

What is the practice of buddhism?

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There are three basics in applying Buddhism: faith, practice and study. They are the primary ingredients in the recipe for developing our innate enlightened condition, or Buddhahood. All three are essential. With this recipe, we will experience actual proof of our transformation in the forms of both conspicuous and inconspicuous benefit. The recipe is universal. These basics are the same in every country where this Buddhism is practiced.

Faith -- in Buddhism, faith is based on experience. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism emphasizes obtaining "actual proof" of the teaching's power. Faith begins as an expectation or hope that something will happen. At the start of our journey, if we are willing to try the practice and anticipate some result, we will then develop our faith brick by brick as examples of actual proof accrue.

Practice -- To develop faith, we must take action. We strengthen our wisdom and vital life force by actualizing our Buddhahood each day in a very concrete way. Practice in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism consists of two parts: practice for ourselves and practice for others. Practice for ourselves is primarily the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Each morning and evening, believers participate in a ritual that, along with chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, includes recitation from two significant chapters of the Lotus Sutra chapters which explain that each individual holds the potential for enlightenment and that life itself is eternal. This ritual has been traditionally referred to as gongyo (literally, "assiduous practice"). Practice for others consists of action based on compassion to help give others the means to make fundamental improvements in their lives, similar to what we are undergoing through our own engagement with Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. The development of our compassion through such practice for others is also a direct benefit to us.

Study -- To gain confidence that this practice is valid, and to understand why your efforts will bring about a result, it is essential to study the tenets of this Buddhism. The basis of study comes from the founder himself, Nichiren Daishonin. More than 700 years ago, he instructed followers in the correct way to practice; and his writings, which have been preserved and translated into English, give us valuable insight into how this practice will benefit us today.

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was formed to support practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and help them teach others about it on a global scale. Today, there are some 18 million members in 163 countries, and the American branch is called SGI-USA.

The SGI has prepared numerous study materials that offer deeper looks at Buddhist theory, as well as practical applications through members' testimonies. There are also English translations of the original teachings of Buddhism, such as the Lotus Sutra. By helping to build understanding and confidence, the study material provides vital encouragement for us especially at crucial moments.

The basic prayer or chant is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is the name of the Mystic Law that governs life eternally throughout the universe. Nichiren Daishonin revealed this law as the underlying principle contained in Buddhism's highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra. All life is an expression or manifestation of this law. Thus when we chant this Mystic Law, we attune our lives to the perfect rhythm of the universe. The result is increased vital life force, wisdom, compassion and good fortune to face the challenges in front of us.

The translation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is as follows:

Nam -- Devotion. By devoting our lives to this law through our faith, practice and study, we will awaken the life-condition of Buddha, or enlightenment, inside ourselves.

Myoho -- Mystic Law. As Nichiren Daishonin explained in one of his writings: "What then does myo signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our life from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend or words express. When we look into our own mind at any moment, we perceive neither color nor form to verify that it exists. Yet we still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur. The mind cannot be considered either to exist or not to exist. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor non-existence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the ultimate reality. Myo is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and ho, to its manifestations" (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 4; see "Suggested Readings").

Renge -- Literally, the "lotus flower," which seeds and blooms at the same time. This represents the simultaneity of cause and effect. We create causes through thoughts, words and actions. With each cause made, an effect is registered simultaneously in the depths of life, and those effects are manifested when we meet the right environmental circumstances. Life itself is an endless series of causes and simultaneous effects. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the

deepest cause we can make in order to produce our desired effect.

Kyo -- Sound or teaching. This is how the Buddha has traditionally instructed — through the spoken word, which is heard.