

**PERSPECTIVE  
CONSISTENT PRACTICE CHANGES EVERYTHING  
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**‘Because I challenged myself to practice consistently,’ writes Jason Henninger, ‘I found I chanted more and enjoyed both morning and evening gongyo more than before, and my mood brightened.’**

I’m sitting on the floor. My computer is propped up on some boxes. I have no furniture, and I have the flu. In spite of all this I am happier right now than I’ve been in months. The reason for my improved mood can be summed up in two words: consistent practice.

“Evening gongyo” is a more specific two-word explanation. I’ve always had a difficulty with consistent practice in general. Some days I’ll chant for hours and other days not at all. And as a studious sort of guy, fond of a good rationalization, I’ve investigated every possible excuse for skipping evening gongyo.

“Nichiren Daishonin,” I’d say, “never specified how gongyo is done. He never said five prayers in the morning and three at night.” And in my lazy little mind I’d imagine him nodding, as if to say: “Quite right. Go ahead and sleep.”

I studied the origins of gongyo, the recitation of the Lotus Sutra, which dates back to the very beginning of Buddhism, before the written word. “It’s just a mnemonic device,” I proclaimed, “and not essential.” And then I’d imagine Shakyamuni smiling and saying: “Exactly. Sweet dreams!”

The greatest flaw in my argument (aside from being more or less completely stupid) was the fact that I almost never missed morning gongyo despite all my attempts to trivialize it. I almost never went without it.

But at night? I’m asleep, right? Who cares about your life-condition when you’re sleeping? And so, armed with this utter foolishness, I slept a lot and missed half my practice.

My wife and I moved to Los Angeles several months ago in high hopes of jump-starting my writing career. We were full of adventure and enthusiasm because we had been heavily involved with the Pacific Northwest’s Youth Culture Festival. We both made great causes for our future together in sunny Southern California.

She got a great job right away. The pay was better than ever, and her company paid for our housing for a couple of months. I sent out resumés and thought to myself: “This will be a piece of cake. I’ll be an editor for a great metropolitan newspaper and make a jillion dollars and we’ll live by the sea, tra la la.”

And I sent out more resumés. And yet more. And yet still even more. There were a ton of great jobs. I just couldn’t get the phone to ring. Every night I’d go to bed wondering, “What am I doing wrong?”

I continued to ask myself that as time went on, and money got scarce, and my brain became a big ugly worried mess. Next thing I knew we were living in my family’s already full house. Every night I’d go to sleep on the floor wondering, “What am I doing wrong?”

Hadn’t I made great causes? Sure I had. Didn’t I deserve a home and a job? Of course. So what the &%@! was I doing wrong?

My mother, my sisters and my wife looked at my downtrodden life, noticed my lack of

consistent practice, and started to “remind” me about evening gongyo and chanting more often. I’d whine, and I’d rationalize, and I’d pretend to be asleep, but eventually I started down the bumpy road to a regular practice.

Nichiren Daishonin, though he wrote little about reciting the sutra, had quite a lot to say about consistency. In his writing, “Expedient Means and Life Span Chapters,” he states, “If one fails to put faith in the Lotus Sutra...practicing the Lotus Sutra only from time to time...then all the merit of the countless good acts one has performed throughout one’s life will suddenly vanish. Moreover, the blessings resulting from one’s practice of the Lotus Sutra will for some time be obscured” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 70).

My benefits certainly had become obscured. But because I challenged myself to practice consistently, I found I chanted more and enjoyed both morning and evening gongyo more than before, and my mood brightened whether or not I was asleep!

To top it all off, my wife and I got a great apartment and I started a new job. We don’t have all our furniture, and I have the flu like I said, but so what? The future looks bright. And in my mind I can almost see Nichiren Daishonin nodding and saying: “Quite right. About time you figured this out.”