

MEDITATION

As we have completed another shodaigyō, I hope that you are learning to relax and slowly gain control of your mind. Your mind is very powerful. It controls all actions through your thoughts. If you want to be good you will be good and if you want to be bad, you will be bad. Ignorant people always blame others for their actions. They do not want to admit it is they who decided to do this or that. They do not want to admit or face reality that they are evil or have can be evil. Delusion is a major cause of suffering.

We are human therefore we are still in the process of developing our mind and spirituality. We all have evil intent or thoughts, but have to realize the context in which the thought was created and find ways to eliminate it. We get angry, but why? The cause could be something trivial or due to selfishness. Once we recognize the cause, apologize and make a note for the future if such event happens again, understand the situation and not get angry.

We are constantly sorting through thousands and thousands of thoughts everyday. Should I do this or that, go left or right, up or down. It could be overwhelming sometimes and for weaker people, the wrong thought takes over. How do we strengthen the mind? Through meditation. Just like anything else, we need to train our minds in order to gain control. The mind is the starting point for all of our actions. Train the mind right and action will be right.

Most of you are aware of the benefits of meditation, such as calmness, better organization of thoughts, relaxation, better physical health, less stress and improved concentration. There are many forms of meditation that you can apply in your daily lives and many books outlining how to master meditation. I will not argue against you trying

any of those methods. What best works for you is what you should do. But I do suggest that since you are Nichiren Buddhist, you incorporate shodaigyo as part of your meditation routine.

Today we listened to the sounds of nature to help bring us into a relaxed stage. If there were no sounds, for most of you, your mind will wander and not concentrate on the moment, which is the act of meditation. Other sounds may distract you, such as the air blowing through the vents or the bus rumbling down the road outside. It is very difficult to calm the mind and singularly focus on meditation. The tape helps. Then we move into chanting the Odaimoku. The style I use with the hand motion is not common in most temples. I use the hand motions because of the benefit of the Odaimoku reaching into your body. These aids help us be able to concentrate more on the task of meditating during the day.

To apply shodaigyo meditation at home, do it at night, preferably when it is dark and well after eating a meal. Light a candle or small light source at your altar. You can burn incense if you have a burner. Sit seiza style if you can, otherwise I recommend a small stool. Do not use a chair since the tendency is to sit back and use the back rest. Using the back rest puts the body at a slanted angle, thus you do not get the full impact from the breathing exercise. Sit with your back straight, do not slouch, either place your left fingers over your right and make an oval shape with your thumbs touching or “sashu”, which is the pose that ministers use when not in gassho. Place your right palm facing you with your thumb up, and then bring your left hand over with the left thumb in between the right thumb and index finger. Slightly grab the right hand. Place either the oval or sashu above your belly button. Close your eyes slightly and move your shoulders to

release stress and strain. Concentrate on your breathing. In, hold, exhale. As you breathe in and out, chant the Odaimoku in your mind. This will help your mind from wandering around too much. If some thought enters, do not forcibly try to remove it but let it drift away. After some time, start chanting the Odaimoku. You can use the hand motions or do it the traditional way of starting slow, then faster, faster, really fast, then slower and slower and really slow. Once completed, go back to the meditation pose and concentrate on your breathing.

You will find that when you finish, you will be relaxed and have a positive outlook. When in Japan, shodaigyo was always conducted at night, either before dinner or a couple hours afterwards. It seems that at night, it is a bit quieter so there are fewer distractions. Plus when it is dark except for the lit candle, you can focus your attention better by looking at the flame. It adds a bit of mystique to the mediation. Some day we can conduct shodaigyo at night so you can experience what it is like when meditating in the dark.

There are many ways to practice meditation, but by using the above directions for shodaigyo at home, through practice, you will find that you are always calm and are always making the right decisions, making you one step closer to becoming a Buddha.