

## PROTECTIVE FORCES EXIST WITHIN US

QUESTION: When we perform the morning prayers, we face east for the first prayer, then turn to face the Gohonzon for the remaining prayers. What if the Gohonzon is on the east side of the room—which way do we face? And what is the significance of facing east?

ANSWER: In the first prayer, we offer appreciation for the protection of the Buddhist gods by facing east toward the sun. If you are already facing east when facing the Gohonzon, it is not necessary to change directions. We can express appreciation to the Buddhist gods by facing the Gohonzon because they are represented in it. Buddhist gods are forces or phenomena in the universe that protect or aid human life. A prime example is the sun. Without it, life would cease to exist.

Nichiren Daishonin viewed the sun symbolically as the center of the universe and representative of the Buddhist gods. Because the sun rises in the east, we face that direction to show appreciation to all functions in the universe that make life possible. But it is just a formality. It is not crucial whether we face east or not. The substance of the first prayer is to acknowledge the great compassion of the universe that protects life.

Sometimes we say we thank the Buddhist gods or the Gohonzon for protecting us; but in reality we appreciate the existence of the Mystic Law within the universe and within our lives.

The names we use to refer to Buddhist gods originated within Indian and Japanese folklore and religious traditions. Because the Daishonin realized that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo permeates all natural forces, he felt comfortable incorporating in his teachings these traditional gods which people of the time were familiar with. They were not originally “Buddhist” gods.

THE important thing to realize is that regardless of what we call them, the ultimate source of these forces is within us, not outside of us. The protection of Buddhist gods is a function of our Buddha nature. Buddhism teaches that our lives and the surrounding environment are one, not two separate entities. Therefore, our environment reflects our inner condition of life. Our inner, life-affirming conviction will manifest itself in our surroundings.

President Ikeda explains:

Just as a baby is nourished and grows naturally of its own accord by drinking milk, if you earnestly chant the Mystic Law with faith in the Gohonzon, your life definitely will come to shine with immeasurable good fortune and benefit.

To cite another example: Dogs have a language in the world of dogs, and birds have a language in the world of birds. While people cannot understand these languages, fellow dogs and fellow birds can certainly communicate within their own species. Also, even though some people do not understand scientific jargon or a particular language, others can communicate very well through these languages.

Similarly, it might be said that when we are doing gongyo or chanting

daimoku, we are speaking in the language of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Even though you may not understand what you are saying, your voice definitely reaches the Gohonzon, all Buddhist gods and all Buddhas and bodhisattvas over the three existences and in the ten directions; and that, in response, the entire universe bathes you in the light of good fortune.

President Toda once said: "When we turn to the east and salute the Buddhist gods, then and there the Buddhist gods within our own hearts appear in the universe around us. Then, when we face the Gohonzon during the second prayer, the Buddhist gods all take their seats behind us.

"If I were to salute the Buddhist gods right now, then, regardless of whether it was night or day, they would all take their seats behind me and salute the Gohonzon. And these Buddhist gods would all start to work to fulfill my desires. This is how it works."

"When we worship the Gohonzon, right then and there the doors of the microcosm within us open completely to the macrocosm, and we can experience a sense of serene and great happiness, as though gazing out over the entire universe. We sense tremendous fulfillment and joy, and gain access to a great and inexhaustible source of wisdom. The microcosm that has been embraced by the universe in turn embraces the universe" (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, pp. 20–22).

### **More From *Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra***

PRESIDENT Toda often told us that when we go to Eagle Peak, we should proudly declare ourselves "disciples of Josei Toda, the leader of kosen-rufu." The names of those who bravely and vigorously dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu are known to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions, and to Bonten and Taishaku and all Buddhist gods. Their reputation extends throughout the universe.

The reason for this, the sutra explains, is that spreading the correct Buddhist teaching in the Latter Day of the Law is the most difficult undertaking there is. Accordingly, the great achievement of those who actually spread the Lotus Sutra cannot fail to be known to the beings in the worlds of the ten directions. Therefore, all Buddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhist gods in the three existences and the ten directions are sure to protect the courageous men and women who propagate the Mystic Law.

In "Emergence of the Treasure Tower," the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says: "This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while [after I have entered extinction] I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas. A person who can do this wins the admiration of the Buddhas" (LS11, 180–81) (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, pp. 61–62).

THE discussion meeting is a wonderful forum of life. Where there is such joy, excitement, bounding vigor and solidarity of faith in the Gohonzon, the Buddhist gods of the universe all assemble, and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas envelop everyone in good fortune and benefit. Through such vibrant life-to-life interaction, the SGI is rapidly increasing in brilliance and strength.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents, no

doubt rejoice at this harmonious solidarity. And Nichiren Daishonin surely praises all of you (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 3, p. 104).

GONGYO, in the morning and evening, is a ceremony fusing the microcosm of our own lives in choral melody with the macrocosm of the universe. The sound of the Mystic Law, the sound of voices chanting daimoku, is the song of the universe.

Each morning and evening we immerse ourselves in the symphony of the Mystic Law that resounds throughout the universe. The Buddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhist gods existing over the three existences and in the ten directions shower us with their praise and protection (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 3, p. 114).

### *From The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*

EACH of you has continued your faith in the Lotus Sutra and can therefore rid yourselves of your heavy sins from the past. For example, the flaws in iron come to the surface when it is forged. Put into flames, a rock just turns to ashes, but gold is rendered into pure gold. This persecution more than anything else will prove your faith genuine, and the Jurasetsu (Ten Goddesses) of the Lotus Sutra will surely protect you.

You must endure this trial and see for yourselves the blessings of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren will also loudly call upon the Buddhist gods. Now more than ever, you must neither show nor feel any fear (MW-1, 138–40).□

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