

The Quantum Life Buddhism Altar

Offerings to and Care of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon

Our basic spirit toward the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should be one of great respect. If we have the fundamental attitude that the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon reflects our living Buddha, endowed with the Three Virtues of Sovereign, Teacher and Parent, then we will always treat the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon with the greatest respect. It bears reminding that this Buddha is a life-condition permeating all phenomena and noumena. That is to say, Buddha is not something outside our-selves, but instead the essence of life process we all share and experience.

The Gosho, “On Attaining Buddhahood” states:

Whether you chant the Buddha’s name, recite the sutra, or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and good fortune in your life. With this resolute mind you should put your conviction into practice.

To recite Gongyo and to chant Daimoku to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon are the basic practices of Buddhism. You do Gongyo to perfect your life, to cleanse all aspects of your mind. It should not be done out of a sense of formality. An attitude of appreciation and gratitude is most appropriate. It is important to understand that the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is your personal tool. When you receive the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon at the Quantum Life Temple in the Gojukai ceremony, you will open a brand new sutra book and hold it above eye level; or in the case of an online purchase, take great care in opening the package. The Abbot or Head Monk will place the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon on it. The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is rolled up in a special envelope or mounted on a foam core “gator board”. When you return to your seat, carefully cover the envelope with the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon inside with a fukusa (scarf).

The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon embodies the very life of Buddha within your life (the essential core of all life processes); hence it should be treated with the utmost respect and sincerity. Until the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is enshrined, pay close attention not to harm or damage it. It should not be unwrapped until it is enshrined in your home by an experienced member (preferably two). The enshrinement ceremony should take place as soon as possible. If necessary, many of you will perform this task on your own. Pay close attention to these instructions and read them totally before you begin.

For newer members, or when changing residence, do not handle the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon alone, if possible enlist the help of another student. Always have an experienced member assist you until you have learned the proper procedure for the enshrinement ceremony if possible. If you are unsure for any reason, please contact me at my email TLKSylvain@gmail.

When deciding where to place your altar, the most important thing is to consider the most suitable place for the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is endowed with the Three Virtues of Parent, Teacher, and Sovereign which will lead you to absolute liberation; therefore, it should be treated with the utmost respect and sincerity. Even in a one-room apartment, it should be placed in the best possible area.

You should use a proper altar made specifically for that purpose, called a Butsudan. It should be sturdy, clean, and secure. If the Butsudan has no doors, a cloth can be draped across the front, which then can be opened and closed.

The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should not be placed too high or too low. When you sit or kneel in front of your Butsudan, the bottom of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon characters (inscriptions) should be slightly above eye level. Never place things on top of the Butsudan, have shelves surrounding it, or pictures and other articles on the wall with the Butsudan. These things will distract your focus.

There is no substitute for the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. Therefore, doing these things should be based on your sincere conviction and not out of formality. The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is supreme, and your actions in the handling and care of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should reflect that understanding with your sincere conviction. As taught by Nichiren, the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is the earthly embodiment of the Buddha life-condition and wisdom within all life. The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is the perfect “mirror” for our reward in practice to enable us to easily invoke, awaken, and integrate this essential life-condition into our current life state no matter what our current life-condition.

At the front of the Butsudan should be a space or table to place the offerings. The offering closest to the front of the Butsudan is water in a water cup. Place fresh water in a cup in front of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon first thing in the morning before anyone uses water in the house. First run the faucet to flush out the still water so that you can offer the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon clean, cool water. Leave the water for the remainder of the day and then remove the cup and empty out the water before Evening Gongyo.

You have a choice of putting the empty cup away until the morning when you offer water for that day, or you can place the empty cup at the front of the

Butsudan. If you have a water cup with a lid, the lid should always be removed when the cup is offered to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon with water in it. If, after emptying the cup before Evening Gongyo, you replace the empty cup in front of the Butsudan, it should be covered with the lid.

As you face the Butsudan, on the right, place a candle holder with a white candle; on the left, place evergreens in a vase; and in the middle, place the incense burner. These three items together are called mitsugusoku (three accessories). This is an extremely important formality (Kegi) in the practice of Buddhism. Sometimes gogusoku (five accessories) are used: incense burner in the center, a pair of candles, one on either side, and two vases with evergreens placed to the outside of each candlestick.

Incense, candles and evergreens, each have a significant meaning in Buddhism. Incense, as they pervade the entire space, represent the Property of the Law or the essential property of the Buddha life-condition or knowledge. This is the truth to which the Buddha-nature is enlightenment, the pervasive Buddha-wisdom.

Candles represent the Property of Wisdom or the spiritual property of the Buddha life-condition. This enables the Buddha-wisdom to see the truth.

Evergreens represent the physical property of the Buddha life-condition, the Property of Compassionate Action in the Samsaric state.

The incense, candles and evergreens should be placed in a straight line. There is special significance to this. In Quantum Life Buddhism, we revere the Property of the Law (signified by the incense), the Property of Wisdom (signified by the candles), and the Property of Action (signified by the evergreens) are inseparable and totally integrated as the life of the True Buddha-nature innate and inherent within our lives.

Incense is made from fragrant wood like shikimi, an evergreen. Therefore, the flame from the candles and the shikimi (evergreen) come together and as a result you get smoke from the incense. The Property of Wisdom (candles) and the Property of Action (shikimi) combined are the Property of the Buddha-life (incense). The candles, evergreens, and incense are in a straight line, to demonstrate that significance in front of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon.

In society, we often use cut flowers to express love or respect, or for decoration. They are beautiful to look at, but flowers die in a few days. From the standpoint of Buddhism, cut flowers are improper offerings to the Buddha because of their ephemeral nature. Evergreens, on the other hand, will last a long time if you change the water in the vase(s) every day.

We usually burn three sticks of incense, but if too much smoke is produced we may use only one. The three sticks of incense represent the Three Treasures—the Treasure of the Buddha (Buddhaness), Treasure of the Law (MyoHoRenGeKyo), and the Treasure of the Sangha (the practice of Bodhisattva). The Treasure of the Buddha is the Buddha-wisdom (teacher) inherent in our lives. The Treasure of the Law is the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon as both mandala and Buddha-nature inherent in our lives as experienced through the teachings and wholly contained within the characters of Myo, Ho, Ren, Ge, Kyo (teachings). The Treasure of the Sangha is our continuous effort to study and share the teachings with others.

When we use incense sticks for secular purposes, we usually burn them in an upright position. In Quantum Life Buddhism they are laid down. The significance behind this is that when the incense is standing upright, the ashes fall and scatter. The scattered ashes signify a scattered mind. When the incense is laid down, the ashes do not scatter. It also purifies the area in front of the altar and is an offering to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon (our perfect mirror of Buddha wisdom).

The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon embodies the life of all Buddhas and the altar is the Buddha's home. The area where the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is enshrined is always kept clean. When cleaning the Butsudan area or Butsudan accessories, an evergreen leaf or a piece of white paper should be kept between your lips as a gesture of respect. Take care to use a clean cloth or duster.

If you eat rice, you may offer it to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. Do not place uncooked rice on the altar. This, unlike water, should not be left all day. After the rice is cooked, the first portion should be offered to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. Ring the bell three times and, observe this silent meditation:

“I offer deepest gratitude to the Three Treasures of the Buddhism of Sowing. Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.” (Namu geshu sampo goho on shatoku Gokuyo no tame. Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.)

Chant Daimoku three times, then remove the rice. Ringing the bell three times signifies appreciation for the Three Treasures.

You may also offer other kinds of food to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. Food offerings, if possible, should be placed in front of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon in the space between the water cup and the lined up incense, candles and evergreens. All food offerings must be vegetarian, and traditionally we avoid offering odoriferous foods such as onions, or garlic. When making

offerings to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon, ring the bell three times and chant Daimoku three times.

These are the basic offerings to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. The most important thing to understand is that the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is the living Buddha inherent in your life. The doors of the Butsudan should be opened when chanting. Otherwise they should be kept closed in order to protect the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. In the event of a fire or natural disaster, protect the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon first.

Lastly, when entering or leaving a home where there is a Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon, always do Daimoku Sansho (chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo three times), offering a greeting to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon.

Instructions for Enshrining the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon

Please do not open the envelope or unroll the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon until you are ready to enshrine it. You should wrap the envelope with a clean cloth or scarf (fukusa) and safely place it in a case or bag you brought for that purpose. When you carry the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon in a case or bag, please be careful to protect it from being buffeted about. Keep the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon in the envelope or package it came in until it is ready to be properly enshrined by you and your sponsor (if available).

The ceremony to welcome the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon into your home signifies gaining the source to lead the most fulfilled life, founded upon conviction. It is an important and solemn ceremony in which you receive into your home the most noble and dignified True Buddha (from the root core of your life process) who will correctly guide your life toward awakened enlightenment. What follows are the important things to remember for the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon enshrinement ceremony and the handling and care of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon.

Preparation

The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should be enshrined in the most respectable room of the house. If you have a multi-story or split level home, you can enshrine it on any level as long as the location is respectful. The important thing, however, is to consider the most suitable place for the

Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. Places with heavy foot traffic that stirs up dust or those too near distracting noises should be avoided. It is a good idea to discuss this with your sponsor or senior practitioner.

Before the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon enshrinement ceremony, again with your sponsor's advice, you must 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. Buddhist accessories should include either the three-piece set of one incense burner, one vase and one candle holder (mitsugusoku); or the five-piece set of one incense burner, two vases and two candle holders (gogusoku). The room should be cleaned beforehand.

Ideally, a Buddhist altar is positioned on a North wall so that the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is facing to the South. This, however, is only a general suggestion; if the floor plan or the arrangement of the room does not allow you to place 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 Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon when reciting the first meditation when facing East in Morning Gongyo. To avoid turning your back completely to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon in such instances, you should turn slightly off line from the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon during the first meditation. If the altar is on the east wall and you cannot do the first meditation without directly facing the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon, again you should seat yourself slightly off line.

Ceremony

After all the necessary preparations are made, you can proceed with the enshrinement ceremony itself. The leader should wash his or her hands in advance. First everyone should start chanting Daimoku. The leader then places an evergreen leaf or a piece of white paper between his or her lips. Next, the leader should take away any accessories that may interfere with enshrinement and put them on a separate table.

While those in attendance chant Daimoku, the leader unwraps the cloth and very carefully removes the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon from the envelope/package. If the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is hanging 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 leader unrolls the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon very slowly, letting the weight of the wood help it unroll naturally. It is strongly recommended that the mandala be securely mounted in either a high quality frame with glare-proof glass and matting to keep the glass away from the paper and print; or adhered to a foam core "gator-board" backing with archival quality adhesive.

The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should be handled very gently with the utmost care and with the lightest touch. Even the rolled Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon can be wrinkled if it is handled too roughly. Even though it may take more time to do the enshrinement, please handle the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon carefully. You can touch the brown frame part of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon if necessary, but please never touch the white part of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon with the inscription of the Chinese characters. Also, never breathe on the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. After it is enshrined, you may notice that the bottom of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon curls upward. In most cases this is nothing to be concerned about. In time, it will straighten out on its own from the weight of the wood dowel. However, if the curl is too high, you may very gently roll the bottom wooden dowel up the back of the bottom of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon and roll it back down to reduce the curl. Be very careful not to roll it up to the white part with the inscription of the Chinese characters as this part is delicate rice paper and could easily be damaged if you have printed the mandala on rice paper or other fragile papers.

Generally speaking, the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should be higher than eye level. If the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon hangs too high, you can adjust the level by using the string. You can also adjust the height of the altar. If you wish to adjust the height of the altar, however, you are encouraged to do so in advance. Please do not move the altar once the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is enshrined. Also, please avoid enshrining the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon so low that you would be looking down at it while chanting both for reasons of respect and proper breathing.

After the enshrinement is completed, the leader (or you in the case you are alone) bows deeply to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon with palms together in reverence, then places the Buddhist accessories in their proper positions. Sufficient distance should be maintained between the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon and the Buddhist accessories to avoid any damage to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon in the event of an accident.

Next, the leader and all participants begin the recitation of the sutra. The Hoben and Juryo chapters (Parts A, B, and C) are recited once, followed by 30 minutes of Daimoku. After concluding the chanting of Daimoku, the following silent meditations are read: the second, the third, and the second portions of both the fourth and fifth meditations.

In the second part of the fourth meditation, it is recommended that you meditate to deepen your conviction, 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 conviction 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 meditations, the ceremony will be concluded by chanting Daimoku three times. In order to avoid splattering wax, please use a candle snuffer to extinguish the candles instead of blowing them out or fanning them with the hand. In most cases it is best not to conduct either Morning or Evening Gongyo during the enshrinement. This is a separate, solemn ceremony meant to “Open the Buddha Eye” connecting your internal Gohonzon with the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon throughout your life.

Since the Nichiren mandala of 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. We must make every effort to keep the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon in good condition for as long as possible. For example, we should be careful not to splash wax or water on the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. We should never handle the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon unnecessarily. We should also exercise precautions to prevent any accidents caused by children or pets. The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon should not be exposed to direct sunlight. As mentioned earlier, unless you are conducting Gongyo or chanting Daimoku, the doors of the altar should be closed to protect the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon.

The Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is the very life of the True Buddha, Inherent in your life. Please treat it with the deepest reverence and respect.

If you have any question about the care of the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon, please do not hesitate to call or E-mail your local Quantum Life Temple. If your Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon is accidentally damaged, or if you would like to have the dust cleaned off the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon, please contact the Chief Monk of your local Temple. Or email me at TLKSylvain@gmail

The Documentary Significance of Joining the Hands in Meditation

The Lotus Sutra contains various descriptions of people in the life condition of Learning and those in the state of Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva Fukyo, for example, joined his hands in reverent worship as he meditated to the inherent Buddha nature of everyone he encountered. Some phrases from the Lotus Sutra include the following:

“In facing the Buddha, we must join and fold our hands in meditation.”

“It is imperative to fold our hands in meditation of whole-hearted determination.”

“We must show our reverence through our hands folded in meditation as we hear about the path with which we are endowed.”

“We must extend greetings by respectfully folding our hands in meditation.”

When we, the common mortals of the nine worlds (unaware of our Buddha), fold our hands in meditation with sincere determination in conviction and face the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon, we become entities that manifest the principles of the “mutual possession of the ten worlds,” (jikkai goku) the “actual three-thousand realms contained in a single life-moment,” (Ichinen Sanzen) and the “attainment of Buddhahood in our present form” (sokushin jobutsu); thus, folding our hands in meditation arouses a feeling of conviction and unification. Folding our hands in meditation is immediately synonymous with understanding our life.

When we meditate and devote ourselves to the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon (our Buddha-nature) with humility, we demonstrate the principle: “Buddhahood is inherent within the nine worlds.” Our existence, as we fold our hands in meditation, facing the Buddha and chanting Daimoku, is the very manifestation of enlightenment.

The Symbolism of Joining the Hands in Meditation

Based on the principles discussed above, Quantum Life Buddhism describes the meaning of folding our hands in meditation in the following way:

Our whole-hearted conviction is represented by the eight petals of the lotus flower. This is also called the “lotus of the heart” or the “white lotus” and it depicts our Buddha nature. In folding our hands in meditation, the eight petals are represented by our eight fingers, and the remaining two thumbs symbolize the father and the mother or the principles of “reality and wisdom” and

“practicing for spiritual stability and wisdom.” Bring the palms together facing each other and at ninety degrees to allow the fingers (petals) to drop and fold around the joined palms. It has been said that the ten digits portray the concept of three-thousand realms inherent in the ten worlds, and joining the fingers and palms signifies the mutual possession of the ten worlds. Bringing the joined hands in front of the chest represents the white lotus of our hearts (our conviction).

The Actual Practice of Joining our Hands in Meditation

We have discussed the significance of joining our hands in meditation. Most important, however, is whether or not we position them correctly when we perform our Morning and Evening Gongyo and chant Daimoku. Many people begin with the correct posture but gradually lose their form. When the tension wanes, their fingertips start to bend and the hands separate. Others increase the tension in their hands too much and push their arms outward. Still others let their hands gradually fall below the chest.

The correct form is sitting up straight and chanting from the diaphragm. Our eyes should be set on the character Myo on the Nichiren mandala of Gohonzon. This enables us to achieve the actual three-thousand realms in a single life moment and become the Buddha of the entity of the Mystic Law. Thus, we must be conscientious on a daily basis to maintain a correct posture in our practice.