

DISTRIBUTE TO: District through Territory Leaders, Zone and Territory Offices
FROM: SGI-USA Organization Center
SUBJECT: **Guidelines on Photographing, Copying or Downloading Images of the Gohonzon**

SGI has approved the following memo with guidelines related to photographing, copying, or downloading images of the Gohonzon. This memo supersedes all previous memos related to this topic.

Why must one not photograph, post or download images of the Gohonzon?

In recent years, high-resolution digital images have become commonplace and accessible to anyone, making it easier to photograph or post such images on the Internet. Likewise, many guests and members are likely to encounter various images of the Gohonzon when doing searches related to Nichiren Buddhism.

In addition, with the cessation of physical gatherings in our SGI activities, there is a growing number of guests interested in joining the SGI who are unable to receive the Gohonzon at this time. This has led to an increased curiosity toward finding and downloading digital images of the Gohonzon.

For this reason, it is important to clearly and correctly convey not only the guidelines prohibiting photographing, copying or downloading images of the Gohonzon, but also the underlying principles and reasons. The guidelines concerning these matters have not fundamentally changed, but we'd like to reconfirm these principles once again at this time.

The Gohonzon: The Fundamental Object of Devotion and Respect

The Gohonzon is the fundamental object of respect and devotion in terms of faith, to which we afford the highest reverence.

Nichiren Daishonin states, "I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart" ("Reply to Kyo'o," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 412). Based on this, we regard the Gohonzon as the very life of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. At the same time, the Gohonzon has as its basis the great Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Law by which all Buddhas attain Buddhahood, and, as such, it is the physical embodiment of the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of all people.

Nichiren also writes, "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself" ("The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon," WND-1, 832).

While the Gohonzon we receive upon joining the SGI is a physical object, we regard it as both an expression of the enlightened life of the Buddha as well as a clear mirror to reflect and call forth the same enlightenment from within our own lives. Therefore, to treat the Gohonzon with respect is simultaneously an expression of respect for our own lives and for the lives of all people.

This accords with Nichiren's example that when we bow to a mirror, the image in the mirror bows toward us (see *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 165).

The SGI's Faith in and Commitment to Protect the Gohonzon

Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon to serve as a "clear mirror" that reflects our inherent wisdom, courage and compassion, and the limitless power of our lives. Through upholding faith in the Gohonzon, we can establish a life state as vast as the universe and realize our goals and dreams.

Nichiren states, “This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters of faith” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832). Central to our Buddhist practice is faith in the Gohonzon, which essentially is faith in the great life force and potential inherent in our lives, as well as in the lives of all people. Only by upholding strong faith in this point can we fully access the benefit of chanting to the Gohonzon.

In addition, as Nichiren described the Gohonzon as the “banner of propagation” of the Mystic Law, it is the object of devotion for advancing kosen-rufu—that is, for accomplishing the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law. The SGI is the only Buddhist organization that is correctly practicing and upholding faith in the Gohonzon in accord with Nichiren’s intent, accomplishing kosen-rufu through its growing network encompassing 192 countries and territories. The SGI is doing so by enabling individuals to achieve their human revolution through faith in the Gohonzon, thereby transforming humanity’s destiny and creating a world of peace.

The Role of the Buddhist Sangha

In Buddhism, the harmonious community of believers—the Sangha—spreads the Buddha’s teachings, maintaining a strict sense of responsibility with regard to respecting the object of devotion. The treatment of and attitude toward the object of devotion is a vital matter.

Today, the SGI is the body of believers that is correctly upholding the Daishonin’s intent regarding the Gohonzon. In this capacity, the SGI assumes all responsibility pertaining to the Gohonzon, including the conferral of the Gohonzon and other matters.

The core spirit of the SGI is based on Nichiren’s statement: “All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren’s propagation” (“The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” WND-1, 217).

Receiving the Gohonzon and joining the SGI indicates a person’s decision and willingness to unite with fellow members and accept the teachings and practices of the harmonious Buddhist community of the SGI.

Restrictions on the Production, Posting and Downloading of Images of the Gohonzon

As the Sangha advancing kosen-rufu in accord with Nichiren’s intent, the SGI does not recognize any still or video image of the Gohonzon as a valid object of faith, nor does it authorize the reproduction of the Gohonzon in any form by individuals, or the posting, publishing or downloading of such images. The SGI urges its members and guests to refrain from posting or accessing images of the Gohonzon, in that doing so effectively makes light of, disrespects and undermines Nichiren Buddhism’s noble spirit and practice of treating the Gohonzon with utmost reverence.

Confident that correct faith in the Gohonzon is what directly enables us to change our own karma and carry out our struggle to establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land, let us always advance with faith as our foundation.
