

**ON THE GOHONZON: Our Relationship to the Whole Universe**  
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As large as the Treasure Tower appeared in the Lotus Sutra, Mount Sumeru rose even higher. Above the Four Heavenly Kings, watching from the mountain summit, were the gods of the Trayastrimsha Heaven led by Shakra Devanam Indra (Jpn Taishaku).

On the Gohonzon, Heavenly King Shakra appears in the second tier of characters, directly below Shakyamuni Buddha.

The gods were filled with joy at the prospect of Shakyamuni revealing the Law. So, when the Treasure Tower appeared, they made fragrant red Mandarava flowers rain down as an offering (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 171).

In his lectures on the Lotus Sutra, Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, explained that the Mandarava flowers falling from heaven, which are frequently referred to in the Lotus Sutra, are the benefits we receive through our practice of the Law.

As SGI President Ikeda points out: “These flowers of good fortune and benefit fall equally upon the Buddha and all people. There is no discrimination...the Buddha and the people dwell in the same saha world” (Lectures on the Lotus Sutra, vol. 3, p. 149). From this perspective, it’s important to realize that the Gohonzon as we see it does not represent a hierarchy from top to bottom but a series of relationships between functions of the Law existing both inside and outside our lives.

For example, the Four Heavenly Kings appear in large bold characters framing the Gohonzon, while Shakra, their leader, is much less conspicuously placed. Shakra held a prominent place in Indian mythology, originally as the god of thunder.

“In ancient India, thunder was regarded as the joyful music of heaven announcing a merciful rainfall,” President Ikeda explains (Lectures on the Lotus Sutra, vol. 3, p. 145). Thus Shakra was seen as a protector of the world.

But in Indian philosophy, he didn’t have the last word.

Above him, in still another heaven, lived Great Heavenly King Brahma, who was said to rule the saha world, so called because human beings who lived there needed endurance. Brahma was regarded as the personification of the fundamental universal principle.

In the Lotus Sutra, many different Brahma kings appear who had attained supremacy in their own particular universes.

On the Gohonzon, Great Heavenly King Brahma is also located in the second tier of characters, directly below Taho Buddha.

The point is that, in the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni shows a relationship of respect between Buddhism and the gods embraced by the people of India. Rather than ignore what people believed, he led them to understand the world from a new perspective in this way.

Nichiren Daishonin demonstrated the same embracing mind when he inscribed the heavenly kings Shakra and Brahma on the Gohonzon.

Since the Gohonzon embodies the enlightened life of the Buddha, it includes our relationship with all of nature and all of the universe. Through our practice, we aim to make this relationship one of joy and appreciation.

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