

*An Introduction to
True Buddhism*

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

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When most people think of Buddhism, they think of Shakyamuni Buddha, India, saffron robes and the like. However, Buddhism, one of the oldest of the world's religions, has its true place in the daily lives of everyday people. In this introduction to True Buddhism we will tell you about some of the fundamentals by answering many of the questions asked by people who are new to its ideas.

What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is a religion that was established by Shakyamuni Buddha who lived in India nearly 3,000 years ago. He observed people suffering as a result of the inevitable cycles of birth, old age, sickness, and death. In searching for the means to alleviate that suffering, he realized, through his religious practices, that life is impermanent and subject to change, yet at the core of existence is something eternal and immutable: the eternal law of life, the law of causality. He clarified this eternity of life, and explained the reasons for the individual circumstances of our day-to-day lives.

Shakyamuni Buddha attained this enlightenment after many years of meditation and study. Then, for the next forty-two years, he expounded to his followers the teaching they should practice, so that they could realize for themselves the same enlightenment and liberation that he had gained. The most devoted followers became monks or nuns and were expected to abstain entirely from sex, intoxicants, and all harmful, abrasive, or frivolous conduct. In addition, the Buddha and his following avoided all luxuries of attire, accommodation, and diet. Like their teacher, the monks and nuns possessed only a robe and begging bowl. They moved constantly from place to place so that they would not become attached even to such rudimentary shelter as a certain tree or cave. In the afternoon or evening they would listen to sermons by the Buddha and then put the teachings into practice through meditation. These sermons were also attended by lay followers of the Buddha, interested and sometimes hostile followers of other religious persuasions, and the merely curious. Because of this diverse group of followers, Shakyamuni Buddha realized the necessity of presenting his teachings according to the capacity of



the listeners. There were many different sutras that now have been classified according to their level of profundity. After 42 years, Shakyamuni revealed that up to that point he had preached only provisional teachings and was now ready to reveal the truth. This truth was the Lotus Sutra that he expounded during the final eight years of his life.

Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the age in which we now live. He made His advent in this world over 700 years ago in Japan. Through His study of Shakyamuni's teachings, He determined the Lotus Sutra to be the only correct teaching for the Latter Day of the Law, a period of time beginning 2,000 years after Shakyamuni's death. He revealed that all human beings have the potential to attain the enlightened state of Buddhahood in their present lifetime. He was able to reveal that all of life's phenomena are manifestations of the eternal true entity of life, the Buddha nature.

What is the purpose of practicing True Buddhism?

The purpose of practicing True Buddhism is to awaken our ultimate potential life condition, Buddhahood, or enlightenment that is inherent in all living beings. We gain the benefit of increased wisdom, the ability to overcome our difficulties and suffering as well as developing a fortunate and happy daily life. We also practice with the goal of creating a peaceful society.

What is the practice of True Buddhism?

The three aspects of practice are faith, practice, and study. Faith is the developing belief and conviction in the Gohonzon. Practice includes practice for oneself and practice for others. Practice for oneself is chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and the twice daily recitation of Gongyo, consisting of portions of the Lotus Sutra. Once you begin to experience the actual benefit of the practice, you will naturally wish to share it with others. The act of propagating this Buddhism with a spirit of deep compassion is to help others to overcome their sufferings. Study is also an important aspect of the practice for the purpose of deepening our faith and confidence in the teachings.

For a new believer who has little or no experience with True Buddhism, faith can be described as an expectation that benefit will manifest through chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to the Gohonzon. As your practice continues, you will develop confidence that you can bring forth the enlightened nature of Buddhahood in your life. Faith then develops in the form of conviction, and conviction develops through actual proof that gives you the confidence to continue the practice.

What is Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo?

In the infinite past, *Kuon-ganjo*, the True Buddha named the ultimate Law or true entity of life in the universe as Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. In view of

the person, the life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin Himself is “Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.” Literally “Nam” means devotion and “Myoho-Renge-Kyo” is the title of the Lotus Sutra. A simplified translation means “Devotion to the Mystic Law of the Lotus Sutra.”

Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is also called the Mystic Law of cause and effect, because within it is both the cause and effect of attaining Buddhahood. “Renge” means Lotus Flower. The Lotus Flower produces its flower and seeds at the same time, representing the simultaneity of cause and effect. The cause is to chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and the effect is attaining enlightenment.

Even though Buddhahood exists within our lives, we are unaware of



it until we begin to chant to the Gohonzon. It is important to understand that without fusing with the life of the True Buddha we cannot actualize it in our own lives.

Once we awaken this true entity within our lives we manifest the immeasurable wisdom and power to overcome adversity and reveal our own enlightened life.

Just as the word “India” includes within itself all the mountains, rivers, treasures and people

of India, Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo includes within itself all of the teachings and benefits of Buddhist practice.

The depth and significance of chanting Daimoku (Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo) cannot be fully explained but has to be experienced through practice to grasp the meaning and benefits within your own life.

What is the Gohonzon?

The object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu is the life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. In order to save His disciples and believers who would take faith after His passing, the Daishonin inscribed His enlightened life as the object of worship, the Dai-Gohonzon, thereby establishing the cause for the universal propagation of True Buddhism and the securing of peace throughout the world. All Gohonzons enshrined in temples and homes of believers are transcriptions of the Dai-Gohonzon and derive their power from it.

When we are seated before the Gohonzon we should realize that we are in the presence of the True Buddha, and are observing the true entity of all phenomena.

Our devotion to the Buddha, expressed through our sincere chanting of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, is the means by which we can fuse our lives with the

life of the Buddha. While in this state of fusion, the powers of the Buddha and the Law permeate our existence purifying our minds, extinguishing our evil karma, and planting seeds of wisdom, compassion, and virtue in our lives.

Having established the correct object of worship and the correct way of faith and practice to manifest the Gohonzon's beneficial power within the lives of believers, the Daishonin transferred the living entity of His inner enlightenment to His sole successor, the Second High Priest, Nikko Shonin. This transmission to one and only one person is the basis upon which each successive High Priest transcribes the Gohonzons which are bestowed upon disciples and believers of succeeding generations. This unbroken flow of the Buddha's life between master and disciple is the means by which the Daishonin's enlightenment will remain in the world to save all mankind throughout eternity.

All believers of Nichiren Shoshu are granted a Gohonzon that is loaned to them by the Head Temple, so they can worship in their own homes. The Gohonzon is transcribed only by the High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu. The chief priest of the local temple bestows the Gohonzon to believers who are ready to receive and protect it.

What is Gongyo and why do we do it?

Gongyo is the morning and evening recitation of the *Hoben* and *Juryo* chapters from the Lotus Sutra. We call this the assisting practice and Daimoku, chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, the primary practice.

The Twenty-sixth High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Nichikan Shonin stated:

The assisting practice is the recitation of both the Hoben and Juryo chapters, which will help reveal the deep and profound benefit of the primary practice. It is comparable to lye (the assisting practice) which helps the washing (of clothes), or to the seasonings (used) to season food.

The only way to receive the true great benefit from practicing this Buddhism is to do Gongyo (five prayers in the morning; three in the evening) and to chant a fulfilling amount of Daimoku.

Please explain the beads we use while doing Gongyo and chanting.

The beads are called *Juzu*. It is said that the beads originated when Shakyamuni instructed Virudhaka: "If you wish to resolve your sufferings, bore holes in 108 wooden beads, string them and carry them with you." As for the symbolic significance, there are many deep meanings. Here we mention a few:

The two large beads at either end are called the parental beads, the

BEAD NEAR THE FATHER'S BEAD:
"THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE
LAW; THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH THAT
HAS ALWAYS EXISTED"

BEADS OUTSIDE CIRCLE:
"ICHINEN SANZEN"

FOUR SMALL BEADS:
"FOUR BODHISATTVAS"

FATHER'S BEAD:
"THE BUDDHA"

FOUR SMALL BEADS:
"FOUR BODHISATTVAS"

BEADS IN CIRCLE:
"108 EARTHLY DESIRES"

MOTHER'S BEAD:
"THE BUDDHA"

FOUR BODHISATTVAS INDICATE:
THE FOUR VIRTUES:
TRUE SELF
PURITY
HAPPINESS
ETERNITY

BEADS OUTSIDE CIRCLE:
"ICHINEN SANZEN"

JUZU

THE BUDDHIST PRAYER BEADS

mother bead and the father bead. They both signify the Buddha and *Myo* (Mystic) *Ho* (Law). Just under the father bead is a smaller one that represents the essential nature of the Law, the absolute truth that has existed before the beginning of time.

There are 108 beads strung between the parental beads that signify the 108 earthly desires that we possess.

There are an additional four smaller beads strung among the 108 beads that signify the four noble virtues: Eternity, Happiness, True Self, and Purity.

The tassels at the ends of the parental beads carry the meaning of Kosen-rufu and symbolize the continuous stream of Myoho (the Mystic Law) to the whole world.

The roundness of the beads signifies the benefit of Myoho which will fill everything in great harmony.

The *Juzu* signify the attainment of Buddhahood and the resolution of our various problems and sufferings. The beads used in Nichiren Shoshu have been offered in front of the Gohonzon and are prayed over at the Head Temple or a local temple. Through the profound “Eye Opening” ceremony conducted by the High Priest or local temple priest, the beads become endowed with the benefit and significance of an instrument of worship in our practice.

Is there a special way to hold the beads?

When we use the beads, we twist them over once, forming a figure eight. The end of the figure eight with the three strands is placed over the middle finger of the right hand and the end with the two strands over the middle finger of the left. The short strands lie on the outside of the hands which are placed together with palms and fingers touching. The beads should not be rubbed together but held quietly between our palms when facing the Gohonzon. It is said that when we hold the beads on our fingers and enclose them between the palms of our hands, we can obtain the great benefit of transforming earthly desires into enlightenment.

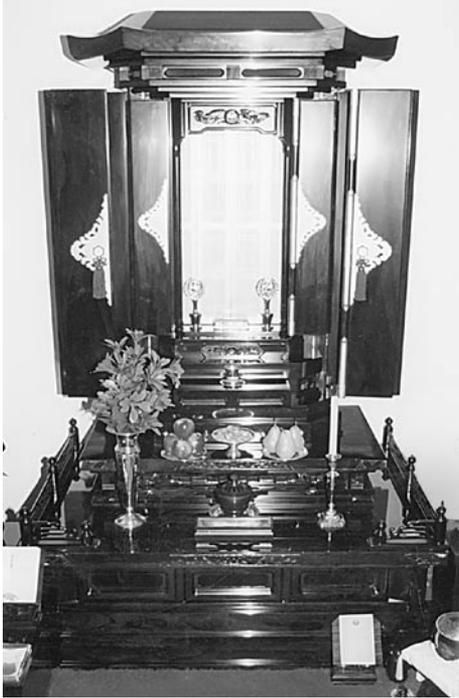
What kind of Buddhist altar do we have in our homes?

Butsudan is a Japanese term meaning “house of the Buddha.” In Nichiren Shoshu, it is the protective enclosure in which the Gohonzon is enshrined. The purpose of a butsudan is to protect the Gohonzon. Generally, when someone begins to practice, they have a small butsudan and upgrade to larger, more ornate ones as their faith grows and they experience actual proof in their lives. The size and type is a matter of personal choice, but it must have been originally purchased for that purpose. You may purchase one from a

Nichiren Shoshu Butsudan store, or order one from Japan, but you must have a butsudan set up in your home prior to receiving a Gohonzon.

The Gohonzon is the enlightened life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin; therefore, we must show the greatest respect and care in preparing an altar.

Placement of the butsudan in your home is very important. When you bring the Gohonzon into your home, you are preparing to embark on a path that will reveal your enlightenment. Therefore, you should place the Gohonzon in the best place in your home. It is preferable to place the butsudan on a wall by itself, without windows or pictures hung near it. The butsudan should



be placed up high enough so that the bottom of the Gohonzon is just above eye level when you are seated. It is your choice whether to sit in a chair or on the floor. The important thing is that the Gohonzon is always above eye level when you are chanting. The butsudan should be opened only during faith activities.

Butsugu is a Japanese term which includes all of the altar accessories: water-cup, candle holder(s), incense-tray, vase(s) for evergreens, and a bell. Correct placement of the butsugu is important because of the significance of each item. All items should be used only for the Gohonzon. For instance, the candle sticks

should not be used for a dinner or power outage. The arrangement of various butsugu is as follows:

The incense tray is placed in the center, with the candle on your right and the evergreens on your left. If two candles and vases are used, place one candle holder at either end of the incense tray. To the outside of the candles are the vases of evergreens. The water-cup is placed closest to the Gohonzon, and offerings such as fruit or rice are placed between the incense tray and the water cup.

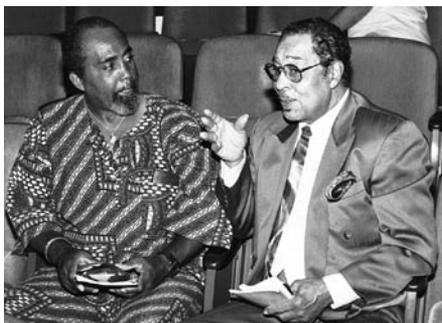
Nothing should be close enough to the Gohonzon to fall onto, splatter, or otherwise cause damage to it if accidentally spilled or knocked over.

Be sure to keep your altar clean at all times. Do not place pictures, notes, or anything other than the above described items in or around the altar. It is important you not be distracted when chanting Daimoku and doing Gongyo.

What is Shakubuku?

Shakubuku is a term you will hear a lot during your practice of True Buddhism because it is one of the most important aspects of your practice. Shakubuku means to refute others' attachment to incorrect views and to lead them to the teachings of True Buddhism.

We accumulate from our Buddhist practice of *jigyō* (practice for ourselves) great fortune, and as our faith deepens and our life condition begins to improve it is only natural that we want to share this with our friends and family.



Therefore the desire to do Shakubuku arises naturally from faith. Faith arises from the daily practice of Gongyo, Daimoku and the study of Nichiren Daishonin's Goshō.

You are welcome to bring your guests to the temple and introduce them to the priest. You can also take them to a local meeting and receive support from your fellow believers. Your efforts to teach them about Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō and the Dai-Gohonzon will plant the seed of Buddhahood in their lives. Even if they do not take faith right away, this seed will eventually sprout and they will be able to practice True Buddhism in the future and attain enlightenment. Also, you will have made the cause to develop great good fortune in your own life and lessen your negative karma.

When can a person receive The Gohonzon?

Because each person is so different, there is no set length of time that you must practice prior to receiving the Gohonzon. The decision to practice Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism and receive Gojukai (the Acceptance Ceremony) is extremely important. Only after receiving Gojukai in front of the Gohonzon at a Nichiren Shoshu temple can a person become a member of our denomination. The requirements are that your practice be consistent and correct, and that you have an altar (*butsudan*) in which to enshrine the Gohonzon set up in advance. The chief priest of your local temple will make the final decision in giving permission for you to receive the Gojukai Ceremony and Gohonzon.

The Gojukai Ceremony is not merely an initiation ceremony, it is a noble

occasion when one seriously pledges to maintain faith and practice in Nichiren Shoshu and to strive toward the life condition of Buddhahood. In front of the Gohonzon, the chief priest leads in the recitation of the sutra, the chanting of Daimoku and the invocation of the silent prayers. Then, he rests a Joju Gohonzon on the head of the new believer and recites the Oath of Acceptance for Gojukai. This is an occasion that will be remembered for the rest of your life and marks a new beginning. After the Gojukai Ceremony, the new believer receives a Gohonzon to be enshrined in her or his home. When you receive the Gohonzon you should hold open a brand new sutra book at eye level until the Gohonzon has been placed in it by the priest, then carefully cover it with a scarf or put it into an envelope. It should not be unwrapped until it is enshrined in your home by a senior in faith.

What do we study?

The *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly* magazine provides us with study materials that have been translated into English. This publication contains segments of Nichiren Daishonin's writings which are called the Gosho. The Gosho are treatises and letters written by Nichiren Daishonin to His disciples as encouragement in their faith. The reading of Nichiren Daishonin's writings allows us to deepen both our understanding of the practice, and our faith and confidence in the Gohonzon.

We study the guidance of the High Priest. Furthermore, each month there is an Oko lecture at each local temple given by the chief priest. These lectures help us understand the profound meaning and depth of the Buddhist teachings. Nichiren Daishonin stated:

"Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself, you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith."

What are the Ten Worlds?

Our life condition determines how we face and handle each situation in life and the environments we create. It is a basic tendency to act in a particular way, make causes to stay healthy, acquire things, and enjoy life. Buddhism calls these life conditions "worlds," and they number ten: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Tranquillity or Humanity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva (compassion, service to others), and Buddhahood.

The causes we make are conceived in our minds. Our bodies move to give these ideas a form, such as our homes, human relationships, our communities, cities, nations, states, and the world. Just as our body and mind are inseparable, people and their environments are also inseparable. We can only create a reflection of the life tendency or "world" that we are in. For

example people who have a basic life condition of Hell will create an environment which reflects that condition. What do you see as you look at your own environment or at the world we have collectively created?

Regardless of our basic life condition, or of what “world” we are in, our emotions and experiences do not remain stable. Everyone will experience anger, joy, calmness, and learning something new. A person in Hell can experience Rapture when his pain is temporarily relieved. A person who is in the world of Bodhisattva feels Rapture when they are able to help someone but might be plunged into Anger when they see someone mistreat others and be plunged into Hell because they can do nothing about it. Each of the ten life conditions contains the potential for all ten within itself. It is a person’s interaction with his or her environment that determines which of the ten worlds will manifest in life at any given time.

The important point to remember is that just as we all possess the potential to manifest the worlds of anger, rapture, and learning, we also possess the potential to manifest the world of Buddhahood when we fuse our lives with the Gohonzon through strong and steady faith and practice.

What is Tozan?

The pilgrimage, *tozan*, to the Head Temple Taisekiji, located in Japan at the foot of Mt. Fuji, is an essential practice in Nichiren Shoshu. During the Daishonin’s lifetime, a tozan was a pilgrimage to visit Him.

The term originally signified serving the Daishonin directly and receiving instruction from Him. Making a pilgrimage to Taisekiji, the dwelling place of both the Dai-Gohonzon and the High Priest, carries the same significance as the tozans during the Daishonin’s lifetime. Taisekiji was founded in 1290 after Nichiren Daishonin’s passing, when the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin moved to this spot and further propagated the teachings he had inherited from the True Buddha. Since that time, Taisekiji has remained the spiritual center from which the orthodox teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have been handed down for over 700 years. Believers come from all over the world to express their appreciation to the Dai-Gohonzon. Their pilgrimages are a living testimony to the universal truth of





Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

How do I learn more about Nichiren Shoshu?

Lectures by the High Priest and explanations of Buddhist concepts by the chief priest encourage your development and understanding of True Buddhism. Your local temple is a great place to bring people who

want to learn about Nichiren Shoshu.

You should attend your local temple activities whenever possible to do Gongyo and chant Daimoku to the temple Gohonzon and hear lectures by the chief priest.

Subscribing to the *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly* magazine will help you learn about the theory and doctrines of True Buddhism. By attending local meetings in members' homes, you will have the opportunity to hear members' experiences.

BASIC BUDDHIST TERMS

Daimoku: Supreme Invocation or Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. This expression also indicates the chanting of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

Gongyo: Literally assiduous practice. Recitation of a portion of the second (*Hoben*) and all of the sixteenth (*Juryo*) chapters of the Lotus Sutra with silent prayers. Performed twice daily.

Gosho: The writings of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. They take the form of treatises, the letters he wrote to His disciples, and oral lectures written down by His successor, Second High Priest Nikko Shonin.

Ichinen sanzen: "Three thousand realms are possessed by a single life moment." The theory that explains that all existence possesses the Buddha nature along with all the other conditions of life. This is elucidated by teaching that there are ten states of life or mind, called the "Ten Worlds." Furthermore the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds makes this 100 worlds. They are manifested through the principle of the Ten Factors and the Three Realms of Existence, which make 3,000 worlds.

Karma: Internal causes residing in the depths of life that manifest themselves as conspicuous effects when external causes or conditions are encountered. All people possess both positive and negative karma. The practice of True Buddhism implants tremendous good karma (fortune) in one's life, and lessens one's retribution for negative karma from causes made in this and previous lifetimes.

Kosen-rufu: Means to widely declare and spread True Buddhism. There are two aspects of Kosen-rufu. “Kosen-rufu of the Entity of the Law” signifies the establishment of the Dai-Gohonzon by the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. His will to us was to accomplish “Kosen-rufu of Substantiation” which signifies the time when all the people of the world embrace the Daishonin’s Buddhism and revere the Dai-Gohonzon. At this time, there will be true world peace and the masses of people around the world will attain Buddhahood.

Lotus Sutra: Shakyamuni’s highest teaching. It was his final teaching, preached during the last eight years of his life together with the Sutra of Infinite Meaning, an introduction to the Lotus Sutra, and the Nirvana Sutra, the teaching for the sake of propagating the principles of the Lotus Sutra. In it, Shakyamuni expounded the ultimate truth of his enlightenment. However, in the Latter Day of the Law, we can only benefit from the Lotus Sutra when it is viewed through the life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. Therefore, as Nichiren Shoshu believers, we practice and study the Lotus Sutra based exclusively on the interpretations and teachings of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin and the successive High Priests of Nichiren Shoshu. In His writings, Nichiren Daishonin sometimes uses the term “Lotus Sutra” to indicate Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, or the Gohonzon.

Three Great Secret Laws: The principle which constitutes the core and foundation of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. They are the True Object of Worship, the True High Sanctuary, and the True Invocation.

The True Object of Worship is the Dai-Gohonzon, inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin on October 12, 1279. Within the Dai-Gohonzon is the Person and the Law. The Person is the eternal enlightened life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. The Law is Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to which the Daishonin is eternally enlightened.

The True High Sanctuary is the place where the Dai-Gohonzon will be enshrined at the time of Kosen-rufu so that all humankind can eradicate their negative karma and attain enlightenment. At the present time it is enshrined in the Enshrinement Hall at Nichiren Shoshu Head Temple, Taisekiji. In a general sense, it also signifies the place where the Gohonzon is enshrined in local temples and believers’ homes.

The True Invocation is Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. Nichiren Daishonin established the True Invocation by chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo for the first time on April 28, 1253. The True Invocation carries the significance of both faith and practice.

Three Periods of Propagation: The three time periods following the passing of Shakyamuni. The first 1000 year period after Shakyamuni’s passing is called the Former Day of the Law (*Shoho*). The second 1000 year period is called the Middle Day of the Law (*Zoho*). The final period starting

thereafter is called the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappo*). Shakyamuni taught that the Latter Day of the Law would last 10,000 years and into the future. He taught that at this time, because the people would have no connection to Shakyamuni, they could no longer gain any benefit from his teachings. The True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, appeared at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law and established the Buddhism of the Three Great Secret Laws so that all people could attain enlightenment now and on into the future.

Three Treasures: The Three Treasures are what all Buddhists revere as the most precious treasures in the universe. They are the Buddha, the Law and the Priesthood. The Buddha is one who is enlightened to the eternal truth of life and the universe and possesses the three virtues of Sovereign, Teacher, and Parent. The Law is the teaching that the Buddha teaches through his own enlightenment. The Priesthood signifies the disciples of the Buddha who inherit, protect, and transmit the teachings to future generations. In Nichiren Shoshu the Buddha is Nichiren Daishonin, the eternal True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. The Law is the Dai-Gohonzon of the True High Sanctuary of True Buddhism, and the Priesthood is Nikko Shonin, the Second High Priest, who directly received the transmission of True Buddhism, and all of the successive High Priests of Nichiren Shoshu who have received this face to face transmission in an unbroken succession for over 700 years. The present High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu, as of November 1999, is Sixty-seventh High Priest Nikken Shonin.

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