

**ON THE GOHONZON: GREAT HEAVENLY KING STARS
INSEPARABLE FROM THE COSMOS
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You could say that the six characters in the second tier of inscriptions on the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon represent the protective functions that we associate with the world of Heaven. The final of these six is Great Heavenly King Stars.

The “heavenly gods” appear in the Lotus Sutra to praise Shakyamuni for revealing the Law by which all Buddhas attain enlightenment. In this capacity, they represent the protective functions of the universe.

A famous episode in Nichiren Dai-shonin’s life offers an example of these “heavenly gods” at work: Government authorities, instigated by jealous priests, ordered his execution. The Daishonin was a human being, so he must have known fear, just as he felt cold and hunger. But he showed no trace of it at Tatsunokuchi, where, in the middle of the night, darkness was to mask the bloody scene. He was prepared to die, even encouraging his disciple Shijo Kingo that offering his life for the Law was the greatest privilege. Then, at the last moment, the executioners were scared away by a comet — one so bright that it lit up the dark skies.

How are we to understand such seemingly miraculous events? The prevalent view among Japanese in the Daishonin’s time was that the heavens dominated human destiny. Buddhism instead sees human life and the universe as inseparable.

SGI President Ikeda explains it this way: “The individual is the microcosm. The microcosm is itself the macrocosm; the two can never be separated, so the self is in fact the universe” (November 1998 *Living Buddhism*, p. 24).

The Daishonin also explains in “The True Entity of Life” that “all beings and their environments in any of the Ten Worlds, from Hell at the lowest to Buddhahood at the highest, are, without exception, manifestations of Myoho-enge-kyo” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 89). This perspective goes to the heart of the Lotus Sutra and the Gohonzon.

We can easily just say that our lives and the life of the universe are one, but as President Ikeda says in *Buddhism and the Cosmos*, “unless we relate to the universe and to other people with humility, we will never be able understand them as they truly are, let alone perceive the ultimate truth.” When we face the greatness of the cosmos — and the greatness of humanity — with humility, he points out, we experience an awakening to our own greatness. Our daily practice of doing gongyo and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo awaken us to our true potential.

As for Nichiren Daishonin’s experience at Tatsunokuchi, it’s referred to as his *hosshaku kemon*, a Japanese Buddhist term that means shedding the transient and revealing the true. It was a turning point in his life and mission. He faced death, and in that moment, his great faith in the Law enabled him to tap the Great Heavenly King Stars in his heart. As a result, his life was, in turn, heralded by the Great Heavenly King Stars in the universe.

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