

Many Treasures, The Verifier — Part 1
On the Gohonzon
By TERRY ELLIS, Contributing Editor

When Shakyamuni Buddha began to preach the Lotus Sutra, he was setting a new precedent. Forty years of teaching were out the window. And a Buddha named Many Treasures Thus Come One appeared seated in the Treasure Tower as his verifier: a signifier of enlightenment who simply said, “He’s right.”

Who was this Buddha who appears suddenly, as if he knew exactly what was happening? According to the Lotus Sutra, Many Treasures had vowed, “If, after I have become a Buddha and entered extinction, in the lands in the ten directions there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is preached, then my funerary tower, in order that I may listen to the sutra, will come forth and appear in that spot to testify to the sutra and praise its excellence” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 171).

When the tower first appears in the Lotus Sutra it is closed, and Shakyamuni’s followers are eager to see this Buddha whose voice they’ve heard. In the letter “On the Treasure Tower,” Nichiren Daishonin explains that the closed Treasure Tower represents the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra — Shakyamuni’s proclamation that all people have the potential to become Buddhas. The open tower, the Daishonin says, represents the essential teaching that all people are Buddhas.

Although Shakyamuni’s followers are anxious to open the tower and see this Buddha, Shakyamuni explains that, according to Many Treasures’ vow, first the many Buddhas who are emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha and are preaching the Law in the 10 directions must return and gather in that same spot. These Buddhas, countless in number, make their way to the *saha* world. When this wonderful scene is set, “Shakyamuni Buddha with the fingers of his right hand then opened the door of the tower of seven treasures. A loud sound issued from it,...and at once all the members of the assembly caught sight of Many Treasures Thus Come One seated on a lion seat ...” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 175).

Once again, Many Treasures praises Shakyamuni for preaching the Lotus Sutra and then offers Shakyamuni half of his seat inside the Treasure Tower. In this position, the two Buddhas appear to be seated high up and far away from Shakyamuni’s followers. So they request that the Buddhas use their powers to raise all to a level of equality. This is known as the Ceremony in the Air, at which Shakyamuni asks an important question: After his death, who will vow to protect and spread the Law?

That was the cue for the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

In the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” No. 25, Soka Gakkai Study Department Vice Chief Haruo Suda says that on a visit to Eagle Peak, where the Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra, someone went looking for a chasm from which the bodhisattvas emerged. Suda comments, “But these are all dramas taking place in Shakyamuni’s life; they are not to be interpreted literally.” And SGI President Ikeda responds, “While not historically factual, the events described in the sutra do express truths about life and the nature of existence.”

Three in a series
(Many Treasures, part 2, will continue this explanation)