

**BACK TO THE BASICS
THE OBJECT OF DEVOTION
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What does the object of devotion in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism represent? What is expressed by the Chinese characters on the Gohonzon?

These characters—and their arrangement on the Gohonzon, with “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—Nichiren” down the center—depict the enlightened potential within each of our lives. The Gohonzon is meant to be a mirror of our true selves.

In the Daishonin's Buddhism, the focus is on manifesting the enlightenment already in our lives—on empowering ourselves from within. This is why the Daishonin warns: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 832). The Daishonin never says that the meaning of the Gohonzon is found outside us, above us or somewhere far away.

He also never says that we need an intermediary, like a priest, to make the Gohonzon work for us. In the Daishonin's view, there is nothing and no one between us and our happiness. This is why he says, “There is no true happiness for human beings other than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (WND, 681). Whatever we communicate through chanting to the Gohonzon, then, is a message to the depths of our lives—to the Law of the universe in our hearts.

The Daishonin makes it clear that “your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, then your performing even ten thousand practices and ten thousand good deeds will be in vain” (WND, 3). We practice to the Gohonzon to make this understanding the basis for everything that we do in life.