



【Basic Practice of Faith: Merit from Sutra Recitation Practice】

It suddenly occurred to me that the autumn season, with its pleasant fresh breezes and change of color on the city's streets, had somehow arrived unnoticed.

The past month, September, was the month we observed "Ohigan-e (Autumn-time Special Memorial Service)." "Higan" is a Buddhist teaching, but this event is a practice unique to Japan. Especially for us, as Buddhists, this traditional event is performed from our hearts, with great sincerity. We, members of Rissho Kosei-kai, hold Ohigan-e Special Memorial Service for our ancestors at the dojo or in our homes during the Higan week, which is the week of the equinox. Through our practice of sutra recitation, we think about our ancestors, make offerings from our hearts, and contemplate with gratitude on how we have been given life, thanks to our ancestors. Also, the origin of Higan is known to be the Sanskrit word Paramita (Perfections). And Paramita is said to be "Toh Higan," indicating the state of awareness in which one has overcome delusions and sufferings. In contrast, the world in which we live, filled with suffering due to greed, anger and so forth, is called "Shigan."

We are taught that by simultaneously practicing the Six Perfections (Paramitas) [donation, keeping the precepts, perseverance, diligence, meditation and wisdom] while we wholeheartedly offer the sutra recitation to our ancestors, we can go from Shigan to Higan. This is not the first time I have said this, and you are already probably aware of this teaching. Therefore, I think for the occasion of Higan-e, you must have purified your own hearts and minds and engaged in the practice of cultivating peoples' hearts and minds.

Now, we do not only offer our sutra recitation for Obon and Ohigan. We consider our morning and evening daily practice of offering recitation of the Kyoten as one of our basic practices of faith. The offering is an act that expresses devotion and gratitude to the Buddha. There are three types of offering: "Rikuyo (service to offer incense, flowers, food, drinks, and other goods)," "Kyokuyo (service to offer sense of gratitude through words and actions)," and "Gyokuyo (service to offer ourselves and to put the teachings into practice in our daily lives)." Because the significance of the morning and evening recitation are offerings to revere and praise the Buddha, this falls in the "Kyokuyo" category. It is, so to speak, the Buddha's testament. While absorbed in offering the sutra recitation as a basic practice of our faith, our hearts and minds are receiving the Buddha's testament and we are making our vow to put it into practice.

When we practice the morning and evening sutra recitation every day, if we miss even one day, it feels like we forgot to do something we should be doing and this leaves a bad taste in our mouths. We call the morning and evening sutra recitation "our job." If we could choose same times every day, it would be even more beneficial. Mysteriously we start to find our day fall properly in place.

According to a brain physiologist, "There is a substance called 'serotonin' that secretes in the brain. This substance is a neurotransmitter which has various influences on the body and mind. The serotonin nerve is called the "happiness nerve" in English because the serotonin promotes healthy feelings and motivation; it also relieves stress and maintains our composure equanimity.





And serotonin will secrete in our normal daily lives, but with certain activities, the secretion increases resulting in a continuous state of happiness. Chanting the sutra or meditation can create such a state. To be precise, the rhythm of breathing, while engaging in sutra recitation or meditation, promote secretion from serotonin.”

I found myself nodding in agreement. Occasionally, during the morning and evening sutra recitation, when I intently fuse myself with Eternal Buddha’s heart and mind and reach the state of total receptivity, I have experienced an indescribable equanimity. That is, to receive very valuable time to connect with the Buddha, to acquire presence of mind, and to gain deep awareness with “gratitude” from the bottom of my heart, the wonder of having received life as a human being. Then, I am filled with the energy to live life positively.

Day-to-day, I am grateful that I have been able to receive such numerous merits.

Gassho
New York Dharma Center Minister
Etsuko Fujita

Reflection

It was about a month ago that I started to have sharp pains in my stomach. That was when I was back in Japan for a temporary visit. Without hesitation, I ignored my family who said, “Why don’t you get it checked at the hospital?” and returned to New York.

But my stomach condition did not change. It felt heavy and was painful. The more I searched the internet, I worried that it might be a serious condition, but I felt the pain had not reached the point where a visit to the hospital was necessary. So, I just brushed it away.

Then, one night, the pain was so severe I could hardly stand. However, I endured the pain while I prepared the offering for the Memorial Service (which was to be held the next day) and worked on some unfinished tasks. My husband was infuriated as he scolded me, saying, “What are you doing!” “There you go, ignoring yourself, and end up inconveniencing others after all!” I was desperately enduring the pain as I did my work so that I wouldn’t inconvenience others. I could not accept my husband’s words that I “...would end up inconveniencing others after all” and tears welled up in my eyes.

The next day my husband took the day off and went to the hospital with me. He seemed anxious while I was being examined, and waited until it was finished. He even accompanied me to have the MRI done. I said to him, “You will only be waiting, so you can go home.” He quietly responded, “We can be together only at times like this.”

His words stunned me. Because of my tendency to become so absorbed in my duties, I had begun to disregard my own family. I left my husband, who just returned from his business trip, at home; I also left my children, who were on summer vacation, at home. I started to see how cold my attitude truly was, thinking as long as I made the meals, they would forgive me. “I’m truly sorry,” I thought. Because my family is healthy, I was able to do the Dharma activities I love to do. Tears of gratitude gushed out.

While I was recuperating, I could not do anything for my family. Yet, I was able to spend those days with a sense of deep gratitude. And when I was able to properly turn my attention to my family, just being together somehow seemed to make them happy.

Be wholehearted in our encounters • our relationships, each place, every place, moment by moment. Through my stomach ache, I was touched by kindness and became aware of very important things.

Administrative Director Yuri Sugino



9/11
9.11 Memorial
Service



9/17 Study Session
Universal Transfer of Merit
Review entire Kyoten
by Rev. Kyoichi Sugino
Ft. Myers Sangha joined



9/21 Higan-e
Special Memorial

SCHEDULE FOR NEW YORK CHAPTER

October 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 1PM Annual Memorial Day Ceremony For the Founder	2 9AM Sutra Recitation	3 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza 2-4PM Area Leaders' Meeting	4 9AM Annual Memorial Day For the Founder Reach out day	5 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Guidance for Leaders	6 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza	7 Closed: Dharma Practices at home
8 1PM Sunday Service President's Dharma Guidance	9 Columbus Day	10 9AM Memorial Service for Cofounder 10AM-5PM Steering Committee/Missionary	11 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Monthly Memorial Service Reach out day	12 9AM Sutra Recitation	13 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza	14 NY Church 35th Anniversary Ceremony At Stony Point Center
15 NY Church 35th Anniversary Ceremony At Stony Point Center	16 9AM Special Prayer for renovation	17 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza	18 9AM Sutra Recitation Reach out day	19 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Guidance for Leaders	20 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza	21 Closed: Dharma Practices at home
22 10:30AM Board Meeting 1PM Sunday Service Study Session	23 9AM Sutra Recitation	24 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza 2-4pm Area Leaders' Meeting	25 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Lotus Sutra Study	26 9AM Sutra Recitation	27 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza	28 Closed: Dharma Practices at home
29 Closed	30 9AM Special Prayer for renovation	31 9AM Sutra Recitation 10AM Hoza				