

**BACK TO THE BASICS
THE CEREMONY IN THE AIR
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Where are you when you do gongyo? Maybe at home or at an SGI facility. OK, but where are you, mentally or spiritually? This is not a trick question. After years of effort and struggle, Josei Toda while chanting daimoku during imprisonment for his beliefs during the war, suddenly found himself floating above the saha world (this world in which people must endure suffering), at the Ceremony in the Air, shoulder-to-shoulder with countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth chanting to the Gohonzon. That experience—a profound, transformational realization—was nothing less than Toda’s discovery of his true, eternal self.

And that discovery was to be a source of power, endurance, wisdom, and compassion that truly changed the course of human history. We can all find this same place, however, if we know where to look. Scholar David Chappell wrote in the June 1999 *Living Buddhism* that the Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni and the Gohonzon and mantra of the Daishonin all point to *myo*, or the “mysterious nature of our lives from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend nor words express” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 2). We discover our true self by performing gongyo, our ritual prayer service.

Here is a great definition of ritual: the dramatic reenactment of a myth. By performing a ritual, one participates in an explanation of the origins of some natural phenomena. For us, that origin (or mystic truth) is that Buddhahood exists within; that nirvana and enlightenment is here and now.

Knowing the names and arrangement of characters on the Gohonzon has really helped me grasp the mythic, symbolic aspects of gongyo. Representatives of the Ten Worlds, the gods of the sun, moon, stars, as well as many other Buddhist gods are all present. So many of these “characters” appear in the Daishonin’s writings as well as other forms of Buddhism and even in Hindu traditions. They all appear, with each of us, as we pray every morning and evening.

To paraphrase the “Reply to Sairen-bo,” when we overflow with joy through our correct practice of the single vehicle (the Mystic Law), we see Eagle Peak in India and visit the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light that has existed for all time. Something to think about the next time you partake of gongyo in front of the Gohonzon in your home.