

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 the 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.