

A PROPER GONGYO

AT THE time Gongyo--the practice of reciting the sutra--was established, there were no loud speakers or microphones for the leaders of Gongyo to speak into so that everyone could hear and follow. That is why a standard rhythm had to be established. So whether there were one hundred or one thousand people reciting the sutra together, their voices would be synchronized by a common rhythm from beginning to end. Today, however, people think that doing Gongyo rapidly like a bullet is the way to do it. When this is the case, it is not clear what one is saying when Gongyo is not recited rhythmically or pronounced correctly. And as it turns out, even though people are doing Gongyo together they are not always in the same place in their recitation. They may begin together, but they don't always end together. While one person may go fast, another may go more slowly.

There is no such thing as fast Gongyo. The aim of the Soka Gakkai is to read Gongyo fast in order to do lots of Daimoku. Then, ironically, they go ahead and do fast Daimoku too. When you recite *Nan-myoho-renge-kyo* fast it sounds like Nabey-o-horay, Nabey-o-horay or something similar, which is not what it should sound like. As long as you are not hearing impaired, a newcomer to the religion, a child or don't have a speech impediment you must pronounce *Nan-myoho-renge-kyo* clearly. It is important that others hear the correct pronunciation. If you are chanting so fast that it sounds like you are invoking a magical incantation, you must stop even if it satisfies you. In your mind you may think you are pronouncing *Daimoku* correctly. But you don't hear yourself, and therefore you cannot distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Others who hear you will know the difference. It is important that you pronounce *Daimoku* correctly, not only for yourself, but for children, for people from other countries, and for those hearing it for the first time.

Doing a fast Gongyo is like trying to get it over with. That is not Gongyo. You must do Gongyo sincerely. When you do Gongyo slowly, or at a reasonable pace, you feel your own Buddha nature. When you do Gongyo slowly, you feel the peace of mind and joy of the sutra. It's important to put your heart into Gongyo.

Inherent in the rhythm of Gongyo is the spirit of all that Gongyo is supposed to be. If you don't do Gongyo at a reasonable pace, pronouncing every word, you cannot feel your own Buddha nature; you just can't.

When I was a young acolyte and was trying to learn Gongyo on my own, I used a metronome to help me keep a consistent rhythm from beginning to end. When we learned it as a class, a drum was beat at a regular tempo for the same purpose. This was so all of us would read Gongyo the same. No one was high, no one was low, no one was fast, no one was slow. The easy parts, the hard parts--all had the same sound and the same rhythm. We learned to match the sound of the sutra with the established rhythm.

Back when Gongyo was first established they didn't have metronomes, so it was the sound of the rainfall--the consistent tat - tat - tat - tat of the falling rain that they followed. It also wasn't the words so much as the rhythm that they learned. In our case, once we learned the rhythm the sounds came. We matched the sounds to the rhythm.

The words and the meaning of the words are not what we focused on; it was the sound. We learned Gongyo like a three-year-old child who cannot read. A teacher pronounced it and we repeated it, that's how we learned the correct rhythm. There is a Buddhist precept that states that the Lotus Sutra is to be read rhythmically. Both Taisekiji and the Soka Gakkai have ignored this precept. It is important that everyone does Gongyo in the same rhythm from beginning to end.