

The Path for Polishing our Life

A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena [ie, the Dharma nature] and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.¹

Based on the dissertation of President Ikeda on "On Attaining Buddhahood". Original translation in Japanese published in the May 2006 edition of Daibyakurenge, the monthly study magazine of the Soka Gakkai.

“Challenge ourselves bravely”: This is the message of Nichiren Daishonin with regard to the practice of *daimoku* to polish our life and make it shine.

The mirror metaphor here is truly inspired. The mirror being endowed with the property of reflection corresponds to our life being endowed with the mystic truth. But if a mirror is not polished, it will naturally become clouded. Since mirrors in the Daishonin’s day were typically made of bronze, they would readily tarnish. When a mirror is tarnished, it cannot fulfil its original function, so it has to be polished regularly. Similarly, if our life is neglected and left uncultivated, it will be shrouded

in ignorance. Hence, the mirror analogy.

The act of polishing is indispensable for restoring the mirror’s innate property. Moreover, just polishing a mirror once is not enough. We have to keep polishing it if we wish it to retain its reflective property. As this metaphor aptly attests, our practice of chanting *daimoku* is a struggle to polish our life, thereby wiping away the dust of ignorance and heightening the brilliance of our enlightened Dharma nature.

This practice of polishing our life may be seen as having two aspects. One is to arouse deep faith, as the Daishonin exhorts (WND-I, pg 4). This could also be

1) On Attaining Buddhahood , WND p4.

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articulated as summoning the fighting spirit to battle our inner darkness. The other aspect is to continue making steadfast efforts, in accord with the Daishonin's admonition that we should **"diligently polish our mirror day and night."**²

These two points echo the two aspects of chanting *daimoku* identified by Nichikan Shonin, based on the phrase in the 'Expedient Means' (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, **"exert oneself bravely and vigorously."**³ Nichikan, who is known as a great restorer of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism,

explains that 'bravely and vigorously' (*yumyo*) means to courageously bring forth the power of faith in chanting *daimoku*, while 'exert oneself' (*shojin*) means to engage sincerely and consistently in the practice chanting *daimoku*.⁴

In chanting *daimoku*, the first important thing is having the challenging spirit to act with courage. This could be described as arousing deep faith from the innermost reaches of our life in accord with the Daishonin's words, firmly believing that we can summon forth the mystic truth within us, manifest our inherent Buddhahood,

and attain enlightenment in this lifetime without fail.

CONTINUING

Next, continuing is vital. Continuing is absolutely essential for attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. The Daishonin says: **'To accept is easy/ to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith.'**⁵ In *On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime*, we see the paramount importance of continuing from the Daishonin's repeated emphasis on the need to practise **'day and night'** and **'diligently'**⁶ Maintaining an

2) *Ib.*

3) See Lotus Sutra, Ch. 2, p. 23. In Japanese, this expression is "yumyo shojin".

4) In 'Interpreting the Text Based upon Its Essential Meaning', a treatise of The Six-Volume Writings, Nichikan Shonin writes: "You should understand that 'to exert oneself bravely and vigorously' (cf LSZ, pg 23; Jpn yumyo shojin) refers to faith and to chanting daimoku. It therefore means to chant the daimoku of the essential teaching. 'Bravely and vigorously' (yumyo) refers to faith. A commen-

tary[[on the Lotus Sutra] therefore states: 'Yu (bravely) means to act with courage; myo (vigorously) means to expend all one's wisdom.' Hence, 'bravely and vigorously' describes courageously bringing forth the power of faith to the fullest extent. Shojin (to exert oneself) indicates the practice of chanting daimoku. A commentary therefore states: 'Sho (pure) means unadulterated; jin (effort) means ceaseless advance.'"

5) WND, p. 471.

6) *Ib.*, p. 4.

unflagging practice of chanting daimoku is a crucial requirement for attaining Buddhahood.

The Daishonin writes: **“Suffer what there is to suffer“, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law?”**⁷ We must continue chanting *daimoku* during times of both suffering and joy. The emphasis here is on **‘continue’**, and it is key that we do so throughout **‘both suffering and joy’**. When confronted with suffering, we must not retreat. We should ‘suffer what there is to suffer.’ This is neither resignation nor escapism. We need to fix our gaze unflinchingly on reality and bravely challenge it based on *daimoku*. The Daishonin is explaining that this is the correct attitude for practitioners of the Mystic Law. Faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism is constantly directed toward transforming reality.

Of course, such a state of life is not gained overnight. But if we steadfastly and diligently continue making efforts to polish ourselves day in and day out, month after month, year after year, we will naturally and surely come to

Chanting daimoku is a struggle to polish our life

attain it, mirroring the words of the sutra passage: **“This cluster of unsurpassed jewels / has come to us unsought.”**⁸

Next, the line, **“enjoy what there is to enjoy,”** can be taken to mean that when we are experiencing joy, we should remember to have gratitude and make even greater efforts to chant *daimoku*, aiming towards the ultimate goal of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. Deepening our seeking spirit in faith is much more difficult in good times than in bad, because in good times it is easy to grow lax and self-satisfied. Rather than being someone who is strong in adversity but weak when things are going well, we should seek to construct the kind of invincible faith that allows us to **“regard both suffering and joy as facts of life”**.⁹

Such strong faith is forged through our practice as Soka Gakkai members striving to achieve the lofty goal of *kosen-rufu* and

our own enlightenment in this existence. Above all, chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* - the process by which we **“diligently polish our mirror day and night,”**¹⁰ strengthens our life in the same way that a magnificent sword is forged and tempered. The crux here lies in ‘chanting with a challenging spirit’ in times of suffering, and ‘chanting with appreciation’ in times of joy.

7) *Ib.*, p. 681.

8) These words are an exclamation of joy when Sakyamuni’s voice-hearer disciples learn that they can in fact attain Buddhahood, which had previously been denied to them. See Lotus Sutra, Ch. 4, p. 87.

9) WND, p681

10) See WND, p4