

Basic Study Course

Class 5

The Significance of Sampai and Chanting

Please write your name: _____

1. Meishusama Teachings

The spiritual world is a world of pure idea and intention. Therefore, things in this dimension can be created from nothing and existing things can utterly vanish. There is no limit to the transformations possible. . . . [W]hen worshipers sincerely and wholeheartedly pray to God in the form of a sacred object, the power of the object, its inner Light, grows greater and more elevated. However, when the attitudes of the worshippers are mere formalities, the power of the objects are correspondingly decreased. In the same way, the more people who gather at a service with utmost sincerity, the brighter the Light within the sacred object becomes. — *The Marvels of the Spiritual World. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

When you go to a shrine or temple to seek divine help, it will bring no benefit if you do it after completing another errand. This is because you have made the spiritual matter subsidiary to your personal matter. This applies equally to the times when you go to receive Jyorei. Go to your center first, and then go and do your other business. As is obvious, this will bring markedly good results.

— *Order. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

2. The Meaning of Sampai

Sampai is one of Shumei's basic spiritual practices. In a general sense, the word *sampai* refers to the act of going to a spiritually elevated place. In Shumei, sampai specifically refers to the following actions: visiting a Shumei sanctuary, chanting, sharing Jyorei, and expressing gratitude. The two main purposes of attending a sampai are to receive Light and to strengthen our spiritual connection with God and Meishusama. Shumei centers provide ideal settings for the purest and most powerful Jyorei to occur. Members are encouraged to engage in sampai regularly for healing and spiritual growth.

Attending sampai has another purpose, which is to help raise the spiritual energy of the Center. The more chanting and Jyorei that occur there, the more purified the Center's sanctuary becomes. In other words, attending sampai helps make the Center a more sacred place for you and your fellow members to receive powerful Light. The increased Light radiating from the Center also benefits the surrounding community

by promoting greater social harmony. In a sense, attending sampai is a step toward realizing Heaven on Earth.

Sometimes, when you decide to attend a Sampai, other things may come up that cause you to delay or even cancel your visit. In these cases, having a strong and mindful intention to get there will help alleviate the obstacles and allow you to attend the Sampai. As a result, you will receive greater Light than usual. However, if your intention is not firm enough, then the barriers may be too great for you to make it, and thus, you will not receive the powerful Light. Likewise, when you decide to go to Shumei's headquarters in Misono, if you maintain that strong intention, then you should be able to make it. Conversely, if you consider going only when it is easy and convenient, then chances are that obstacles will arise. Having a strong commitment will overcome these obstacles and will help bring about a smooth and successful progression in your spiritual journey.

Question: What is your main purpose for attending sampai?

3. The Benefits of Sampai

- Your connection with God and Meishusama becomes stronger; the spiritual cords that sustain that connection grow thicker.
- You receive blessings from God and Meishusama by your expressions of gratitude.
- Your spiritual clouds diminish and you experience less purifications and challenges.
- You gain the opportunity to strengthen and intensify your prayers.
- You set aside time in a serene setting for reflecting upon your spiritual life.
- Your family and ancestors receive powerful Light, which helps them to advance spiritually.

Question: Have you experienced the benefits of sampai? If so, how has sampai benefited you?

4. Types of Sampai

- **Monthly Sampai**

Monthly Sampai is a special gathering for us to express gratitude to Meishusama for the blessings we received during the previous month. Each Shumei Center hosts its Monthly Sampai on a regularly designated day of each month. The Sampai consists of offerings, chanting, group Jyorei from senseis, a speech, and so on. The Light manifested during the Sampai is the most powerful of the month. The Monthly Sampai is a significant occasion for us to pray for the realization of “Heaven on Earth” — the ideal world that Meishusama envisioned. It is also an important opportunity to intensify our prayers for the happiness of others, especially for those who are undergoing difficult purifications. Group prayer is an extremely powerful means of sending out divine energy to others throughout the world.

- **Daily Sampai**

Each center has at least one morning Sampai and one evening Sampai every day. During the Sampai, the screen covering the Scroll of Light is opened. At the morning Sampais, an offering of rice, salt, and water is placed on the altar stand (called *Hatsusoku*). Although the Light is most powerful during formal Sampais, one can still receive Light by attending at other times. Performing hoshi (selfless service), such as, cleaning before or after a Sampai, add to the energy one receives. Additionally, attending a Sampai every day for perhaps 30 or even 100 days in a row is a powerful way for one to grow spiritually and overcome purifications. Continuous and deliberate effort is the key to one’s spiritual growth and the enhancement of one’s Jyorei.

- **Home Sampai**

Shumei members can also have a Scroll of Light for their individual homes. After you receive your home Scroll, you can start having monthly Sampais at your home. This home Scroll will purify your home, sending Light to your family, friends, and even neighbors. Like a Shumei Center’s Monthly Sampai, it consist of offering, chanting, Jyorei, and sharing of gratitude. If a sensei attends your gathering, or if there are many people, then the Light will be more powerful.

- **Special Sampai**

Within Shumei there are also various special Sampais that are held annually. Each sampai has a specific meaning and purpose. Among them, the Grand Sampai held in Misono, Shumei's headquarters in Japan, is the largest. Tens of thousands of Shumei members and their friends from around the world attend this Sampai to celebrate the spiritual transformation of themselves and others. Renewing their gratitude, many reaffirm their commitment to help realize Meishusama's vision: creating a world of Truth, Virtue, and Beauty. The following is a list of annual special Sampais:

January 1 — **New Year's Sampai** / February 3 — **Purification Sampai** / February 4 — **First Day of Spring Celebration** / February 10 — **Meishusama's Memorial** / March 1 — **Spiritual Birth of Shumei** / May 3 - 5 — **Grand Sampai (Misono)** / June 2 — **Official Birth of Shumei** / June 15 — **Sunrise Sampai** (Meishusama's Revelation) / June 30 — **Purification Sampai** / 2nd Sunday of October — **Shumei America Anniversary** / **Men's Grand Sampai** (Misono) — October / **Youth Grand Sampai** (Misono) — November / November 29 — **Kaishusama's Memorial** / December 1 — **Gratitude Sampai** / December 23 — **Meishusama's Birthday** / December 31 — **Purification Sampai**

5. The Purpose of Rituals

The purpose of sacred rituals is to deepen our relationship to God. Within Shumei, bowing at the entrance of the sanctuary reminds us that we are entering sacred space. During the ceremony, bowing, clapping, and chanting express reverence and appreciation to God and Meishusama. Over time, these attitudes get reinforced through repetition, especially because our subjective thoughts are being translated into objective behavior. In other words, the more we do something, the more it becomes ingrained in our consciousness. Through repetition, rituals promote character development.

Sacred rituals also harness the power of symbolism to communicate higher truths to the subconscious mind and to induce spiritual experience. Lastly, sacred rituals generate refined energy fields that uplift the atmosphere of the locations where they take place. The effect can be felt as serenity, joy, and clarity. (*Shumei Rituals. An Offering of Light*)

6. Shumei Chants

The Amatsunorito, which literally means “The Prayer of Heaven,” is the basic chant recited during Sampai. *Amatsunorito* is comprised of two words, *amatsu* and *norito*. *Amatsu* means heavenly, and *norito* refers to a type of ancient Japanese ritual-prayer that stems from the Shinto tradition.

Kamigoto, like the Amatsunorito prayer, comes from the Shinto tradition, and it literally means “words of Kami,” or “divine words.” This chant has the great capacity to purify our spiritual clouds, rejuvenate our spiritual energies, and align us with higher truth. Chanting either of these prayers generates a strong sound vibration that purifies the atmosphere in the area and prepares one to receive Light. Although the Kamigoto sounds different from the Amatsunorito, it can be regarded as a longer version of the latter. Unlike the Amatsunorito, it is generally chanted only on special occasions. While the Amatsunorito is chanted during all daily Sampais, the Kamigoto prayer is typically chanted only three times a year, on February 3, June 30, and December 31, as well as when purifying one’s Ohikari.

Zengensanji literally means “The Good Words of Praise.” In contrast to the Amatsunorito and the Kamigoto, both of which originated from the Shinto tradition, the Zengensanji is based on Buddhist scriptures. Just prior to the official commencement of the Japan Kannon Society in 1935, Meishusama asked one of his students to bring him a copy of chapter twenty-five of the Lotus Sutra, entitled *The Universal Door of the Bodhisattva Who Listens to the Sounds of All the World*. This is popularly called the Kannon Sutra. Following a series of profound mystical experiences with Kannon, Meishusama was led to this sutra, from which he drew inspiration and borrowed some key terms based on their spiritual power. (*Shumei Rituals. An Offering of Light*)

7. Kototama

According to Meishusama, the universe is filled with invisible ether through which inaudible sounds are carried. Many ancient cultures believed that the manifest world was created by these sound frequencies . . . In addition, there are five root syllables that are essential conveyors of spiritual power. When these five sounds are vibrating out of harmony, the universe is thrown into disarray. The Amatsunorito incorporates all five syllables throughout its length, and when chanted with the correct pronunciation, tone and rhythm,

and with pure intent, balance and harmony are restored in the world. The power of chanting is based on the principle of Kototama, the concept that every word has a spiritual power inherent in its sound, irrespective of its actual meaning. The idea of certain root sounds having special divine power is similar to the Eastern concept of mantras, which are used for meditation and inner transformation. (*Shumei Rituals. An Offering of Light*)

Question: Have you experienced the power of *kototama* while chanting?

8. Chanting the Amatsunorito

Within Shumei, it is customary to bow and clap both before and after chanting. Before the chant, one bows three times. The first bow is shallow and acknowledges one's open-hearted presence before God. The second and third bows are deep and express respect and gratitude. Bowing is followed by three handclaps, symbolizing the divine world, the spiritual world, and the physical world, respectively. They also signify the unity of body, mind, and spirit. The abrupt, brisk sound from the clapping clears the mind, bringing us into the present moment, and makes us more receptive to God's blessings. Chanting usually concludes with a deep bow and three handclaps. If one is chanting before one of Shumei's Scrolls, this bow is directed toward the Scroll. (*Shumei Rituals. An Offering of Light*)

9. Scroll of Light

To protect your house, you should enshrine the Scroll of Light and honor it daily, which will purify the entire household's spiritual atmosphere. — *Fire and Jyorei. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

Located on the altar within each Shumei sanctuary is a sacred Scroll of Light containing an exact reproduction of original calligraphy done by Meishusama. The Scroll of Light at most local centers has two Chinese characters inscribed on it: one signifying "Bright" and the other signifying "Divine Light." Centers that operate as regional headquarters each have a Scroll containing three characters that indicate "Great Bright Light." As an embodiment of Divine Light, the Scroll of Light is an object of deep veneration for

members of Shumei, although what is actually focused on during Sampai is the energy and ideas behind these symbols rather than the visible characters, themselves.

It is customary for the Scroll to be enshrined behind a special screen that is only opened during Sampai. In Misono, an original Scroll created by Meishusama himself is located behind Meishusama Hall, housed in a special eight-sided annex called “Shinden” (Shrine).

Usually, there is a floral arrangement to the side of the Scroll, affirming Shumei’s belief in beauty as a form of spiritual nourishment, and also a picture of Meishusama in honor of his role as the “Bringer of Light.” Beneath the Scroll is an offering stand with a pair of candles and a flower arrangement. An extra table is often used for daily offerings of gratitude consisting of water, rice, and salt. These humblest of foods constitute the essence of nourishment, and it is these essences that are offered to God, whose spiritual presence is intensified in the altar area.

Many members of Shumei also conduct Monthly Sampais in their homes. These members have enshrined, above a small altar, a Scroll of Light that is similar to the larger scrolls enshrined at official Shumei centers. Having a scroll enshrined in one’s home entails a good deal of responsibility on the part of the recipient. It is both an honor and a mark of dedication to the ideals that Shumei embraces. (*Shumei Rituals. An Offering of Light*)

Question: What makes the scroll of Light unique and special?

Have you ever felt energy from the scroll? If so, how did it feel?

10. Kannon Screen

Also, in many homes there are altars with Kannon Screens dedicated to deceased family members and ancestors. The Kannon figure on the screen is a copy of a brush painting that was rendered by Meishusama. . . . Maintaining a Kannon screen is an act of reverence for our departed loved ones who exist in the spiritual realm and who often help us from that invisible location. The positive energy that we send to our ancestors by honoring them with gratitude and sacred chants before this special altar helps to

purify and uplift their consciousness. This benefits us as well as them, because the higher their spiritual level, the greater their capacity to help us in times of need. (*Shumei Rituals. An Offering of Light*)

11. Daikoku sama

All members of our organization revere Daikoku, the god of prosperity, and I am often asked what relationship he has with Kannon. This is a reasonable question, as until now there did not seem to be a connection. Let me explain why I have begun to enshrine Daikoku statues in my home.

It was 1933, and I had been in debt for some time and was becoming a little dispirited. A bank employee who sometimes visited me had an ancient statue of Daikoku that he offered to give me. I accepted it gratefully and placed it in front of my hanging scroll which has a painted image of Kannon on it. From that month on, my financial problems ended and money began to roll in.

— *Daikoku, the God of Prosperity. Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

Meishusama attributed the dramatic turnaround in his financial problems to the acquisition of a statue of the Japanese folk deity, Daikokusama. Thus began an inner relationship with this deity that lasted to the end of his life. As Meishusama began collecting statues of Daikokusama, his financial situation continued to improve.

All Shumei centers now have a statue or picture of Daikokusama within their premises. At the headquarters in Misono, there is a special shrine dedicated to him located on the edge of the Great Plaza outside of Meishusama Hall. He appears as a chubby, elderly man with a gentle smile on his face, holding a small mallet in one hand, and carrying a large bag of rice over his shoulder. Historically, Daikokusama symbolized financial wealth, health, longevity, and wisdom. Meishusama advised people to keep a statue or picture of this deity in their homes to promote wealth and abundance. In order to enhance the blessings, he volunteered to strengthen the spiritual presence within each of their statues. Some Shumei members honor this deity by chanting a modified version of the Amatsunorito in front of this statue or picture, which they keep in their homes.

When chanting Amatsunorito to Daikoku sama, the final refrains are as follows:

Mee Loh Koo Dah Ee Koh Koo Ten Jin

Mah Moh Lee Tah Mah Eh Sah Kee Hah Eh Tah Mah Eh

(Two times)

Kah-m Nah Gah Lah

Tah Mah Chee Hah Eh Mah Seh

(Two Times)

11. Discussion

- How do you feel when chanting with large numbers of people?
- What is the benefit of attending Sampai regularly?
- Why is it beneficial to offer Otamagushi before entering a sampai?
- Why is it better to chant in the sanctuary rather than at home?
- How have you benefited from attending sampais or engaging in daily chanting?

12. Assignment (Essay writing) for Online Course participants

Please write a short (one page-length) essay on the following questions:

Q1: What did you learn from the video?

Q2: Have you had any wonderful experiences in your practice of chanting or sampai?

If so, please write about it. (If not, then you can write about what makes it difficult to do so.)