

Faith, Practice and Study

How to Make a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich

If you want to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you need three things: bread, peanut butter and jelly. But some people don't like jelly on their peanut butter, so they skip that part. Other people may not care for peanut butter so they skip that and just have bread and jelly. I know people who just eat the peanut butter out of the jar with a spoon – skipping the bread and the jelly.

Those different ways are OK and they all include part of the ingredients. But, strictly speaking, if you want to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you need to use bread, peanut butter and jelly.

Nichiren's practice of Buddhism has three action steps:

faith: which means developing belief in this practice and in your own

Buddha nature

practice: which includes practice for ourselves (chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reciting the sutra) and practice for others (sharing this Buddhism with others) and

study: which means to learn about Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

Some people may have difficulty with one or more of the steps. Some people may skip the part that is hard for them to do and just do the parts that are easier for them. Each step, chanting, sharing with others and study is a good cause by itself. But just like in the sandwich, all the parts are necessary. **To practice as Nichiren taught, we need to do all three things.** Chanting helps us have experiences which helps us develop our faith which leads us to want to tell others which leads us to study which leads us to understand more which helps us chant and on and on and on. It's all tied up together. Nichiren himself wrote, "Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others." (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol.1, p.386*)

Studying things helps us to learn how they work so we can make the best use of them. If we practice and study, as Nichiren taught, we learn how to use our practice to become happy. President Ikeda wrote: "Disregarding the ways of practice and study is like flying an airplane with no idea of your course, altitude or destination, and no means of refueling." (World Tribune, Sept. 8, 2006 p. 8) That's not a trip you probably want to take.

It can be hard to do all of this on your own. You may have a lot of questions. Our SGI-USA organization helps us to do the parts of our practice that are difficult for us to do by ourselves. At meetings we can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and learn how to recite the sutra with other members. Then we might share our experience of practicing Nichiren's Buddhism or hear someone else share theirs. This can help us get the courage to talk with our own friends about this practice. And usually at each meeting, there will be some type of study presentation that will be interesting enough so that we will want to learn more by studying ourselves.

With your own hard work and the support of your SGI-USA community you can do all parts of this practice and create an amazing life.

The Three Kinds of Proof

People tell you lots of things. Do you believe everything you hear? How do you decide what you believe?

Take $4+4=8$, for example. Did you know that? Do you believe it? How can you be sure? It seems to make sense. Maybe you were told this by someone you trust, like your parents, a teacher or even your older brother or sister. Or, maybe you saw it in a math book or on a flashcard or some other “math facts” item. You could also do an experiment to find out for yourself.

Bring your hands up in front of your face with the palms (the inside part) facing away from you. Now tuck your thumbs in so that they don't show. Notice that you have four fingers on each hand. Bring your hands together so that your fingers are all in a line. Now count them. Eight, right? You have just done an experiment where you provided actual or factual proof that $4+4=8$.

When Nichiren was getting ready to tell people about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, he knew he would be asked to show or “prove” that what he was teaching was true. He taught that there are three kinds of proof: theoretical, documentary and actual.

A theory is an idea or a belief. For **theoretical proof**, we need to ask ourselves, “Does this make sense?” **Documentary** proof has to do with ideas that are in writing. Is there something we can read about the thing we are trying to prove? **Actual proof** comes when we actually try out the idea; we can do an experiment to see what happens

Nichiren taught that actual proof is the most important.

We can use proof in all areas in our lives. Nichiren wants us to use it in order to have a stronger feeling about chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. We can ask ourselves these questions: Did anything change when we chanted? Did we learn something about ourselves or about life? Do we feel any different? As we have these experiment experiences, and create actual proof, our faith or belief in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo gets stronger.

The Devil King of the Sixth Heaven

The Devil King of the Sixth heaven is another name for fundamental darkness. Whenever something tries to move forward it is met with resistance. For example, the faster a boat moves forward in the water the more resistance it has to overcome in the water. If a rocket tries to take off from the Earth, it has to overcome the force of gravity pulling it back. It's the same thing when we try to develop ourselves or move our lives forward. We will, of course, meet resistance or obstacles outside us, but the most difficult obstacles are the ones inside us. That devil king of the sixth heaven is not a force outside us. It is that part of our lives that tells us we can't do it, that we don't have the Buddha nature or that we're not good enough. Everyone has this fundamental darkness. Some people get overcome by it and let it stop them. It can get so bad that we can even try to stop others from believing in themselves.

You don't have to let that happen. Fundamental darkness is really just not knowing about or believing in your Buddha nature. Remember, everyone's got the courage and confidence they need inside. We can all get to use that by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Chanting with belief in our Buddha nature allows us to win over our fundamental darkness and bring out our highest potential. Because our obstacles give us a reason to chant, actually they can help us bring out our best. We can develop in ways we couldn't have if we didn't have that problem and then we can take the best action to achieve a victory.

So, remember, the devil will come up. Don't give in to doubting yourself. Chant powerfully; bring out your courage, confidence and wisdom. Then take the best action and achieve victory after victory.

Absolute and Relative Happiness

What is it that makes you happy? A new toy? But what happens when the toy breaks, or you get tired of it? Winning a trophy? Of course, you may be the winner one game, but then lose the next. Having a lot of money? Once you get the money, then what? If you spend it, then it's gone and if you save it, it is just sitting somewhere. How much can you enjoy that? Definitely those things can give you some kind of happiness. There are a lot of problems with this kind of happiness though. For one thing it doesn't last forever. Life changes all the time. Sometimes you have stuff and sometimes you don't. More important though is that if you're not happy on the inside all the toys, trophies or money in the world won't make you happy. Happiness that depends on things outside you is called "relative" happiness.

The other kind of happiness is called "absolute" happiness. This kind of happiness is based on the strong life we develop when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and strive to bring out our Buddha nature. We may be chanting for goals that seem outside of us, but by doing that we discover the strength that is inside us. That is the purpose of our Buddhist practice. Our situations may change all the time. Sometimes they're good, sometimes not so good. When we are aware of and know how to bring out the strength inside through chanting, we can always have what we need to overcome any obstacle. That's absolute happiness.