

How to Begin Chanting

From the Sutra on How to Practice Meditation on Bodhisattva Universal Worthy

“Ananda, if there are monks, nuns, laymen, or laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, or others of the eight kinds of beings, or any living beings who **intone the great vehicle**, practice the great vehicle, **set their minds on the great vehicle**, wish to see the form and body of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, wish to see the tower of Many Treasures Buddha, wish to see Shakyamuni Buddha and the many Buddhas that are emanations of his body, or wish to attain purification of the six sense organs—they should study this meditation.”

Throughout the Lotus Sutra, the exhortation to read, recite, copy, spread, etc... even a phrase of the sutra is repeated. Nichiren nailed this down to the title of the sutra itself as it is also the repeated at the beginning of each of the 28 chapters of the Sutra and its profound meanings in each character as defined by TienTai Chiyi in China. This is known as the Daimoku (jp.).

Chanting, or as I like to call it, active meditation, is very effective in the goals of meditation. I should say that this is true for meditation with the goal of awakening the Buddha mind as opposed to simple relaxation or quietude is most affected here. The reason is that in awakening or enlightenment training, the objective is to become aware of the mind's constant state of agitation and to learn to intercept its stream of thoughts, individuate their kind and eventually to subdue those thoughts to gain control over one's tendencies. When using a mantra, it is important to achieve these thought goals in three ways that provide an easier path to that state where your concentration is least distracted and becomes so focused as to be in a trance-like state. The mantra achieves this state quickly by providing a strong and focused distraction of repetition. That repetition works best to a steady rhythm, and that mental as well as physical commitment can bring focus and a trance state very quickly.

As to which mantra is most effective, goals are once again the key element. In Nichiren or Lotus Sutra Buddhism, the goal of enlightenment is an awakening of the Buddha mind for as long as possible while in this life. To do this, the exhortation from Shakyamuni to study is primary. With study comes awareness of the teachings 5 periods of training and development to deepen understanding of the fundamentals of awakening and practice. These 5 periods or path to understanding are represented in the 5 characters of Myo, Ho, Ren,

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Ge, Kyo. As the student deepens understanding of these teachings, the mantra of repeating those characters takes on continuous development and mental focus.

The mantra of NaMuMyoHoRenGeKyo then becomes an immersion into the Buddha state itself, and the state of awakening can be experienced during the chanting. To maintain this state after chanting ceases becomes the goal of the practice.

What is especially necessary for effective chanting is a Gohonzon, enshrined in a modest altar with no distractions surrounding it. The Gohonzon functions as a strong focal point for clearing the mind to commune directly with our Buddha mind. Lack of distraction is very helpful as is the determined and strong, clear vocalization of the daimoku with a galloping rhythm and an attentive posture. The more time spent in this activity, the more one can realize the Buddha mind state. It has been said that one should chant until one feels the joy. As for a rule of thumb, we chant for at least 30 minutes and recite a portion of the Lotus Sutra in order to affix our Buddha mind into our daily lives.

Congratulations and best of fortunes.

NaMuMyoHoRenGeKyo