

# **Stepping Stones**

**A Guide  
to  
Buddhist  
Practice**

**A Workbook**

**By  
Margaret Blaine**

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# Please Read Before Starting to Use the Workbook

This workbook was written for people interested in trying out the chanting practice established by Nichiren Daishonin. It is also a wonderful supplement to my book *Your Path to Unshakeable Happiness*.

Experienced practitioners who have reviewed the book have said that it helped to re-vitalize their practice.

If you are a newcomer the workbook should be an accompaniment to having an experienced practitioner work with you, as you take your first steps into the practice. You may have questions not answered in the workbook, and an experienced practitioner can give you needed support in the early stages as you encounter unfamiliar experiences.

## How Can I Find Someone Close to Me?

Go to the national website at [www.sgi-usa.org](http://www.sgi-usa.org). Click find us, enter your zip code and you will find the group closest to you. They will welcome you.

I strongly encourage you to go to a meeting as you begin. Discussion meetings occur at least once a month and sometimes once a week. Nothing is required and you attend when you can.

In the discussion meeting, you'll find people to chant with and help you learn the basics. You'll hear experiences of how members have used the practice to address issues in their lives and you can always ask questions. You'll hear presentations on various Buddhist concepts and topics by more experienced members.

## What is the SGI?

The Soka Gakkai International is the international lay organization now established in 192 countries around the world. The home base is in Japan. Every country has its own national organization. In the United States, the national SGI is based in Los Angeles.

The SGI is primarily a volunteer organization, having a paid person only in major centers.

There are no priests in the SGI.

Around the country there is a community center in most states, but most of the meetings occur where a member has opened their home for meetings.

No contributions are required. However, if someone wants to support the activities of the organization and facilities, contributions are gratefully received.

## The Goal of the SGI

The sole goal of the SGI is the happiness of each practitioner, thus leading to world peace one person at a time.

Towards that end the SGI puts out two publications. *The World Tribune* is the weekly newspaper which has experiences, topics for discussion meetings, and news of what's happening. *Living Buddhism* is the monthly magazine. It focuses more on study, with articles on different aspects of Buddhist practice and philosophy. Once a month there is a gosho study, an in depth look at one of Nichiren Daishonin's letters to his followers. The goal of Living Buddhism is to deepen each person's understanding of Buddhism. You can order the publications at [www.sgi-usa.org](http://www.sgi-usa.org) in the online store.

The SGI has a printing press and there are numerous books available at community center bookstores and online.

You can see SGI initiatives established in the world to address global problems on the SGI-USA website under "Engaged Buddhism," such as:

1. Peace and disarmament
2. Sustainable development
3. human rights education

## How to Use this Workbook

Congratulations on making the decision to try out the practice. I hope you will commit yourself for 90 days. You have embarked on the daily adventure of awakening the Buddha within you.

The process builds on itself one step at a time. You'll need the slower pace to experience what is happening inside you. If you have any questions unanswered in the workbook itself, experienced practitioners in your local group will be able to help you.

## **Chapter 1**

# **Nichiren Buddhism**

## **What is This Religion?**

The SGI, the lay international organization of Nichiren Buddhists, has no dress code, no monks, no obvious religious architectural style. The appearance of religion has been allowed to fall away and only the substance is left. So what is left then? Many people would say nothing. But a great deal remains.

The appearance of religion has been allowed to fall away and only the basic substance is left, such things as basic human values:

- Peace
- Happiness
- Security
- The right to build your life as you wish it

## **Different Definitions of Religion**

Most modern educated people would say that such simple concerns are not religion. They would expect the member of a religion to believe in a higher power outside themselves. There would be a priesthood acting an essential intermediary between the member and that higher power. And there would be rules and rituals that identify that religion as different from another.

In Nichiren Buddhism, religion is defined differently. That connection with the universal energy is not seen as being outside of you. Rather it is seen as residing within you in your Buddha Nature and is tapped through a twice daily chanting practice to bring out its attributes, such as deep wisdom or compassion, to handle everyday life issues.

## **Relationship of Religion and Daily Life**

People in the modern world view religion and daily life as two separate entities. You live daily life and then go somewhere else to practice your religion.

In the SGI, daily life and religion are seen as one and the same. It is in daily life where we face the life challenges which can result in unhappiness or happiness, and it is in daily life where you express who you are as you take on these challenges. In the SGI, daily life challenges to happiness are taken on through religious practice and become the steppingstones to enlightenment.

Religion is not seen as adhering to a belief system, but rather optimizing the life force within you, so you can meet the challenges of daily life and become happy. The belief is religion should support your life, rather than you supporting the religion.

## **Nichiren Buddhism is seen as:**

1. A way to take on challenges to happiness in our lives
2. A way to tap the universal energy within each person to meet these challenges
3. A way to optimize the life force within each person
4. A way to use the challenges of daily life as steppingstones to enlightenment

## **The Discussion Meeting and Member Support**

Members are supported through the discussion meeting. There you can hear experiences of how practitioners have met life challenges through using a chanting practice. Members study together and apply Buddhist concepts in their lives.

In the discussion meeting the rubber meets the road. Does your life get better because of your practice, or not?

## **Reasons to Practice Nichiren Buddhism**

What can you hope for, when you practice Nichiren Buddhism?

The goal of Buddhist practice is for you to become happy. What would a happy life look like? What changes would you need to make to make happiness a reality?

When you practice Nichiren Buddhism daily, you will start to manifest what you need to become happy.

### **Expect to See Actual Results**

The following are the kinds of things you can expect:

- You will be able to pull yourself out of a negative life condition, such as depression, anxiety or chronic anger.
- You'll be able to find solutions to ongoing situations, such as financial, relationship, health, and work problems. You'll be able to overcome bad habits.
- You'll be able to overcome obstacles to make your life work.
- You'll be able to find solutions to ongoing problems.
- You'll become happy.

You may have other things you are hoping for. Be assured that when you start to chant, your whole life will move forward in the direction of your happiness.

Through addressing these challenges, you embark on the daily adventure of awakening the Buddha within, through strengthening your life, forging your character and building your faith.

## An Example

I've heard hundreds of experiences from real practitioners. Here are a few examples:

### George

When George started to practice, he suffered from a chronic debilitating anxiety. He could function but it was a struggle. He made the decision to practice Nichien Buddhism on a regular basis and soon noticed that he felt calmer after he chanted.

When he awakened in the middle of the night with anxiety, he chanted until he relaxed and fell asleep. Members of his home group chanted with him when he felt he needed a boost and encouraged him with examples of other people's experiences.

He found that if he was anxious about something he needed to do, he could chant about it until he felt more confident. Then, he learned to quickly take the action that had been causing anxiety. When he did this he felt much stronger afterward.

Over the next couple of years, he noticed his anxiety gradually decreasing and bothering him less frequently. One day he realized he hadn't felt anxious for several months.

Today, he is a happy man. Debilitating anxiety is a thing of the past.

### John

When John started to chant, he was deeply depressed. An engineering graduate, he realized he still didn't know what he wanted to do with his life. He was underemployed, stocking shelves. He'd been stuck in this hole for a number of years. His life was not working.

Once he started to practice, his life took an upward turn. He discovered if he chanted longer in the morning he would come to a point where he felt like smiling. Then, when he went about his daily activities, he felt more energetic and had more motivation.

As he did this day after day, his depression lessened. As he had more energy and felt better, he took on a volunteer job teaching Buddhism in a prison. Over the next few months, he discovered he really liked helping people and decided he wanted to study to be a counselor. He went to graduate school and established himself in his chosen profession.

As he chanted twice a day and the years went on, his depression continued to decrease. Today he is depression free, functioning well and most important, a happy man.

## Prove It to Yourself

You are not asked to believe anything when you begin. Faith will develop later after you see the benefits from practicing. It is a "prove-it-to-yourself practice." Or, what we call actual proof.

# **Exercise: Creating a Vision For the Future**

## **The Purpose of the Exercise**

It's time to start to examine what you want for your life. These are the beginning steps to moving you in the direction of becoming happy. You have to know where you want to go, before you can take the steps to getting there.

## **Benefits Exercise**

As you look at the different parts of your life, take a few minutes and write down what you would like to change. We will look at work, relationships and personal issues.

### **Work**

What would you like to achieve in your work life?

- Do you want more money?
- Do you hope for a promotion?
- Are you feeling overworked and don't know how to change it?
- Have you been laid off?
- Are you looking for another job.
- Do you want a successful conclusion to a project?
- Are there problems with a supervisor at work or another co-worker?
- Have you been fired multiple times and don't know how to change this pattern?
- Others?

**Write your work goals here:**

## **Relationships**

- What are your concerns around the area of relationships?
- Are you a loner and wish you had some friends?
- Do you wish you had a committed relationship?
- Are there issues with a child that you'd like to see resolved?
- Do you want to improve your parenting skills?
- Do you have issues with someone in your family of origin, a parent or a brother or sister?
- Are you have problems with your significant other and want to see them solved?
- Are you having dating issues, for example not knowing how to ask someone out or how to have them ask you?
- Have you had several relationships and found you've chosen the wrong kind of person more than once?
- Is your partner opposed to you practicing?
- Others?

**Write your relationship goals here:**

## **Personal life**

What about personal issues? If any one of these are really affecting your life, then I would include it as an issue.

- Are you having with depression?
- Do you have anxiety problems?
- Do you fight an overeating problem?
- Do you have a bad habit you'd like to overcome?
- Do you have a difficulty with addiction?
- Do you have a health issue?
- Do you have a purpose for living?
- Are you in the middle of a life transition?
- Do you want to develop discipline?
- Do you have a difficulty with follow through?
- Do you procrastinate?
- Do you know you need to do something but are afraid to move forward?
- Are you up against an impasse in your life and don't know how to get around it to get what you want?
- Do you want to go to school or find a job?
- Are you totally overwhelmed with life and see no path out?
- Others?

**Write your personal goals here:**

## **Chapter 2**

# **Laying the Foundation**

## **How do Nichiren Buddhists Address Life Problems?**

### **The Chanting Practice**

Nichiren Buddhists address life issues through a chanting practice which is done for about 15 minutes twice a day. A chanting practice to solve problems probably seems strange and very different. All I can say to you is it works. You don't have to believe me, or even believe chanting will work. No faith is required. You just try it and see what happens.

Think of it rather like switching on an electric light. You flip a switch and the light comes on. But you don't really have to know how electricity works in order to turn on a light. It's the same way with chanting.

### **The Buddhist Explanation**

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo puts your life into rhythm with the Mystic Law of the universe, which, in Nichiren Buddhism, is the ultimate law or truth of life existing within everything in creation. Connecting with the Mystic Law allows your life to move forward and become positive and progressive.

As you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo on a daily basis, you tap into your Buddha nature. Your Buddha nature embodies a deep wisdom, unshakeable happiness, compassion and infinite freedom. As you bring these qualities out during daily life, they gradually become more and more a part of your life.

### **Nichiren Buddhism Is Practical**

This Buddhist explanation probably seems theoretical. I want to reassure you that Nichiren Buddhism is entirely practical. It is an experiential practice. You will come to understand in your own life how it works when you start chanting. Most practitioners feel it is the most practical thing that they do.

# **What is the Daily Practice?**

## **The Primary Practice**

Nichiren Daishonin taught the primary practice, which is chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo over and over. This is called daimoku in Japanese. In this way, you tap into your Buddha nature, your universal connection. You can bring out the compassion, wisdom and unshakeable happiness of your Buddha nature into everyday life.

There are no rules about how long to chant. You can chant as often as you like and as long as you like. The general rule of thumb is to chant until you feel satisfied. This could be five minutes or it could be many hours depending on whether this is an ordinary day, or whether you have a serious problem or crisis you are trying to handle.

## **The Secondary Practice**

Gongyo is the secondary practice of chanting two books of the Lotus Sutra, a verbal teaching, which takes about fifteen minutes. They are called "Expedient Means" and the "Life Span" chapters.

## **Full Practice**

Chanting Gongyo and Daimoku together, twice a day, is the full chanting practice.

## **Short History of Buddhism**

In this section, I want to give you a very brief history of Buddhism, so you will understand where this practice comes from. Then you will see how Nichiren Buddhists address problems in life.

Buddhism originated with Shakyamuni Buddha. As time has gone on, different teachers have contributed to our understanding of the Buddhist teaching. Buddhism emphasizes the body of religious truth, more than the person by whom it is preached. consequently, Buddhism is not so concerned with unique events, personages and history.

## **Shakyamuni Buddha**

Shakyamuni Buddha lived in 2500 BC. He lived in north central India. He was born as a prince and lived a protected life growing up. He was married at a young age and fathered a son. The plan was that he would take over the kingdom.

There is a story that Shakyamuni found his mission in life when, as a young man, he made four trips outside the palace. Once outside the protected environment of the palace, he was faced with the sufferings of the people, which are, birth, sickness, aging and death. He developed a deep desire to help people transcend human suffering and become happy.

In order to follow his mission, he left his princely heritage, leaving behind his home and his family. He perceived, even though young, that military force or political power would not relieve the problem of suffering. He decided to take up the spiritual life to find the fundamental solution to the problem of suffering in society.

In order to become an enlightened sage himself, he tried many spiritual practices. Ultimately, according to the story, he was enlightened to the truth of life during a meditation underneath a bodhi tree. He then became a spiritual teacher and began to teach the people throughout India.

## The Lotus Sutra

Over the next fifty years, he taught his followers through 84,000 sutras, verbal teachings. At the end of his life, he taught them the Lotus Sutra. He felt it was his highest teaching. He told his followers that the sutras prior to the Lotus Sutra should be considered provisional, that those teachings lead up to the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that *everyone* has the Buddha nature. The Buddha nature is an enlightened level of life which embodies unshakeable happiness, compassion, deep wisdom and infinite freedom.

Furthermore, it also teaches that anyone may attain the state of Buddhahood or enlightenment. This was a highly controversial teaching for that time. Common beliefs said there were certain groups, including women, who could not attain enlightenment.

After Shakamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra traveled from India, spread into China, across Korea and into Japan.

## Nichiren Daishonin

In 13th century Japan, there lived a Buddhist monk called Nichiren Daishonin. He spent years studying Shakaymuni's sutras trying to understand the core of Buddhism. The teachings had become confused in the 1900 years since Shakaymuni's death. He agreed with Shakyamuni that the core of the teachings was the Lotus Sutra.

While Shakaymuni had described the Buddha nature and enlightenment, Nichiren taught a chant, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which would allow you to tap into your Buddha nature and bring out its qualities into everyday life. The goal of Nichiren Buddhism is to open up your Buddha nature and enable yourself to live an enlightened life of unshakeable happiness.

In the next chapter you will actually learn the chant and how to practice.

## **What is the 90 Day Challenge?**

When someone is brand new to Buddhism, has many questions and isn't sure yet whether it is for them, it's time to take the 90 day challenge.

The 90 day challenge is where the rubber meets the road. You will see whether Nichiren Buddhism works for you. This is where you prove it to yourself one way or the other. Since you will discover this through experience, the 90 day challenge will give you the experience of how the practice works.

Trying the 90 day challenge and proving something to yourself is different from taking a leap of faith. Faith in this practice comes after you have had multiple experiences where the practice has worked. Then you know you can rely on it. At the beginning, you don't have to believe anything. It is an experiment.

# **Exercise: Prepairing For the 90 Day Challenge**

## **How to Start the 90 Day Challenge**

Remember the exercise you did in chapter one, where you listed all the things you would like to have happen in your life? Pull it out and look it over.

Now, listen to the chant. The URL for it can be found below.

Chapter three will take you through the steps of the 90 day experiment.

## **It's time to listen to the chant, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo**

To hear the chant go to <http://www.sgi-usa.org/memberresources/beginnersresources/howtochant.php> You can hear an explanation of the chant on the first video. The second one, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will allow you to listen to the chant. The video is only a little over a minute but it will allow you to hear the pronunciation and how the chant sounds.

The third video gives the pronunciation of the two books of the Lotus Sutra. If you decide the practice is for you then it will be time to learn Gongyo, the full practice.

## Chapter 3

# Introduction to Chanting

## Chanting: A Dialogue with the Universe

We have discussed the daily chanting practice which lays the foundation for the types of changes we have talked about. Practitioners chant twice a day, in the morning and again in the evening. Practitioners chant about concerns and challenges, anything which is important in their daily lives.

The idea of chanting may sound strange to Western ears. You might ask, "What does chanting have to do with anything?"

When you chant about something, you will feel as though you are connected with a deep wisdom which can guide you in the direction you want to go. One practitioner describes it this way. "When I chant, I feel as though instead of being a player on the field in a sporting event, I am sitting high in the bleachers. Instead of being in the middle of the action, I have an overview and I can see the direction I need to go much more clearly."

Another practitioner holds his finger over his head and crooks it. "I feel as though I am plugging in to the universe. When I do, I can access anything I need, from answers to questions, to ideas for how to do things like solve construction problems. It seems as though what I need shows up when I need it. It's so practical and makes my life so much easier."

Each person's experience is unique. You really have to try it. It is an experiential practice.

I hope that those of you reading this workbook are willing to suspend judgment and try something new. Think of it as trying an experiment. No one is going to ask you to believe anything. This is a practice where you prove to yourself whether it works for you.

Chanting seems simple but it is profound. When you chant, you start a dialogue with the universe. When you set your goal you tell the universe what you need. As you chant daily you are going to find that the steps to getting that goal will appear, in ways you might never have imagined.

What is the chant? It is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and it is repeated over and over. This is the primary practice. In the next two sections I will talk about what it means.

# The Meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

Japanese characters often have multiple meanings. In the following discussion, this is the case.

**Nam-myoho-renge-kyo** – Represents the Wonderful Law, the ultimate law or truth of the universe. It is also referred to as the Mystic Law. A second meaning is our Buddha Nature.

**Nam** – To devote oneself to, or fuse your life with the eternal and unchanging truth. Through this fusion, you can draw forth inexhaustible wisdom, which functions in accord with changing circumstances.

**Myo** – Is the name given to the mystic nature of life, eternal life, enlightenment.

**Ho** – The manifestations of the mystic nature of life, temporal life, phenomena.

**Myoho** – The Mystic Law, the ultimate truth or law of life, the Wonderful Law. It also represents the essence of life itself that is manifest while one is alive and continues in a latent state in death.

**Renge** – The Lotus Flower, an important symbol in Buddhism. It grows in muddy water, yet it still opens a beautiful flower full of light, undefiled by the muddy water. Like that, you have the Buddha Nature, the enlightened level of life within you. Even with your feet planted in the muddy water of everyday life, you can bring out the qualities of your enlightened nature to function in daily life.

The Lotus flower has a quality unique in the plant kingdom. It seeds and flowers simultaneously. The Lotus flower shows how cause and effect work in our lives. From the moment you have a thought, take an action, or speak, you have simultaneously set a cause deep in the depths of your life. It will manifest as an effect at some time in the future, when conditions are right.

**Kyo** – The words and voices of all living beings. The voice does the Buddha's work.

## The Gohonzon

Practitioners sit in front of a mandala called a Gohonzon. The Gohonzon is written on a scroll in Sanskrit and Chinese characters.

*Go* is an honorific prefix and *honzon* means object of respect or devotion.

Down the middle is written Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren, embodying the enlightenment of the eternal Buddha, the Law personified as a person.

Around Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are the characters which represent all of the different life conditions we live internally every day of our lives. We call them the Ten Worlds. (There are other symbols as well.)

When Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, your enlightened Buddha nature, is in the center of your life all of the other life conditions come into balance around it.

## The Gohonzon is a Mirror

The Gohonzon is a mirror of your enlightened life. You are not praying to something outside of yourself. Nichiren Buddhists believe that the universal energy exists within everything in creation and in your Buddha Nature. It doesn't exist as a specific entity outside. When you chant in front of the Gohonzon you will be able to reflect deeply on your life and bring out the best of yourself.

Nichiren Daishonin knew that people would have the tendency to want to focus on something and so he inscribed the Gohonzon to give practitioners a focal point.

# **Exercise: Steps to Chanting at Home**

## **To Begin**

First, listen again to the video at <http://www.sgi-usa.org/memberresources/beginnersresources/howtochant.php>

## **Steps to Chanting at Home**

1. Find a comfortable place to sit facing a blank space on the wall. This focal point represents the Gohonzon. If you decide to become a practitioner you will have a Gohonzon for your home.
2. Set a goal, which will be a stretch. For now, think of something specific, something you want. If your issue is a problem, think of how you want the solution to look. Goal setting will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.
3. At the beginning of the session. Visualize your intention, your goal accomplished, After that, you can let your mind go wherever it wishes.
4. Begin to repeat Nam-myoho-renge-kyo over and over. Maybe 5 or 10 minutes at the beginning.
5. As you chant, you may find ideas come to you about possible steps towards your goal. Don't let these float away. You are going to want to act on them later. You can write them down if you wish.
6. Don't try to figure out how you are going to get to your goal while chanting. Continue to see the goal as accomplished.
7. Don't try to force anything to happen. Just stay comfortable and natural, allowing whatever happens to happen.
8. When you have completed the time you set to chant, end with three slow Nam-myoho-renge-kyos.

These will be the series of steps you will follow as you chant daily for your goal. Plan to chant for 90 days and see what happens. You have begun an exciting new adventure!

## Chapter 4

# Goal Setting

## The Role of Earthly Desires

Earthly desires, in earlier forms of Buddhism, were considered the cause of suffering and obstacles to attaining enlightenment. People were encouraged to shed their earthly desires.

Enlightenment, on the other hand, was to attain a vast, expansive state of unshakeable happiness. The two would appear to be polar opposites.

In Nichiren Buddhism, when you chant about your problems, concerns and opportunities, the sufferings created by the attachment to earthly desires become the motivation, the fuel for constructing happiness. Chanting for and overcoming your problems and challenges to achieve your goals provides actual proof of faith and encourages us to chant more.

When you base your life on Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, it doesn't matter what problem you are concerned about, a friend who is ill, an issue in a relationship, a problem at work. You can use those problems to create value, grow, and become happier.

By chanting about your concerns you can use them to elevate your life condition thereby developing your character. When you chant, you can increase your life force and build good fortune in your life. Problems become the direct path to strengthening your life and as you overcome them one by one they become the steps which lead you to Buddhahood, or enlightenment.

When you chant about a problem, you are tapping into your highest life state, Buddhahood, and bringing it out to use in daily activity. As you do this over time, your life begins to embody the characteristics of your Buddha nature, deep wisdom, compassion, unshakeable happiness and infinite freedom.

## Introduction to Setting Goals

Nichiren Buddhists chant for goals. By chanting for goals, you take the rudder of your life into your hands and set the direction you want to go. Can you imagine a pilot setting out to cross the ocean who didn't know where he was heading? Where do you think he would end up if he was unclear?

Sometimes you might just feel like chanting. No chanting (daimoku) is ever wasted, But if you have a specific concern you will achieve it faster if you set a goal. Specific goals are particularly important during the first ninety days when you are trying out the practice to see if it will produce results in your life. If you have a specific goal, then you will know when you reach it.

In the next two sections we'll examine the kinds of goals to set for the best results. Then we'll go through eight steps to setting a goal. Finally in the exercise for this chapter you will set a goal and begin to chant for it.

## What kinds of Goals Can I Set? What Can I chant For?

**You can chant about anything. Here are some ideas.**

- You can chant for money
- A solution to a relationship problem
- Clarity about a decision you must make
- To have a safe trip
- To protect someone.
- A resolution to a work problem
- A better job
- A place to live
- You can chant for world peace.

You can chant about anything which comes up in your life. For example, I chanted for ideas of what to put on my website. My husband chanted for solutions to construction problems when remodeling our house. What people chant for is as varied as their problems and challenges.

## 8 Steps to Setting A Goal?

### 1. Set A Positive Goal

For example, let's say you want to lose 20 pounds. You don't chant to lose the 20 pounds. Instead, chant to weigh your goal weight. Let's say you've developed a health problem. Chant for perfect health.

### 2. Be Specific About What You Want

Sometimes people are surprised at the idea of being specific. You have to know where you are going in order to get there.

### 3. Make a Determination

Chant with a conviction that says, "This goal is going to happen no matter what!" This conviction announces to the universe that you are serious. If you chant with hope, but without conviction, then you are telling the universe that you believe the outcome is in doubt. **Be determined.**

## **4. See Your Goal as Completed**

Chant with the end in mind, your preferred outcome. See the outcome as already achieved.

## **5. Don't Try to Figure Out How to Achieve Your Goal**

All you are responsible for is setting your preferred outcome. The universe is responsible for plotting the map for getting there.

## **6. Pay Attention To Ideas Which Come**

When you chant regarding a goal you are communicating with the universe. The response comes in the form of ideas or internal promptings for steps to take towards your goal.

## **7. Take Action on the Ideas You Receive**

Action is the second half of the equation. Ideas will come to you and it is up to you to follow through with putting them into action. This is how your goal will work itself out.

## **8. Chant Until You Achieve Your Goal**

If you have a goal that could take weeks or months to work itself out, or one that is a major challenge, make sure you have the support of experienced practitioners. You can find them by going to <http://www.sgi-usa.org>. Look to the right for "Find US." Then put in your zip code to find a group near you.

## **Exercise: Setting Your First Goal**

In Chapter one, you completed an exercise where you wrote down the things you would like to see happen in your life?

That exercise should give you some ideas for goals.

Pick one, or more than one if you wish. You can chant for as many goals as you like. Some people have just one. Another person may have a list of goals.

Then follow the *8 Steps to Set a Goal* in the last section.

Remember to keep chanting until you achieve your goal. In chapter 7, there are two articles on recognizing steps of progress towards your goal.

**Write your goals here:**

## Chapter 5

# You Can Change Your Life Condition

## What is a Life Condition?

Every day you experience internal reactions to events. Sometimes you are excited and happy. Other times you are angry or depressed. These internal feelings are called life conditions or life states.

In Nichiren Buddhism, there are ten internal life states called the Ten Worlds. There are six lower worlds and four higher ones, ranging from Hell to Buddhahood.

Even though they are called worlds, they are not actual places outside, but rather inner potentials. You move in and out of them as you respond to the circumstances of your life. In the next section I will describe the Ten Worlds and how they work in your life.

You shift from one to another when you chant. You have the power to raise your life out of a negative life condition into a positive one.

## The Ten Worlds

### The Six Lower Paths (Worlds)

- 1. Hell** – In this life state living is misery and suffering and you feel there is no way out. You are filled with rage and destructive behaviors.
- 2. Hunger** – In this life state you are at the mercy of your cravings for such things as food, drugs, money, pleasure, power, and recognition. You are never satisfied.
- 3. Animality** – This life state represents the “law of the jungle.” You fear the strong and despise and prey on the weak. You can’t make long-range judgments.
- 4. Anger** – In this life state you are determined to best others in everything, see threats everywhere, value yourself as superior, and hold others in contempt.
- 5. Humanity** – In this life state you are generally humane, highly vulnerable to outside influences, and can easily fall into the lower four worlds.
- 6. Rapture** – In this short lived life state you feel intense joy resulting from the fulfillment of a desire, inner contentment, and physical well-being.

These six paths are reactive, responding to changing circumstances in your life. In the six lower worlds, you are basing your happiness and identity on externals.

## **The Four Noble Paths**

At this point you realize everything is impermanent and start to search for a lasting truth. The four noble paths means you must make a decision to do something, be self-motivated. These paths are not reactive to circumstances.

- 1. Learning** – In this life state you seek the truth through the teaching and experiences of others.
- 2. Realization** – In this life state you seek the truth through your own direct perception. You are no longer a prisoner to your own reactions.
- 3. Bodhisattva** – In this life state you have an aspiration to achieve enlightenment, and also enable others to do the same. You find satisfaction in altruistic behavior.
- 4. Buddhahood** – In this life state you experience a state of perfect freedom, infinite compassion, deep wisdom and unshakeable happiness. Free of karmic bonds and purified of illusion, you can harmoniously resolve what appear to be insoluble contradictions. Buddhahood is expressed in the bodhisattva way of life.

## **How The Ten Worlds Work in our Daily Lives.**

Example: You work for a sales organization. When you go to work there is a meeting to encourage everyone to sell more widgets. The prize will be a trip to Hawaii. For a moment you are in the world of hunger. You receive a phone call from your significant other. When you realize who it is, you experience rapture. Then he/she tells you she doesn't want to be in the relationship, you fall into hell.

Maybe later in the day you have a realization that there are certain things you need to learn to be a good business person. For a while you are in the world of learning as you listen to thoughts of someone who has been successful in building their organization.

This is how you move in and out of the ten worlds all day, every day.

## **You Can Change Your Life Condition**

### **You Can Be Happy Regardless**

Most people in the West think that happiness or unhappiness comes from the outside. They tend to blame the weather or something that is going on in their lives. But that means they are just being reactive and victimized by whatever happens in their environment.

## **Your View of Life Affects Your Happiness**

What determines whether you are happy then? Buddhism teaches that whether you feel happy or not does not depend on outside circumstances but rather on your internal state of life, your life condition. You view life, as you are, from the inside out. If you are depressed, then life takes on a grey hue. If you chronically worry, then your life takes on anxiety. On the other hand, if you are happy then the world looks wonderful. Your view of life affects the degree of happiness you experience.

## **You Can Change Your Life Condition At Will**

In the last section, you learned about the Ten Worlds, which range from the negative states of the lower worlds to the four positive higher worlds. Each of the worlds contains the potentials of all the others.

When you chant Nam-myoho-renge kyo, you can, at will, pull your life condition out of a state of negativity and into a more positive state. This means you are no longer compelled to remain in unhappy states of anxiety, anger, or hunger.

No one knows quite how it works but you can prove it to yourself by trying the exercise at the end of this chapter.

## **A Promise**

When you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo over time, you will cultivate a state of joy in your heart that will not be influenced by the tempests and waves of life. In this state, it is though you are in the clear sky above, looking down at all the negativity in life. When you cultivate such a state of life, you will be able to calmly accept whatever happens and put things into proper perspective with a positive attitude.

## **Exercise: Change Your Life Condition**

Are you are dealing with depression, anxiety, fear, anger or any other negative life condition? Would now like to change it? If so, here are the steps.

1. Focus on the solution to your concern. If you don't know the solution, chant for a solution.
2. Sit down, set your focal point on the wall, and start chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
3. Sometimes you might have to chant longer, but stick with it until you feel your life state change and you feel more positive.

**Make a few notes about what happened.**

## Chapter 6

# Poison Into Medicine

### Change Poison into Medicine

Changing poison into medicine is one of the clearest expressions of how Nichiren Buddhism works in our lives. This is not just looking on the bright side of things, positive thinking or avoiding negativity.

Changing poison into medicine means first looking at the negative circumstances of your life, such as hurt, anger, despair, jealousy, illness and poverty. You hold the power to change that suffering into joy and good fortune because you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is not just a subjective feeling. You can change your actual circumstances, transforming a destructive situation into a positive one. Strong faith can transform any suffering into benefit, thus turning poison into medicine.

Suffering is a powerful incentive for spiritual progress. It is possible to create value out of every situation, to transform any suffering into benefit. Looking at it this way, since you chant, any illness or misfortune is an opportunity to create something positive in your life. Having had this experience over and over, when faced with challenges, longer term practitioners say, "Good, this will give me an opportunity to chant and improve my life."

Whenever experiencing pain, loss or failure, instead of blaming other people or circumstances, a practitioner will chant in order to look deeply into her own life. Through this process you can acquire a profound understanding of tendencies and patterns of behavior which are contributing to the problem. When you change those tendencies, you change poison into medicine. In this way, everything in life becomes a source of learning and development.

### Let me give you an example.

A woman was bitter and angry at her ex-husband. Their bad relationship was affecting the children. As a Buddhist practitioner, she went to get guidance about how to handle this from her seniors in faith. They told her to chant for his happiness. With gritted teeth she followed their advice.

One day, he called to talk to their son, a rare occasion. While she and her husband were talking, he told her about some good fortune in his life. To her great surprise she found she was genuinely happy for him. Through chanting for his happiness she had erased the poisons of bitterness and anger from her own life. Not only was her life improved but so was her child's situation. Now he no longer had to live with the fighting and tension, which had existed before.

There is no greater freedom than to know that all of your life has value, that all you're suffering has been exactly what you've needed to bring yourself to higher ground. You can change poison (that which could harm you) into medicine (that which will heal you).

## How to Handle a Challenging Problem

1. Consistency is important for results, so chant for a resolution to your problem every day.
2. Pay attention to ideas you have regarding your issue. If you need to act on something, do it.
3. When doubts arise, don't allow yourself to indulge them for long. Instead turn your attention to what you want. You might have to do this many times a day. **Remember, it is your job to set the goal, the universe will provide the steps to getting there.**
4. If you have a major problem, you might want to have others chant with you. This can be a powerful way to amass the power needed to push your situation over the hump.
5. Listen to experiences of long term members in discussion meetings. They have handled many difficult problems using the practice. Their experiences will demonstrate how to use the practice to succeed. They will encourage you and can answer questions on how to chant about your issue and how to handle discouragement.
6. Difficult problems are a time when you can deepen your faith. Study Nichiren Daishonin's writings or something from President Ikeda. You can always go to the SGI website, [www.sgi-usa.org](http://www.sgi-usa.org) and search. The writings of Nichiren Daishonin are online through this website as well.
7. Experienced practitioners are always willing to support you and they will have ideas on study material.
8. **Never give up! Chant until you achieve your goal.**

## **Exercise: Change Poison into Medicine**

1. Pick something you want to change in your life.
2. Set a positive goal, envisioning the solution to the problem.
3. Chant for your goal daily.
4. Make a determination. Chant until you achieve the goal.

Note any challenges to remaining positive.

How did you handle these challenges? What did you learn?

## **Chapter 7**

# **Types of Benefits**

## **Recognizing Different Types of Benefits**

In this chapter we are going to cover the different kinds of benefits you could receive when chanting for a goal. Being able to recognize them is very encouraging when you are challenging an obstacle.

### **Conspicuous Benefits**

When you chant for a goal you are going to notice that answers come in many ways. Here are a couple of examples where it is clear that the person chanting had received a benefit.

One young woman wanted interviews for a job and wasn't landing any. Then she started to chant for the first time and chanted for the perfect job. Within the week she had several interviews. This is an example of conspicuous benefit.

One mother was chanting for a solution to a difficult relationship problem with her daughter. Within the year, the relationship took a marked turn for the better.

In both of these examples it is clear that the person chanting received a benefit, which could be recognized by anyone, a conspicuous benefit.

### **Inconspicuous Benefits**

An inconspicuous benefit is much more subtle. Inconspicuous benefits grow in our lives like tree rings over time. When you look back you suddenly realize how much you have changed or how much your life has changed. These things were happening all along but you weren't really aware of them. Sometimes it takes another person to bring it to your attention. Inconspicuous benefit shows up as good fortune which rises like the tide and results in a rich, expansive state of life.

Inconspicuous benefits include all the ways your life is strengthened as you move towards one goal after another. For example, a young man nervously takes on a challenge and achieves it. The inconspicuous benefit is the confidence he gained in the process of meeting the challenge.

### **Conspicuous and Inconspicuous Benefits Can Work Together**

Sometimes you receive a conspicuous benefit, but there is also another less obvious benefit that comes with it.

For example, you receive an idea that would be a step towards your goal. You act on it even though you are scared to take the action. Then something opens up, a step toward your goal that could not have happened until you took that action.

Two things happened here. When the step opened up, you received a conspicuous benefit. You had a response which was a step toward your goal. Since you could identify and see it, this was a conspicuous benefit.

But something else happened as well. You faced a fear and took the action anyway. In this way you overcame a weakness in yourself which would make you stronger next time. This is an example of an inconspicuous benefit.

Sometimes you don't recognize something that turns out to be a benefit. For example, a regular pot user chanted for pot. She got it. This was the conspicuous benefit she wanted. When she smoked it, she realized it brought her down-compared to chanting, which lifted her up. Before long, she gave up the pot.

Giving up the pot was an inconspicuous benefit. She had been smoking quite a lot of it and it was affecting her life, in loss of ambition. When she gave it up, she got her life back.

## **Hidden Benefits**

Sometimes your goal doesn't work out quite as expected and you will discover there is a hidden benefit. Sometimes you discover the unexpected benefit in hindsight.

In one example, a nurse, was tired of high pressure work and chanted for a less stressful work environment. She got it, but there was an unexpected twist. She found she was bored in her new environment. There wasn't enough excitement to keep things interesting for her. It turned out to be an opportunity to learn something about herself. Taking it in that spirit, she took a step towards happiness and chanted for the job that would suit her, now that she knew herself better. Knowing yourself well is taking a big step toward establishing a fulfilling life.

On occasion, you don't receive what you have chanted for. Then at a later time you discover that what did happen was more to your benefit than what you thought you wanted.

A young man was looking for work out of town and he and his wife put their dream home on the market. They had remodeled it and since she was an interior designer, it was perfect. They anticipated it would sell quickly.

Even though other houses on their street were selling, their house didn't sell. Six months passed. Since they were chanting to sell the house, they couldn't understand why the house didn't find a buyer. One day, the husband landed a job. According to the ad, the job appeared to be out of town. He discovered as long as they were within 15 minutes of the airport they didn't have to sell their home. Since they met the requirements, they were able to remain in the home that was perfect for them.

You can trust, if you are chanting for a goal, whatever happens is moving you in the direction of happiness.

## Exercise: Recognizing Steps of Progress

You have written your goals in chapter four. Start noticing anything which comes to you regarding those goals. When you chant about something, you have started a dialogue. You have sent out your request to the universe and the universe will respond. Pay attention.

You might like to note:

- Ideas received
  - Information which has come to you regarding your goal through another person, article or book, etc.
  - Internal promptings to take one direction or another
  - Results when you took action
  - Have any surprising coincidences happened, which you might have been tempted to dismiss?
  - Have you changed in some way needed to achieve your goal? An inconspicuous benefit?

- Have you seen a conspicuous benefit?

- Other observations?

## Chapter 8

# Handling Obstacles

## Obstacles and Challenges Become the Path

In Nichiren Buddhism, obstacles assume a positive function. They become the steppingstones towards learning to bring out, recognize, and embody the characteristics of your Buddha nature.

Having experienced their own growth through challenging obstacles, long term practitioners will say, "You have an obstacle? Congratulations. Look at it as an opportunity. Now you have something to chant about."

Buddhism teaches you to never give up. Chant until you overcome the obstacle and reach your goal. Here are the steps on the path.

### The Path

You come up against an obstacle.

#### **Step 1: Sit down and chant about it.**

#### **Step 2: Set a positive goal**

Envision the solution to your concern.

#### **Step 3: Pay attention to anything that comes to you relating to your goal**

Ideas will come to you. You might see a way to move forward while you are chanting, or you might get exactly the help you need from someone else to take the next step, a thought, information from a book or the internet. Perhaps something shifts in your environment that could be a step towards your goal.

#### **Step 4: Take action based on the information you have received.**

Goals are achieved by taking action in daily life. This might require you to take a step which feels uncomfortable. Maybe the action you must take is unfamiliar, or, in order to take the action you have to walk through a fear.

### **Step 5: Face Your Fears Head On**

If you have to face a fear, remember you can raise your life condition by chanting until you feel courageous enough to take the action.

### **Step 6: Note any insights relating to your goal**

When you chant for a goal you might receive new insights regarding your goal. You begin to understand it differently in a wider, deeper, richer way. Even though on the surface your goal appears to shift, it satisfies your greater understanding.

For example, let's say you are having a relationship problem with your grown daughter and you start to chant for her happiness. One day, while chanting, you realize you have been trying to control her behavior and this is bringing you a lot of distress. You learn through Buddhist study that each person is responsible for their own life. You see that you cannot actually control what your daughter does in her life. All you can do is take care of yourself in the relationship. Gradually, you let go of your attempts to control. To your delight, the relationship begins to improve. One day you realize that you have become happier and so has she. You achieved your goal although your understanding has changed.

### **Repeat Steps 4 through 6**

Keep repeating these steps until you accomplish your goal.

## **Some Considerations when Facing an Obstacle**

### **How to Set a Goal when Dealing with A Difficult Obstacle**

When you have something you are very worried about, like losing a house, losing a job, a health situation, it is easy to forget how to set a positive goal. When we forget, we tend to want to chant as follows. "Don't let me lose the house." Or, "I want to get rid of this cancer." These are negative goals in that you are envisioning what you don't want.

Instead, remember to focus on what you *do* want. Envision a safe, secure, financial situation where you can easily make the house payment. If you are dealing with a health issue, envision perfect health. Now you are envisioning a solution to your problem.

### **Don't Pray to Something Outside of Yourself**

Don't beg for the solution to your problem. You are not praying to something outside of yourself. You are connecting with your Buddha Nature within, where you and the universe become one. Envision what you want.

## **Hope Versus Determination**

There is a big difference between hope and determination.

Hope means that you aren't sure that you will achieve your goal. For example, I hope I might lose 12 pounds. But since I haven't had success in the past, I'm not sure it will happen.

A determination, on the other hand, says that your goal will be achieved no matter what and you are willing to do anything necessary to achieve it.

It is the difference between being a beggar versus knowing that you are a Buddha. Remember you are a Buddha and you determine what will happen in your life.

## **Take Control of Your Thoughts**

What do you do when negative thoughts, worry and doubt, come up during the day? You can't afford to allow yourself to wallow in negativity. The universe is going to reflect your habitual thinking. This doesn't mean an occasional thought. Habitual thinking is when you dwell on your fears a good part of the time.

Anytime you start to worry, refocus your thoughts on your goal and see it as already accomplished. As you are changing a habit, you may have to do this multiple times a day. It does get easier, as you persist.

## **Some Things to remember**

Some goals are going to take longer. Some are complex and have many parts which need to fall into place before the goal can be achieved.

Perhaps you are going to have to change in some way in order to achieve the goal. It wouldn't be surprising if you had some resistance to making those changes and might even have been putting it off.

The important thing is to keep on chanting with the determination to do whatever you need to do to achieve the goal, no matter how long it takes.

## **Exercise: Handling An Obstacle**

This exercise is to allow you to keep track of your efforts and insights in handling obstacles. I have included the exercises in the back of the workbook to be copied and used over and over.

### **Identify the obstacle**

How would you like to see this obstruction resolved? Set that solution as your goal and write it here.

### **Chant and jot down any thoughts or information which comes to you regarding your goal.**

Have you gained a new understanding of your goal? Note any insights.

Note any action you take toward your goal. What happened as a result of taking that action?

Note any steps of progress toward achieving your goal.

Note any twists and turns you want to remember.

**Have you had to deepen your faith in any way, through chanting longer, studying or receiving guidance. If so, how?**

## **Chapter 9**

# **Establishing Consistency**

## **The Importance of Developing a Consistent Practice**

One of the challenges in the first year is to establish a regular practice. I call it a challenge because it requires someone to establish a new habit and we all tend to be resistant to changing our routines.

Consistency is important because it is through regular daily chanting that you will see the benefits of the practice. It's not called a practice without good reason. You can't chant hit or miss and expect to see good results. For example, when someone studies hard to get into a top ranking school, they gain a great deal in knowledge and ability. Consistency in practice is essential to attaining Buddhahood.

Consistency is also the way you build good fortune and create rhythm in your life over months and years.

## **How to Overcome Obstacles to Consistency**

As you are thinking about establishing a practice and are working and developing the new habit, it is important to realize that there are no hard and fast rules about how long to chant. In the beginning, while someone is taking the 90 day challenge, we suggest you chant 5-10 minutes so you will experience the benefits chanting can bring.

If you have a major concern, you could chant for longer, until you feel satisfied and settled. You can also just chant as few as three Nam-myoho-renge-kyo's if you are very rushed one morning.

The rule of thumb is to try to do something every day. This is how you establish the rhythm in your life.

Have you asked any of the following questions as you try to establish your practice?

### **How do I make more time in the morning?**

Some people get up as late as possible and then race to get breakfast and run out the door.

As a rule of thumb it is preferable to sit in the same place every day in front of your Gohonzon. If you don't have a Gohonzon yet, sit in front of your focal point. You will get more out of your chanting time if you are able to sit down and focus. That being said, if on occasion, you have to run, you can chant in the car or do three Nam-myoho-renge-kyo's before leaving home. If you are doing the 90 day challenge, try to chant for 5-10 minutes daily.

To establish the new habit, I would get up 15 minutes earlier and chant right before or after breakfast. In this way you have a good start to your day. If you do this, you will be surprised how things start to work out so that you have more time, both in parts of your day where you have been rushed, and also in having time to chant.

## **How can I chant around young children?**

Chanting around young children is its own unique challenge. You want time to yourself and also to have them feel welcome. You could work your day so you chant during their nap time, or get up before they arise for the day. If that is not possible, bring some toys and have them play next to you while you chant. Let them ring the bell. In this way, they will not feel that your practice shuts them out.

Should you have a difficult child who is trying to engage your attention through acting out, maybe you could work out something with your significant other or another adult to watch him/her while you take some time to chant. Some parents just make sure they get up earlier in the morning to give them a little time before the rest of the family wakes up. In the afternoon, they chant during nap time if the child is still young enough to take a nap.

Some parents have children who have special needs. For example one parent had a child who refused to be put down. If this is the case I would chant with them on your lap. If the child squirms so you really can't focus, I would do a babysitting trade with another adult or have your spouse watch them.

Another special need would be a child who acts out in dangerous ways. If this is the case, they should be watched by someone else. I would tell you to walk around and chant, and you can, but for the long haul it is better to be able to sit down and focus.

## **How do I find time to chant with a night schedule at work?**

A night schedule is just the same as a day schedule. You can adjust your day so whenever you wake up, you chant after your designated breakfast time and before your dinner.

## **What if I want to be by myself when I chant, not around other people?**

Sometimes people prefer to be able to chant privately. This is fine. Find a place where you can close a door, a bedroom perhaps, or an outside building. Then request that family members leave you to yourself for a while.

## **What do I do if I get home late from work?**

If you get home from work late on occasion and you are tired, then just chant for a few minutes or chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times. The important thing is to do your best and not chastise yourself if you can't chant as long as you would like.

## **What do I do if I don't seem to have the discipline?**

Some people have difficulty with having the will power to sit down on a consistent basis and chant. You'll know you are a person with this difficulty if you find yourself saying, "I know I need to chant but I haven't been doing it."

When this is the case, the first thing to chant about is to develop the willingness to chant.

If you haven't yet had the experience of what morning chanting can do for your day, try it for just a few days and watch what happens. Usually, if a person can't find time to chant, it's because they haven't yet seen the benefit of making it a priority.

## **What if my significant other doesn't want me to chant?**

On occasion a significant other is resistant to the idea of a partner starting to chant.

First, I would begin by chanting for a resolution to the issue.

When this is an important relationship, you should sit down with your partner and have a discussion about it. If your partner isn't reasonable, then you'll have to decide how important it is to you, or determine if there is a way you can chant so that you won't create a problem. I know a woman who used to chant in the shower, another in the bathroom. Before long, since they were chanting about it, things worked out in their lives so it wasn't an issue any longer.

Some other ideas that might help: If you live close to an SGI Buddhist center, maybe you could chant there. Or, some people find a chanting partner and chant at that persons house.

## **6 Ways to Grow a Consistent Practice**

Establishing a consistent daily chanting practice is the key to the results you want. It is never easy to establish a new habit or change a routine. But if you are persistent, in a short time it will seem natural as though you have been doing it forever.

In this section, I'm going to give you six ways on how to establish a consistent practice.

### **1. Connect Chanting With Something Else**

- Think through how much time you need to get up in the morning, have breakfast and still have a breathing space before leaving for work or school. If you tend to race out the door right after breakfast, or skip breakfast altogether, then start a little earlier so you don't have to rush. Do your best. If there is a whole sequence of habits which have to change, just keep working at it.
- Connect chanting to breakfast or to your cup of coffee. When you finish breakfast, go right in to chant before your day begins. It's much harder to remember to chant once all the daily activity draws you in. If you don't eat breakfast, do it after you finish dressing. Connect chanting to something you habitually do.

- When you come home take time to see everyone and then go chant. If it is too close to dinner and you have to cook, do it right after dinner.

Your chanting time is flexible and needs to work with your schedule, but never think of it as secondary to your schedule. Chanting is what will make everything else work in your life, so make it your priority and work your schedule around it. Different people work out their chanting time in different ways, so set it up to work in a comfortable way for you.

## **2. Establish a Motivator**

Don't you have something you really want? Maybe you have put it on hold? This is the time to dust off that goal and chant about it a few minutes a day. When there is something you really want, you will be more motivated to chant.

## **3. Watch What Happens**

Watch what happens during your day, when you chant and when you don't. Do you see a difference? I suspect that when you see how much better things go during the days when you've chanted, you'll really want to chant.

## **4. Consistency Gets Results**

Do you want to see the benefits of chanting? I'm sure you started because you wanted those results. This is the way to get them. Occasional chanting simply doesn't achieve the kinds of results seen with a consistent practice. When reluctant to chant, remind yourself that you want the benefits.

## **5. Chant for a Short Period**

Chant 5-10 minutes a day at first. This is a short enough time to fit around anyone's busy schedule. But it will allow you to see the benefit of practice.

## **6. Chant with Someone Else**

Sometimes it is easier to be consistent when you have a commitment to meet someone else at a certain time. You won't want to let them down. And you will make a new friend. Some practitioners have a regular chanting group, where everyone has become good friends. Catching up before and after they chant together is very enjoyable. Social supports, such as this, create an environment which confirms and encourages what you are doing.

Establishing a new habit is hardest at the beginning. But if you are persistent it will soon be part of your lifestyle, something you do without thinking about it.

# Exercise: Establishing a Consistent Practice

This exercise will be useful in tracking any difficulties to establishing a consistent practice. When you track what you are doing, you bring it into awareness so that you start noticing what is happening.

1. Note time and day you did sit down to chant.
  2. List any resistances to chanting on the day that you missed.
  3. Note how your day went when you chanted in the morning.
  4. How did your day go when you missed your morning chant?
  5. Continue until you are chanting daily.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

## **Chapter 10**

# **Human Revolution**

## **What is Human Revolution?**

### **Human Revolution, a Definition**

Human Revolution is not a revolution in the political sense or in the sense of one person fighting another. Rather, it is a major inner transformation that allows you to shine in your own unique way, overcoming weaknesses and negativity, to become a person of strength and purpose who is strong physically, intellectually and spiritually. You will develop a deep wisdom, compassion, an awareness of infinite freedom and a rock solid inner foundation that will support you all through life. You'll find your unique purpose, your reason for being alive. Most of all you'll become unshakeably happy.

### **The Person and Their Environment Are One**

In Buddhism there is no distinction between you and the environment in which you live. Like a fish living in water, you and your environment are inseparable and influence one another. To a Buddhist, self-improvement and enhancement of your circumstances go hand in hand. As one person after another comes out of suffering, the wider world benefits too, becoming less negative and more positive.

## **How to Experience Human Revolution**

### **Pick A Goal and Chant About It**

In order to achieve your goal, you may have to develop skills, overcome fears, develop new character traits, or shift your viewpoint. All of these changes contribute to that inner transformation step by step. In this way you make small changes in a way that seems true to you, based on chanting about your goal. This is the direct path to this inner transformation as you set and achieve one goal after another based on chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

## **When you chant, and base your life on the Mystic Law, you grow and elevate your life condition.**

Here are some of the ways you will grow by following through with one goal after another:

**Endurance** – When you pursue a goal one step at a time, you develop the ability to endure until the end.

**Patience** – When a desired result doesn't happen quickly, you will develop the patience to see it through to the end.

**Courage** – You may have to do something you are afraid of doing. When you look fear in the face and move forward anyway, you will develop courage and inner strength every time you do it.

**Flexibility** – When you chant, the path can take surprising twists and turns. You learn the flexibility to accommodate and not be thrown off your feet.

**Confidence** – Confidence develops as you overcome hesitation, anxiety or worry.

**Stability** – As you chant and move forward, seeing things work out over and over despite how they look on the surface, you will develop the capacity to remain un-swayed by the ups and downs of life.

**Faith** – When you have had the repeated experience of overcoming obstacles you thought were impossible through chanting, and seeing how they work out in ways you could never have imagined, you develop stronger and stronger faith that everything will work out next time as well.

**Mastery** – You become aware that you are the captain of your ship, the environment doesn't control anything.

**Energy** – When you chant, you will find you have more life force.

**Fortune** – You build your good fortune over time. When you look back later you will see how your fortune has grown.

**Compassion** – You develop the capacity to truly care for others, to make their problems and anguish your own, supporting and encouraging them until they become happy.

**Wisdom** – When you tap the Buddha wisdom of your Buddha Nature, you come to embody it more and more over time.

**Happiness** – As faith and trust in the Mystic Law grows so does unshakeable happiness.

When you know you can rely on the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, you'll come to build a rocklike foundation unswayed by the flux and change that is life. When you awaken to your Buddha nature, a world of infinite joy will bloom in your life and every action will become a source of benefit. As your awareness shifts into the higher self, your life will turn towards relieving human suffering.

In this way, you accomplish that inner transformation, your human revolution one step at a time.

## **Exercise: Tracking Steps Of Growth**

This exercise is to help you track the small improvements you make in your life every day. Each of these small changes may not seem like a lot but one added to another equals major change over time. This can be a diary of your practice.

### **Write Your Goal Here:**

As you chant, focus on your goal, and take action, note the small changes you make in order to achieve it. Maybe you did something you were afraid of doing? Maybe you started to chant longer and saw differences in lessening of anxiety? If you had an exciting experience, which proved to you your practice brings results, write down what happened. Note anything you felt was important to achieving your goal.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

## **Chapter 11**

# **Wrapping it Up**

Congratulations! By now, you have been chanting for several weeks and will have seen benefits as a result of chanting. I hope you that you are well on your way to establishing a daily practice.

If you haven't done it yet, I strongly encourage you to connect with a group close to you. There you will receive guidance and support from experienced practitioners. Their perspective is important as you as take the steps to transform your life and do your Human Revolution.

## **Review of the Steps**

In this workbook, I have introduced you to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism one step at a time.

1. To begin, we looked at a new view of religion and at the benefits of practicing Nichiren Buddhism. Then, I asked you to look at what you wanted to see in your life.
2. Next, you received some background so you would understand where this form of Buddhism came from.
3. You learned about the 90 day experiment and listened to the chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. You may have even listened to Gongyo, the recitation of the Lotus Sutra.
4. You were introduced to the chanting practice itself, the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the Gohonzon and took the first steps to chanting at home.
5. We discussed the role of earthly desires, what kinds of goals you can set and the eight steps to setting a goal. Then, you were asked to set your first goal.
6. You were shown how you could use the practice to change your life state and were given an exercise to try it out.
7. You were taught how to take a challenging problem and change a negative situation into one that creates value, thus changing poison into medicine.

8. You were given a way to recognize the steps of progress leading to your goal.
9. We discussed the role of obstacles and some things to think about when facing a difficult obstacle. You were asked to make observations as you chanted about an obstacle you were facing, so you could have the experience of identifying the steps of progress towards your goal.
10. We talked about the difficulty of establishing a consistent practice and some of the challenges every newcomer might face and ways to handle those challenges.
11. Finally, we discussed Human Revolution or the changes that lead to establishing Buddhahood in your life. The exercise was given to help you track the changes you are making. Using this over time, you can have a diary of your practice.

Congratulations on finishing the course! Over the months and years to come, you are going to experience the wonderful growth that occurs as you strengthen your life.

Now it is time to connect with the SGI, if you haven't done it before. The SGI is set up around the world with discussion meetings so that you will have a reliable support system long term for making the kinds of changes necessary to establishing Buddhahood in your life.

# Resources

## On the Web

### [www.SGI-USA.org](http://www.SGI-USA.org)

This is the official Nichiren Buddhist website for the USA. There is a lot of material on this website including Buddhist concepts, articles and experiences. You have access to Nichiren Daishonin's writings, the founder of this form of Buddhism. There is an online bookstore and a way to connect with a group close to you.

### [www.margaretblaine.com](http://www.margaretblaine.com)

This is my website where you can find posts and articles on different aspects of Buddhist practice. You can contact me at [margaret@margaretblaine.com](mailto:margaret@margaretblaine.com) to share stories, questions or make comments.

## Books and Publications

### The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, 2 volumes

#### President Ikeda's Books

Daisaku Ikeda, leader of the SGI for 60 years and the foremost proponent of this form of Buddhism in the world, has written many books.

#### *World Tribune*

The *World Tribune*, a weekly newspaper is available through subscription. In it, you will receive news of what is going on in the SGI around the world and read experiences of how people have overcome challenges and obstacles using the practice.

#### *Living Buddhism*

In *Living Buddhism* you will find articles on Buddhist philosophy, experiences, concepts for the monthly discussion meetings, and articles for the monthly Gosho study. Your local group will be studying one of Nichiren Daishonin's letters to one of his followers once a month and the material for this study will be in this publication.

You can order The *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism* through your local SGI organization or online at the national SGI-USA website.

## **Other books for newcomers**

*Buddha in Your Mirror* by Ted Morino, Woody Hochswender, Greg Martin

*Your Path to Unshakeable Happiness* by Margaret Blaine

## **Find Us**

### **Community Centers in each state**

There will be larger meetings at the community centers, may also have as well as a bookstore. Your community center can be located on the SGI-USA website by putting in your zip code.

## **Help Spread the Word**

If you have liked this workbook, I would appreciate it if you would write a short review, a couple of sentences, for Amazon or to send to me. This is how good books are found by other people.

I can be reached at [margaret@margaretblaine.com](mailto:margaret@margaretblaine.com) or through my website at [www.margaretblaine.com](http://www.margaretblaine.com)

## About Margaret Blaine

Margaret has been a Nichiren Buddhist practitioner for twenty years. A licensed clinical social worker, in her profession, she worked as a counselor with molested children, battered women, mental health issues and family problems. She saw a great deal of human suffering and always had the question, "Is there anything which could enable anyone to become happy without fail?"

In 1994, she was introduced to Nichiren Buddhism. She heard hundreds of stories from people whose lives had turned around and became happy. Hearing these stories, Margaret realized that she had found what she had been looking for as a therapist, a way for anyone to become happy. Over the next few years, she became happy in her own life using the chanting practice.

She decided to share what she'd learned by writing her book *Your Path to Unshakeable Happiness*. This workbook *Steppingstones: A Guide to Buddhist Practice* is an accompanying book written to show anyone how to integrate the chanting practice into their own lives.

Margaret lives in Eugene, Oregon with her husband. She has three children and grandchildren. She has a website at [www.margaretblaine.com](http://www.margaretblaine.com). She works in her local Buddhist group, maintains physical fitness, writes, plays the piano, gardens and sews.