

# THE MIDDLE WAY

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ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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WINTER – 2016

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WINTER – 2017

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## WHAT IS THE GOHONZON?

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**November 2015 – November 2016**

- Gohonzon<sup>1</sup> was written in order to preach the Law for the enlightenment of all living beings, which is the Law of *kuon ganjo* (eternity without beginning or end for all living beings); *honnin'myo* (True Cause, which is the Law – the original cause – that enables all Buddhas to attain enlightenment); *ichinen sanzen* (the entire universe, including Buddhahood, is contained within one's life); *Ninpo-ikka* (oneness of the person and the Law) and *Shitei ikka* (the oneness of master and disciple). The Gohonzon also conveys that the Law includes all living beings, and that all living beings in the universe are connected and support one another. The Gohonzon itself is not the Law.
- The Four Heavenly Kings represent the whole infinite, unlimited and eternal universe in all directions--North, South, East and West--of a billion worlds where Buddhas are enlightened. The gods of the Sun (*Nitten*) and Moon (*Gatten*) represent the infinite, unlimited and eternal realm in the sky without distinction of daytime and nighttime. Wheel-turning Kings (*Tenrinjōō*) and Dragon Kings (*Dai-ryū-ō*) represent the infinite, unlimited and eternal world on the land and in the ocean. Devadatta (Jp. *Daibadatta*), Kishimojin, Fudō Myōō and Aizen Myōō indicate the infinite, unlimited and eternal world in the spiritual realm. These all express the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, which is the center and source of the universe.

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<sup>1</sup> Gohonzon - the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu.

- Gohonzon is an expression of Mt. Sumeru<sup>2</sup> (*Shumisen* (the center of the universe and the symbol of enlightenment)). That is why the platform part of the butsudan, below where the Gohonzon is enshrined, is called *Shumidan*. (*dan* means platform)
- Gohonzon revives the spirit of *Ryojyusen* (Vulture or Eagle Peak)<sup>3</sup> which is the place for preaching Namumyōhōrengekyō. It symbolizes Buddhahood.
- The Gohonzon is an expression, on the surface of a wooden board or a piece of paper, of the original three-dimensional scene of the Treasure Tower (Namumyōhōrengekyō) that appears in the *Hoto* (11<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, with the two Buddhas, Taho and Shakyamuni, seated side by side preaching the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō forever in the three existences of past, present and the future.
- Gohonzon expresses the enlightenment of *Ninpo-ikka* (oneness of the person and the Law) and *Shitei ikka* (the oneness of master and disciple).
- Gohonzon is a mirror that reflects the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds (*Jikkai gogu*) and *ichinen sanzen* (the entire universe, including Buddhahood, is contained within one's life) in the life of all living beings in the universe. It indicates that Namumyōhōrengekyō is the fundamental core of your life, and that Gohonzon reflects your own life.
- Gohonzon represents the unprecedented existence (the Law), which is equally true and common to everyone, that the Buddha wanted to teach and impart to all living beings in much the same way that a teacher would write "mind "air," "gravity," and "1+1=2" on a blackboard to teach these concepts. Though this "existence" (Law) is not visible to the human eye, just as "mind "air," "gravity," and "1+1=2" are not visible, it certainly exists. The Law is present in the object (Gohonzon). And the object (Gohonzon) represents the Law. However, the object itself is not the Law. When you worship the object, you must worship it by bringing to mind the invisible Law that is behind the object. Therefore, the correct order for worship is Law→object→Law, which means that the Law exists first, the Gohonzon, representing the Law, returns you to the Law. The Law⇔object cycle leads to correct faith and Buddhahood.
- You certainly must protect the Gohonzon you receive with your faith every day as though you are serving a living Buddha, protecting it with your life in the same manner as you would protect your own life. However, if the Gohonzon (an object) became ash and dust due to an accident or misfortune, the Law will not disappear.

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<sup>2</sup> Mt. Sumeru – In ancient Indian tradition, the world was divided into four continents with Mt. Sumeru in the center of them. In Buddhism it is thought that the god Taishakku resided on the summit while the Four Heavenly Kings lived half way down the four sides.

<sup>3</sup> Ryōjusen (Eagle Peak) – the place where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra.

This is because the “thing” does not have permanent, eternal existence, but represents the Law which is the cause for enduring, eternal existence. However, the person who serves the “object” but does not have the will to protect the living Law with one’s life, will not be able to defend the Law.

- It is not only the Gohonzon (an object) that is the Gohonzon. The place where the Gohonzon and the practitioner, who carries out the religious practice, come face to face and unite, that is when a Gohonzon becomes an object of worship for the first time.

For non-believers, the Gohonzon is not an object of worship, but rather an object of hatred, which may seem like a strange piece of paper, or like stupa or mortuary tablet for the deceased. Even if it is a real Gohonzon that Nichiren Daishonin<sup>4</sup> inscribed, if it is enshrined in a temple of another religious sect, we believers cannot worship it or practice to it. Moreover, even though the Gohonzon is real, if the faith at the temple it is enshrined in or affiliated with is false, then that object of worship will not be recognized as a Gohonzon. We must ensure that a Gohonzon is real or not, whether a Gohonzon is in the place of slander or not, and at the same time we must self-reflect and determine whether our faith is genuine or not.

- On October 1st, 1279 Nichiren Daishonin wrote “Now in the second year of Koan (1279), it is twenty-seven years since I first proclaimed the true teaching.” He then went on to compare himself to Shakyamuni, T’ien-t’ai and Dengyō, thereby disclosing the real reason for his coming into the world, which was for the completion of Buddhism by establishing the true religion and the true object of worship, which he expressed in writing. Although there are people who say that April, 28<sup>th</sup> in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Kencho (1253) is the date the religion was established, Nichiren Daishonin had not inscribed a Gohonzon, which is the basis of the religion, by that time, therefore the religion was not yet established by then. Originally April, 28<sup>th</sup> in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Kencho (1253) was considered the start of the religion as it was the date Nichiren became a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

There are some people who tell plausible lies when they assert that there is a ranking among Gohonzons, with the original, number one Gohonzon and source of all Gohonzons being the Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary (*Dai-Gohonzon*), the second being the Gohonzon at the temples, and the third, the Gohonzon in the home, and that the temple Gohonzons and the Gohonzons in the home are only copies of the Gohonzon in the High Sanctuary. People who hold this view also tell believers that it is not acceptable to only worship at home, or only worship at the temple, because unless they make a pilgrimage to worship the *Dai-Gohonzon* believers will not inherit

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<sup>4</sup> Nichiren Daishonin - (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Mystic Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

the lineage and attain the virtue of enlightenment. This view is absolutely false. There are absolutely no rankings among Gohonzons that were created for the enlightenment for all living beings. This is because the contents of all legitimate Gohonzons conform to what Nichiren Daishonin expressed on October 1, 1279, which was that his realization of the reason he came into the world was to establish a religion based on the representation of the invisible Law that certainly exists and which he himself became aware of. This is just like the equation  $1 + 1 = 2$  that is written on a blackboard. If you erase  $1 + 1 = 2$  from the blackboard that equation still exists. Therefore, although the contents of Gohonzons are the same, if there is a ranking of Gohonzons based on appearance and location, then that would mean the essence of the law of each Gohonzon would be different, and we would therefore be worshipping a law full of contradictions. The Gohonzon is an object, but it is also not an object. The Law contained within Gohonzons is the same.

- Every life in the universe is connected, all life supports each other and all beings exist. Gohonzon expresses that the life of Hell is also connected to the Buddha's life, that all lives are equal, and that all lives are innately qualified to be enlightened.
- Gohonzon is not a tool to use as a means to gain benefits and achieve your hopes and desires in this world through the observance of Buddhist teachings, such as curing sickness, gaining profit, or eliminating trouble from your life. The purpose of Gohonzon is to verify and become aware of the Buddha-nature that your life possesses. The *Hoben* (2<sup>nd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra states, "Because the Buddhas, the World-honored ones, only on account of the one [very] great cause appear in the world. Shariputra<sup>5</sup>, why [do I] say that the Buddhas, the World-honored ones, only on account of the one [very] great cause appear in the world? Because the Buddhas, the World-honored ones, desire to cause all living beings to open [their eyes] to the Buddha-knowledge so that they may gain the pure [mind], [therefore] they appear in the world; because they desire to show all living beings the Buddha-knowledge, in the world; because they desire to cause all living beings to apprehend the Buddha-knowledge, they appear in the world; because they desire to cause all living beings to apprehend the Buddha-knowledge, they appear in the world; because they desire to cause living beings to enter the way of the Buddha-knowledge, they appear in the world. Shariputra, this is why it is [only] on account of the one [very] great cause that Buddhas appear in the world."<sup>6</sup> For the greatest most critical purpose – the enlightenment of all living beings – Buddhas appear in the world to open (*kai*), show (*ji*), realize (*go*), and cause to enter (*nyu*) Buddhahood for all living beings. That is why, if you forget that the essential purpose of Gohonzon is to express the preaching the Law [for the

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<sup>5</sup> Shariputra – Sharihotsu – one of Shakyamuni's chief disciples.

<sup>6</sup> *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Chapter Two, pp. 59-60.

enlightenment of all living beings], and if your only interest is in fulfilling your immediate desires, then that is not real faith.

- Gohonzon is composed of a combination of Indian, Chinese and Japanese characters and pronunciations, which represents the universal view of the Lotus Sutra. It is not limited to or adheres to Japanese culture, and does not demand and force Japanese culture on believers of other countries.
- Although Nichiren Daishonin created the Gohonzon, in “Letter to Nii-ma Gozen” he wrote, “O-ama Gozen is insincere and foolish. She was also irresolute, believing at one time, while renouncing her belief at another. When Nichiren incurred the displeasure of the government authorities, she quickly discarded the Lotus Sutra. This is why, even before, I told her the Lotus Sutra is ‘the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand,’ whenever we met. If I give her the Gohonzon because I am indebted to her, then the Ten Goddesses<sup>7</sup> will certainly think I am a very partial priest.”<sup>8</sup>

Nichiren Daishonin cannot personally and freely decide if he can give a Gohonzon or not. If it is not acceptable to the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, the Ten Goddesses would criticize and punish Nichiren, and he will receive divine punishment from the Buddha (*butsubatsu*). Gohonzon is not a personal expression of Nichiren [like a piece of artwork], nor is it Nichiren’s personal possession.

- If 10 billion Gohonzons exist in the world, that does not mean that there are 10 billion Laws. There is only one Law that pervades everything and connects everything to the whole. This is called *Shoho jisso* (the true entity of all phenomena) – the concept that all things and phenomena reflect the truth – and *Ichinen sanzen* (the entire universe, including Buddhahood, is contained within one’s life). 10 billion Gohonzons are 10 billion windows into the fundamental and essential Law. If 10 billion worlds where Buddhas are enlightened were spheres, the Law is in the center of each of the spheres, and 10 billion Gohonzons are the windows on the surface of the spheres peering into the center. The thing you see through each of those windows is the one and only Law which is rooted in the center of all lives. To deliver the one and only Law in the center of each believer, and for each family to practice the True Law faithfully, 10 billion Gohonzons are written and printed. The windows are not the Law, but when you look through the window, you see the Law inside, which is the true Gohonzon. Your reflection in the mirror is not real, it is a virtual image. What is real is your flesh-and-blood self standing or sitting in front of the mirror. But if you don’t self-reflect while

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<sup>7</sup> Ten Goddesses – Jūrasetsu-nyo – the ten daughters of Kishimojin who, along with their mother, pledged to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>8</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Three, p. 68.

looking in the mirror, you can't see or learn about yourself. The Gohonzon is that mirror which reflects your inner life, and in your heart is the Buddha – the pure land of your mind (your heart, your life). This is your spiritual birthplace – your true home. The Gohonzon reflects all lives in the universe, including our own, capturing the image of ourselves like a mirror. And Gohonzon teaches us that “our life has the life of the Buddha of Namumyōhōrengekyō as its root, as well as the life of the Nine Worlds which can't be eliminated.”

- The basic purpose of Buddhism, no matter which sect, is the teaching of the enlightenment of all living things. If the religion is not upholding or teaching the enlightenment of all living things, but instead teaches miraculous recovery from disease, financial prosperity, good fortune, a good match, exorcism, traffic safety etc., then that is not a religion. Even if there are various roads leading to the summit of the same mountain, none are correct. There is a proverb, “No matter who wins, doctrinal arguments are the shame of the Buddha.” If the Law that enlightened Shakyamuni, the Law that enlightened Amida Buddha, the Law that enlightened Dainichi Buddha, and the Law which Kannon<sup>9</sup>, Yakushi<sup>10</sup>, and Jizō<sup>11</sup> practiced as Bodhisattvas, is not the same Law, and if the enlightenment of Shakyamuni and Amida Buddha and the enlightenment of the others are not fundamentally the same, then the enlightenment of all living things will not be possible.

As demonstrated in the previous point, Shakyamuni Buddha, Amida Buddha and the others are each windows. When we look through these windows, we should be able to see the same Law. Otherwise, if the Law is different, then what you see will be different. It is written in the Lotus Sutra that the Law that enlightened all Buddhas is *Myōhōrengekyō*. Through this Gohonzon Nichiren Daishonin is showing that if you don't worship the Law that enlightened the Buddha, but worship the Buddha instead, then you cannot attain the same enlightenment as the Buddha.

In other words, the purpose of all Buddhas – Shakyamuni Buddha, Amida Buddha, Dainichi Buddha, Yakushi Buddha, etc. – is the enlightenment of all living things. And the Law they preached was the Law that leads all living things to enlightenment. As this is the case, there cannot be a different law for each Buddha. There is only one Law that each Buddha realized, and that is the one and only Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

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<sup>9</sup> Kannon – a bodhisattva who appears in the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra and out of compassion manifests in 30 different forms throughout the world to save people from danger and suffering.

<sup>10</sup> Yakushi – the Buddha of medicine and the Buddha of healing, who while a bodhisattva made 12 vows to cure all illness and lead people to enlightenment.

<sup>11</sup> Jizō – a bodhisattva said to have been entrusted by Shakyamuni to save the people between the time Shakyamuni passed away and Miroku (Matreya) appears, which is supposedly 5,670 million years after Shakyamuni's death.

Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha himself is Namumyōhōrengekyō, Amida Buddha is Namumyōhōrengekyō, Dainichi Buddha is Namumyōhōrengekyō, and Yakushi Buddha is also Namumyōhōrengekyō. However, even though you may change the name of the Buddha to a daimoku—*Namushakamunibutsu*, *Namuamidabutsu*, *Namudainichinyorai*, and *Namuyakushinyori*—and hold onto them, believing in them and worshipping them as objects of worship, you will never come to realize the truth that the Law realized by these Buddhas was the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Moreover, even though these Buddhas realized the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, they are not the Buddha who would reveal the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Referring to them as windows means that as a Buddha they are a window, but the glass of each of these windows is cloudy, and warped which causes distortion. And if the angle of the window is distorted and not directed towards the center, it does not have the power to lead to the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Nichiren Daishonin said the Buddha is not to be worshipped. Nichiren was the only one who could manifest the Law in writing as the object of worship (Gohonzon) so that any common mortal could understand.

Unless we directly worship the Law (without an intermediary) which each Buddha realized, we won't be able to attain the enlightenment that other Buddhas had.

- In the goshō “Question and Answers on the Object of Worship” it states, “The object of devotion that I have mentioned earlier, the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, is the object of devotion for Shakyamuni, Tahō, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. It represents the true intent of the votary of the Lotus Sutra.”<sup>12</sup> This means, if the object of worship does not represent the Law of the enlightenment of all living things, which is the fundamental purpose of Buddhism, then it is not worth using as an object of worship.
- Nichiren Daishonin is “the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jōgyō,” and legitimately claims the inheritance of the Lotus Sutra. Daishonin also said, “Nichiren will succeed Bodhisattva Jofukyō.”

Now is the time of *Mappō*, which began 2000 years after Shakyamuni Buddha passed away. This is the Latter Day of the Law, which means the end of the power of Shakyamuni's law to enlighten people and all sentient beings. It is a time most distant from the Buddha, when the world is filled primarily with people who cannot believe in the existence of Buddha and the Buddhist teachings.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume II, p.788.

As per the world view at the time, Japan was geographically the country farthest east from Shakyamuni's country of India. During the eras that preceded *Mappō*, most people respected Shakyamuni and believed in his teachings. And having the Buddha as the object of worship, ridding oneself of evil passions, and living rationally and morally was considered the path to the Buddha Way. That was the norm in the world at the time. *Mappō* is the era in which that norm was broken.

In the age of *Mappō* Buddha's charisma cannot save you. That is why Shakyamuni himself expounded in the Lotus Sutra that in the era after his death everyone should make the Law of *Myōhōrengekyō*, the Mystic Law of the Lotus Sutra, the object of worship, and not to worship Buddha as the object of the faith. In the 21<sup>st</sup> (*Jinriki*) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni passed the baton to Bodhisattva Jōgyō, and asked him to propagate the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō in the Latter Day. The year 1222, the year Nichiren was born, was the 170<sup>th</sup> year since entering the age of the Latter Day. Upon becoming a priest, Nichiren studied all the scriptures, treatises, documents, and literary material concerning Buddhism and other disciplines. As a result, he came to realize that since Shakyamuni's death in 949 B.C.E. and the beginning of *Mappō* in 1052 C.E., there had not been a single priest or monk, other than himself, who ever lived as a practitioner and believer of the Lotus Sutra. Upon that realization, Nichiren declared that he himself was the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jōgyō who was transferred the Law of *Myōhōrengekyō* by Shakyamuni as described in the Lotus Sutra.

In "Letter from Teradomari" Nichiren Daishonin wrote, "The Lotus Sutra invariably concludes the Dharma preaching of all Buddhas of the three existences<sup>13</sup>. The past events described in the Fukyō chapter<sup>14</sup> I am now experiencing as predicted in the Kanji chapter<sup>15</sup>; thus, the present foretold in the Kanji chapter corresponds to the past of the Fukyō chapter. The Kanji chapter of the present will be the Fukyō chapter of the future, and at that time, I, Nichiren, will be its Bodhisattva Fukyō."<sup>16</sup> Bodhisattva Jōgyō is a messenger; and the way to practice during the age of *Mappō* is demonstrated in the behavior of Bodhisattva Jofukyō who appears in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Daishonin demonstrated the life of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra who as a common mortal, like all living beings, suffered from his opposition to the Lotus Sutra in the past which ultimately resulted in him making a positive connection to the Law. Thus, the two elements of Bodhisattva Jōgyō and Bodhisattva Jofukyō are integrated in Nichiren Daishonin to become the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Bodhisattva Jōgyō appears on the Gohonzon, but not Bodhisattva Jofukyō. The

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<sup>13</sup> Three existences – past, present and future.

<sup>14</sup> Fukyō Chapter – 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra which describes the practice of Bodhisattva Jofukyō who respected everyone for their innate Buddha-nature.

<sup>15</sup> Kanji Chapter – 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>16</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 4, p. 106.



appearance of Bodhisattva Jōgyō suggests his role as a messenger, and indicates that his commitment to deliver the Law during the age of Mappō, as entrusted to him by Shakyamuni, has been honored. Bodhisattva Jofukyō, on the other hand, was a practitioner who believed, practiced and worshipped the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon was first revealed immediately after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution when Nichiren Daishonin described himself as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law and therefore presented the Gohonzon from the viewpoint of Bodhisattva Jofukyō. That is why Bodhisattva Jofukyō does not appear on the Gohonzon. The absence of Bodhisattva Jofukyō on Gohonzon clearly indicates Nichiren Daishonin's position, which is that "at that time Nichiren, will be its Bodhisattva Fukyō."

Before the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, which occurred in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Bunei (1271), Nichiren Daishonin used Shakyamuni, who preached the Lotus Sutra, and the Lotus Sutra itself as the object of worship. But after the experience of nearly being executed by the ruler, he began to use the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, which is the substance of the Buddha, as the object of worship. This means that Nichiren was like Bodhisattva Jofukyō, who spoke his 24 (*kanji*) characters to everyone he met, and which Nichiren interpreted and recited as: "I respected you deeply. I do not despise you, or look down on you with contempt. Because you can all become a Buddha of Namumyōhōrengekyō if you believe in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and practice as the true path of a Bodhisattva."

#### BODHISATTVA JOFUKYO'S 24 KANJI CHARACTERS

我深敬汝等。不敢輕慢。  
所謂者何。汝等皆行菩薩道。當得作仏。

#### NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S "24" CHARACTERS

不輕菩薩が我深く汝らを敬う、敢えて驕慢せず、  
所以は如何、汝等皆菩薩の道を行じて当に作仏すべしと

The people to whom Bodhisattva Jofukyō spoke all thought they were being insulted by a shabby looking old stranger who was telling them that they can be Buddha. They hurled rocks at Jofukyō and beat him with sticks and staves. Bodhisattva Jofukyō ran off. Once he was at a fair distance he turned around and began to chant again to the people who tried to hit him, saying, "I respect you deeply. . .".

To believe immediately and honestly is to have a direct relationship with the Law. To oppose the Law and disbelieve is to have a reverse relationship (*gyakuen*). All sentient beings during the Latter Day of the Law are *gyakuen*, having an inverse relationship with the Law. It is the mission of the bodhisattva to plant the seed *Myōhōrengekyō* into the people of *Mappō* so that they can attain enlightenment through this inverse relationship.

The Gohonzon which Nichiren Daishonin initially inscribed soon after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution was very simple. It only included Namumyōhōrengekyō and his name, Nichiren. But after he was exiled to the penal colony on Sado Island, the Gohonzons he began writing, called *Sadoshigen honzon*, were similar to the current one.

On September 12 in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Bunei (1271) Nichiren Daishonin was nearly executed, but was subsequently exiled to Sado. On Sado, on July 8th, Nichiren Daishonin created a Gohonzon — *Sadoshigen honzon* — for the first time ever. This is the unprecedented Gohonzon, the great Mandala of the Lotus Sutra which first appears in the world some 2220 years after the Buddha's death.

Chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra read, "Since hatred and jealousy abound even during the lifetime of the Buddha, how much worse will it be in the world after his passing?"<sup>17</sup> Because we propagate the True Buddhist teachings, there will be hardships and trials. If there were no hardships and trials, then Shakyamuni's words in the Lotus Sutra would be lies. Shakyamuni who preached enlightenment for all living being can't be a liar.

- In "Questions and Answers on the Object of Worship," written in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Koan (1278) Nichiren Daishonin states, "Question: In the evil world of the latter age, what should ordinary men and women take as their object of devotion. Answer: They should make the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra their object of devotion."<sup>18</sup>

However, in "Repaying Debts of Gratitude,"<sup>19</sup> written in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Kenji (1276), it says, "First, in Japan and all the other countries throughout the world, the object of worship should in all cases be the Lord Shakyamuni of true Buddhism." That is why some people insists that it is correct to make Shakyamuni the object of worship. Because Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra they believe Shakyamuni is more noble [than the Law].

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<sup>17</sup> "On Persecutions Befalling the Buddha," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume One, p.239.

<sup>18</sup> *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume II, p. 787

<sup>19</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume Four, p. 271.

In the past, Shakyamuni also listened to the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, practiced it and became enlightened by it and to it. He preached the Lotus Sutra because he wanted all living beings to attain Buddhahood like himself. Therefore, the truth is the Law existed first, then afterwards the Buddha became enlightened to the innate Law that is within everything. This is called *zenbutsu-go* (the existed first, then came the Buddha). The reverse is not true that the Buddha existed first, then devised the law that he preached to all living things, which is called *butsuzenhō-go*. It is an absurd claim that God created the universe. Buddha does not preach the creation of the universe. Buddha claims that there is a commonly shared Law that is the principal cause for all living beings in the universe.

If the words of Nichiren Daishonin, “the object of worship should in all cases be the Lord Shakyamuni” is upheld, then *Namu Shakyamuni Butsu* (南無釈迦牟尼仏) should certainly have been written down the middle of Gohonzon. However, the reason Nichiren Daishonin consistently wrote *Namumyōhōrengekyō* was because he realized that the contents of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment should be the object of worship. So, “to make Shakyamuni the object of worship” as stated in “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” means that the essence of the enlightenment of all Buddhas is *Myōhōrengekyō* as I explain in #10 below, and it also means “the object of worship should in all cases be *Namumyōhōrengekyō*.”

- The Gohonzon has consistently been written in favor of designating the upper right corner as the place of honor. I.e.:

Fudō Myōō (right)	Aizen Myōō (left)
Kishimojin (right)	Jurasetsumyo (left)
Tendai Daishi (right)	Dengyō Daishi (left)
Tenshō Daijin (right)	Hachiman Daibosatsu (left)

Thus, Tahō Buddha (*Tahō Nyorai*) on the right and Shakyamuni Buddha (*Shakyamuni Butsu*) on the left means that Tahō Buddha is seated in a higher position than Shakyamuni Buddha. In other words, the mission and responsibilities of Tahō Buddha, which is to appear at any time, in any country, in his Treasure Tower is to prove that the Law of *Myōhōrengekyō* is true. That is why the essence of Tahō Buddha, which is *Namumyōhōrengekyō*, is the central title. To indicate that the essence of Shakyamuni Buddha is also *Namumyōhōrengekyō*, Tahō Buddha is placed in a higher position than Shakyamuni.

From the appearance of the Gohonzon, you will understand that Nichiren Daishonin showed us and all living beings in the Latter Day of the Law, that it is not for us to

worship a statue of Shakyamuni as the Buddha, because if we don't worship the essence of Shakyamuni's enlightenment, then we cannot attain Buddhahood as Shakyamuni had done.

I composed this "Diagram and Commentary on the Gohonzon" after I accepted the request from a Hokkekō believer<sup>20</sup> who belongs to Sanbo-in<sup>21</sup>. Initially, I had in mind to create this for the people in the United States as they cannot read the *Kanji* written on Gohonzon. But then I realized that Japanese people, who can read *Kanji*, don't understand the contents of Gohonzon either. Then naturally it followed that I not only wanted believers to understand Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, but I also wanted the general public, who are non-believers, to recognize the essence of the object of worship expressed by Nichiren Daishonin. I want to convey to everyone that the Gohonzon is delivering the soul of the Mystic Law (*Myōhō*) to all living beings, and if possible, for them to recognize this as a connection.

I have seen the "HONZON MAP" published by Soka Gakkai in the United States on the Internet. The Soka Gakkai has traditionally referred to Gohonzon as a "happiness-making machine." I have observed that their attitude towards Gohonzon was for making oneself happy and putting oneself at the center of Gohonzon. By putting oneself in the center indicates that the purpose of chanting ODaimoku to Gohonzon was for satisfying one's desires.

But what is the faith or belief of putting Gohonzon in the center? It is the true faith. The real belief, where one endeavors to get close to the Law of Nichiren Daishonin.

In this document, I not only indicated what items were written where, but I tried to express the exact meaning of each item as much as possible. I have numbered each item according to the order in which they were added to Gohonzon, beginning with the first Gohonzon written in Echi.

I did not write this to be flippant or to profane the Gohonzon or the essence behind what Nichiren Daishonin had written when he said, "The soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Namumyōhōrengekyō."<sup>22</sup> I wrote this to try to honestly help others to take a step closer to the soul of the Law which Nichiren inscribed on the Gohonzon.

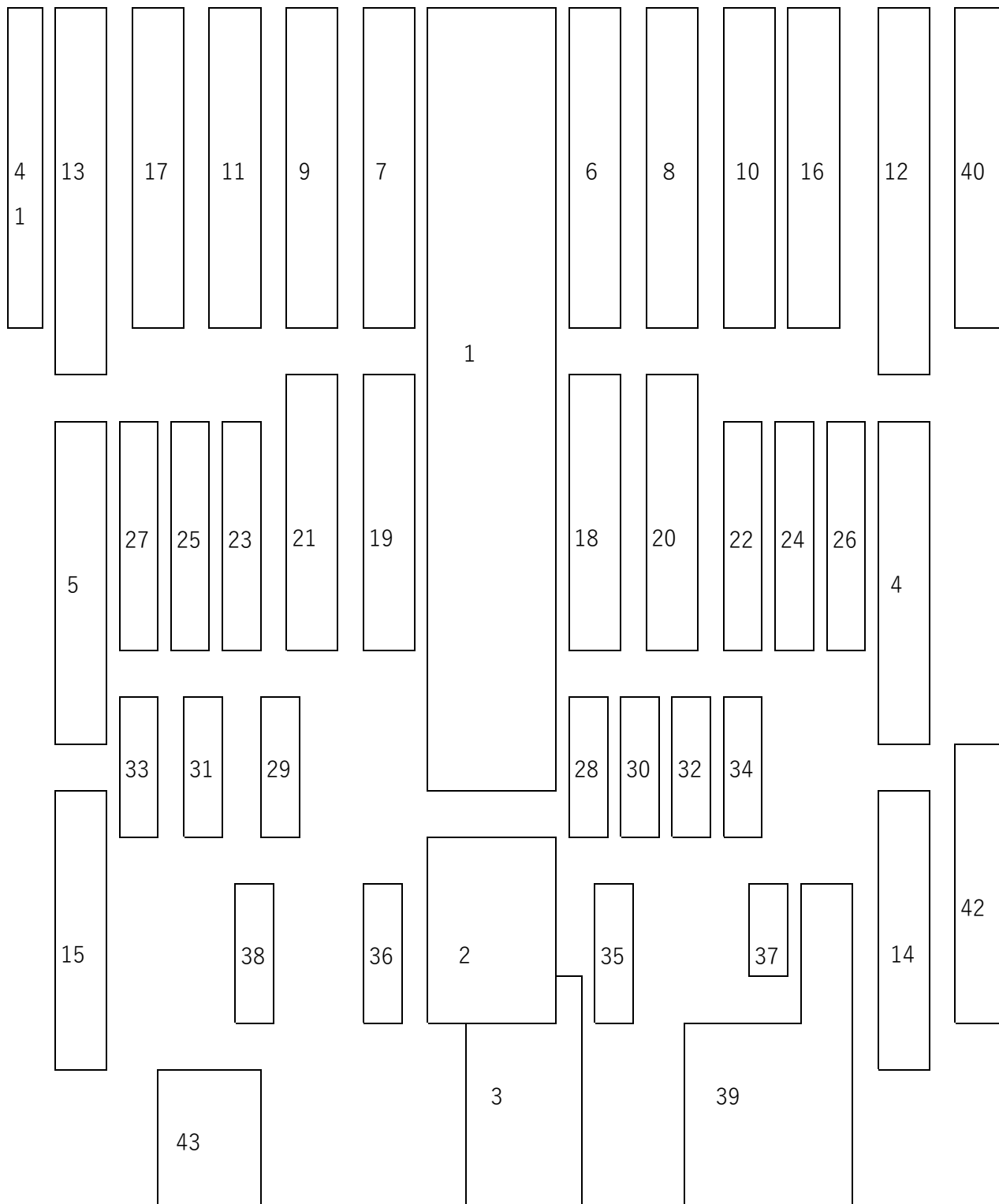
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<sup>20</sup> Hokkekō believer – a Nichiren Shoshu lay believer.

<sup>21</sup> Sanbo-in – Nichiren Shoshu Shoshinkai temple whose chief priest is Reverend Raidō Hirota.

<sup>22</sup> "Reply to Kyo'o," *Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume. One. p. 120.

# **DIAGRAM & COMMENTARY ON THE GOHONZON**



DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION  
OF THE GOHONZON ENSHRINED IN SANBO-IN<sup>23</sup>  
TRANSCRIBED BY NITTATSU SHONIN  
JANUARY 7 IN THE 42<sup>ND</sup> YEAR OF SHOWA (1967)

1. 南無妙法蓮華經 Namumyōhōrengekyō

The Law that is taught in the Lotus Sutra, which is the essential cause for the enlightenment of all living things, consists of five *kanji* characters<sup>24</sup>, 妙法蓮華經 (Myōhōrengekyō). The seven-character Odaimoku<sup>25</sup>, 南無妙法蓮華經 Namumyōhōrengekyō, does not exist or appear anywhere in the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Daishonin refers to the “five-character” and “seven-character Daimoku” in the Goshō. The fact that the seven-character Daimoku of Namumyōhōrengekyō is written down the center of Gohonzon indicates that *Namu* means to believe in the Law of *Myōhōrengekyō* with devotion, faith, and one’s own life, and that this Law is everything as well as one’s life itself. In brief, if you stand beside the Buddha (or view from the Buddha’s perspective), that would mean you are enlightened like the Buddha, so you don’t need *Namu*. However, if Namumyōhōrengekyō is shown in the very center as the basis of Gohonzon, then that indicates that Gohonzon stands beside all living beings—that it was written from the perspective of the common mortals and all living beings (which was the status of Shakyamuni before he became Buddha)—for the enlightenment of all living beings. Furthermore, the Odaimoku of Namumyōhōrengekyō that we chant has the same meaning as ‘Namumyōhōrengekyō’ shown on Gohonzon. Nichiren Daishonin also chanted the Odaimoku of Namumyōhōrengekyō, along with his disciples and believers, as a practitioner and devotee of the Lotus Sutra by placing his hands together and chanting to the Gohonzon of Namumyōhōrengekyō which he inscribed. Namumyōhōrengekyō also indicates that this is the correct belief or faith, and to devote (*Namu*) oneself to the practice of *Myōhōrengekyō* for the attainment of Buddhahood.

The Odaimoku of Namumyōhōrengekyō that is written on Gohonzon is different from typical *Kanji* script. The character 法 (*Ho*), of the seven-character Namumyōhōrengekyō, remains centered and unchanged, and appears as a part of the other characters above and below it, while the other six characters of Namumyōhōrengekyō are stretched out to the right and the left. This causes the Odaimoku to look like a beard, and has, since ages past, been called “beard daimoku.”

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<sup>23</sup> Sanbo-in – Temple of the Three Treasures. Rev. Hirota’s temple in Fukuyama, Japan.

<sup>24</sup> Kanji characters – Chinese characters used in Japanese script.

<sup>25</sup> Odaimoku - Daimoku - chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō, the title of the Lotus Sutra. “O” is an honorific prefix.

When you face Gohonzon and see the four Heavenly Kings in the four corners of Gohonzon protecting the four directions of North, South, East, and West, and between them Fudō Myōō and Aizen Myōō written in Siddham<sup>26</sup>, who express the spiritual realm, you understand that the Gohonzon is presenting the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō in the center – which is the core of all creatures – as a source of light. This indicates how this Law, like light, radiates out equally throughout the whole world to all creatures. Therefore, the Odaimoku is not a “beard daimoku,” which only describes its appearance. Rather, “light Daimoku” is the appropriate term, since it expresses the virtue of the Law, which spreads completely throughout the entire universe to all living things.

**Myō** is the most mysterious aspect of all creatures. In the Buddhist sutras taught before the Lotus Sutra, Buddhahood for all living beings was denied. The Lotus Sutra teaches that because of *Myo*, of *Myōhōrengekyō* – the title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese, and the one singular Law of the universe – even the unenlightened person—who is in a state of fundamental darkness (*gumpon no mumyo*), the origin of an evil mind, where the dark mind in one’s life is full of confusion, ambivalence and ignorance which cannot be eliminated or completely cleared out—can be enlightened

**Ho** is the Law which teaches **Myō**.

**Renge** is the lotus flower. The Buddha uses the metaphor of a lotus flower to explain **Myōhō** (the Mystic Law) to all living things. All lives in nature have eternal life which lasts forever, without beginning or end. And all lives are connected to each other, and connected to the life of Buddha. **Renge** represents *Inga guji*, which means that there is always a cause and an effect, and the two will always match. With each passing moment in one’s life, there is a cause and an effect.

When parents are the cause, their child is the effect; and when that child is the cause and has a child, the grandchild is the effect. A child can be both cause and effect. All lives reveal the essence of life, which consists of a stacking up layers of an eternity of past, present and future for yesterday, today and tomorrow.

This **Renge**, which we speak of, is different from the Zen sect *renge* of *Nenge Mishō*, which represents a heart-to-heart communication, where a teaching is transmitted by picking up a flower and subtly smiling. This latter *renge* would result in as many opinions as there are people observing it, and is therefore lacking in concreteness.

**Kyō** means the Sutra which teaches **Myōhōrenge** (the Mystic Law of cause and effect).

The primary element in the center of Gohonzon is the Law of *Myōhōrengekyō* which is the essence, the basis and the center of the lives of all living things in the universe, and at the same time, it represents and reveals the life of Buddha, thus indicating the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds (*Jikkai gogu*), which means all living things possess Buddha, and Buddha possesses the conditions of all living things.

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<sup>26</sup> Siddham – ancient script used for writing Sanskrit.

## 2. 日蓮 Nichiren

The combination of Namumyōhōrengekyō (#1) and Nichiren (#2) in the center of Gohonzon demonstrates the manifestation of enlightenment as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. In Buddhist terms, when the person and the Law merge into to one this is called *Ninpo-ikka*.

## 3. 在御判 Zaigohan

*Zaigohan* means that Nichiren Daishonin achieved the oneness of the person and the Law (*Ninpo-ikka*) as a practitioner of Lotus Sutra at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, that his life is eternal, and that upon his realization that he was the True Buddha (*Honbutsu*) of the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappō*) he inscribed this Gohonzon as the paradigm of enlightenment. Nichiren Daishonin is not alive now. Therefore, the high priest of each era is responsible for transcribing Gohonzon on behalf Nichiren Daishonin.

The Gohonzon, which was written by Nichiren Daishonin himself, only bears his stamp which says *Nichiren*. After he passed away, Nikko Shonin began writing *Zaigohan* on Gohonzon.

Nichiren Shu and other Nichiren sects, other than Nichiren Shoshu—which established Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin as the three founders—initially wrote *Zaigohan* as Nikko Shonin had written it. But in time, these other Nichiren sects began placing the signature of the high priest (#43) who transcribed the object of worship directly below the Odaimoku where #2 and #3 are positioned (see diagram), and made this the standard.

Nichiren Daishonin, who was a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, read the Lotus Sutra with his entire body, and suffered four major religious persecutions and many minor persecutions, achieved a life of *Ninpo-ikka*. But none of the priests of any of the other sects lived a life such as Nichiren Daishonin had lived. Consequently, they are not worthy of writing of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* XX at the center of the Gohonzon.

*Nichiren Zaigohan* is the only true representation of the deep meaning behind the conception of the Gohonzon. This was expressed by Nikko Shonin after Nichiren Daishonin's death, based on Nichiren's teaching of the Law. It is the only way Nichiren Shoshu presents it.

## 4. 不動明王 Fudō Myōō

The sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. The life of Buddha exists in the endlessly repeating world of birth and death of all living things.

## 5. 愛染明王 Aizen Myōō

Earthly desires are a pure aspiration for enlightenment. The life of Buddha exists in the endless yearnings and evil passions of all living things.

Numbers 4 and 5 cover the entire infinite, unlimited and eternal spiritual realm. Fudō Myōō and Aizen Myōō are Buddhist deities who protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.



Nichiren Daishonin wrote the very first Gohonzon on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1271 (in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Bunei), at the estate of Homma Rokuro Zaemon-no-jo the Lord of Echigo Province.

According to *The Catalogue of the Collection of Gohonzons (Gohonzon Shu Mokuroku)*, edited by Kihachi Yamanaka and published by Rissho Ankokukai, which is a photographic record and description of Gohonzons inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin, the earliest stages of Gohonzon consisted of item numbers 1-7 on this diagram: with Namumyōhōrengekyō, Nichiren and Nichiren's handwritten signature appearing in the center, surrounded by Fudō Myōō and Aizen Myōō written in Siddham, and Tahō Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha. The catalogue does not indicate the dates Zaigohan (#3), Fudō Myōō (#4) and Aizen Myōō (#5), Tahō Buddha (#6) and Shakyamuni Buddha (#7) were added. In addition, there is no indication to whom the first Gohonzons that included Zaigohan, Aizen Myōō, Tahō Buddha, and Shakyamuni Buddha were bestowed. In later years, the Four Heavenly Kings were positioned in the four corners of Gohonzon, with the connotation of North, South, East and West added later. From the framework of the early stages of Gohonzon, which only expressed what was absolutely necessary, we can understand that this object of worship, which had never before been present in the world, is the manifestation of the life, heart or mind of the entity that exists throughout the universe.

## 6. 南無多宝如来 **Namu Tahō Nyorai**

Tahō Buddha<sup>27</sup> is the Buddha of the “Land of Treasure Purity” located in the eastern region of the universe. In a past life, while practicing as a bodhisattva, Tahō made a vow in which he promised, “Even after I attain Buddhahood and pass away, if in the future a Buddha appears to teach the Lotus Sutra, then no matter what age it is, or where it is being taught, I will emerge in my Treasure Tower and attest to the truth that the Lotus Sutra is the only Law for the enlightenment of all living things, and prove, based on my experience, that the Lotus Sutra is the True Law for people who are confused and lost and can't take faith upon the first hearing.” Tahō appears in the *Hoto* (11<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

*Namu* (devotion, belief,) which appears above numbers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20, and 21 (see diagram), indicates that for each of these individuals the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō—the Law of the Lotus Sutra—is the principal source, and necessary condition for enlightenment. *Namu* appearing above these individuals does not signify devotion to or belief in any individual, whether they are Buddhas, Bodhisattvas or Buddhist saints.

## 7. 南無釈迦牟尼仏 **Namu Shakyamuni Butsu**

Worship the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō which is the basis of the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha who taught the Lotus Sutra, but do not believe in and worship Shakyamuni Buddha who taught nearly 84,000 sutras during his entire life.

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<sup>27</sup> Tahō Buddha – Buddha of Many Treasures.

#### 8. 南無上行菩薩 **Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu**

Bodhisattva Jōgyō is the leader of the four Bodhisattvas and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who appear in the *Yujutsu* (15<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, after being summoned by Shakyamuni. These four Bodhisattvas are numbers 8, 9, 10, 11 on the Gohonzon diagram.

In the *Jiniriki* (21<sup>st</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Jōgyō, the four Bodhisattvas, and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are conferred the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, by Shakyamuni, who hands over the Law to his successors to spread the Law to future generations in the Latter Day of the Law.

#### 9. 南無淨行菩薩 **Namu Jyōgyō Bosatsu**

The second Bodhisattva among the four Bodhisattvas.

#### 10. 南無無辺行菩薩 **Namu Muhengyō Bosatsu**

The third Bodhisattva among the four Bodhisattvas.

#### 11. 南無安立行菩薩 **Namu Anryukyō Bosatsu**

The fourth Bodhisattva among the four Bodhisattvas.

#### 12. 大持国天王 **Dai-Jikokutenno**

A Great Heavenly King who is a benevolent deity protecting the Eastern quarter of the universe.

※ Deity or god here is not the God—Creator of the universe—Christianity, Judaism and Islam believe in. In Buddhism, deity or god is a presence or existence whose function is to aid and support the Buddha. A Buddha is like a doctor, and a god or deity is like a nurse who supports the doctor.

#### 13. 大毘沙門天王 **Dai-Bisha montenno**

A Great Heavenly King who is a benevolent deity protecting the Northern quarter of the universe.

#### 14. 大國天王 **Dai-Kōmokutenno**

A Great Heavenly King who is a benevolent deity protecting the Western quarter of the universe.

#### 15. 大增長天王 **Dai-Zōchotenno**

A Great Heavenly King who is a benevolent deity protecting the Southern quarter of the universe.

The Four Heavenly Kings (#s 12, 13, 14, and 15) cover the north, south, east and western realms, which is the entire, infinite, unlimited and eternal spiritual world as well as the entire infinite universe. In the Dharani (26<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra the Four Heavenly Kings vow to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

#### 16. 若悩乱者頭破七分 Nyaku noran sha zu ha shichibun

The Dharani (26<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra state, “Whoever troubles the preacher [of the Law], may his head be split in to seven [pieces].” (Head here means mind) What this means is that the person who cannot believe in the True Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, which is the Law for all living beings, who is self-centered and thinks he is right, will deviate from truth and reason, then his mind will become scattered and fragmented.

In addition, Miao-lo, the ninth patriarch of the Tien-t'ai school in China, commenting on the Yakuo (23<sup>rd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra in the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of his *Hokke Mongu Ki* (*Annotations on the Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*) indicated that those who trouble the votary of the Lotus Sutra will have their heads split into seven pieces. It is not known whether Nichiren Daishonin wrote the phrase *Nyaku noran sha zu ha shichibun* before 1279, but it was firmly established on the Gohonzons inscribed after the Atsuhara Persecution in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Koan (1279).

#### 17. 有供養者福過十号 U kuyo sha fuku ka jugo

Those who make offerings to the votary of Namumyōhōrengekyō, which is the true Law for all living beings, will have good fortune surpassing that of the ten honorable titles. To express the excellent nature of the Buddha, we use the word *Jugo* which indicates the ten epithets of the Buddha<sup>28</sup>. *Jugo* expresses the virtues of the votary of the Lotus Sutra. Miao-lo, in his commentary on the Yakuo (23<sup>rd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra in the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of his *Hokke Mongu Ki* explains that the merits of the votary of the Lotus Sutra who honors and keeps in mind Namumyōhōrengekyō, which is inherent in all living beings, are unfathomable. This phrase was firmly established on Gohonzon around 1279.

#### 18. 南無文殊師利菩薩 Namu Monjushiri Bosatsu

One of the leaders of Buddha's disciples, Monjushiri is representative of Bodhisattvas of the theoretical teachings, and represents wisdom and enlightenment. He appears in the *Devadatta* (12<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

#### 19. 南無普賢菩薩 Namu Fugen Bosatsu

One of the leaders of Buddha's disciples along with Bodhisattva Monjushiri (#18). Bodhisattva Fugen represents the virtues of truth and practice. He appears in the *Fugen* (28<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

#### 20. 南無舍利弗尊者 Namu Sharihotsu Sonja

Sharihotsu (Skt. Shāriputra) is one of the ten principal disciples of Shakyamuni Gautama Buddha, and foremost in wisdom. He appears in the *Hoben* (2<sup>nd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

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<sup>28</sup> Ten epithets of the Buddha – Ten epithets for a Buddha, expressing his power, wisdom, virtue and compassion 1. The Thus Come One, 2. Worthy of Offerings, 3. Right and Universal Knowledge, 4. Perfect Clarity and Conduct, 5. Well Gone, 6. Understanding the Word, 7. Unexcelled Worthy, 8. Trainer of People, 9. Teacher of Heavenly and Human Beings, and 10. Buddha, World-Honored One.

## 21. 南無迦葉尊者 Namu Kashō Sonja

Mahākāshyapa (Jp. Kashō) was one of the ten principal disciples of Shakyamuni Gautama Buddha, and foremost in ascetic practices. He was the first of 24 successors to inherit the lineage of Shakyamuni's teachings. He presided over the First Buddhist Council<sup>29</sup>, which compiled the Buddha's teachings after the death of Shakyamuni. He appears in the *Juki* (6<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

## 22. 大梵天王 Daibontenno

Bonten is ruler of this *saha* world<sup>30</sup> and is one of the tutelary deities who protect Buddhism.

## 23. 帝釈天王 Taishakutenno

One of two main tutelary deities, he, along with Daibonten (#22) and other deities, protects Buddhism.

(There are some Gohonzons that have this deity written as Shakudaikanin, which is no longer in use. Taishakutenno and Shakudaikanin are the same deity. Writing Shakudaikanin is inconsistent with the other deities who appear on Gohonzon (i.e., Daibontenno, Daigatsutenno, and Dainichitenno), and therefore confusing. Taishakutenno communicates consistency. In the past, Japanese learned that Taishakutenno was also called Shakudaikanin, that was common knowledge. But today people don't have that understanding, and therefore it is difficult for them to understand this inconsistency.)

## 24. 第六天魔王 Dairokuten no Maō

The Devil of the Sixth Heaven of the world of desire obstructs the faith of devotees of the Lotus Sutra who seek enlightenment, and challenges them by testing whether their faith is truly set on enlightenment or not.

In the "Treatment of Illness<sup>31</sup>," Nichiren Daishonin wrote, "The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Bonten and Taishaku, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven." The origin of enlightenment is the Buddha nature, which all lives innately possess. The origin of fundamental darkness is the lost and confused mind of Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, and Rapture (or Heaven), and the seed of evil thoughts which all lives innately have and can't eliminate.

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<sup>29</sup> First Buddhist Council - To protect and preserve the correct teachings of Shakyamuni, Mahākāshyapa convened a meeting of 500 venerable monks after the Buddha's passing. This was the first Buddhist Council. At the time, Shakyamuni passed away in 949 B.C.E., it was impossible to express the detailed nuances of Shakyamuni's teachings with the many dialects that existed at the time. These elder disciples chose Ānanda, who was the cousin of Shakyamuni and one of his ten major disciples who accompanied Shakyamuni everywhere and thus had heard more of his teachings than anyone, and who was also the second of 24 successors to Shakyamuni, to recite the sutras. The others would then confirm the recitation, and then recite it and commit it to memory. This is how the sutras were passed on orally to future generations for about 1,000 years. Once the vocabularies had expanded and languages became more standardized the sutras became definitive and were committed to written word.

<sup>30</sup> Saha world – this world, the world of endurance where people endure many sufferings and Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Law.

<sup>31</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume Three, p 279..

It is the role of Shoten Zenjin to not only protect true believers of the Lotus Sutra, but to also test the strength of a believer's faith.

## 25. 大月天王 Dai Gattenno

The moon, which is the largest presence among the stars in the night sky, is traditionally considered a benevolent guardian god of nature during the nighttime.

## 26. 大日天王 Dai Nittenno

The sun, which is the largest presence among all the stars during the daytime, is traditionally established as a guardian deity in nature and a bestower of blessings during the daytime.

## 27. 大明星天王 Dai Myojotenno

*Myojotenno* is the god of the stars. It is the very first star that appears in the twilight sky with the gods of the sun (*Nitten*) and the moon (*Gatten*). It represents all the stars since it is tens of times more brilliant than a star of the first magnitude. *Myojotenno* is both the morning star that appears in the Eastern sky before sunrise, as it is the first star and the largest star, and the evening star (Venus) which appears in the Western sky after sunset. It is defined as a star that connects and rules daytime and night time as a guardian benevolent deity.

## 28. 鬼子母神 Kishimojin

Kishimojin is a female demon who used her ten demon daughters (*jurasetsunyo*), to kidnap the children of others so that she could feed them to her own children, who numbered a thousand or ten thousand, for their nourishment. The people, beside themselves with fear, grief and despair, appealed to Shakyamuni for help. To teach her a lesson, Shakyamuni decided to hide Kishimojin's youngest child among her thousand or ten thousand children. Despite having so many children, Kishimojin went out of her mind over the loss of this one child, and searched everywhere throughout the world, retracing her steps many, many times to no avail. Unable to find her youngest anywhere, she herself was reduced to the point of utter despair. So she decided to visit the one place she hadn't searched because she loathed to do so. That was to visit Shakyamuni Buddha.

Shakyamuni reprimanded Kishimojin for her evil behavior, and demanded that she pledge to never kill another child. Through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra he taught her that her agony and sorrow were immeasurable at the loss of one child out of her thousand or ten thousand children, therefore she should be able to imagine the depth of grief and sorrow other parents, relatives and friends felt when she kidnapped, killed and ate their children. Through this teaching Kishimojin reflected on her behavior and displayed sincere remorse for what she had done. Shakyamuni then returned Kishimojin's child to her, whom he had hidden. To atone for her sins, for which she could never apologize enough even in another lifetime or more, she vowed to Shakyamuni that from here on she and her ten demon daughters (*jurasetsunyo*) would protect the devotees of the Lotus Sutra and all children.

On the Gohonzon, the “horn”<sup>32</sup> part of the character【鬼】(demon) was changed to the character【思】(caring) and now reads【思子母神】, which means the mother goddess who bestows the blessing of children.

*Hendoku iyaku* is the Buddhist term which indicates that one who slanders or sins can turn misfortune into a good outcome. This concept reveals that sinners also have Buddha-nature and can therefore become enlightened through faith in the correct Law and through self-reflection.

Using the ruthless killer Kishimojin on the Gohonzon as a symbol of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds<sup>33</sup> (*Jikkai gogu*), which means that every person has within them the potential for obsessive love as well as to be a ruthless killer, indicates that the Gohonzon of Nichiren Daishonin expresses life as it is completely, from the ugliness and dirtiness aspects of our life (hell) to the noblest aspect of our life (Buddhahood), which the unenlightened person has forgotten. This Gohonzon is very different from the objects of worship of statutes of the Buddha and Bodhistatvas worshipped in other sects of Buddhism. The objects of worship of other sects only express a perfect and absolutely merciful stature and show no ugliness or defilement at all.

## 29. 十羅刹女 *Jurasetsunyo*

Please refer to #28.

## 30. 提婆達多 *Daibadatta*

Devadatta (Jp. Daibadatta) was a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha, who became a monk under the instruction of Shakyamuni. In a very short time, however, he became conceited, determined that he was superior to Shakyamuni, and was convinced that if he killed Shakyamuni and replaced him, the Buddhist community would prosper. He persuaded Prince Ajātashatru (Jp. Ajase-ō), the son of King Bimbisara who was a devoted patron of Shakyamuni, to kill his father and replace him on the throne. Once King Bimbisara was dead Devadatta, for his part, planned to kill Shakyamuni. Ajātashatru succeeded in killing his father and becoming King of Magadha, but Devadatta failed in his many attempts to kill the Buddha. Because of his wickedness and ill-fated plans, Devadatta fell into hell while still alive. Nonetheless, Shakyamuni journeyed to hell to visit Devadatta to tell him that he would be enlightened in the future as Tennō Buddha<sup>34</sup> because he had formed a relationship with the Lotus Sutra while he was alive. Shakyamuni’s disciples and followers were distrustful and dismayed by Shakyamuni’s actions. After all, Devadatta had tried to kill the Buddha and fell into hell for it. Shakyamuni explained to them that in a previous lifetime Devadatta had been a hermit named Ashi who had taught the Lotus Sutra to Shakyamuni. Because of the karmic connection, Shakyamuni had established with the Lotus Sutra at that time and the virtues he

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<sup>32</sup> Horn – this character 鬼 means devil with a horn.

<sup>33</sup> Mutual possession of the Ten Worlds – each of the Ten Worlds contain the potential for all ten worlds. That means all nine worlds have the potential for Buddhahood, and Buddhahood retains the nine lower worlds and is not separate from the common mortal.

<sup>34</sup> Tennō Buddha – Heavenly King Buddha; Devadatta’s name in the future when he attains Buddhahood.

had attained, he could be enlightened as the Buddha in his present life and teach the Law to all living beings. He also told his disciples that every life has the life of Buddha equally inside them. There is no one who is 100% evil or 100% good. He explained that all existences of life contain the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds (*Jikkai gogu*). It is because of this that Devadatta appears on the Gohonzon.

### 31. 阿闍世王 Ajase-ō

Please refer to #30.

After King Ajātashatru had killed his father and attempted to kill his mother, and was near death himself, he sought help from Shakyamuni. The Buddha admonished him strongly and preached to him the teachings of the Lotus Sutra through the Nirvana Sutra. Ajātashatru awakened to faith in the Lotus Sutra and showed deep remorse for his previous sins. Thereafter, like his father, he lived his life devoted to faith in the Lotus Sutra, and after Shakyamuni's death he sponsored the First Buddhist Council which compiled Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings.

### 32. 轉輪聖王 Tenrinjōō

Wheel-turning kings are ideal kings who rule the entire world peacefully with justice through the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō without any military power.

### 33. 大龍王 Dai-ryū-ō

Great Dragon Kings, of which it is said there are eight, live at the bottom of the sea in the palace of the sea gods. They are benevolent deities who protect the world and devotees of the Lotus Sutra from the oceans.

### 34. 阿修羅王 Ashura-ō

Ashura are evil spirits who continually fight against Taishaku (#23) and represent the world of Anger, but once they have been warned about their behavior, they become guardian deities who protect devotees of the Lotus Sutra.

### 35. 天照大神 Tenshō Daijin

In Japanese mythology, *Tenshō Daijin* (a.k.a. *Amaterasu Omikami*, Sun Goddess) is considered to be the first child born to *Izanagi* and *Izanami*, the gods who created Japan out of chaos. *Tenshō Daijin* is the ancestral God of the Yamato Imperial Court (250-710 C.E.) of Ancient Japan.

### 36. 八幡大菩薩 Hachiman Daibosatsu

In Japanese mythology, Great Bodhisattva Hachiman was originally worshiped as a god (*Hachiman Dai-Myōjin*), and since ancient times has been considered the god of agriculture. During the construction of the Daibutsu (Great Buddha) of Todai-ji<sup>35</sup> temple in

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<sup>35</sup> Daibutsu (Great Buddha) of Todai-ji – Vairocana Buddha

Nara (743-749), Hachiman was considered the god of copper, which is the primary element in the bronze used to build the great statue. Since that time, Hachiman became associated with Buddhism and was given the title “Great Bodhisattva” by the emperor at the beginning of the Heian period (794-1185), signifying the synchronization of Buddhism and Shinto<sup>36</sup>.

During the Genpei War (1180-1185), a war between the *Heiki* (Taira) clan and the *Genki* (Minamoto) clan, the Minamoto clan worshipped Great Bodhisattva Hachiman as a god of war and protector of samurai. Upon the defeat of the Taira clan Minamoto no Yoritomo became Shogun, established a shogunate government in Kamakura and built a Hachiman shrine at Tsurugaoka in the center of Kamakura. As the shogunate government gained power and spread throughout the country, Great Bodhisattva Hachiman grew in popularity and came to be worshipped by the people throughout Japan as a god. Hachiman shrines began to be erected all over Japan so that the population could benefit from the power of Hachiman. The adulation of Great Bodhisattva Hachiman in Japan continues to this day.

Nichiren Daishonin considered the original source of Hachiman to lay with Shakyamuni. He also believed that the native gods of Japan, *Tenshō Daijin* (#35) and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman (#36), are counted among the Buddhist *shoten zenjin* (heavenly gods and benevolent deities), and thus included them on the Gohonzon even though they do not appear in the Lotus Sutra.

*Tenshō Daijin* and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman were established on the Gohonzon in February 1276 (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Kenji). They may or may not have appeared on Gohonzon before that time.

### 37. 天台大師 Tendai Daishi

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai (also known as Chih-i in Japanese) (538-597) was the founder of the T’ien-t’ai school of Buddhism in China. After studying all the sutras, T’ien-t’ai Chih-i came to realize that the Lotus Sutra was the highest teaching of the Buddha and contained the supreme Law. His lectures establishing the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra were compiled into three copious volumes of interpretation: *Hokke Mongu*, (*Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*), *Hokke Gengi* (*Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*) and *Maka Shikan* (*Great Concentrations and Insight*).

To support his findings, and as a method of proselytism and conversion, T’ien-t’ai organized Buddhist thought of the time into a system which he called “Three Schools of the South and Seven Schools of the North,” then systematically set about to refute their teachings and establish the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra through a more refined classification of Shakyamuni’s teachings into the “Five Periods and Eight Teachings.” The five periods are: 1) *Kegon* period (a high level of teaching Shakyamuni taught just after attaining enlightenment); 2) *Agon* period (Shakyamuni’s lowest level of teachings taught to prepare people for higher levels of understanding – these are the Hinayana<sup>37</sup> teachings ); 3) *Hōdō* period (introductory

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<sup>36</sup> Shinto – an ancient Japanese religion which literally means “the way of the spirits.” In Shinto, there are many gods and goddesses throughout the world

<sup>37</sup> Hinayana - Lesser Vehicle – teachings to eliminate human desires, upholding precepts, adhering to the teachings taught in the first 14 years of Shakyamuni’s preaching life, and thereby achieving personal enlightenment.



Mahayana<sup>38</sup> teachings); 4) *Hannya* period (Wisdoms sutras—a higher level of Mahayana teachings—were taught); 5) *Hokke-Nehan* period (the Lotus Sutra and Nirvana Sutra were taught, revealing the truth). The “Eight Teachings” are divided into two sub-categories: “Four Teachings of Method” were the way in which the Buddha expounded the teachings to the people: 1) *Tonkyō* (sudden teaching) where the Buddha taught from his own enlightenment without consideration for the listener’s capacity; 2) *Zenkyō* (gradual teachings) where the Buddha taught progressively to gradually develop the listener’s capacity; 3) *Himitsukyō* (the secret teaching) where the Buddha teaches in a way that each individual derives meaning and understanding differently, according to their own capacity; and 4) *Fujōkyō* (non-fixed teaching) where each listener knowingly benefits differently, according to their capacity. The “Four Teachings of Doctrine,” which is the second category of the “Eight Teachings,” classifies the Buddha’s teachings according to their content for the purpose of the enlightenment all living beings: 1) *Zōkyō* (the Tripitaka<sup>39</sup> teaching) corresponds to Hinayana teachings and consist of three divisions of the Buddha’s teachings—sutras, rules of discipline, and doctrinal treatises, and stress observing the precepts as a means of controlling earthly desires; 2) *Tsūgyō* (the connecting teaching) forms a bridge between the Tripitaka teachings and provisional Mahayana teachings; 3) *Bekkyō* (specific teaching) is a higher level of Mahayana teachings specifically addressing bodhisattvas; and 4) *Engyō* (the perfect teaching) is true Mahayana, revealing that people of all capacities possess the Buddha-nature and can realize enlightenment. In his summation, T’ien-t’ai concluded that the Lotus Sutra is the greatest Sutra of them all.

Nichiren Daishonin is also called *Sangokushisi*, which means the four sages across three countries. The three countries are India, China and Japan, and the four sages are Shakyamuni, T’ien-t’ai, Dengyō and Nichiren. The four sages across three countries represent the direct and correct lineage and tradition of the Lotus Sutra and how it spread. Nichiren Daishonin devised the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, which was passed down orally from three sages, and made it the foundation in writing the Gohonzon.

### 38. 伝教大師 Dengyō Daishi

The Great Teacher Dengyō (767-822)—also known as Saichō—introduced and established in Japan the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra taught by T’ien-t’ai of China. He repeatedly requested imperial permission to build a Mahayana Ordination center for priests to be ordained in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Permission was granted in 827, one week after Dengyō’s death.

### 39. 仏滅後二千二百三十余年の間一閻浮提の内未曾有之大曼荼羅也 Butsumetsugo nisen ni hyaku san-ju yonen no aida itienbudai no uchi, mizou o dai-mandara nari

<sup>38</sup> Mahayana - Great Vehicle – introductory or provisional Mahayana are teachings expounded as a temporary means to lead people to the true teachings. True Mahayana is the Lotus Sutra—the teaching for the enlightenment of all living things.

<sup>39</sup> Tripitaka – a collection of three types of writings which form the Buddhist canon. They include the sutras, the rules of monastic discipline, and commentary on the sutras and rules of behavior.

“Never in 2,230-some years since the Buddha’s passing has this great mandala appeared in the world.”

Based on the interpretations of the Lotus Sutra by the Great Teachers T’ien-t’ai and Dengyō, Nichiren Daishonin determined that the year of Shakyamuni’s death was 949 B.C.E. From there he calculated that the ending of the period of the Former Day of the Law (*Shōhō* – the era of the righteous law) – the first 1000 years after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death – was 51 C.E., the end of the Middle Day of the Law (*Zōbō* – the era of the imitative law) – the second 1000 years after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death – was 1052 C.E.; and the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappō* – the current age) began in 1052.

Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the first Gohonzons right after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in 1271. On these early objects of worship, he inscribed *Butsumetsugo nisen ni hyaku ni-ju yonen* (“almost two thousand two hundred and twenty-some years after the Buddha’s passing”). About two and a half years later he settled on Mt. Minobu where he established a temple. In 1275, he added ten more years to this phrase and now it appears on Gohonzon as *Butsumetsugo Nisen ni hyaku san-ju yonen* (“almost two thousand two hundred and thirty-some years after the Buddha’s passing”). Two thousand two hundred thirty-some years after the Buddha’s passing would actually be the year 1281, which would be only six years after 1275. But taking into consideration the oppressive conditions imposed on the people in the Atsuhara region by the government, Nichiren changed this phrase to “thirty-some years” as an expression and symbol of the conditions of *Mappō* (the Latter Day of the Law).

Now, in the year 2015, 734 years have passed since the 4<sup>th</sup> year of *Koan*, 1281. But we do not add these ensuing years to Gohonzon, which would be *Butsumetsugo nisen ku hyaku roku junen* (“almost two thousand nine hundred sixty-some years after the Buddha’s passing”). This is because the date Nichiren Daishonin finally settled on (the date that is related to the Atsuhara Persecution) is deeply connected in meaning to Nichiren Daishonin’s honorable seal, and has the same meaning as *Zaigohan* (refer to #3). This date reflects Nichiren Daishonin’s condition and state of mind at the time. It will never change; no matter how much time elapses.

His signature and personal stamp also changed at this time. Initially Nichiren had signed his name using *Ban* characters (see below). Then, in “An Outline of the Zokurai and Other Chapters,” a letter written to Lady Nichinyo on June 25, 1278 (in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of *Koan*)<sup>40</sup>, he introduced his signature in modified *Boron* characters<sup>41</sup> (see below). His stamp which appears on Gohonzon was also changed to the *Boron* characters and firmly established that same year.

The high priest of each generation has the authority to transcribe Gohonzon. However, some high priests became delusional and insisted stubbornly that they have inherited all the laws of Nichiren Daishonin. The successive high priests did not exist two thousand two

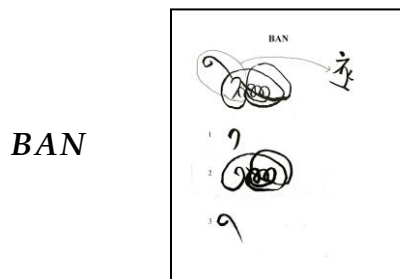
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<sup>40</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume Five, p. 263.

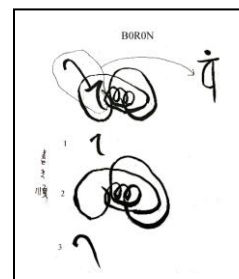
<sup>41</sup> Ban characters and Boron characters – Sanskrit characters which are called *ban* and *boron* in Japanese, which Nichiren combined with Japanese Hiragana characters to compose his signature stamp.

hundred and thirty-some years after the Buddha's passing. They were not the votary of the Lotus Sutra as Nichiren Daishonin was, nor the farmers of the Atsuhara Persecution. They are simply persons who copied the Gohonzon out of respect for the Atsuhara Persecution. Therefore, to write, in this place on Gohonzon, the name and date of another human being who transcribes the Gohonzon would deviate from the meaning of Gohonzon.

This object of worship which Nichiren Daishonin devised is based on the historical lineage of the Lotus Sutra as transmitted by Shakyamuni, T'ien-t'ai, and Dengyō who are also represented in this Gohonzon. Additionally, this object of worship represents the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra who surpasses Shakyamuni, T'ien-t'ai, and Dengyō. Moreover, it expresses the oneness of master and disciple (*shitei ikka*); achieving enlightenment through the recitation of the Lotus Sutra with one's whole body; *kuon ganjo* (eternity without beginning or end for all living beings); *honnin'myo* (True Cause, which is the Law – the original cause – that enables all Buddhas to attain enlightenment); and *ichinen sanzen* (the entire universe, including Buddhahood, is contained within one's life). It is not unprecedented for an object of worship to be written on a piece of paper or inscribed on a wooden board. But the fact that the Laws of *kuon ganjo* (eternity without beginning or end for all living beings); *honnin'myo* (True Cause, which is the Law – the original cause – that enables all Buddhas to attain enlightenment); and *ichinen sanzen* (the entire universe, including Buddhahood, is contained within one's life) are expressed as the contents of this object of worship makes it the most unique and unprecedented mandala that has ever appeared in *ichienbudai* (the entire universe)<sup>42</sup>, surpassing Shakyamuni, T'ien-t'ai, and Dengyō.



BAN



BORON

#### 40. 為現当二世 Tame gentōnise

*Gentōnise* means two existences – the present and future – but the past existence is omitted. The true, original meaning is for the continuous, perpetual, never ending three existences of past, present and future.

#### 41. 授与之 Juyo-no

This means this [Gohonzon] is awarded to the person who is going to remember the teaching of the Buddha and receive Gohonzon. But the name of the individuals who would

<sup>42</sup> Entire universe – *ichienbudai* (*Embudai*) or Jambudvīpa (Skt.), one of the four continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru (see footnote 2), which is populated by people with heavy karma and therefore the place where Buddhism spreads to save the people from their suffering.

receive Gohonzon is not written on Gohonzon, as the individuals are many and unspecified at the time the Gohonzon is printed.

**42. 昭和四十二年一月七日 Showa yon-ju ninen ichi-gatsu nanoka**

The 7<sup>th</sup> day of the first month in the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of Showa (January 7, 1967), the date Nittatsu Shonin inscribed this Gohonzon.

**43. 第六十六世 日達花押 奉書写之 66th High Priest Nittatsu Kaō Hōshoshashi**

The Gohonzon reads *Nichiren Zaigohan*, but in reality, Nichiren Daishonin can't make his seal because he is not alive. Therefore, the Gohonzon is transcribed by the high priest of the time on behalf of Nichiren Daishonin. This Gohonzon has the name and stamp (a freehand stamp) of 66<sup>th</sup> High Priest Nittatsu of Taisekiji.

*Hōshoshashi* means to respectfully transcribe. So, this phrase also states, "I respectfully transcribe this Gohonzon." There are some people who insist that *shi* means to "transcribe and worship" the Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary (*Dai-Gohonzon*), but that meaning is different from the meaning of the content of the *Dai-Gohonzon*. There is no ranking of Gohonzons such as, the original and number one Gohonzon is the *Dai-Gohonzon*, the second is the Gohonzon at the temples, and the third is the Gohonzon at home. It is not only the *Dai-Gohonzon*, but all Gohonzons have been respectfully transcribed and express the Law of *kuon ganjo* (eternity without beginning or end for all living beings); *honnin'myo* (True Cause, which is the Law—the original cause—that enables all Buddhas to attain enlightenment); *ichinen sanzen* (the entire universe, including Buddhahood, is contained within one's life); *Ninpo-ikka* (oneness of the person and the Law) and *Shitei ikka* (the oneness of master and disciple).



***The Middle Way***

Is published by  
Udumbara Foundation

Website: [www.udumbarafoundation.org](http://www.udumbarafoundation.org)

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