

SOKA SPIRIT Q&A
DOES THE GOHONZON NEED AN ‘EYE-OPENING’ CEREMONY?
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Is it necessary for the Gohonzon to have an “eye-opening” ceremony by the high priest?

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood has made the claim that the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon that the SGI issues are “counterfeit,” because the high priest has not performed an eye-opening ceremony upon them. How should we view this claim?

After excommunicating the SGI in November 1991, the priesthood stopped issuing Gohonzon to SGI members. However, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for the purpose of saving all humanity. By using his authority to prevent conferral of the Gohonzon on sincere believers, High Priest Nikken Abe goes against the Daishonin’s intent.

Therefore, Sendo Narita, the chief priest of Joen-ji, a temple that severed its ties to High Priest Nikken and the head temple, Taiseki-ji, offered to make the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon available to SGI members in 1993. The Rev. Narita believed that making the Gohonzon available to the harmonious body of sincere practitioners was in accord with the Daishonin’s will, since his purpose in propagating the Mystic Law was to enable all people to attain Buddhahood.

As to the question of the necessity of having the high priest’s permission to distribute the Gohonzon, it is only recently that Nichiren Shoshu came up with this rule. It has been the norm, for instance, for local priests to bestow Gohonzon reproduced in their temples. Priests other than the high priest often reproduced and issued Gohonzon from their local temples.

Moreover, nowhere in his writings does the Daishonin indicate that we need the high priest to empower the Gohonzon. Nichiren Shoshu claims that the high priest must perform an eye-opening ceremony on the Gohonzon; however, the Daishonin makes it clear that the “eye-opening” takes place nowhere but within our lives, when we open our own “eyes of the Buddha.” He states, ““Single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha’ may be read as follows: single-mindedly observing the Buddha, concentrating one’s mind on seeing the Buddha, and when looking at one’s own mind, perceiving that it is the Buddha” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 389–90).

The Daishonin clarifies in his writings that the eye-opening ceremony was simply a formality passed down in provisional Buddhist teachings and is not part of the original spirit of Buddhism. When the Daishonin says “It is the power of the Lotus Sutra that can infuse such paintings and statues with a ‘soul’ or spiritual property” (WND, 684), he is debunking the idea of such a formal ceremony that priests need to perform.

He tells us it is one’s faith in the Lotus Sutra, the Gohonzon, that brings forth Buddhahood in our lives. As he states, “When we revere Myoho-rence-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo” (WND, 887).

It is not a high priest, nor his sanction, nor his capacity to perform an “eye-opening ceremony” that gives a Gohonzon the power to work. As the Daishonin admonishes, “Even though you chant and believe in Myoho-rence-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching” (WND, 3).

The magnitude of tremendous benefit that SGI members have received from our practice to the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon is actual proof that we are putting these teachings into practice.