

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON FAITH**  
**Why Do We Face East?**

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**Q: When we do the morning prayers, we face east for the first prayer, then turn to face the Gohonzon for the remaining prayers. But if the Gohonzon is on the east side of the room, which way do we face? And what is the significance of facing east, anyhow?**

A: In the first prayer, we offer appreciation for the protection of the Buddhist deities and prayer to strengthen their protective power. If you already are facing east when facing the Gohonzon, it is not necessary to change direction during this prayer. Buddhist gods are not fixed entities but forces innate in ourselves and the universe that protect us and our environment.

Nichiren Daishonin viewed the sun as the symbolic center of the universe and a representative of the Buddhist gods. Because the sun rises in the east, we face that direction during the first morning prayer to show our gratitude to all the functions in the universe that make life possible. By reciting the sutra and chanting daimoku toward the east, however, does not mean that we worship the sun.

So while we sometimes say we thank the Buddhist gods or the Gohonzon for protecting us, it is most important to realize that such protective functions stem from our Buddhahood. We tap this protection from within our lives by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin states, “The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Bonten and Taishaku [Buddhist gods], whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 279). Some of the Buddhist deities we refer to originated with Indian folklore, others with Japanese folklore and other religious traditions. Realizing that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the Mystic Law, is the source of all natural forces, the Daishonin incorporated these traditional gods, with which people of the time were familiar, into his teachings to represent these forces.

President Toda once explained it this way:

When we turn to the east and salute the Buddhist gods, then and there the Buddhist gods within our hearts appear in the universe around us. Then, when we face the Gohonzon during the second prayer, the Buddhist gods all take their seats behind us. If I were to salute the Buddhist gods right now, then, regardless of whether it were night or day, they would take their seats behind me and salute the Gohonzon. And these Buddhist gods would all start to work to fulfill my desires. This is how it works.

The important thing to remember is — regardless of what we call them — the ultimate factor that enables us to bring forth these forces, innate in life and the universe, exists within us. The protection of the Buddhist gods is a function of our own Buddha nature. Buddhism teaches that our life and our surrounding environment are one entity, not two separate entities. Therefore, our environment reflects our inner condition of life. Our inner, life-affirming conviction will manifest itself in our surroundings positively. So when we face east during morning gongyo, it’s an affirmation of this Buddhist principle.

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Subject: World Tribune 01/02/98 n.3172 p.6 WT980102p06

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