

Caring for the Gohonzon

Congratulations on receiving your Gohonzon! The topics on this sheet might be useful as you care for and protect the Gohonzon over the years to come.

Enshrining the Gohonzon

The best place to enshrine the Gohonzon will be safe, somewhere appropriate to the greatness of the Gohonzon, and convenient for you and the people you live with. It can be in a living area or bedroom, study etc, whatever suits your circumstances.

Enshrining can be tricky so your leader/s will come and enshrine it for you as soon as convenient for you. You can invite other members, family and friends and make a celebration of it, or you can keep it small if you prefer. Be sure to keep the box and the inner foam tube protecting the Gohonzon. They will be useful if you need to roll up the Gohonzon when moving house etc. We try to ensure we do gongyo after enshrining the Gohonzon.

To avoid looking down on our life, the Gohonzon should be enshrined so that when we are chanting, all the writing on it is above eye level. In other words, whether sitting on the floor or in a chair we should be looking up at the Gohonzon. If we sit on a chair to chant, the Gohonzon will be enshrined at a higher level than if we chant sitting on the floor.

Our chanting will be more enjoyable if the Gohonzon is well lit. If the room lighting is not strong it can be helpful to shine a small desk light, reading light or other light directly onto the Gohonzon.

Ideally, the butsudan is the only item on the wall and we don't hang things on the wall above or around it (artwork, photos, clocks etc) that might distract us while we are chanting, or detract from the Gohonzon. After all, nothing compares to the Gohonzon! Similarly, we should avoid storing things on top of the butsudan. Our altar is a place of devotion rather than a storage shelf.

Daily care

If we offer water on our altar, we should change it each morning. Daily dusting of the altar is a wonderful cause for our life. Although we may neglect the rest of the housework, if we dust or clean our altar every morning, this is a cause for purifying our life. People who are in the habit of dusting their altar each morning report that over time they can see the effect of this cause in their daily life. You can get a duster that you use for the altar only. The inside of the butsudan can be dusted less often. There is no need to dust or touch the Gohonzon itself.

Since the Gohonzon is made of paper, smoke tends to cause it to discolour. We should therefore make every effort to keep smoke (from incense, candles etc) away from the Gohonzon. If you burn incense, try to position the incense burner so that the smoke doesn't drift onto or near the Gohonzon. You can also reduce the possibility of discolouration by using good quality incense that has little smoke. Unfortunately, some kinds of 'less smoke incense' are still quite smoky so you may need to try them out or ask others for recommendations.

Similarly, if you use candles, try to burn them some distance from the Gohonzon. It is a good idea to get into the habit of lighting the candles **before** you open the butsudan, and put out the candles **after** you have closed the butsudan. Having this habit minimises the possibility that smoke from matches, candles etc will get onto the Gohonzon.

It is advisable to close the butsudan when not chanting (unless you are intending to return soon) to protect the Gohonzon from insects or any other potential kind of damage.

Cleaning

When our head is close to the Gohonzon (when opening the doors, or cleaning inside the butsudan) we should try not to breathe on the Gohonzon. Traditionally, a leaf or piece of paper can be placed between the lips. It is also advisable for the same reason not to chant aloud while your head is close to the Gohonzon.

How we treasure and take care of our Gohonzon can be a cause for our happiness. It is often said that if we keep our altar and the surrounding area clean and free of clutter and unnecessary ornaments etc, our lives are also likely to be less cluttered and more focused. Our altar is a reflection of our life.

Similarly, once enshrined, we should try not to move the Gohonzon. It is better to choose the best place and leave the butsudan there.

Moving house or being away from home

When we move house, we can roll up the Gohonzon ourselves, and re-enshrine it as soon as possible in the new site, doing gongyo after re-enshrining. Or, if the move is straightforward, short distances are involved, your butsudan is easily portable and you have someone with you to drive, open doors etc, you can leave the Gohonzon in the butsudan and carefully move the butsudan with the doors closed. If in doubt, do whatever will provide the most protection for the Gohonzon. Feel free to discuss your plans with your local leader.

If you go away from home for an extended period, there is no rule about what to do with the Gohonzon. If you feel it will be safe and protected in its usual place, you can leave it there. However, if you have any doubts about the safety and security of the Gohonzon while you are away, you can roll it up and ask your divisional leader to look after it until your return. If in doubt, discuss it with your leader.

Fire

Should there be a fire, the priority is always to ensure everyone gets out safely. If you have time, you can quickly roll up the Gohonzon and take it with you. If in doubt, put the priority on saving lives, including your own.

Other circumstances

If your Gohonzon is rolled up for an extended period (for example, because you generally chant to your partner's Gohonzon), be sure to protect it from damp air. If it gets damp while rolled up, mildew spots can appear.

The Gohonzon is the clearest of all mirrors, which reflects the entire universe exactly as it is. When you chant to the Gohonzon, you can perceive the true entity of your life and can tap the inexhaustible life force of Buddhahood.

President Ikeda 27 February 1990