



Myohoji Temple

Did You Know? #2

How to Enshrine the Gohonzon

The ceremony to welcome the Gohonzon into your home signifies gaining the source to lead the most fulfilled life, founded upon faith. It is an important and solemn ceremony in which you receive into your home the most noble and dignified True Buddha who will correctly guide your life. What follows are the important things to remember for the Gohonzon enshrinement ceremony and the handling and care of the Gohonzon.

Please do not open the envelope and unroll the Gohonzon until after the *Gojukai* ceremony. Wrap the envelope with a clean cloth or scarf (*fukusa*) and safely place it in a case or bag. When carrying the Gohonzon in a case or bag, be careful to protect it from being buffeted about. Keep the Gohonzon in the envelope it came in until it is ready to be properly enshrined.

Preparation

The Gohonzon may be enshrined in just about any room of the house. If you have a multi-story or split level home, you can enshrine it upstairs or downstairs, as long as the location is respectful and appropriate. The important thing is to consider the most suitable place for the Gohonzon. Places such as those with heavy foot traffic that stir up dust; those too near the distracting noises of the bathroom or kitchen; or others that are not appropriate for the Gohonzon should be avoided. It is a good idea to discuss this with your sponsor.

Before the Gohonzon enshrinement ceremony prepare a Buddhist altar (*butsudan*) and various Buddhist accessories (*butsugu*) such as an incense burner, vase(s) for evergreens, candle holder(s), a water cup, a bell and bell striker. Your Buddhist accessories should include either the three-piece set of one incense burner, one vase and one candle holder; or the five-piece set of one incense burner, two vases and two candle holders. The room should be cleaned beforehand.

Ideally, a Buddhist altar is positioned on the north wall. However, if the floor plan or the arrangement of the room does not allow placement of the altar in this fashion, you can be flexible. In some cases the altar may be on the west wall, and you would have to turn your back to the Gohonzon when you recite the first prayer in morning Gongyo. To avoid turning your back completely to the Gohonzon in such instances, turn slightly off line from the Gohonzon during the first prayer. If the altar is on the east wall and you cannot do the first prayer without directly facing the Gohonzon, again, seat yourself slightly off line.

Generally speaking, the bottom wood part of the Gohonzon should be at eye level. If the Gohonzon hangs too high, adjust the level by using the string. You can also adjust the height of the altar. If you adjust the height of the altar, however, do so in advance. Please do not move the altar once the Gohonzon is enshrined.

Ceremony

After the preparations are made, proceed with the enshrinement ceremony. First, the person(s) enshrining the Gohonzon should wash their hands. Then all participants start chanting Daimoku to the empty altar. Any accessories that may interfere with the enshrinement should be put on a separate table.

The person leading the enshrinement ceremony then places an evergreen leaf or a piece of white paper between his or her lips so as not to breathe on the Gohonzon, and unwraps the cloth and very carefully removes the Gohonzon from the envelope.

There is no strict rule concerning how to unroll the Gohonzon while enshrining it in the butsudan. The important point is the safety of the Gohonzon. Generally, the person leading the enshrinement partially unrolls the Gohonzon without exposing the white part, then hangs the Gohonzon by the string hoop attached to the top. If the Gohonzon hangs too high in the butsudan, then the attached long string can be used to tie a loop from which to hang it. Then, while holding the bottom wood dowel, the person leading unrolls the Gohonzon very slowly, letting the weight of the wood do the work.

Handle the Gohonzon very gently with the utmost care and with the lightest touch. Even the rolled Gohonzon can be wrinkled if it is handled roughly. You may touch the brown frame part of the Gohonzon if necessary, but never touch the white part of the Gohonzon. After it is enshrined, the bottom of the Gohonzon sometimes curls upward. In time, it will straighten out on its own from the weight of the wood. However, if the curl is too high, you may very gently roll the bottom wood dowel up the back of the bottom of the Gohonzon and roll it back down to reduce the curl. Do not roll it up to the white part with the inscription of the Chinese characters.

After the enshrinement is completed, the person leading bows deeply to the Gohonzon with palms together in reverence, then places the Buddhist accessories in their proper positions. Maintain sufficient distance between the Gohonzon and the Buddhist accessories to avoid any damage to the Gohonzon.

Next, the candle(s) and incense are lit, and all participants begin the recitation of the sutra. In most cases it is best not to conduct either morning or evening Gongyo during the enshrinement. This is a solemn ceremony, separate from morning or evening Gongyo. The *Hoben* and *Juryo* chapters (Parts A, B, and C) are recited once, followed by Daimoku. After concluding the chanting of Daimoku, the following silent prayers are read: the second, the third, and the second portion of both the fourth and fifth prayers. In the second part of the fourth prayer, it is recommended that you pray to deepen your faith, to expiate negative karma created by the slander of the Law, that each successive generation of your family will be able to carry on the practice of faith in the Mystic Law eternally, for the peace and prosperity of your family, and for the achievement of world peace through the propagation of True Buddhism. After reading the silent prayers, the ceremony concludes by chanting Daimoku three times.

Additional Information

In order to avoid splattering wax, use a candle snuffer to extinguish the candles, instead of blowing them out or fanning them with the hand.

Since the Gohonzon is made of wood and paper, after many years it may become discolored or otherwise marred. We must, however, try to prevent this as best we can. Make every effort to keep the Gohonzon in good condition for as long as possible. Be careful not to splash wax or water on the Gohonzon, and never handle the Gohonzon unnecessarily. Exercise precautions to prevent any accidents caused by children or pets. The Gohonzon should not be exposed to direct sunlight. Unless you are conducting Gongyo or chanting Daimoku, the doors of the altar should be closed to protect the Gohonzon.

The Gohonzon is the very life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. Please treat it with the deepest reverence and respect. Never photograph the Gohonzon or allow it to be videotaped. If you have any question about the care of the Gohonzon, do not hesitate to call your local Nichiren Shoshu Temple. If your Gohonzon is accidentally damaged, or if you would like to have the dust cleaned off the Gohonzon, contact the Chief Priest of your local Temple.