

BACK TO THE BASICS
CHANTING NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO
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What did Nichiren Daishonin have in mind when he introduced the chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo? We can get a sense of his thinking in “The One Essential Phrase” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 922–24).

One thing we can see from this letter is how the Daishonin encouraged the lay believers, like the lay nun Myoho, the recipient of this letter, to chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with faith even though they did not understand its full meaning. He states, “Even though one neither reads nor studies the sutra, chanting the title alone is the source of tremendous good fortune” (WND, p. 923).

That we can instantly tap our inherent Buddhahood by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is “[an incomparably greater wonder than] fire being produced by a stone taken from the bottom of a river, or a lantern lighting up a place that has been dark for a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years,” the Daishonin explains (WND, 923).

If we wait to chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo until we completely understand the depths of its meaning, we wait unnecessarily to light up our lives.

The 26th high priest, Nichikan, in talking on the significance of chanting, stresses two aspects: faith and practice. In other words, he treats Nam-myoho-enge-kyo as something that we should first of all chant—with a conscious effort to trust in the value of chanting—before we go about analyzing its meaning.

The Daishonin also states that “within the title, or daimoku of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the entire sutra...” (WND, 922). This passage means that all the ultimate principles of life expounded in Buddhism are contained in the phrase Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Since Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is such a vital phrase for humanity, the Daishonin’s simple yet profound teaching is that “one’s voice does the Buddha’s work” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708). In other words, use your voice—chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo—to open and vitalize Buddhahood.

Next week: More on Nam-myoho-enge-kyo from Ted Morino.