

**BUDDHIST BASICS  
LIKE A HOUSE ON FIRE  
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There once was a very rich man, who lived in a gigantic old house with lots of children. It was a nice enough house, but the wiring and the plumbing had problems and, well, the place was falling apart.

One day, a fire broke out and tore through the rafters. The rich man, standing outside, was horrified to see that his children were still inside.

“Fire!” he shouted. “Get out!”

But the kids wouldn’t listen. They were having fun, playing, paying no heed to their father’s cries and the ever-thickening smoke.

So the rich man tried a different tactic: “I have some rare and wonderful things for you!” he exclaimed. “Come see the fine carts I have — one pulled by a sheep, one by a deer and one by an ox. Come out and I’ll give them to you...”

The promise of new, cool stuff got the children’s attention. They charged out of the burning house. “Please give us the carts!” they clamored.

“I love all of my children equally,” the rich man said. “And my wealth is immeasurable. I cannot give you inferior vehicles.” So instead he gave them each a cart decorated with seven kinds of precious gems and pulled by a great white ox — a gift far finer than the ones originally promised.

In this story, the burning house represents this world. The children represent the people of the world so absorbed in their “play” and attached to the pursuit of immediate reward that they cannot perceive the eternity of life nor the workings of cause and effect. As a result, they suffer.

The rich man represents the Buddha, who strives to save people from the flames of suffering by using various means to awaken them to life’s ultimate reality. The three carts represent the vehicles of Learning, Realization and Bodhisattva, teachings by which Shakyamuni Buddha led believers to understand the Lotus Sutra.

The great white ox cart represents the supreme vehicle of Buddhahood or the Lotus Sutra itself. In Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, the supreme vehicle is the Gohonzon, and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to it carries all people to enlightenment.

*Five in a series*