

**BACK TO THE BASICS
THE TREASURE TOWER
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How do you really describe a human life? Not by the surface features: how a person looks, what she sounds like or how he acts. But by how precious the life itself is. Over the centuries, poets and prophets have offered many descriptions of the wonder of life. In Buddhism, the Treasure Tower serves as metaphor for the inherent value of human life, the life of the Buddha.

Few images in the Buddhist canon surpass the Lotus Sutra's Treasure Tower in scope. It reaches more than 2,000 miles high with "numberless streamers," "ten thousand million jeweled bells," gold, silver and other treasures adorning its surface. With its "five thousand railings" and "thousand, ten thousand rooms," it is really hard to imagine. Which, of course, is the point.

This Treasure Tower, appearing in the Lotus Sutra's 11th chapter, is meant to be grand, awesome and unfathomable because that is how Buddhism views human life. The logic-defying description confused most people over the centuries, who often dismissed it as mere hyperbole. The genius of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, then, is its explanation of the fantastic image as human life itself. "Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself," he writes to his disciple Abutsu-bo. "No other knowledge is purposeful" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 299).

This interpretation clarifies the Treasure Tower and its relevance today. One of society's greatest problems is people's lack of respect for life, both their own and others.

Not realizing the treasure within themselves, many feel their lives are without purpose. And a lack of reverence for the lives of others leads to discrimination, violence and war. The Daishonin's illumination of the Treasure Tower reveals to us just how precious both our lives and the lives of others are: full of wonder, vast, eternal.

Thanks to the Daishonin's Buddhism, which shows how to open the Treasure Tower within, we can bring forth the power we have to influence our world and make it a Buddha's land. We have the potential; we just have to decide to live up to it. And once we do, watch out, because as belief in the sanctity of human life spreads, the world will be radically transformed. This principle of human life's infinite worth offers the greatest hope for our world.

The Treasure Tower and its appearance brim with symbolism, far more than this article can discuss. But in each case, the symbolism describes the reality of our lives here and now. "In contrast to what people commonly regard as treasures," SGI President Ikeda writes, "the gold, silver and other treasures adorning the Treasure Tower indicate treasures in the realm of faith; they are the treasures, for example, of 'listening to the teaching' and 'believing it.' They are the only treasures we can take with us after our death. They are eternal wealth" (March 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 35).

That the Treasure Tower rises up from the earth is also important, as it indicates the world of Buddha deep within human life. It is our choice whether we will build such a tower of faith and happiness in our lives. President Ikeda urges us, "Let us adorn our lives by challenging ourselves with the spirit, 'This is where I will build my Treasure Tower'" (March 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 37).

To help us construct such a towering self, the Daishonin gave us the Gohonzon and

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which embody the Treasure Tower within. Through diligent faith and practice, we can come to understand with our very lives that our true identity—and the identity of all people—is best described as an infinite tower of treasure.

For an enlightening discussion on many aspects of the Treasure Tower, see President Ikeda's "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" in the March 1997 Living Buddhism, available on the Pubs 97-98 CD-ROM and the third volume of The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, available this spring.

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