to go on living welled up within him.”

- Sensei, *Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teaching of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 28



Discussion Questions

1. What are some actions you can take to express appreciation?
2. What do you appreciate most about your Buddhist practice and our Soka community?



May 2021 Discussion Meeting Presentation Script

Topic: "The Power of Gratitude"

Slide 1:

****This slide is NOT part of the discussion meeting presentation. This slide is to outline basic Zoom etiquette. This slide can be shown at the beginning of a discussion meeting as members/guests join the meeting. The presentation starts from slide 2.**

Slide2:

- Hi everyone! Thank you for the opportunity to share this month's study topic.
- Today we will be studying about "The Power of Gratitude."

Slide 3:

- Let's start today's presentation by briefly going over a study by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley.
- There have been many studies on gratitude and its impact on people, but this particular study focused on how gratitude effects mental health.
- This one followed 300 students who were seeking mental health counseling.
- They were divided into three groups: The first group wrote a letter of gratitude to someone each week for three weeks. The second group wrote down their thoughts and feelings toward negative experiences. And the third group did not engage in any writing activity.
- The results showed that the first group reported significantly improved mental health compared to the other two groups at the 4-week mark and even 12 weeks after the studied ended.
- An article in the World Tribune explains: "The UC Berkeley study stressed that expressing gratitude positively affected people who were struggling with anxiety and depression. So what lesson can we learn from this point? That, perhaps, gratitude is not something to practice only when we are surrounded by fortunate circumstances, but something to practice at all times as a way of life."
- Now let's study the Nichiren Buddhist view of the power of living with gratitude!

Slide 4:

- Nichiren Daishonin teaches in his writings that as Buddhist practitioners, we should remember to repay our debts of gratitude to our parents, our teachers and our country.
- Here, the phrase "repaying debts" is not like owing money to someone and repaying that debt. The phrase "repaying debts of gratitude" means recognizing what others have done for us and how their support has helped us become the people we are today. From that recognition and feeling of gratitude, on our own accord, we express our appreciation to those around us.

- We can say that understanding what people have done for us and feeling in our hearts the desire to respond to that is what makes us truly human.
- And Nichiren teaches that we can have appreciation for our parents because they gave us life, for our teachers because they helped us develop our character and for our country or society that provides the basis for our livelihood.
- In addition, Buddhism emphasizes appreciating all living beings or all people. We could not exist, and we could not benefit from Buddhist practice without our connections to others.
- The Daishonin writes: **“If you stop to consider, you will realize that, at one time or another in the past, all men have been your father and all women, your mother. ... And since this is so, you should help all of them to attain Buddhahood.”**
- By recognizing our connections with all people, we can find great power in having gratitude for everyone we encounter. This will help us develop lives of absolute happiness.

Slide 5:

- While this idea of being able to have gratitude for all people may make sense to us, there are certainly times in our lives when it is extremely hard to feel appreciation.
- Sometimes we feel that it’s the people in our environment that are causing our pain and suffering.
- How do we find gratitude and appreciation in those cases?
- We can always start by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
- Ikeda Sensei explains: **“When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, the sound of the Mystic Law reaches the realm of Buddhahood in the universe as well as the Buddha nature within us, unlocking its innate compassion, wisdom and courage. It fills us with the energy to face every difficulty, strengthens our life force and makes us unbeatable. It enables us to exercise our wisdom and intellect, sets us on a sure path leading to good fortune and benefit and allows us to advance toward victory. The true purpose of our Buddhist practice is to elevate our life state.”**
- Isn’t this amazing? I’m sure many of us have experienced this when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
- And many times, it is during our hardest moments that we determine to chant for longer periods of time or with a more focused prayer. We can view and use our struggles, and issues and problems with others as an opportunity to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, an opportunity to shift our lives and engage in carrying out an inner transformation, our human revolution. This is how we can develop immense appreciation and gratitude for everyone and everything in our lives.
- It may not be easy or happen overnight, but if we continue to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo consistently, we will definitely develop the state of life where we can have genuine gratitude for everything.

Slide 6:

- Sensei explains that living with a sense of gratitude is actually what enables us to overcome all adversity.
- He says: **“The spirit of gratitude imparts immeasurable joy and vitality to our hearts, and as long as we have a keen sense of it, it serves as a wellspring that enables us to overcome every form of adversity and welcome true happiness into our lives. Gratitude enriches our lives to an incomparable degree.”**

- Of course, when we overcome obstacles and receive benefits, we feel happy and victorious. But it is during times of struggle—times when we may not have any hope—that bringing forth gratitude is exactly what enables us to transform our sufferings.
- It is through overcoming adversity with appreciation that we enrich our lives.

Slide 7:

- Taking action with gratitude for our loved ones, our community and our Buddhist practice invigorates our lives and brings benefit and good fortune.
- We express our appreciation through our Buddhist practice, which consists of chanting, studying Buddhism and participating in faith activities. And another integral part of our Buddhist practice is making offerings with a heart of appreciation.
- Two key offerings in Buddhism are “the offering of goods”—food, clothing, money and other goods—and “the offering of the Law”— spreading the teachings of Buddhism.
- The offering of goods allows us to release our attachment to material possessions while our offering of the Law helps us let go to our attachments that cause us to suffer.
- Explaining further, Sensei says: “When we participate in Soka Gakkai activities and joyfully make such offerings of the Law, we will gradually be accumulating good fortune. Eventually this will manifest as great benefit. This is called inconspicuous benefit. Through this, we can build an unshakable foundation for our lives and realize a state of absolute happiness.”
- So by living out our lives with gratitude and making offerings with a heart filled with appreciation, we can bring out the wisdom and courage to conquer our fundamental negativity, transform our lives and truly enjoy living.

Slide 8:

- Before we get into our discussion groups, let’s take a look at a brief real-life example that Sensei wrote about reminding us of the profundity of living with gratitude.
- “Having a spirit of appreciation for someone from whose actions we benefit ... produces in our hearts a feeling of pride and self-esteem: ‘I am worthy of receiving such goodness.’ It provides us with spiritual support to go on living.
- “I once heard an episode involving a young man [who felt distressed and was considering self harm]. Someone trying to dissuade him from this course suggested that he first write letters to everyone to whom he owed thanks. When the youth thought about all the people he ought to write and realized how many had supported and helped him along the way, the power to go on living welled up within him.”
- This episode ties back to what we learned earlier about the students who wrote thank you notes to someone each week.
- Essentially, Buddhism teaches that we don’t only feel appreciation because we are happy, we actually become happy by living with appreciation. That is the true power of gratitude.

Slide 9:

- Thank you for listening thus far! Now, let's discuss!
- Let's break up into groups and use these questions as a starting point.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some actions you can take to express appreciation?
2. What do you appreciate most about your Buddhist practice and our Soka community?