

EDITORIAL: The Right Way To Chant?

Ever wonder how you're supposed to chant? What is the secret to successful prayer?

It's a safe bet we've all asked, at one time or another, "How do I chant for _____?" (Fill in the blank with "a job," "a relationship," "more money," "happiness," etc.).

But there really aren't different ways to chant for different desires. Over the years, many views have been shared, both in these pages and during personal guidance, about the most effective ways to chant. Some people emphasize connecting your desire to kosen-rufu (that is, "I want this job so I can show actual proof of the practice"). Others say we should chant for other people's happiness first. Still others that we should think about our desires; calm our mind; picture our Buddha nature; and so on.

These tips represent many people's wisdom gained from years of practice. And while they can be and have been effective for certain people at certain times, when it comes down to it, there is no one way to chant.

There is no secret formula.

The only rule, so to speak, is to be yourself. There are no shoulds or ought tos. As SGI President Ikeda says in next week's "Discussions on Youth": "There is no set form or pattern for how we should pray. Buddhism emphasizes being natural. Therefore, simply chant earnestly without pretense or artifice, just as you are."

Some of us seek how-to-chant guidance when we feel deadlocked and that our prayers aren't being answered. But having faith means believing in our Buddhahood, being confident in our prayers and trusting the efficacy of chanting — all just as we are. As Nichiren Daishonin writes: "Faith alone is what really matters" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 242).

Faith aims to set people free. No one can dictate what is OK to pray for and what isn't. By honestly praying for our desires, our life-condition naturally becomes broader, deeper, bigger. Nothing is off limits. The right way to chant is to share all your thoughts and feelings freely with the Gohonzon; denying your true feelings is counterproductive.

Of course, if your intent is destructive — as in praying for someone's unhappiness — you're going against the Buddhist Law and will have to face the effects you're creating this way. But the bottom line is that freedom of choice in prayer is our *modus operandi*.

As Mr. Ikeda also says in next week's dialogue: "There's no need to pretend that you're praying for something really lofty when you're not. You're only fooling yourself when you do.... Of course, it's perfectly fine...to chant with resolve to become a bigger-hearted person or for the welfare of your friends and for kosen-rufu — the happiness and prosperity of all humankind. You are free to chant for whatever you wish. It's all up to you."

In Buddhism, we use the term *absolute freedom*, which can mean limitless joy. Through unhindered, honest prayer, we can develop an unstoppable state of life that is free to enjoy everything life throws at us, free to always gain joy from the Law. Josei Toda used to say that he felt as if his life-condition were freely expanding into the sky, allowing him to go wherever and accomplish whatever he chose.

The power of our unrestrained, unreserved prayer can lead us all to the state where nothing can stop us. Where we may share in Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road":

*Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.*

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