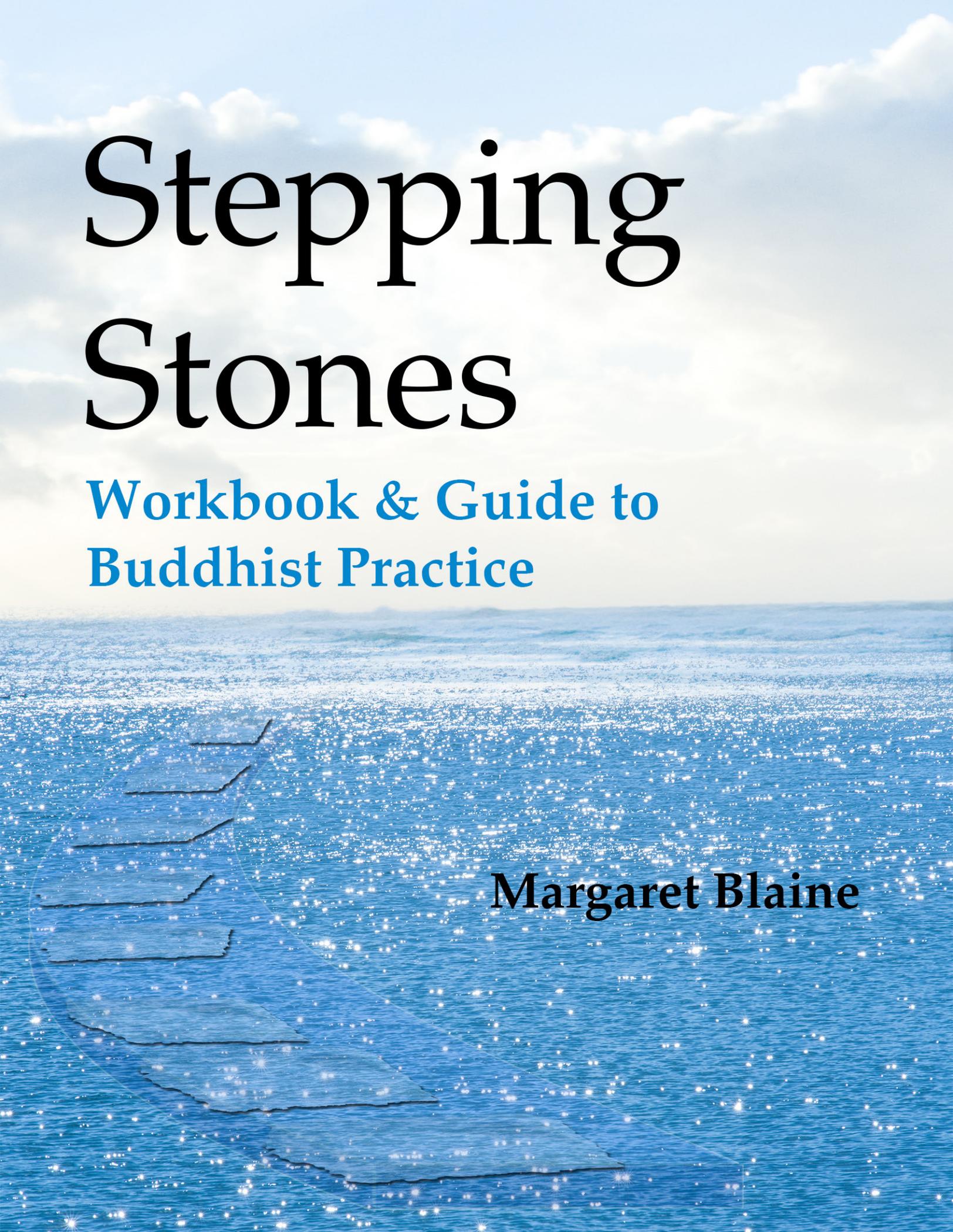


Stepping Stones

**Workbook & Guide to
Buddhist Practice**

Margaret Blaine



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Introduction

Welcome! By getting and using this workbook you will begin an adventure which will transform your life. I have written *Stepping Stones* for you, to show you how to use this Nichiren Buddhist chanting practice so you can take your life into your own hands, and become happy. I know that the idea of becoming happy through a chanting practice might sound strange to some Western ears, but I don't ask you to believe anything; I only want to encourage you to try something new. You will discover through experience whether it works in your life. This is a prove-it-to-yourself practice.

You will learn:

- How Nichiren Buddhism differs from traditional religions
- How to set up your chanting practice
- How to make major life changes successfully
- How to shift out of negative internal states at will.
- How to create value in any situation
- How to overcome personal problems
- How to handle obstacles
- How to find inner peace, unshakeable happiness or enlightenment

I invite you to find out for yourself what 12 million practitioners around the globe who practice will tell you: there is a path to happiness! Let's get started.

Please Read Before Using 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*.

If you are a newcomer, use this workbook as you begin your practice with the help of an experienced practitioner. You may have questions, and he or she can support you in the early stages as you encounter unfamiliar experiences.

If a member, you could use this book to revisit the basics. Experienced practitioners who have reviewed the book have said that it helped to revitalize their practice. You can also use it to help someone starting the practice or as an outline if you are leading a class.

How Can I Find Someone In My Area?

Go to the national website at www.sgi-usa.org. Click “find us” and enter your zip code, and you will discover 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 meetings, you’ll find people to chant with and help you learn the basics. Members share how they use the practice to address issues in their lives, and you can always ask questions. You’ll also hear presentations on various Buddhist concepts and topics by more experienced members.

What is the SGI?

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

There is a community center in several states, but most of the meetings occur where a member has opened his or her home for meetings, and there are no priests.

The SGI is primarily a volunteer organization, having a paid person only in major centers. No contributions are required; however, if you want 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 produces 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, which is 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 in the online store.

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

You can learn more about SGI initiatives, which were established to address global problems, on their website under "Engaged Buddhism." These include:

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! You have embarked on the daily adventure of awakening the Buddha within you, and I hope you will commit yourself for 90 days.

The process builds on itself one step at a time, and the slower pace helps you experience what is happening inside. If you have questions that are not answered in the workbook itself, experienced practitioners in your local group will be able to help you.

Nichiren Buddhism

Distinguishing Characteristics of This Religion

The SGI, the international lay organization of Nichiren Buddhists, has no dress code, no monks, and no obvious religious architectural style. The appearance of religion has been allowed to fall away. So, what remains? Basic human values such as:

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

Different Definitions of Religion

Most educated people would say that such simple concerns are not part of religion. They expect members of a religion to believe in a higher power. For them, there would be a priesthood acting as an essential intermediary between them and that deity – and there would be rules and rituals that differentiated one religion 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 resides within — in your Buddha nature — and is tapped through a twice-daily chanting practice to bring out its attributes, such as deep wisdom or compassion, which help you handle everyday life issues.

Relationship of Religion and Daily Life

People view religion and daily life as two separate entities. You live your daily life and then go somewhere to practice your religion. In the SGI, these two things are seen as one and the same. In daily life, you face challenges that can result in happiness or unhappiness, and it is here where you express who you are while facing these challenges. Through religious practice, you learn how to deal with these difficulties, and they become the stepping stones 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 everyday life and become happy. Religion should support your life, not the other way around.

Nichiren Buddhism is also seen as a way to:

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

The Discussion Meeting and Member Support

Members are supported through discussion meetings. There, they learn how practitioners have met life challenges by using a chanting practice. Members study together and apply Buddhist concepts to their lives. In the discussion meeting, the rubber meets the road. You'll be challenged to answer the question: Does your life get better because of your practice or not?

Reasons to Practice

What can you hope for when you practice Nichiren Buddhism? The goal of Buddhist practice is for you to become happy. What would that look like? What changes would you need to implement to make happiness a reality?

When you practice daily, you will start to manifest what you need in order to become happy.

Expect to See Actual Results

You can anticipate being able to do the following:

- Pull yourself out of negative life conditions, such as depression, anxiety, or chronic anger
- Find solutions to ongoing situations, such as financial difficulties and relationship, health, and work problems
- Overcome bad habits and obstacles
- Become happy

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

By 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 chronic, debilitating anxiety. He could function, but it was a struggle, so he decided to practice Nichiren Buddhism on a regular basis and soon noticed that he felt calmer after chanting.

If he woke in the middle of the night with anxiety, chanting helped him relax and fall asleep. Members of his home group chanted with him when he felt he needed a boost and encouraged him with examples of their experiences.

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

Over the next couple of years, his anxiety gradually decreased and bothered him less frequently. One day, he realized he hadn't felt anxious for several months. Today, George is a happy man. Debilitating anxiety is a thing of the past.

John

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

Once he started to practice, his life took an upward turn. He discovered that chanting longer in the morning brought him to a point where he felt like smiling. Then, when he went about his daily activities, he felt more energetic and motivated.

His depression lessened day after day. Since 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 wanted to study to be a counselor. He went to graduate school and established himself in his chosen profession.

John has chanted twice a day for several years and 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 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

It's time to examine what you want for your life. These are the beginning steps toward becoming happy. You have to know where you want to go before you can initiate the steps to get there.

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?
- Would you like 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 to successfully complete a project?
- Are there problems with a supervisor or another coworker?
- Have you been fired multiple times and don't know how to change this pattern?

Write your work goals here:

Relationships

Take a look at your relationships and answer these questions:

- What concerns do you have about your 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 resolve?
- Do you want to improve your parenting skills?
- Do you have issues with someone in your family of origin, a parent, brother, or sister?
- Are you having problems with your significant other and want to solve them?
- Are you having dating issues? For example, not knowing how to ask someone out or how to have them ask you.
- Do you habitually choose the wrong kind of person as a partner?
- Is your partner opposed to you practicing?

Write your relationship goals here:

Personal life

What about personal issues? If any of these is affecting your life, then include it.

- Are you struggling with depression?
- Do you have anxiety problems?
- Do you sometimes overeat?
- What bad habit would you like to overcome?
- Are you battling an addiction?
- Do you have a health issue?
- What is your purpose for living?
- Are you in the middle of a life transition?
- Would being more disciplined help you?
- Do you have difficulty following through?
- Are you a procrastinator?
- What fear is keeping you from moving forward?
- Is your life at an impasse that you don't know how to get around?
- Do you want to go to school or find a job?
- Are you totally overwhelmed with life?

Write your personal goals here:

Laying the Foundation

How Do Nichiren Buddhists Address Life Problems?

The Chanting Practice

Nichiren Buddhists chant twice a day as a way of addressing life issues. It may seem strange to think that chanting can solve problems, but it works. And you don't have to believe me – just try it and see what happens.

Think of it like turning on a lamp. You flip a switch, and the light comes on. You don't have to know how electricity works in order to turn on a light. It's the same way with chanting. No faith is required.

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 that exists within everything in creation. Connecting with the Mystic Law allows your life to move forward and become positive and progressive.

While you chant on a daily basis, you tap into your Buddha nature, which embodies a deep wisdom, unshakeable happiness, compassion, and infinite freedom. As you bring these qualities out during daily life, and they will gradually become a part of your overall life.

Nichiren Buddhism Is Practical

This explanation probably seems theoretical, but I assure you that Nichiren Buddhism is entirely practical. It is an experiential practice. You will come to understand how it works in your own life 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 the compassion, wisdom, and unshakeable happiness of your Buddha nature into everyday life.

There are no rules about how long to chant. Practice as often as you like and as long as you like. The general rule about chanting is to continue until you feel satisfied. This could

happen in five minutes (on an ordinary day), or it might take many hours, especially if you have a serious problem or crisis you are trying to handle.

The Secondary Practice

Gongyo is the secondary practice of chanting two sections 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. Over time, 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 concerned with unique events, personages, and history.

Shakyamuni Buddha

Shakyamuni Buddha was born a prince and lived in 2500 BC in north central India. As was typical of the time, he lived a protected life while growing up. He married at a young age and fathered a son.

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 sheltered environment, he was faced with the sufferings of the people: 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 his home and family behind. Even though young, Shakyamuni knew that military force or political power could not provide a fundamental solution to human suffering. He decided to explore the spiritual life to determine whether the solution could be found there.

In order to become an enlightened sage himself, he tried many spiritual practices. Ultimately, he was enlightened to life’s truth while meditating underneath a bodhi tree, which led him to become a spiritual teacher.

The Lotus Sutra

Over the next 50 years, he educated his followers through 84,000 sutras (verbal teachings). At the end of his life, he taught them the Lotus Sutra, which he felt was his highest teaching. He told his followers that the previous sutras should be considered provisional, and that those teachings led up to the Lotus Sutra.

This sutra teaches that everyone has the Buddha nature – an enlightened level of life that embodies unshakeable happiness, compassion, deep wisdom, and infinite freedom. Furthermore, it teaches that anyone may attain the state of Buddhahood or enlightenment. This was highly controversial because it was commonly believed that there were certain groups, including women, who could not attain enlightenment.

After Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra traveled from India, 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 Shakyamuni's sutras, trying to understand the core of Buddhism. The teachings had become confused in the 1900 years since Shakyamuni's death, but he agreed with Shakyamuni that the core of the teachings was the Lotus Sutra.

While Shakyamuni had described the Buddha nature and enlightenment, Nichiren taught a chant, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which would allow people to tap into their Buddha nature and bring 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.

What Is the 90-Day Challenge?

If you are new to Buddhism, have many questions, and aren't sure whether it is for you or not, it's time to take the 90-day challenge.

This is where you will discover if Nichiren Buddhism works for you – and you'll prove it to yourself in one way or the other. At the beginning, you don't have to believe anything because it is an experiment.

Accepting this challenge and proving something to yourself is different from taking a leap of faith. Faith grows after you've had multiple experiences where the practice has worked. Once that happens, you know you can rely on it. You'll gain some experiences occurs during the discovery process, and the 90-day challenge will give you insight into how the practice works.

Exercise: Preparing for the 90-Day Challenge

How to Start

Remember the exercise you did in the first chapter? You listed all the things you would like to have happen in your life. Pull out those notes and look them over.

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

Visit this website:

<http://www.sgi-usa.org/memberresources/beginnersresources/howtochant.php>

You will hear an explanation about the chant on the first video. The second video, "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo," is very short, but it will allow you to hear the pronunciation. There is also a third video that gives the pronunciation of the two books of the Lotus Sutra. If you decide the practice is for you, then you should learn the full practice (gongyo), which includes those books.

Chapter 3

Introduction to Chanting

A Dialogue with the Universe

We have discussed the daily chanting practice that lays the foundation for many types of changes. Practitioners chant twice each day, in the morning and again in the evening. They chant about concerns, challenges, and things that are important in their daily lives.

This may sound strange to Western ears, and you might be wondering, “What does chanting have to do with anything?”

To start, chanting is an experiential practice and makes you feel as though you are connected to a deep wisdom, which can guide you in the direction you want to go. Chanting seems simple, but it is also profound. When you chant, you start a dialogue with the universe. You set your goal and tell the universe what you need. As you practice daily, you are going to find that the steps to achieving that goal will appear in ways you might never have imagined.

Each person’s experience is also unique. One practitioner described 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 overall view, 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 into 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.”

I hope that you are willing to suspend judgment and try something new. Think of it as an experiment. No one is going to ask you to believe anything. This is a practice where you prove to yourself whether or not it works.

As a reminder, this is the chant for the primary practice: Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It is repeated over and over.

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 – This is the name given to the mystic nature of life, eternal life, and enlightenment.

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

Myoho – The Mystic Law, the ultimate truth or law of life, and 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 blossoms as a beautiful flower full of light. Like that, you have the Buddha nature, the enlightened level of life within you. Even with your feet mired in everyday life, you can use the qualities of your enlightened nature to function in daily life.

The lotus flower is unique in the plant kingdom because it seeds and flowers simultaneously. It also shows how cause and effect work in our lives. For example, from the moment you have a thought, take an action, or speak, you have concurrently set a cause 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, which is written on a scroll in Sanskrit and Chinese characters. Nichiren Daishonin knew that people would want to focus on something, so he inscribed the Gohonzon to give them a focal point. The word is made up of two parts:

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

Nam-myoho-rence-kyo Nichiren is written down the middle, embodying the enlightenment of the eternal Buddha, the Law personified as a person. The law is Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. The person in which it is embodied is Nichiren.

The characters around Nam-myoho-rence-kyo represent all of the different life conditions we experience internally every day. We call them the Ten Worlds. There are other symbols as well.

When Nam-myoho-rence-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 a specific external deity. Nichiren Buddhists believe that the universal energy exists within everything in creation and in your Buddha nature. 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.

Exercise: Steps for Chanting at Home

To Begin

First, listen to the video once more:

<http://www.sgi-usa.org/memberresources/beginnersresources/howtochant.php>

Steps

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, imagine what the solution will look like. 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 for 5–10 minutes initially.
5. As you chant, ideas may arise as possible steps towards your goal. Don't let these float away. You will want to act on them later, so you can also 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. Try not to force anything to occur. Just be comfortable and natural, allowing whatever happens to happen.
8. When you have completed the allotted chanting time, end with three slow Nam-myoho-renge-kyos.

You will follow this series of steps 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

In earlier forms of Buddhism, earthly desires were considered the cause of suffering and the obstacles to attaining enlightenment; therefore, people were encouraged to shed their earthly wishes.

Enlightenment, on the other hand, meant attaining a vast, expansive state of unshakeable happiness. Do the two 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 and the fuel for constructing happiness. Chanting for and overcoming your 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, (i.e. a friend who is ill, an issue in a relationship, or a problem at work). You can use those troubles to create value, grow, and become happier.

Chanting about your concerns allows you to use them to elevate your life condition, thereby developing your character. You can increase your life force and build good fortune in your life. Problems provide the direct path to buddhahood or enlightenment, as you overcome them, one by one.

When you chant about something, you tap into your highest life state – Buddhahood – and bring it out so it can be used in daily activity. Over time, your life will begin to embody the characteristics of your Buddha nature: deep wisdom, compassion, unshakeable happiness, and infinite freedom.

Introduction to Setting Goals

Nichiren Buddhists also chant for goals. By doing so, they take the rudder of life into their hands and set the direction they 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. Setting specific goals is particularly important during the first 90 days when you are trying out the practice to see if it will produce results in your life. If your goal is clear, 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 toward setting one. 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:

- 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
- World peace

There are no limits to what you can chant about. For example, I chanted for ideas when thinking about 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 situations.

Eight 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. Or perhaps you've developed a health problem. Try chanting 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!" By doing so, you announce 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 that Come

Remember, 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 and put 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 1, you completed an exercise where you wrote down the things you would like to see happen in your life. That exercise should've given 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; others may have a list of goals.

Now, follow the Eight Steps to Set a Goal from the last section.

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

Write your goals here:

Chapter 5

Change Your Life Condition

What is an Internal Life State?

You experience internal reactions to events every day. Sometimes, you are excited and happy. Other times, depression or anger rule your mood. These inner 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 physical locations or actual places, but rather inner potentials. You move in and out of them while responding to life's circumstances.

You have the power to raise your life from a negative state into a positive one, and this happens when you chant.

The Ten Worlds

The Six Lower Paths (Worlds)

1. Hell – In this life state, misery and suffering are overwhelming, and you feel there is no way out. You are filled with rage and destructive behavior.
2. Hunger – While here, you are at the mercy of your cravings for things such as food, drugs, money, pleasure, power, and recognition. Satisfaction doesn't exist.
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 – If you are determined to best others in everything, see threats everywhere, value yourself as superior, and hold others in contempt, then you are in this life state.
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 – This is a short-lived life state where you feel intense joy, resulting from the fulfillment of a desire, inner contentment, and physical well-being.

These six paths are reactive, which means you are simply responding to changing circumstances as they present themselves. In the six lower worlds, you are basing your happiness and identity on things outside of you.

The Four Noble Paths

When you begin to realize that nothing is permanent and begin searching for a lasting truth, you enter the four noble paths. When on these paths, you choose not to react to circumstances around you; instead, you make decisions to do something and to be self-motivated.

1. Learning – In this life state, you seek the truth through the teaching and experiences of others.
2. Realization – Your own direct perception guides you as you seek truth in this life state and are no longer a prisoner to your own reactions.
3. Bodhisattva – In this state, you aspire to achieve enlightenment and also enable others to do the same. You find satisfaction in altruistic behavior.
4. Buddhahood – Here, 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

For example, imagine working 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, then you receive a phone call from your significant other. When you realize who it is, you experience rapture...until he or she says the relationship isn't working out. Suddenly, you're in hell.

Maybe later in the day, you realize that there are certain things you need to learn to be a good business person. For a while, you're in the world of learning as you listen to someone who has been successful in building an organization.

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

Changing Your Life Condition

You Can Be Happy Regardless

Most people in the West think that happiness or unhappiness comes from some external place in the world. 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 around them.

Your View of Life Affects Your Happiness

What determines whether or not you are happy? 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 gray hue. Chronically worrying causes anxiety. On the other hand, if you are happy, then the world looks wonderful. Your view of life, therefore, affects the degree of happiness you experience.

You Can Change Your Life Condition at Will

In the previous 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 these contains the potential 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 one that is more positive. This means you no longer need 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 as if you are in the clear sky above, looking down at all the negativity in life. When you cultivate such a state, 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 you like to change it right now? If so, here are the steps:

1. Focus on the solution to your concern. If you don't know what that is, chant for a solution.
2. Sit down, set your focal point on the wall, and start chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
3. You may need to chant longer periodically, 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

Creating Value Out Of Any Situation

Change Poison into Medicine

This is one of the clearest expressions of how Nichiren Buddhism works in our lives. It means more than just looking on the bright side of things, thinking positively, or avoiding negativity.

To begin this transformation, you must begin by looking at the negative circumstances of your life, such as hurt, anger, despair, jealousy, illness, and poverty. You possess the power to change that suffering into joy and good fortune by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is not just a subjective feeling. Turning a destructive situation into a positive one is up to you. If your faith is strong, you can convert any suffering into a benefit, thus turning poison into medicine.

Suffering is a powerful incentive for spiritual progress. It makes it possible to create value out of every situation. Looking at it this way, since you chant, any illness or misfortune provides 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."

When pain, loss, or failure falls upon a practitioner, instead of blaming other people or circumstances, he or she will chant in order to look deeply into his or her own life. Through this process, you, too, can acquire a profound understanding of tendencies and behavioral patterns that are contributing to your problems. When you change those habits, you convert poison into medicine. In this way, everything in life becomes a source of learning and an opportunity for development.

Let me give you an example.

A woman was bitter and angry at her ex-husband, and their bad relationship was affecting the children. As a Buddhist practitioner, she went to get guidance from her seniors in faith about how to handle this. 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. She found, to her great surprise, that she was genuinely happy for him. Through chanting for his happiness, she had erased the bitter and angry poisons 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 your suffering has been exactly what you've needed to bring yourself to higher ground. You can change poison (which could harm you) into medicine (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 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 get you 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, and they will encourage you. If you have questions about how to chant about your issue (or how to handle discouragement), you can look to them for answers.
6. Difficult problems provide an opportunity to 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, and search. Daishonin's writings are available on 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 that make it difficult to remain positive.

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

Chapter 7

Types of Benefits

Recognizing Different Kinds of Benefits

In this chapter, we are going to cover the different kinds of benefits you may 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 will notice that answers come in many ways. Here are two examples where each person benefited from chanting.

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. In this case, the benefit of chanting appears clearly connected to the practice.

In another example, a mother chanted 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 situations, it is clear that chanting played an important role in improving the lives of each individual. Since both results were clearly evident, we call them obvious or conspicuous benefits.

Inconspicuous Benefits

Benefits of this nature are much more subtle. They 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). These things were happening all along, but you weren't really aware of them. Sometimes, another person has to bring it to your attention. Inconspicuous benefits show 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.

Benefits Can Work Together

Sometimes you receive a conspicuous benefit, but another less obvious benefit may come with it. For example, you receive an idea that leads toward your goal. You act on it even though you are afraid of taking the action. Then, something opens up – a step toward your goal that could not have occurred until you took that action.

Two things happened here. When the step opened up, you received a conspicuous benefit. You responded by putting it to use. Since you could identify and see it, this was a conspicuous benefit.

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

Occasionally, you fail to 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 marijuana was an inconspicuous benefit. She had been smoking quite a lot of it, and it was affecting her life and reducing her ambition. By eliminating it, she got her life back.

Hidden Benefits

Sometimes your goal doesn't work out quite as expected, and you discover there is a hidden bonus to that as well. These unexpected advantages are often realized in hindsight.

In one example, a nurse was tired of high pressure work and chanted for a less stressful 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 her interested. 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 (since she knew herself better). Knowing yourself well is a big step toward establishing a fulfilling life.

On occasion, you won't receive what you have chanted for, but this isn't necessarily bad. After time passes, you may discover that what happened was more to your benefit than what you thought you wanted.

For example, 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, theirs did not. 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: Noticing Steps of Progress

In Chapter 4, you wrote down your goals. Pay close attention and notice anything that comes to you regarding those goals. When you chant about something, you begin a dialogue. You send out your request to the universe, and it will respond.

You might like to note:

- Ideas received
- Information that has come to you from another person, article, or book, etc. regarding your goal
- Internal promptings to take one direction or another
- Results when you took action
- Surprising coincidences that happened, which you might have been tempted to dismiss
- Changes you've made in order to achieve your goal
- Inconspicuous benefits
- Conspicuous benefits
- Other observations

Chapter 8

Handling Obstacles

Obstacles and Challenges Become the Path

In Nichiren Buddhism, obstacles assume a positive function. They become the stepping stones towards learning to recognize, bring out, 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 along 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 that relates to your goal.

Ideas will pop up. You may 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 or information from a book or the Internet). Perhaps something shifts in your environment that might be a step towards your goal.

Step 4: Take action based on the information you receive.

You achieve your goals by taking action in daily life. This might require you to do something that feels uncomfortable. The action you must take may be unfamiliar, or, in order to act you may have to address something you're afraid of facing.

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 in regards to it. If so, you will begin to understand it differently in a wider, deeper, richer way. Even though your goal may appear to shift on the surface, these new insights will satisfy 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 causing you a lot of distress. You learn through Buddhist study that each person is responsible for his or her own life. You see that you cannot actually control what your daughter does; 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 4–6

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

If you are very worried about something, like losing a house or a job, or are coping with 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 because 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, imagine perfect health. Now you are visualizing 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. Instead, 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 everything necessary to achieve it.

The difference between these two things is similar to the differences between being a beggar and 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 because the universe is going to reflect your habitual thinking. This doesn't mean an occasional thought is a problem. Habitual thinking is when you dwell on your fears for a good part of the time.

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

Some Things to Remember

Some goals are going to take longer to achieve due to their complexity. If many things need to occur before your goal can be achieved, then you'll need to be patient.

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 (or might even be putting them 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: Managing an Obstacle

This exercise will help you to keep track of your efforts and insights when dealing with obstacles.

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 that comes to you regarding your goal

.

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

Note actions you take toward your goal. What happened as a result of taking those measures?

Record any steps of progress toward achieving your goal.

Write down 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 Regular Practice

One of the challenges in the first year is establishing a regular twice daily practice. I call it a challenge because it requires beginning a new routine, and we all tend to resist any sort of deviation from our normal patterns.

Consistency is important because it is through regular daily chanting that you will see the benefits of the practice, and it's called "practice" for good reason. You can't chant hit or miss and expect to see good results. For example, when people study hard to get accepted into top ranking schools, they gain a great deal of knowledge and improve their ability to think. To attain Buddhahood, you must commit yourself to the effort.

Regularity is the way to build good fortune and create rhythm in your life over time.

How to Overcome Obstacles

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 chanting 5–10 minutes as a way to experience the benefits it can bring.

If you have a major concern, you may chant longer until you feel satisfied and settled. You can also just chant as few as three Nam-myoho-renge-kyos if you are very rushed in the morning.

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

Since you're just beginning your practice, you might have asked some of the following questions:

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 Go-honzon. If you don't have one 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-kyos before leaving home. If you are doing the 90-day challenge, try to chant for 5–10 minutes daily.

To incorporate this the new habit into your existing routine, try getting up 15 minutes earlier and chanting right before or after breakfast. This is 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?

This situation presents a unique challenge. You want time to yourself and also to have the children feel welcome. Some parents make sure they get up earlier in the morning to give them a little time before the rest of the family wakes up. You can also schedule your day, so you can chant during their nap time. If that is not possible, bring some toys and have them play next to you while you chant. By including them in this way, they will not feel that your practice shuts them out.

Still, some children will try to engage your attention by acting out or begging to be held. You can try chanting while holding them, but if it is too hard to focus, or if the children really need 100 percent supervision, then arrange for a babysitter or ask another adult watch them. Chanting while walking is another approach, but sitting down and focusing is better in the long run .

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?

Sometimes people prefer chanting 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 late on occasion and 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 lack the will power to sit down on a consistent basis and chant. You'll know if this applies to you 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 experienced what morning chanting can do for your day, try it for just a few days and watch what happens. Usually, if people can't find time to chant, it's because they haven't seen the benefit of making it a priority yet.

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 recommend chanting for a resolution to the issue.

You should also sit down and discuss 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 was no longer an issue.

Some other ideas that might help: Visit your local SGI Buddhist center and chant there or find a chanting partner and chant at that person's house.

Six Ways to Grow a Consistent Practice

Establishing a regular daily chanting practice is the key to the results you want. It is never easy to begin 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). Here are some tips:

1. Connect Chanting with Something Else

- Think about the amount of time you need in the morning. 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, then chant 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 eating.

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 arrange your schedule around it. Different people plan 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 when you've chanted, you'll be even more committed to your practice.

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 same benefits 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 your busy schedule, but it will allow you to see the benefit of regular 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 him or her down, and you will make new friends. Some practitioners have a regular chanting group, and everyone has become good friends. Catching up before and after they chant together is very enjoyable. Social support, such as this, creates an environment that 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

Daily Tracking Form

This exercise will be useful in tracking any difficulties to establishing a consistent practice. When you track what you are doing, you make yourself aware of it so that you start noticing what is happening. A calendar to help you with tracking is on the next page.

1. Note the time and day when you sit down to chant.
2. List any resistance to chanting on the day that you missed.
3. Record how your day went when you chanted in the morning.
4. Keep track of days when you missed your morning chant (and how they went).

Continue until you are chanting daily.

Weekly Tracking Form

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1						
2						
3						
4						

Chapter 10

Human Revolution

What is Human Revolution?

Don't think of human 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 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 reason for being alive. Most of all, you'll become unshakably happy.

The Person and 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 life enhancement 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 new character traits and skills, overcome fears, or shift your viewpoint. All of these changes contribute to that step-by-step inner transformation. 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 benefit by following through with your goals:

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

Patience – When a desired result doesn't happen quickly, you will learn to see it through despite a delayed outcome.

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

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

Confidence – This 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 develop the capacity to remain unswayed by the ups and downs of life.

Faith – Your faith is strengthened when you've had repeated experience of chanting then successfully overcoming obstacles in unexpected ways.

Mastery – You learn 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, and support and encourage them until they become happy.

Wisdom – When you tap the Buddha wisdom of your Buddha nature, you 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. As your Buddha nature awakens, a world of infinite joy will bloom in your life and every action will become beneficial. As your awareness shifts into the higher worlds, you will start practicing for yourself and others.

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

Exercise: Tracking Growth

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

Write Your Goal Here:

As you chant, focus on your goal and take action. Observe the small changes you make in order to achieve it. Maybe you did something you were afraid of doing. Perhaps you started to chant longer and saw differences (like being less anxious). If you had an exciting experience, which proved to you your practice brings results, write down what happened. Record 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 experienced its benefits. I hope 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. There, you will receive guidance and support from experienced practitioners. Their perspective is important as you take the steps to transform your life and complete 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 think about 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-myohorenge-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-myohorenge-kyo and the Gohonzon, and took the first steps to begin chanting at home.
5. We discussed the role of earthly desires, what kinds of goals you can set, and the eight steps for setting a goal. Then, you were asked to set your first goal.
6. You learned 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 learned how 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 made observations as you chanted about an obstacle, 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, the challenges newcomers face, and ways to handle those situations.
11. Finally, you gained insight into human revolution, or the changes that lead to establishing Buddhahood in your life. You were given an exercise to help you track the changes you are making. Using this over time, you will 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 has discussion meetings all around the world, 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

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

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 to share stories, ask questions, or make comments.

Books and Publications

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, 2 volumes

These Are The complete writings of Nichiren Daishonin, the founder of this Buddhism.

President Ikeda's Books

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

World Tribune

The World Tribune, a weekly newspaper, is available by 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 and experiences, concepts for the monthly discussion meetings, and articles for the monthly Goshu 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, and Greg Martin

Your Path to Unshakeable Happiness by Margaret Blaine

Find Us

Community centers in each state are the major centers for the area. Where most local meetings are held in people's homes, larger city wide and state wide meetings are held in the community centers. Community centers have other resources such as bookstores. Your nearest center can be located on the SGI-USA website by entering 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 you can send it to me. This is how good books are found by other people.

I can be reached at margaret@margaretblaine.com or through my website at www.margaretblaine.com.

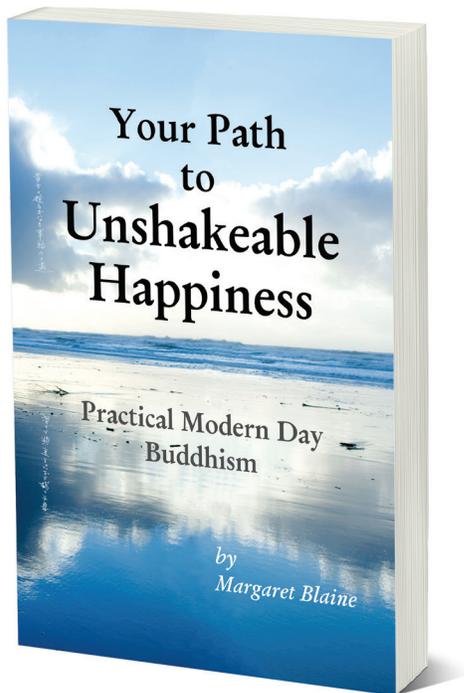
About Margaret Blaine

Margaret has been a Nichiren Buddhist practitioner for 20 years. As a licensed clinical social worker, she worked with molested children, battered women, and individuals with mental health issues and family problems. She saw a great deal of human suffering and always pondered the question, "Is there anything that 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 had become 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 joyous in her own life by using the chanting practice.

She decided to share what she'd learned by writing her book, *Your Path to Unshakeable Happiness*. This workbook, *Stepping Stones: 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 and has three children and grandchildren. She works in her local Buddhist group, maintains physical fitness, writes, plays the piano, gardens, and sews.



What if you knew that happiness is your birthright, and given the right set of tools you could be happy even through life's challenges. How would your life be different?

Margaret Blaine, author and speaker on Nichiren Buddhism, provides a very clear guide to happiness regardless of your circumstances. You'll see how a Nichiren Buddhist chanting practice, geared to the 21st century lifestyle, can help you get unstuck and provide you with an opportunity to become happier.

Discover:

- How to get unstuck and move forward.
- How to make a major life change successfully.
- How to find inner peace
- How to live a fulfilled life.

Bonus: Download the first chapter

<http://margaretblaine.com/happinessdownload/>