

Q&A ON FAITH
HOW DOES THE GOHONZON TEACH RESPECT FOR ALL?
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Can you describe the importance of the Gohonzon in terms of respecting ourselves and others?

The object of devotion that Nichiren Daishonin inscribed manifests his inner enlightenment. It also manifests the Mystic Law itself. The Gohonzon thus embodies the true nature of his life; it reveals that his life-condition was one with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Daishonin's conviction in the Gohonzon's supremacy in Buddhist history was so unshakable that he said, "When it comes to the object of devotion, you should use a superior one [the Gohonzon]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 366). He also said that the Gohonzon is a natural outcome of what is expounded in the Lotus Sutra: "It is in no way my invention" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 831).

The Daishonin's Buddhism teaches us to absolutely respect this object of devotion that is physically outside of us. And this respect for the Gohonzon is synonymous with our respect for the potential of Buddhahood that is inherent in everyone's life.

In other words, the Daishonin's message behind his inscription of the Gohonzon is that we should exert ourselves to respect the Buddha nature that is innate in the life of each individual. Hence, he stated: "The heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the 'Never Disparaging' chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being" (WND, 852).

One meaning of Nichiren Daishonin inscribing the Gohonzon is to teach reverence simultaneously for oneself and others. It can be said that being able to respect one's innate Buddhahood, not one's small ego, and at the same time respect others' Buddhahood is actually what it means to embrace the Gohonzon.

Referring to the fact that the Buddhahood within our lives is the same as the life of the universe, the same as the power of the Gohonzon, the Daishonin clarified the source of this greatest joy. He stated: "Realizing for the first time that our minds are originally that of the Buddha is synonymous to having a great joy. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788). The core of our lives is as respectable as the universe and the Gohonzon. This view leads to self-respect and respect for others.

If we are not respecting ourselves on the deepest level, it means we are not respecting others in the true sense. No matter how respectful we may sound or act, without true self-respect, we cannot show true respect to anyone else.

In other words, if we have respect for our fundamental Buddha nature within, we can have the same toward this same nature in others. In fact, nothing can prevent us, then, from respecting others. It becomes a natural part of how our lives operate. So, if we can truly respect others, we are surely coming from true self-respect.

The existence of the Gohonzon in our lives teaches us how immensely we can respect and rejoice over our treasure within. The Gohonzon is an incomparable gift to all humanity from the Daishonin.

In *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, SGI President Ikeda quotes the English poet John

Donne in referring to the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging: “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” (vol. 1, p. 150).