

Study for April 2018

Faith, Practice, and Study: The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism

—Part 1 [of 3]

The Faith of the Soka Gakkai: Unlocking Immeasurable Good Fortune and Benefit

Lecture presented by Antonio Choi
SGI Canada Study Department

Hi everyone! My name is Antonio Choi and this is a podcast for the April study meeting. I will only be covering the key points for this month's study, so please also read all of the study material when you are preparing for the district study meeting.

In the months of April, May, and June we will be studying faith, practice and study—three fundamentals in the correct practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” Nichiren Daishonin writes:

Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. (WND-1, 386)

President Ikeda teaches us that exerting ourselves in faith, practice, and study and upholding the correct teaching, directly connected to the Daishonin, have been the tradition of the Soka Gakkai since its earliest days, and that Nichiren Buddhism pulses vibrantly only within the efforts of Soka Gakkai members to compassionately propagate the Mystic Law based on faith, practice, and study.

This month, we will be learning about faith—the first of these three elements. Now please listen to the first Goshō passage from “The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon”.

This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith. This is what the [Lotus Sutra] means when it states that one can “gain entrance through faith alone” [LSOC3, 110].

Since Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters believe solely in the Lotus Sutra, honestly discarding expedient means [cf. LSOC2, 79] and not

accepting even a single verse of the other sutras [cf. LSOC3, 115], exactly as the Lotus [Sutra] teaches, they can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon. How reassuring! Make every possible effort for the sake of your next life. What is most important is that, by chanting Nam-myohorenge-kyo alone, you can attain Buddhahood. It will no doubt depend on the strength of your faith. To have faith is the basis of Buddhism. (WND-1, 832; “The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon”)

In this passage, the Daishonin explains the meaning of faith and the benefits that can be obtained through faith.

The Daishonin inscribed his enlightened state of life in the form of a mandala—the Gohonzon to enable all people to attain enlightenment. That being said, it is with faith in the Gohonzon that we can bring forth the power of the Gohonzon. Faith enables us to tap the power of the Mystic Law in our lives and establish the life state of Buddhahood within us. Through solely believing in the Lotus Sutra, we “can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon”, in other words, the palace of happiness. A basic tenet of Nichiren Buddhism is that everything starts with faith, no matter who we are or what our circumstances.

In the lecture, President Ikeda explains two important aspects of faith that we should pay attention to. First, he cites a passage from a Gosho addressed to the lay nun Myoichi. After being widowed, Myoichi continued to strive earnestly in faith, while doing her best to raise their children. In the letter, the Daishonin likens faith to the way a woman cherishes her husband, a man treasures and protects his wife, parents care for their children, and a child clings to its mother. President Ikeda explains the importance of chanting Nam-myohorenge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon in the same unaffected, openhearted way. He further teaches us that strength or depth of faith cannot be measured by superficial markers. He says:

The Daishonin does not specifically instruct us on how long we should chant, and so on. Of course, it’s important that we set personal targets for the amount of daimoku we want to chant... however, ... when we are too tired or sleepy to do so, it might be more productive and valuable if we get some rest and chant the next morning...

The Daishonin also teaches that chanting Nam-myohorenge-kyo even once has immeasurable benefit.

The second important point regarding our attitude in faith is being without doubt. Let me read the Gosho passage.

The accepting and upholding of this original Law [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] is expressed in the single word “belief” or “faith.” The single word “belief [or faith]” is the sharp sword with which one confronts and overcomes fundamental darkness or ignorance. The commentary [T’ien-t’ai’s Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra] says, “Belief means to be without doubt.” You should think about this. (The Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings, pp. 119–20.)

Fundamental darkness or ignorance is the most basic kind of delusion or negativity—the inability to believe that the Buddha nature is inherent within all of our lives. We may experience this in many occasions. Faith in the Mystic Law is the “sharp sword” with which one conquers the fundamental darkness inherent in life and attains enlightenment.

In the Gosho passage, the Daishonin states “Belief means to be without doubt.” What does it mean to be without doubt? President Ikeda explains:

It is to believe wholeheartedly, to have absolute conviction. However, I should point out that there is a crucial distinction between being without doubt [after questioning and seeking answers] and simply never doubting...

Through deepening our faith, a seeking spirit to understand the teachings arises, and through studying the teachings and putting them into practice, we strengthen our conviction as we experience the power of Buddhist practice. And forging absolute conviction in the depths of our lives is what it means “to be without doubt.”

Faith in the Mystic Law is faith in our unlimited potential. President Ikeda further teaches us the importance of firmly believing that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is our own life, which embodies the unshakable conviction that is the very essence of the “sharp sword” of faith capable of dispelling all darkness or ignorance.

President Ikeda explains:

By practicing Nichiren Buddhism, we as Soka Gakkai members can attain a state of life where we deeply perceive that we ourselves are entities of the Mystic Law, and that each one of us possesses unlimited potential.

Kosen-rufu is nothing other than building an age of spiritual revolution where each person acts based on a deep belief in the infinitely noble Buddha nature inherent in all people. We are spearheading this movement to effect a great change in the destiny of all humankind.

President Ikeda concludes this installment by saying

The Soka Gakkai is forever an organization of faith. Please join me, together with fellow members around the world, in proudly and confidently walking the great path of faith—united in the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple and directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin.

Let's refresh our determination and strengthen our faith to May 3rd, Soka Gakkai Day and Soka Gakkai Mother's Day, together with president Ikeda.

Thank you for listening. If you have any question regarding the material, please send email to study@sgicanada.org.