

Chanting With Our Entire Being
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What is the correct approach to chanting?

Fundamentally, I think it can be said that if after chanting daimoku you feel refreshed and revitalized, then you chanted great daimoku.

In many of his writings, Nichiren Daishonin states that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the core of his teachings. It seems the Daishonin felt the need to establish first and foremost the act of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself in order to guide the people of his time away from misguided practices and beliefs that opposed the original intent of Buddhism. While emphasizing the importance of having faith in the power of the Mystic Law, he appears to forgo addressing any other specific details of exactly how to chant. What the Daishonin does stress, however, is our attitude—the realization or conviction that we should have when chanting. He writes: “Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant Myoho-renge-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 216). He also explains: “You, yourself, are a Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies. You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction” (WND, 299–300).

We can discuss the purpose behind the act of chanting from two different levels. On one level, we chant to open our innate Buddhahood, the universal existence and cultivation of which is the ultimate message of the Lotus Sutra and the basis of human happiness. On another level, we can say that we chant to have our specific prayers answered—an intriguing element in the practice of Buddhist faith.

Ultimately, it is important that we chant with our entire being. This is indicated by a phrase the Daishonin quotes from the verse portion of “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which reads, “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives” (WND, 389). For us, this translates into an earnest desire to reveal our Buddha nature each time we chant. He states, “As a result of this passage, I have revealed the Buddhahood in my own life” (WND, 389). Explaining the principle of having our prayers answered through the power of faith underlying our act of chanting, Nichiren Daishonin exhorts: “Muster your faith, and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (WND, 412). And: “Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?” (WND, 412).

From another perspective, Nichiren Daishonin cautions, “A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered” (WND, 1001). In this passage, cowardice can be interpreted as the benighted quality of life that is not rooted in our Buddhahood. In other words, cowardice can be defined in Buddhism as the impure elements in life, which, if allowed to take

control of the self, separate us from our Buddha nature or the Mystic Law. Conversely, if we are continuously developing our Buddha nature, taking action with the wisdom we tap through chanting and thus courageous in our life-condition, then we are moving toward and becoming the type of person who can have all their prayers answered.

SGI President Ikeda states: “The more specific and detailed the blueprint we have in our hearts, the better. The point is to continue vividly painting the target we have and to advance toward that goal single-mindedly. Then, at each instant, the reality of our lives will gradually approach the painting that is our aspiration. “Everything depends on what is in our hearts. Heartfelt prayers will definitely be answered” (Learning from the Gosho, p. 129). In praying to the Gohonzon, we should drop all pretense and just be ourselves, offering sincere prayers for the realization of all our desires. By so doing, we can elevate our life-condition and strengthen our life force to the point where we start sensing what to do about each of our specific goals.

In the final analysis, we should first decide that we are going to win before we chant. This strong determination coupled with our chanting enables us to summon forth the appropriate wisdom to deal with any of the inevitable difficulties we will encounter on the way toward achieving our goals. With this resolution, something positive will start welling up from within our lives through chanting. Worry should not be basis of our prayer, as this can undermine the power of chanting. Rather we should resolve to win first, so that through each daimoku we chant we are tapping every human quality necessary for our victory.

By chanting such heartfelt daimoku to the Gohonzon, the very core of our lives aligns with the purest life force of the universe, melting away whatever negative effects we may otherwise have to experience due to our karma. “Various sins are just like dewdrops,” wrote the Daishonin. “The ‘sun of wisdom’ (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo) is capable of dissolving them all” (Gosho Zenshu, p. 786).

Chanting from the heart solidifies the condition of Buddhahood as the basis of our existence, which is described by the Daishonin as “the unchanging reality which reigns over all of life’s functions” (WND, 832). When Buddhahood is firmly established as the basis of our lives, we gain self-control without being defeated by the five poisons—greed, anger, foolishness, arrogance and doubt.

After chanting, we can return to the reality of our daily lives, acting with renewed confidence to touch the lives of other people and reach our goals. As the Daishonin states, “The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (WND, 852).

Lastly, President Ikeda writes about the meaning of prayer in Buddhism, referring to the concept of a pledge or vow in *The New Human Revolution*. He says to a pioneer member in Brazil: “Prayer in Nichiren Buddhism means to chant daimoku based on a pledge or vow. At its very core, this vow is to attain kosen-rufu. It means chanting resolutely with the determination: ‘I will attain kosen-rufu in Brazil. Therefore, I will show magnificent

actual proof in my work. Please enable me to bring forth my greatest potential.’ This is what our prayer should be like. “It is also important that we establish clear and concrete goals for what we hope to achieve each day and then pray and challenge ourselves to achieve each of them. This earnest determination gives rise to wisdom and resourcefulness, thereby leading to success. In short, to win in life we need determination and prayer, effort and ingenuity. It is misguided to dream of getting rich quick, expecting to encounter a rare stroke of luck or some shrewd moneymaking scheme. This is not faith. It is mere fantasy” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 1, pp. 250–251).

Summary of key points

- **Chant with your entire being or with the spirit that “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion.”**
- **Chant with clear and concrete goals.**
- **Chant with the determination “I will win no matter what.”**
- **Chant with the vow to help achieve kosen-rufu**