

QUESTION AND ANSWERS ON GONGYO AND ODAIMOKU

Q: What character should we look at when we chant?

RH: (Reverend Hirota): When we chant, we should look at or focus on the character 妙 *myo* on the Gohonzon so that we don't lose our concentration. The Soka Gakkai says if you have troubles you chant to overcome your troubles. But that is not the purpose of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*; that is not going to solve your troubles. The Gakkai coined terms and phrases, such as *tōsō*, which means "combative *daimoku*" or "*daimoku* war." *Odaimoku* is not something you fight with or use to conquer or compete with.

Q: During *tōsō* people count the *daimoku* by hours or by number of *daimoku*, or by lining up matchsticks in groups. What is the correct way to chant?

RH: When we chant *Odaimoku* to Gohonzon, Gohonzon acts as a mirror. What is reflected back to us is *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*; that we are *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*, that *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* -- Buddha nature -- exists within us. This *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* is written down the center of Gohonzon, but it's just characters. The real home of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*, or where it resides is within our hearts. If we don't use a mirror we can't see our own face. Gohonzon is a mirror that shows us the reflection of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* within us.

Q: The Gakkai taught that you should not go to Gohonzon when you are angry or in a bad mood. You should only go when you are calm.

RH: When you are angry or in a bad mood and you chant, the chanting will lessen the bad feelings that you have because you realize that the Buddha nature exists within you. If there is someone

that you hate or are angry with, you will realize that Buddha nature is also in that person. So when you are angry or in a bad mood chant, because what you gain from it is the realization of your own Buddha nature and the Buddha nature of others.

Q: So, being in a bad mood is an opportunity to become enlightened too?

RH: You chant to become closer to the Buddha and your Buddha nature. From the Soka Gakkai's approach you are concentrating on the problem so that the problem will change. But when you are chanting sincerely you realize that that is foolish, that the reason you are chanting is to become closer to the Buddha and to reveal your own Buddha nature. The best way to chant is not to count time or count Daimoku, but to sit in front of Gohonzon and chant until you realize that the Buddha exists within you. That is how long you chant daimoku, until you gain that understanding.

It is as if you had a jewel and you are polishing it. It's very important that you polish your Buddha nature with Odaimoku. Even though chanting is not about how much time you put into it, or the number of Odaimoku you chant. If you chant three Odaimoku and haven't understood the reason why we chant, and you feel like you want to quit at there, but instead you press on past that point of unwillingness and continue until you reach the point where you do understand, then all the things that you had to go through to get to the point of understanding were necessary. What we are striving for is to reach the point of understanding that we are chanting to bring out the Buddha nature from within -- the Buddha nature that has always existed within each of us.

When I sit in front of Gohonzon I think, "Oh boy, I don't feel like doing Gongyo today. But even though I don't feel like it I still should do it – I have to do it." So I start Gongyo with this attitude, and finally I reach a point where I'm thinking, "Boy, I'm glad I'm doing Gongyo today! It's made such a difference." I transcended my reluctance and reached an understanding of my purpose. It would be great if I could carry over this feeling of joy in doing Gongyo to my next Gongyo, but that is not what happens with humans beings. We keep repeating our lack of enthusiasm and unwillingness, and then have to struggle through it.

As humans, we have to keep reminding ourselves to do Gongyo. Only sometimes do we have the feeling that we want to do Gongyo, but it is never constant. Sometimes when I sit in front of Gohonzon I think, "Boy, this is taking so long," and I look at my clock and only five minutes have passed. Then there are times when I think only five minutes have gone by and I look at my clock and it's thirty minutes which have passed. It's important that you have the ability to keep doing

Gongyo during the times that you don't want to, when it seems like the clock is broken or hardly moving at all, as well as during the times when you do want to and the time speeds by. That is what practice is. It's training. It's hard, and you have to discipline yourself to do it.