

WHY I PRACTISE BUDDHISM ...

I have been practising Buddhism for more than twenty years now and looking back I realise my life has been totally transformed.

I practise the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin and rather than meditate I chant 'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo' (as well as exerts from the Lotus Sutra in a mixture of Sanskrit and Chinese Mandarin, which we call 'Gongyo'). I chant to something called a Gohonzon (which is basically a piece of paper with every aspect of life represented on it in Chinese and Sanskrit and 'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo' down the centre). The Gohonzon represents a reflection of the enlightened state of life, it is not something we worship, it is a very powerful tool that helps us to manifest our Buddhahood, that's limitless wisdom, courage, compassion and life force. The whole point of this Buddhism is that we are not worshipping something outside ourselves but rather we are manifesting our Buddhahood or bringing out from within us this most amazing life state.

By English standards this may seem like a very bizarre thing to do every morning and evening and you may be surprised to know that the SGI has 12 million members worldwide in 192 countries.

The SGI (Soka Gakkai International) is the name of our lay Buddhist organisation. Soka Gakkai is a Japanese term meaning 'value creation' which is exactly what this Buddhism is about, creating value no matter what ... in fact 'the bigger the negative the bigger the positive'. Ours is a transformative practice and is literally about transforming negative into positive and transforming our lives at the core. It involves challenging those things which inhibit the full expression of our positive potential and humanity. We call this process 'doing our human revolution' and this can mean making the impossible, possible, which has totally been my experience.

Nichiren Daishonin was a 13th century Japanese monk who wanted to understand why there was so much suffering in Japan at that time. Nichiren felt passionately that Buddhism should enable people living in the real world and facing real problems to become empowered and change their lives for the better. He devoted his life to researching Shakyamuni (the original Buddha)'s teachings. Nichiren was the first person to realise the transformative power in chanting 'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo'.

'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo' literally means 'to devote one's life to The Mystic Law of cause and effect, expressed through the vibration that connects everything in the universe'. 'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo' is the title of The Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha's final teaching. In this sutra Shakyamuni explains that all that his teachings before The Lotus Sutra were provisional. Its key message is that Buddhahood – a condition of absolute happiness, freedom from fear and from all illusions – is inherent in all life. He explains that you don't have to be born a man and don't have to go through many austerities to attain Buddhahood in your next life time. Buddhahood can be attained in your present from, from this moment now, by chanting 'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo'.

Nichiren Buddhist's believe 'Nam-Myoko-Renge-Kyo' to be the vibration of Buddhahood and that when we make this sound (whether we understand the process or not), we are plugging into limitless wisdom, courage, compassion and life force (life force because we are in rhythm with the universe and universal law).

Stepping away from the drama of our lives with our eyes open and our hands in prayer position when we focus on the Gohonzon (if we have one) and do Gongyo or chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, we elevate our life state, plugging into limitless, wisdom courage, compassion and life force . We also cleanse our life at the deepest level (mitigating our karma), as we are plugging into pure life force by connecting with our 9th level of consciousness which is below karma. For me chanting is like dialogue with the universe.

By making this sound, we change how we vibrate and how the space around us vibrates. Although on one level it may seem like a very simple thing to do, it is actually stirring our life up at the deepest level.

With this Buddhist practise you can start every day with hope and then in the evening we can review the events of the day from the perspective of Buddha hood, perhaps understanding in a new way what is truly going on.

With this Buddhism we have no priests or temples, we have no words for guilt or sin and we have no commandments or judgement. It is a matter of debate whether Buddhism is a religion or not, many including myself regard it more as a way of living and thinking. Rather than focus on what has gone before we focus on 'from this moment' because it is in our current moment that we are making the causes that determine our future. From the Buddhist perspective ever moment contains 3,000 possibilities i.e. when your button is pressed rather than respond as you always have done, you have 3,000 possible ways to respond – every moment you truly have a choice. Buddhism is about taking totally responsibility for your life and the choices you make.

Ultimately this Buddhism is about truly respecting all life, especially your own, we also chant and practise for the happiness of ourselves and others. I know from personal experience that by truly respecting your life everything can change ...

I know also from personal experience that in time you can gain a completely different attitude to 'problems' as in time you can gain so much proof of this practise that whatever comes up you come to totally believe you can turn this around and create value. Ultimately this can mean making decisions based on Buddahood rather than fear and as a result there can be absolute freedom and absolute happiness.

You can also forge the most amazing friendships when you come out the other end together. In so many environments you have to pretend everything s ok when it is not and this can be very isolating. With this Buddhism, rather than have someone preach at you, we have discussion and study meetings where you can share your journey and gain new insights. If you can't find the words or want to remain private about your journey, chanting with others to a Gohonzon can be very uplifting and if you don't want to chant just being in this environment can be very uplifting.

Life is too short and too precious to be unhappy for long ... so I do hope you give the chanting a try ... It doesn't cost anything and can be the most wonderful journey of discovery ... You don't need a Gohonzon to start, just try chanting 'Nam-Myoko-Renge-Kyo' to a blank wall, with your eyes open for 10 minutes morning and evening thinking about what it is you truly want ...

For more information about the SGI, please take a look at some of their websites ... you may find there are meetings going on near to you ... <http://www.sgi.org> or www.sgi-usa.org

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