

**Q&A ON FAITH**  
**THE GOHONZON REFLECTS OUR INFINITE POTENTIAL**  
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What is the true significance of the Gohonzon?

In contrast to T'ien-t'ai's Buddhism, where an introspective, meditative practice of looking into one's own life was stressed and an object of devotion did not play a chief role, Nichiren Daishonin made a written mandala, not a Buddhist statue, the central object of devotion. He did this by inscribing the Gohonzon, which manifests the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that "illuminated" his life-condition. The Daishonin said that "this Gohonzon is the essence of the Lotus Sutra and the eye of all the scriptures. It is like the sun and the moon in the heavens, a great ruler on earth, the heart in a human being, the wish-granting jewel among treasures, and the pillar of a house" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 624).

The Daishonin made it clear that the Gohonzon was the legitimate culmination of all Buddhist teachings. He explained that "the sutra itself and the commentaries of T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo explicitly state that the Gohonzon will appear after two thousand years have elapsed following the Buddha's passing..." (WND, 831). He also stated, "This mandala is in no way my invention" (WND, 831). In other words, the entirety of Buddhist history was a prelude to the inscription of the Gohonzon.

But to the people of his time, this object of devotion designed for their enlightenment was something entirely new. To help them appreciate its true value, the Daishonin stressed the importance of their faith in the Gohonzon. He told them: "Believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart" (WND, 412). "Believe in this great mandala of the five characters" (WND, 468). "Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all Jambudvipa" (WND, 386).

He also stressed the Gohonzon's protective functions. The people of his time harbored great uneasiness toward the future. Fear of an impending attack on the Japanese nation by a Mongolian expedition contributed significantly to their anxiety. The Daishonin thus taught them that "when we have this mandala with us, it is a rule that all the Buddhas and gods will gather round and watch over us, protecting us like a shadow day and night..." (WND, 624). And that the Gohonzon "is a ship to ferry people over the sea of the sufferings of birth and death" (WND, 414).

The Daishonin also often expressed his conviction that the appearance of the Gohonzon would be the harbinger of the widespread propagation of the Law throughout the world. "I was the first to reveal as the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra this great mandala that even those such as Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo were unable to express" (WND, 831). The Gohonzon was grounded in the Daishonin's compassion for all people, not just those of his country or his time.

The following two passages reveal the essential nature of the Gohonzon and how we should practice to it:

1) "The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon" reads: "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (WND, 832). This passage clearly indicates that our own Buddhahood is the entity of the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon

is comparable to a clear mirror that reflects our innate Buddhahood. It is inscribed to let us know the great essence of our own lives. Therefore, we have to be careful not to put ourselves and others down, as this negates the purpose of the Gohonzon.

2) “On Attaining Buddhahood” reads, “When you chant *myoho* and recite *renge*, you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-renge-kyo is your life itself” (WND, 3). All in all, the Gohonzon exists to let us realize how precious the essence of our lives are. In this sense, the Gohonzon is an eternal “reminder” of the importance of appreciating the infinite potential of our lives. As SGI President Ikeda says: “We can attain a state of life where we can thoroughly enjoy good times and bad. This drives home again just how momentous and unprecedented it was for the Daishonin to reveal the Gohonzon of the true entity of all phenomena. My heart is filled with gratitude when I think of it” (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 183).

*Coming up next in this series: more on the Gohonzon.*