

**YOUTH STUDY AUGUST 2000
THE GOHONZON TRANSCENDS TIME
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“Since the Buddha’s passing, two kinds of images, wooden and painted, have been made of him. They possess thirty-one features but lack the pure and far-reaching voice. Therefore, they are not equal to the Buddha” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 85).

Frequently when Buddhist thought and practice are discussed in the media in this country it is about one of two kinds of Buddhist schools: Zen and Tibetan. Very rarely is it about Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. How many of you have been asked if you have read a book about Zen and motorcycles? Or about celebrities that embrace Tibetan Buddhism?

Zen and especially Tibetan Buddhists often use mandalas (sacred diagrams) for their prayers. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism also has a mandala, the Gohonzon. Tibetan and Zen Buddhists use images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for meditation in their mandalas. This is one obvious difference between Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and other Buddhist sects. We use no images of Shakyamuni or other Buddhist figures. This is because the Gohonzon encompasses the 32 attributes of the Buddha as Nichiren Daishonin states in the above passage. If we worshipped or venerated an image of a Buddha, we are focusing on just one Buddha, not all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and different functions of the universe and the Gohonzon itself. Nichiren Daishonin states that the pure and far-reaching voice of the Buddha “cannot be captured either in a painting or in a wooden image” (WND, 85). “The Buddha’s pure and far-reaching voice, which once vanished, has reappeared in the visible form of written words to benefit the people” (WND, 86).

To understand why we use no images of deities in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we must remember that the Gohonzon was bestowed for all humankind by Nichiren Daishonin by the use of words. Words, not images, have a far greater impact in making change in the world. Although images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas may be bound by time, the Gohonzon is timeless.

(There are many fine books about different kinds of Buddhism. One that is useful and accessible is William R. LaFleur’s book *Buddhism*.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you discuss Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with others? Does it depend on how much knowledge of different kinds of Buddhism people whom you talk to have?
2. How do you understand the Gohonzon? What do the various words on the mandala represent?
3. What kind of life-condition does the Gohonzon contain? Does it contain that of the inscriber, Nichiren Daishonin?