

**On the Gohonzon: The Bodhisattvas of the Earth — Part 2**  
**Present Within Our Lives**  
**By TERRY ELLIS, Contributing Editor**

*(This concludes a two-part article. Part 1 appeared in the April 24 World Tribune.)*

Although the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear in the Lotus Sutra as if actors in a drama, Nichiren Daishonin says in “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” that “because they are Bodhisattvas contained in Shakyamuni’s own life, Shakyamuni summons forth these true disciples who were nurtured by the original Buddha” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 798). In other words, these Bodhisattvas of the Earth embody Shakyamuni’s own practice as a bodhisattva of the Mystic Law; they were the original cause of his enlightenment in the infinite past.

And the same applies to us. The Daishonin explains it this way: “Present within our lives is the Lord Shakyamuni...the original Buddha since time without beginning”; also, “Bodhisattvas Jogyo, Muhengyo, Jyogyo and Anryugyo represent the world of Bodhisattva within our lives” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 65).

The four virtues these bodhisattvas represent — true self, eternity, purity and happiness — are all inherent in our own Buddhahood. The Daishonin teaches that by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon we can reveal these qualities from within.

From still another perspective, these bodhisattvas represent the compassion of the universe — and exist not only in human beings but in plants, animals and insentient things.

As the Daishonin says: “The function of fire [Jogyo] is to burn and give light. The function of water [Jyogyo] is to wash away filth. The winds [Muhengyo] blow away dust and breathe life into plants, animals and human beings. The earth [Anryugyo] nourishes the grasses and trees, and heaven provides nourishing moisture. Myoho-renge-kyo too works in all these ways. It is the cluster of benefits brought by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth” (MW-1, 24).

Why did Shakyamuni refuse to entrust the spread of the Law to the other bodhisattvas at the Ceremony in the Air, instead passing it to Bodhisattva Jogyo, representative of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth? These others aspired to become Buddhas by a process of accumulating merit, as in accumulating minor good, and as such were known as bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching. “By contrast,” SGI President Ikeda explains, “the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching cause the great vitality of Buddhahood to issue forth from the depths of their lives — from the fundamental nature of the Law.... While bodhisattvas in their appearance as practitioners, in terms of their state of life, they are Buddhas.” Since they are essentially Buddhas, they are treated as such on the Gohonzon: Their names are placed on the same upper row as Shakyamuni and Many Treasures Thus Come One.

Shakyamuni explains in the “Universal Worthy” chapter, “If you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 324). Achieving this awareness of who we are is a crucial matter that depends on our practice to the Gohonzon. As President Ikeda says: “It’s a matter of fusing one’s entire being with the eternal life of the cosmos. This is what it means to be a Bodhisattva of the Earth.”

*Six in a series*

Title: Bodhisattvas of the Earth, Part 2  
Subject: World Tribune 05/08/98 n.3190 p.5 WT980508p05  
Author: Terry Ellis  
Keywords: Bodhisattvas Concepts Earth Gohonzon Lives Part Present Study Terms Tribune Within World