



SGI President Ikeda on the Importance of Buddhist Study

The following excerpts are taken from an essay by SGI President Ikeda published in the September–October 2010 Living Buddhism.

Study exams provide opportunities for accumulating immense benefit not only for the examinees working hard to deepen their understanding of Nichiren Buddhism but also for everyone else involved, including those who support them in their studies, those responsible for administering and marking the exams, as well as the event staff. As Nichiren Daishonin states, “Where there is unseen virtue, there will be visible reward” (“Unseen Virtue and Visible Reward,” WND-1, 907). All who participate in and support the study exams are sowing the seeds for becoming outstanding philosophers, educators and leaders of abiding happiness and victory.



In the diary I kept during my youth, I wrote: “No matter how high our leadership positions, if we fail to study seriously, we will be left behind...The Daishonin’s words, ‘Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study’ [“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND-1, 386], apply equally to everyone. No one is an exception.”¹ When we lose our seeking spirit toward Buddhist learning, we open the door for arrogance to creep into our lives.



Buddhist study is not the special privilege of elite professional clerics. In view of the Lotus Sutra’s ultimate teaching of universal enlightenment, truly humanistic Buddhist study is study that is open to all and can be joyfully undertaken by anyone. This type of learning pulses vibrantly in each individual’s life, instilling in us the means for leading lives of value creation, carrying out the philosophy of human revolution and achieving absolute victory based on faith in the Mystic Law.

The great Russian author Leo Tolstoy recorded the following saying in one of his journals: “Without correct thought, there can be no correct action. When there is correct thought, correct action is sure to flow forth naturally from such thought.”² These are words of undeniable truth.



Study the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and practice as they teach, with a pure heart, regarding today’s efforts as a cause for eternal happiness.



[Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda] always emphasized the importance of having a solid grounding in Buddhist study. No matter the situation, his guidance flowed forth freely from the wellspring of the writings of Nichiren Daishonin. That's why he admonished the youth division members who would shoulder the Soka Gakkai's future, saying, "I hope that you will exert even greater efforts in Buddhist study, faith and self-improvement." He also specifically said to the young women's division: "Develop a strong foundation in Buddhist study! If you do so, you will never be swayed by any problem you may encounter."

The in-depth Buddhist study in which I engaged with my mentor during my youth has been the foundation for my Buddhist practice throughout my life. At every opportunity, Mr. Toda instructed me on the writings of Nichiren. In May 1951, just after he'd been inaugurated as the second Soka Gakkai president, he delivered a powerful lecture on "Letter from Sado." I remember fondly listening to his famous "Friday lectures" from the wings at Toshima Civic Hall. He gave almost 200 of these lectures, which were open to all members. Even when I was in poor health, his stirring lectures would fill me with renewed vigor and courage. I've opened the way to victory in our movement precisely because I faithfully followed Mr. Toda's instruction in Buddhist study, which was in complete accord with the Daishonin's teachings.

In Buddhist study, nothing is more dangerous than distorting or manipulating

the Daishonin's teachings with arbitrary interpretations for self-serving purposes. That's what makes the instruction of a teacher with correct understanding so important. We must be ready to refute those who present false and misguided teachings that distort Nichiren's message. As Nikko Shonin, Nichiren's direct successor, states in his "Twenty-six Admonitions,"³ "Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views" (*Gosho zenshu*, p. 1618).

It is my dearest wish to convey the lessons I learned from my mentor to our members around the world for today and the future. When I compose installments in the series "*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin and the Mentor-Disciple Relationship*," Mr. Toda's voice filled with conviction rings in my ears. And when I compose installments of "Learning From the Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: The Teachings for Victory," my mentor's passionate words resonate deeply in my heart. I will continue writing extensively as we move toward the Soka Gakkai's 80th anniversary (in 2010).



The essence of Buddhist practice, unchanged since Nichiren's time, lies in fellow practitioners gathering to study Nichiren's writings, deepen their faith and renew their determination to carry out kosen-rufu and their own human revolution.

The Daishonin often urged his followers to read his letters together. For instance, he



writes, “I want people with seeking minds to meet and read this letter together for encouragement” (“Letter from Sado,” WND-1, 306). And in another writing, addressed to followers closely acquainted with each other (the lay nun of Ko and the lay nun Sennichi), he writes, “Since you two are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you and listen to it together” (“Letter to the Lay Nun of Ko,” WND-1, 595).

The model of friends in faith gathering and reading Nichiren’s letters aloud, studying their significance, encouraging each other and resolving to triumph in life by following his teachings, is exactly what today’s discussion meetings are about. Discussion meetings are Soka Gakkai activities that, brimming with friendship, goodwill and inspiration, are in complete accord with the formula outlined in Nichiren’s writings.



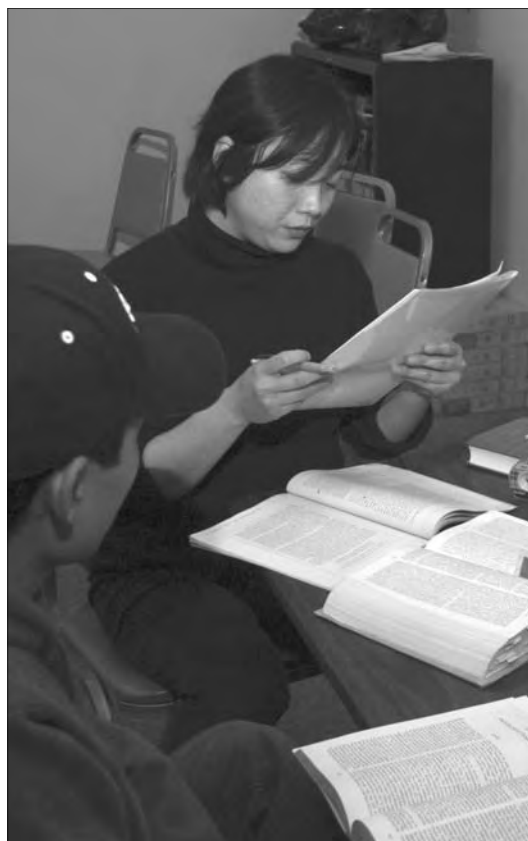
According to the latest neurological research, when the brain tackles difficult problems, neurons actively form networks that persist after the problem-solving activity is completed, thereby contributing to increased brain function. That means that by continuing to apply ourselves to learning throughout our lives, we strengthen and develop our brains.

Moreover, as members of the SGI, we are daily studying and putting into practice Nichiren Buddhism, which enables us to transform the four sufferings—birth, aging, sickness and death—into the four noble virtues—eternity, happiness, true self and purity. This is the path to crowning our lives

of mission with unflagging youthful vitality, good health and longevity.



1. Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary: One Man’s Journey From the Beginning of Faith to Worldwide Leadership for Peace* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2000), p. 216.
2. Translated from Japanese. Leo Tolstoy, *Torusutoi zenshu* (Collected Writings of Tolstoy), translated by Tatsuo Kuroda (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1931), vol. 19, p. 875.
3. “The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko”: A document that Nikko, Nichiren’s designated successor, wrote for the sake of both priests and laity of future generations to maintain the purity of Nichiren’s teachings. It outlines the fundamental spirit of faith, practice and study.



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Suggestions for Enjoying the Learning Process

These are just a few of the ways you and your fellow members might create joyful and rewarding experiences through studying the 2010 Introductory Exam material. Be creative and make this an enjoyable learning process.

Please note that nothing in this list of suggested activities should be interpreted as requiring additional study meetings added to an already busy schedule.

Personal Approach

- Reflect on what you would like to change through this activity. Pick a point from the *Study Guide* that pertains to your situation and strive to digest the point and put it into practice. Share your experience at your next discussion meeting or with your friends.
- In SGI President Ikeda's lectures featured in this year's *Study Guide*, he discusses certain passages from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Select a quote you like from one of the selected letters and then read the letter in its entirety. Learn about the recipient and his situation and how Nichiren Daishonin encouraged him. Go back to President Ikeda's lectures and reread the section that includes the quote.
- Remember that Buddhist learning is a lifelong pursuit. There's no need to be discouraged if you don't understand a concept immediately. Consider any difficult concept as a worthwhile challenge and take the time to develop a deeper understanding.

Learning With Others

- Discuss topics in the *Study Guide* at home visits. Discuss experiences you have had of deepening your understanding of *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* through chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.
- Ask each participant to bring to the next meeting an experience or other material that relates to a particular study concept that is part of this year's Introductory Exam. Use the material to discuss how to apply the concepts in daily life.