

Questions and Answers on Faith
How Can I Focus More on the Gohonzon?
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Q: While I'm chanting before the Gohonzon, I notice that I have several nervous habits such as biting my fingernails and tugging at my hair. How can I overcome these habits and become more focused on the Gohonzon?

A: In discussing the proper stance we should have in front of the Gohonzon, the most important point to bear in mind is that we should chant wholeheartedly — to the point where we enjoy chanting. In a sense, it can be like a warm, open-hearted exchange with a trusted, respected friend or mentor. The experience should be refreshing; it's not like going to boot camp.

Of course, this is a practice that we strive to do every day of our lives, so there is the same tendency to develop bad habits as in any part of our lives. And these can interfere with how we focus on chanting to the Gohonzon.

Our minds may begin to wander from time to time, or we may catch ourselves fidgeting or squirming. When this happens, it is important that to the best of our ability we try to keep our mind on the right track.

Becoming aware of these negative tendencies is nothing to feel guilty about. The very nature of habits necessitates that we make conscious efforts to change them; recognizing an unwanted behavior is the first step in eradicating it.

If you were standing face-to-face with someone you held in high esteem, you would never allow yourself to bite your fingernails or tug at your hair. Think of world leaders meeting at an international summit: They greet each other confidently and with mutual respect, not biting their nails and tugging their hair. We should view our time in front of the Gohonzon similarly.

In February when SGI President Ikeda was in Hong Kong, he gave the following guidance about how to do morning and evening prayers, based on instructions from his mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda:

President Toda spoke on the essential practice of our faith, gongyo: "When you do gongyo in front of the Gohonzon, it is the same as if you are sitting before Nichiren Daishonin himself. You should never have a careless or sloppy attitude, nor should you doze off or yawn while doing gongyo. Chant resonately and joyfully."

Mr. Toda is not saying that we have to be rigid and tense when doing gongyo. The Daishonin is "the Buddha originally endowed with the three properties" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 759), so we should just be ourselves in our "originally endowed" form, as if we were in his presence.

When we realize that chanting is the fundamental cause to awaken our "originally endowed" selves and develop the life force and wisdom to change any problem, we begin to settle down and fuse with the Gohonzon. We chant with a voice that is clear and sonorous, focused on our prayer. With conviction and hope for the future, sensing that we are clearing away doubt and worry. With the determination that "I will make this happen," tapping into the Buddhahood inherent within us. The challenge we face each day is to master the act of enjoying chanting in this way. Our earnest prayer when chanting is the source of all solutions.

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