

The Lotus Sutra

Translated by Burton Watson

Including
Rev. Shokai Kanai's
Lectures on the Lotus Sutra

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Preface

This combination of the Burton translation of the Lotus Sutra, and the commentaries of Rev. Shokai Kanai, was my idea of making the actual sutra more readable and understandable.

I find that the translation by itself is sometimes difficult to read in context, and the commentaries by themselves require a lot of back and forth with the Sutra, which eats up time and energy.

So I have taken the lecture notes of Rev. Kanai and integrated them as initial summaries, footnotes, and pseudo-appendices at the end of the chapter where necessary.

No changes aside from the occasional grammar and spelling alterations were made.

I hope that you will find this methodology helpful.

Patricia A. Whitney
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Chapter One: Introduction

SUMMARY

In Chapter 1, Sakyamuni Buddha is sitting in deep meditation at the top of Mt. Sacred Eagle in Rajgir, India. There were gathered gods, the rich and the poor, men and women, and also non-human beings such as deities in forms of beasts, birds, and fishes. This denotes that the Lotus Sutra is for all beings, not only human beings, but also for animals and plants. It symbolizes equality and compassion.

Suddenly the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows and illuminated the universe throughout the east quadrant. This means the Buddha is about to expound the sutra of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma.

TRANSLATION TEXT

This is what I heard¹:

At one time the Buddha² was in Rajagriha, staying on Mount Gridhrakuta³. Accompanying him were a multitude of leading monks numbering twelve thousand persons⁴. All were arhats⁵ whose outflows had come to an end, who had no more earthly desires, who had attained what was to their advantage and had put an end to the bonds of existence, and whose minds had achieved a state of freedom.

Their names were Ajnata Kaundinya, Mahakashyapa, Uruvilvakashyapa, Gayakashyapa, Nadikashyapa, Sâriputra, Great Maudgaly~yana, Mahakatayana,

¹All sutras start with this phrase. The sutras are not books written by Sakyamuni Buddha nor recorded by someone else. They are sacred words, phrases, parables transmitted from mouth to mouth for 100 to 200 years, then written down as sutras in later years. There was probably no method to write at the time of the Buddha. At that era, writing may be considered to be disrespectful to the Buddha.

²There are many Buddhas such as Sakyamuni, Taho, Amitabha, Mahavairocana and others. In this chapter, the Buddha is Sakyamuni. The Sakyamuni Buddha is the only one who was born from parents as we were, drank milk as we did, ate as we did. Other Buddhas were revealed by the Sakyamuni Buddha. Without him, we do not know anything about other Buddhas.

³It is also called Mt. Sacred Eagle or Vulture Peak. The top of the mountain looks like a head of an eagle.

⁴Hindu often uses numbers like 4, 8, 9 as perfect numbers. Four represent front, back, left, and right; 8 means the preceding four plus the four corners; and 9 symbols the preceding eight plus the center. A number multiplied by 4, 8, or 9 means a lot of ...

⁵Arhat : One who is free from all sufferings and illusions. Those who have listened to the Buddha for over 40 years and improved themselves spiritually. It is now ready for them to step farther to listen to the Lotus Sutra. Although they are awoken from illusions, they do not know how to lead others to the supreme teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Aniruddha, Kapphina, Gavampati, Revata, Pilindavatsa, Bakkula, Mahakaushthila, Nanda,⁶ Sundarananda, Purna Maitrayaniputra, Subhuti, Ananda,⁷ and Rahula.⁸ All were like these, great Arhats who were well known to others.

There were also two thousand persons, some of whom were still learning and some who had completed their learning.

There was the nun Mahaprajapati⁹ with her six thousand followers. And there was Rahula's mother, the nun Yashodhara,¹⁰ with her followers.

There were bodhisattvas and mahasattvas¹¹, eighty thousand of them, none of them ever regressing in their search for anuttara-samyaksambodhi¹². All had gained dharanis, delighted in preaching, were eloquent, and turned the wheel of the Law¹³ that knows no regression. They had made offerings to immeasurable hundreds and thousands of Buddhas, in the presence of various Buddhas had planted numerous roots of virtue, had been constantly praised by the Buddhas, had trained themselves in compassion, were good at entering the Buddha wisdom, and had fully penetrated the great wisdom and reached the farther shore.¹⁴ Their fame had spread throughout immeasurable worlds and they were able to save countless hundreds of thousands of living beings.

Their names were Bodhisattva¹⁵ Manjushri, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Bodhisattva Gainer of Great Authority, Bodhisattva Constant Exertion, Bodhisattva Never Resting, Bodhisattva Jeweled Palm, Bodhisattva Medicine King, Bodhisattva Brave Donor, Bodhisattva Jeweled Moon, Bodhisattva Moonlight, Bodhisattva Full Moon, Bodhisattva Great Strength, Bodhisattva Immeasurable Strength, Bodhisattva Transcending the Threefold World, Bodhisattva Bhadravala, Bodhisattva Maitreya, Bodhisattva Jeweled

⁶ Nanda = Sakyamuni Buddha's half younger brother

⁷ Ananda = Sakyamuni Buddha's cousin

⁸ Rahula = Sakyamuni Buddha's son

⁹ Maha-Prajapati Bhiksuni = Sakyamuni Buddha's adoptive mother

¹⁰ Yasodhara Bhiksuni = Sakyamuni Buddha's wife

¹¹ Maha - means great, chief, representative of the group

¹² Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi = Buddha's Wisdom

¹³ Wheel of Dharma : The Wheel of the Dharma signifies the Buddha's teachings, the Dharma is transmitted from the Buddha to A, from A to B, from B to C, and so on. The teachings are transmitted from one to another just like an eternally turning wheel.

The Wheel of the Dharma is a symbol of Buddhism. The wheel has eight spokes which represent: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation.

¹⁴ The Other Shore : This Shore represents the Saha World - here sentient beings live, here life is filled with suffering. There is an endless cycle of birth and death in this world. On the other hand, the other shore denotes the Buddha-land where there is no suffering. It also refers to the land of Nirvana where the cycle of birth and death does not exist.

The other shore is Hi-gan in Japanese. Higan is a memorial service in which we express our appreciation to our ancestors. It is held twice a year at the time of spring and autumn equinoxes. It denotes the Buddha's teaching of the MIDDLE WAY (chu - not to exceed one way or the other).

¹⁵ Bodhisattva : A Bodhisattva is a person who seeks enlightenment not only for himself but also for others. A Bodhisattva is a future Buddha.

Accumulation, and Bodhisattva Guiding Leader. Bodhisattvas and mahasattvas such as these numbering eighty thousand were in attendance.

At that time Shakra Devanam Indra with his followers, twenty thousand sons of gods¹⁶, also attended. There were also the sons of gods Rare Moon, Pervading Fragrance, Jeweled Glow, and the Four Great Heavenly Kings, along with their followers, ten thousand sons of gods.

Present were the sons of gods Freedom and Great Freedom and their followers, thirty thousand sons of gods, Present were King Brahma, lord of the saha world, the great Brahma Shikhin, and the great Brahma Light Bright, and their followers, twelve thousand sons of gods.

There were eight dragon kings¹⁷, the dragon king Nanda, the dragon king Upananda, the dragon king Sagara, the dragon king Vasuki, the dragon king Takshaka, the dragon king Anavatapta, the dragon king Manasvin, the dragon king Utpalaka, each with several hundreds of thousands of followers.

There were four kinnara kings¹⁸, the kinnara king Great Law, and the kinnara king Upholding the Law, each with several hundreds of thousands of followers.

There were four gandharva kings¹⁹, and gandharva king Pleasant, the gandharva king Pleasant Sound, the gandharva Beautiful Sound, each with several hundreds of thousands of followers.

There were four asura kings, the asura king Balin, the asura king Kharaskandha, the asura king Vemachitrin, and the asura king Rahu, each with several hundreds of thousands of followers.

There were four garuda kings,²⁰ the garuda king Great Majesty, the garuda king Great Body, the garuda king Great Fullness, and the garuda king As One Wishes, each with several hundreds of thousands of followers. And there was King Ajatashatru,²¹ the son of Vaidehi, with several hundreds of thousands of followers.

¹⁶ Gods : In Buddhism, gods are subject of cycle of birth and death. They are protective deities that must follow the law of the Dharma (Myo-ho), they also support the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

¹⁷ dragon-kings : All beings living in the oceans, rivers and water; such as fish.

¹⁸ kinnara-kings : Practitioners of Dharma

¹⁹ gandharva-kings : Musicians who serve the protective gods asura-kings. Demons who fly in the sky and harm human beings. Even demons adore the teachings of the Buddha.

²⁰ garuda-king : All beings who fly in sky like birds

²¹ King Ajatashatru : The son of King Bimbisara and Queen Vaidehi. When King Ajatashatru was the crowned prince, he imprisoned his father and mother. Through the instigation of Devadatta (who was the cousin of Sakyamuni Buddha), Ajatashatru later killed his

Each of these, after bowing in obeisance before the Buddha's feet,²² withdrew and took a seat to one side.

At that time the World-Honored One, surrounded by the four kinds of believers,²³ received offerings and tokens of respect and was honored and praised. And for the sake of the bodhisattvas he preached the Great Vehicle sutra entitled Immeasurable Meanings, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas.

When the Buddha had finished preaching this Sutra, he sat with his legs crossed in lotus position and entered into the samadhi of the place of immeasurable meanings, his body and mind never moving. At that time heaven rained down mandarava flowers, great mandarava flowers, manjushaka flowers, and great manjushaka flowers, scattering them over the Buddha and over the great assembly, and everywhere the Buddha world quaked and trembled in six different ways.

At that time the monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings in the assembly, as well as the petty kings and wheel-turning sage kings - all those in the great assembly, having gained what they had never had before, were filled with joy and, pressing their palms together, gazed at the Buddha with a single mind.

At that time the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, one of his characteristic features, lighting up eighteen thousand worlds in the eastern direction. There was no place that the light did not penetrate, reaching downward as far as the Avichi hell and upward to the Akanishtha heaven.

From this world one could see the living beings in the six paths of existence in all of those other lands. One could likewise see the Buddhas present at that time in those other lands and could hear the sutra teachings that those Buddhas were expounding. At the same time one could see the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who had carried out religious practices and attained the way. One could also see the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who, through various causes and conditions and various types of faith and understanding and in various forms and aspects were carrying out the way of the bodhisattva. And one could also

father and took the throne of the Kingdom. Ajatasatru represents evil human beings together with Devadatta. However, King Ajatasatru repented his wrong behavior and eventually embraced faith in the Lotus Sutra.

²² worshipped the feet of the Buddha : It is one of customs in India to show respect to the nobility. During Buddhist services, priests and monks bow deeply touching their foreheads on the floor and their palms of hands facing up. This action is to receive Buddha's feet on their palms indicating high respect to the Buddha.

²³ the four kind of devotees : They are bhiksus (priests), bhiksunis (nuns), upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (lay-women)

see the Buddhas who had entered parinirvana, towers adorned with the seven treasures were erected for the Buddha relics.

At that time the Bodhisattva Maitreya had this thought: *Now the World-Honored One has manifested these miraculous signs. But what is the cause of these auspicious portents? Now the Buddha, the World Honored One, has entered into samadhi. An unfathomable event such as this is seldom to be met with. Whom shall I question about this? Who can give me an answer?*

And again he had this thought: *this Manjushri, son of a Dharma King, has already personally attended and given offerings to immeasurable numbers of Buddhas in the past. Surely he must see these rare signs. I will now question him.*

At this time the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, as well as the heavenly beings, dragons, spirits, and the others all had this thought: *this beam of brightness from the Buddha, these signs of transcendental powers - now whom shall we question about them?*

At that time Bodhisattva Maitreya wished to settle his doubts concerning the matter. And in addition he could see what was in the minds of the four kinds of believers, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, as well as the heavenly beings, dragons, spirits and the others who made up the assembly. So he questioned Manjushri, saying, *"What is the cause of these auspicious portents, these signs of transcendental powers, this emitting of a great beam of brightness that illumines the eighteen thousand lands in the eastern direction so we can see all the adornments of the Buddha worlds there?"*

Then Bodhisattva Maitreya, wishing to state his meaning once more, asked the question in verse form:

Manjushri,

Why from the white tuft between the eyebrows of our leader and teacher does this great light shine all around?

Why do mandarava and manjushaka flowers rain down and breezes scented with sandalwood delight the hearts of the assembly?

Because of these the earth is everywhere adorned and purified and this world quakes and trembles in six different ways.

At this time the four kinds of believers are all filled with joy and delight, they rejoice in body and mind, having gained what they never had before.

The beam of brightness from between the eyebrows illumines the eastern direction and eighteen thousand lands are all the color of gold.

From the Avichi hell upward to the Summit of Being, throughout the various worlds the living beings in the six paths, the realm to which their births and deaths are

tending, their good and bad deeds, and the pleasing or ugly recompense they receive – all these can be seen from here.

We can also see Buddhas, those sage lords, lions, expounding and preaching sutras that are subtle, wonderful and foremost.

Their voices are clear and pure, issuing in soft and gentle sounds, as they teach bodhisattvas in numberless millions.

Their Brahma sounds are profound and wonderful, making people delight in hearing them.

Each in his own world preaches the correct Law, following various causes and conditions and employing immeasurable similes, illuminating the Law of the Buddha, guiding living beings to enlightenment.

If a person should encounter troubles, loathing old age, sickness and death, the Buddhas preach to him on nirvana, explaining how he may put an end to all troubles.

If a person should have good fortune, having in the past made offerings to the Buddhas, determined to seek a superior Law, the Buddhas preach the way of the pratyekabuddha.

If there should be Buddha sons who carry out various religious practices, seeking to attain the unsurpassed wisdom, the Buddhas preach the way of purity.

Manjushri, I have been dwelling here, seeing and hearing in this manner many things numbering in the thousands of millions.

Numerous as they are, I will now speak of them in brief.

I see in these lands bodhisattvas numerous as Ganges sands, according with various causes and conditions and seeking the way of the Buddha.

Some of them give alms, gold, silver, coral, pearls, mani jewels, seashell, agate, diamonds and other rarities, men and women servants, carriages, jeweled hand carriages and palanquins, gladly presenting these donations.

Such gifts they give to the Buddha way, desiring to achieve the vehicle that is foremost in the threefold world and praised by the Buddhas.

There are some bodhisattvas who give jeweled carriages drawn by teams of four, with railings and flowered canopies adorning their top and sides.

Again I see bodhisattvas who give their own flesh, hands and feet, or their wives and children, seeking the unsurpassed way.

I also see bodhisattvas who happily give heads, eyes, bodies and limbs in their search for the Buddha wisdom.

Manjushri, I see kings going to visit the place of the Buddha to ask him about the unsurpassed way.

They put aside their happy lands, their palaces, their men and women attendants, shave their hair and beard and don the clothes of the Dharma.

Or I see bodhisattvas who become monks, living alone in quietude, delighting in chanting the sutras.
Again I see bodhisattvas bravely and vigorously exerting themselves, entering the deep mountains, their thoughts on the Buddha way.
And I see them removing themselves from desire, constantly dwelling in emptiness and stillness, advancing deep into the practice of meditation until they have gained the five transcendental powers.
And I see bodhisattvas resting in meditation, palms pressed together, with a thousand, ten thousand verses praising the king of the doctrines.
Again I see bodhisattvas, profound in wisdom, firm in purpose, who know how to question the Buddhas and accept and abide by all they hear.
I see Buddha sons proficient in both meditation and wisdom, who use immeasurable numbers of similes to expound the Law to the assembly, delighting in preaching the Law, converting the bodhisattvas, defeating the legions of the devil and beating the Dharma drum.
And I see bodhisattvas profoundly still and silent, honored by heavenly beings and dragons but not counting that a joy.
And I see bodhisattvas living in forests, emitting light, saving those who suffer in hell, causing them to enter the Buddha way.
And I see Buddha sons who have never once slept, who keep circling through the forest diligently seeking the Buddha way.
And I see those who observe the precepts, no flaw in their conduct, pure as jewels and gems, and in that manner seeking the Buddha way.
And I see Buddha sons abiding in the strength of fortitude, taking the abuse and blows of persons of overbearing arrogance, willing to suffer all these, and in that manner seeking the Buddha way.
I see bodhisattvas removing themselves from frivolity and laughter and from foolish companions, befriending persons of wisdom, unifying their minds, dispelling confusion, ordering their thoughts in mountain and forest for a million, a thousand, ten thousand years in that manner seeking the Buddha way.
Or I see bodhisattvas with delicious things to eat and drink and a hundred kinds of medicinal potions, offering them to the Buddha and his monks; fine robes and superior garments costing in the thousands or ten thousands, or robes that are beyond cast, offering them to the Buddha and his monks; a thousand, ten thousand, a million kinds of jeweled dwellings made of sandalwood and numerous wonderful articles of bedding, offering them to the Buddha and his monks; immaculate gardens and groves where flowers and fruit abound, flowing springs and bathing pools, offering them to the Buddha and his monks; offerings of this kind, or many different wonderful varieties presented gladly and without regret as they seek the unsurpassed way.

*Or there are bodhisattvas who expound the Law of tranquil extinction, giving different types of instruction to numberless living beings.
Or I see bodhisattvas viewing the nature of all phenomena as having no dual characteristics, as being like empty space.
And I see Buddha sons whose minds have no attachments, who use this wonderful wisdom to seek the unsurpassed way.*

*Manjushri, there are also bodhisattvas who after the Buddha has passed into extinction make offerings to his relics.
I see Buddha sons building memorial towers as numberless as Ganges sands, ornamenting each land with them, jeweled towers lofty and wonderful, five thousand yojanas high, their width and depth exactly two thousand yojanas, each of these memorial towers with its thousand banners and streamers, with curtains laced with gems like dewdrops and jeweled bells chiming harmoniously.
There are heavenly beings, dragons, spirits, human and nonhuman beings, with incense, flowers and music constantly making offerings.*

*Manjushri, these Buddha sons in order to make offerings to the relics adorn the memorial towers so that each land, just as it is, is as outstandingly wonderful and lovely as the heavenly king of trees when its flowers open and unfold.
When the Buddha emits a beam of light I and the other members of the assembly can see these lands in all their various outstanding wonders.
The supernatural powers of the Buddhas and their wisdom are rare indeed; by emitting one pure beam of light, the Buddhas illuminate countless lands.
I and the others have seen this, have gained something never known before.
Buddha son, Manjushri, I beg you to settle the doubts of the assembly.
The four kinds of believers look up in happy anticipation, gazing at you and me.
Why does the World-Honored One emit this beam of brightness?
Buddha son, give a timely answer, settle these doubts and occasion joy!
What rich benefits will come from the projecting of this beam of brightness?
It must be that the Buddha wishes to expound the wonderful Law he gained when he sat in the place of practice.
He must have prophecies to bestow. He has showed us Buddha lands with their adornment and purity of manifold treasures, and we have seen their Buddhas - this is not done for petty reasons.
Manjushri, you must know.
The four kinds of believers, the dragons and spirits gaze at you in surmise, wondering what explanation you will give.*

At that time Manjushri said to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Maitreya and the other great men: *"Good men, I suppose that the Buddha, the World Honored One, wishes now to expound the great Law, to rain down the rain of the great Law, to blow the conch of the great Law, to beat the drum of the great Law, to elucidate the meaning of the great Law. Good men, in the past I have seen this auspicious portent among the Buddhas. They emitted a beam of light like this, and after that they expounded the great Law. Therefore we should know that now, when the present Buddha manifests this light, we will do likewise. He wishes to cause all living beings to hear and understand the Law, which is difficult for all the world to believe. Therefore he has manifested this auspicious portent."*

"Good men, once, at a time that was an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable number of asamkhya kalpas in the past, there was a Buddha named Sun Moon Bright, Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One, who expounded the correct Law. His exposition was good at the beginning, good in the middle, good at the end. The meaning was profound and far-reaching; the words were skillful and wondrous. It was pure and without alloy, complete, clean and spotless, and bore the marks of Brahma practice."

"For the sake of those seeking to become voice-hearers he responded by expounding the Law of the four noble truths,²⁴ so that they could transcend birth, old age, sickness and death and attain nirvana. For the sake of those seeking to become pratyekabuddhas he responded by expounding the Law of the twelve-linked chain of causation.²⁵ For the sake of the bodhisattvas he responded by expounding the six paramitas²⁶, causing them to gain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi and to acquire the wisdom that embraces all species."

"Then there was another Buddha who was also named Sun Moon Bright, and then another Buddha also named Sun Moon Bright. There were twenty thousand Buddhas like

²⁴ THE FOUR (NOBLE) TRUTHS :

A basic concept in Buddhism which explains the cause of suffering and the way of freedom from them.

1. ALL EXISTENCE IS SUFFERING : This world is full of sufferings. Life is full of dissatisfaction; if we do not have enough money, we suffer; if we have more than enough money, we still worry about not losing it.

2. THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING IS ILLUSION AND DESIRE : There are so many people dying everyday. If we do not know them, we do not feel sad but if we know them, we grieve. It is because we have desire for them to live long.

3. NIRVANA IS THE REALM FREE FROM SUFFERINGS : Peace of mind can be attained after we eliminate all sufferings or dissatisfactions.

4. THE WAYS FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF NIRVANA IS TO PRACTICE EIGHT FOLD PATHS:

They are: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation.

²⁵ TWELVE CAUSES (the Twelve-linked chain of dependent origination) : Ignorance (moo-my), Action (go), Consciousness (shake), Mental functions and matter (my-shake), the Six senses (rook-nigh), Contact (soak), Perception (dg), Desire (AI), Attachment (Hs), Existence (u), Birth (Hs), and Old age and death (ro-shi).

²⁶ SIX PARAMITAS : The six kinds of practice by which Bodhisattvas are able to attain Enlightenment. They are : Donation (fuse), Keeping Precepts (ji-kai), Perseverance (nin-niku), Endeavor (Sho-jin), Meditation (zen-jo), and Wisdom (Chi-e).

this, all with the same appellation, all named Sun Moon Bright. And all had the same surname, the surname Bharadvaja. Maitreya, you should understand that from the first Buddha to the last, all had the same appellation; all were named Sun Moon Bright. They were worthy of all the ten epithets²⁷ and the Law they expounded was good at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end."

"The last Buddha, when he had not yet left family life, had eight princely sons. The first was named Having Intention, the second Good Intention, the third Immeasurable Intention, the fourth Jeweled Intention, the fifth Increased Intention, the sixth Cleansed of Doubt Intention, the seventh Echoing Intention, and the eighth Law Intention. Dignity and virtue came easily to them, and each presided over a four-continent realm."

"When these princes heard that their father had left family life and had gained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, they all cast aside their princely positions and followed him by leaving family life. Conceiving a desire for the Great Vehicle, the constantly carried out Brahma practices, and all became teachers of the Law. They had already planted good roots in the company of a thousand, ten thousand Buddhas."

"At that time the Buddha Sun Moon Bright preached the Great Vehicle sutra entitled Immeasurable Meanings, a Law to instruct the Bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. When he had finished preaching the sutra, he sat cross-legged in the midst of the great assembly and entered into the samadhi of the place of immeasurable meanings, his body and mind never moving. At this time heaven rained down mandarava flowers, great mandarava flowers, manjushaka flowers, and great manjushaka flowers, scattering them over the Buddha and the great assembly, and everywhere the Buddha world quaked and trembled in six different ways."

"At that time the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, and mahoragas, the human and nonhuman beings in the assembly, as well as the petty kings and wheel-turning sage kings - all those in this great assembly gained what they had never had before and, filled with joy, pressed their palms together and gazed at the Buddha with a single mind."

²⁷ THE TEN EPITHETS OF THE BUDDHA

Tathagata: one who has come from the world of truth.

Deserver of Offerings: one who deserves oblations.

Perfectly Enlightened One: one who knows everything perfectly.

Man of Wisdom and Practice: one who sees the truth and walks the way satisfactorily.

Well-Gone: one who is gone to the world of enlightenment.

Knower of the World: one who understands the world.

Unsurpassed Man: one who is not surpassed by anyone.

Instructor of Men: one who trains or instructs men.

Teacher of Gods and Men: one who teaches gods and men.

World-Honored One: one who is honored by the people of the world.

"At that time the Thus Come One emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, one of his characteristic features, lighting up eighteen thousand Buddha lands in the eastern direction. There was no place that the light did not penetrate, just as you have seen it light up these Buddha lands now."

"Maitreya, you should understand this. At that time in the assembly there were twenty million bodhisattvas who were happy and eager to hear the Law. When these bodhisattvas saw this beam of light that illuminated the Buddha lands everywhere, they gained what they had never had before. They wished to know the causes and conditions that had occasioned this light."

"At that time there was a bodhisattva named Wonderfully Bright who had eight hundred disciples. At this time the Buddha Sun Moon Bright arose from his samadhi and, because of the bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright, preached the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. For sixty small kalpas the Buddha remained in his seat without rising, and the listeners in the assembly at that time also remained seated there for sixty small kalpas, their bodies and minds never moving. And yet it seemed to them that they had been listening to the Buddha preach for no more than the space of a meal. At this time in the assembly there was not a single person who in body or mind had the least feeling of weariness."

"When the Buddha Sun Moon Bright had finished preaching this sutra over a period of sixty small kalpas, he spoke these words to the Brahmas, devils, shramanas and Brahmins, as well as to the heavenly and human beings and asuras in the assembly, saying, 'tonight at midnight the Thus Come One will enter the nirvana of no remainder.'"

"At this time there was a bodhisattva named Virtue Storehouse. The Buddha Sun Moon Bright bestowed a prophecy on him, announcing to the monks, 'This bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse will be the next to become a Buddha. He will be called Pure Body, tathagata, arhat, samyak-sambuddha.'"

"After the Buddha had finished bestowing this prophecy, at midnight he entered the nirvana of no remainder."

"After the Buddha had passed away, Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright upheld the Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, for a period of fully eighty small kalpas expounding it for others. The eight sons of the Buddha Sun Moon Bright all acknowledged Wonderfully Bright as their teacher. Wonderfully Bright taught and converted them and roused in them a firm determination to gain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Those princely sons gave offerings to

immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas, and after that all were able to achieve the Buddha way. The last to become a Buddha was named Burning Torch."

"Among the eight hundred disciples of Wonderfully Bright was one named Seeker of Fame. He was greedy for gain and support, and though he read and recited numerous sutras, he could not understand them, but for the most part forgot them. Hence he was called Seeker of Fame. Because this man had in addition planted various good roots, however, he was able to encounter immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas, to make offerings to them, revere, honor and praise them."

"Maitreya, you should understand this. Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright who lived then - could he be known to you? He was no other than I myself. And Bodhisattva Seeker of Fame was you."

"Now when I see this auspicious portent, it is no different from what I saw before. Therefore I suppose that now the Thus Come One is about to preach the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas."

At that time Manjushri, wishing in the presence of the great assembly to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*I recall that in a past age immeasurable, innumerable kalpas ago there was a Buddha,
most honored of men, named Sun Moon Bright.*

*This World-Honored One expounded the Law, saving immeasurable living beings
and numberless millions of bodhisattvas, causing them to enter the Buddha
wisdom.*

*The eight princely sons whom this Buddha sired before taking leave of family life,
when they saw that the great sage had left his family did likewise, carrying out
brahma practices.*

*At that time the Buddha preached the Great Vehicle, a sutra named Immeasurable
Meanings, and in the midst of a great assembly for the sake of the people
established broad distinctions.*

*When the Buddha had finished preaching this sutra he sat in the seat of the Law,
sitting cross-legged in the samadhi called the place of immeasurable
meanings.*

*The heavens rained mandarava flowers, heavenly drums sounded of themselves, and
the heavenly beings, dragons and spirits made offerings to the most honored of
men.*

All the Buddha lands immediately quaked and trembled greatly.

The Buddha emitted a light from between his eyebrows, manifesting signs that are rarely seen.

This light illumined the eastern direction, eighteen thousand Buddha lands, showing how all the living beings there were recompensed in birth and death for their past deed.

That one could see how these Buddha lands, adorned with numerous jewels, shone with hues of lapis lazuli and crystal was due to the illumination of the Buddha's light.

One could also see the heavenly and human beings, dragons, spirits, many yakshas, gandharvas and kimnaras, each making offerings to his respective Buddha.

One could also see Thus Come Ones naturally attaining the Buddha way, their bodies the color of golden mountains, upright, imposing, very subtle and wonderful.

It was as though in the midst of pure lapis lazuli there should appear statues of real gold.

In the midst of the great assembly the World-Honored Ones expounded the principles of the profound Law.

In one after another of the Buddha lands the voice-hearers in countless multitudes through the illumination of the Buddha's light all became visible with their great assemblies.

There were also monks residing in the midst of forests, exerting themselves and keeping the pure precepts as though they were guarding a bright jewel.

One could also see bodhisattvas carrying out almsgiving, forbearances, and so forth, their number like Ganges sands, due to the illumination of the Buddha's light.

One could also see bodhisattvas entering deep into meditation practices, their bodies and minds still and unmoving, in that manner seeking the unsurpassed way.

One could also see bodhisattvas who knew that phenomena are marked by tranquility and extinction, each in his respective land preaching the Law and seeking the Buddha way.

At that time the four kinds of believers seeing the Buddha Sun Moon Bright manifest his great transcendental powers, all rejoiced in their hearts, and each one asked his neighbor what had caused these events.

The one honored by heavenly and human beings just then arose from his samadhi and praised Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright, saying, "You are the eyes of the world, one whom all can take faith in and believe, able to honor and uphold the storehouse of the Dharma. The law that I preach- you alone know how to testify to it."

The World-Honored One, having bestowed this praise, causing Wonderfully Bright to rejoice, preached the Lotus Sutra for fully sixty small kalpas.

He never rose from this seat, and the supreme and wonderful Law that he preached was accepted and upheld in its entirety by the Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright.

After the Buddha had preached the Lotus, causing all the assembly to rejoice, on that very same day he announced to the assembly of heavenly and human beings, "I have already expounded for you the meaning of the true entity of all phenomena.

Now when midnight comes I will enter nirvana.

You must strive with all your hearts and remove yourselves from indulgence and laxity, it is very difficult to encounter a Buddha- you meet one once in a million kalpas."

When the children of the World-Honored One heard that the Buddha was to enter nirvana, each one was filled with sorrow and distress, wondering why the Buddha should so quickly seek extinction.

The sage lord, king of the Law, comforted and reassured the countless multitude, saying, "When I enter extinction you must not be concerned or fearful!

This bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse has already fully understood in his mind the true entity that is without outflows.

He will be next to become a Buddha, bearing the name Pure Body, and he too will save immeasurable multitudes."

That night the Buddha entered extinction, as a fire dies out when the firewood is exhausted.

They divided and apportioned his relics and built immeasurable numbers of towers, and the monks and nuns whose number was like Ganges sands redoubled their exertions, thereby seeking the unsurpassed way.

This Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright honored and upheld the Buddha's storehouse of the Dharma throughout eighty small kalpas, broadly propagating the Lotus Sutra.

These eight princely sons whom Wonderfully Bright converted held firmly to the unsurpassed way and were thus able to encounter innumerable Buddhas.

And after they had made offerings to these Buddhas they followed them in practicing the great way and one after the other succeeded in becoming a Buddha, each in turn bestowing a prophecy on his successor.

The last to become a heavenly being among heavenly beings was named the Buddha Burning Torch.

As leader and teacher of seers he saved immeasurable multitudes.

This Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright at that time had a disciple whose mind was forever occupied with laziness and sloth, who was greedy for fame and profit.

He sought fame and profit insatiably, often amusing himself among clansmen and those of other surnames.

He threw away what he had studied and memorized, neglected and forgot it, failed to understand it.

Because of this he was named Seeker of Fame.

But he had also carried out many good actions and thus was able to meet with innumerable Buddhas.

He made offerings to the Buddhas and followed them in practicing the great way, carrying out all the six paramitas, and now he has met the lion of the Shakyas.

Hereafter he will become a Buddha whose name will be Maitreya, who will save living beings extensively in numbers beyond calculation.

After that Buddha passed into extinction, that lazy and slothful one—he was you, and the Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright—that was the person who is now I myself.

I saw how the Buddha Torch Bright (Sun Moon Bright) earlier manifested an auspicious portent like this.

And so I know that now this present Buddha is about to preach the Lotus Sutra. The signs now are like those of the earlier auspicious portent, this is an expedient means used by the Buddhas.

Now when the Buddha emits this beam of brightness he is helping to reveal the meaning of the true entity of phenomena.

Human beings now will come to know it.

Let us press our palms together and wait with a single mind.

The Buddha will rain down the rain of the Law to fully satisfy all seekers of the way. You who seek the three vehicles,²⁸ if you have doubts and regrets, the Buddha will resolve them for you, bringing them to an end so that nothing remains.

²⁸ THE THREE VEHICLES

Sravakahood (Sho-mon): in which one understands Buddhism by listening, or one who understands Buddhism by reasoning.
 Pratyekabuddhahood (En-gaku): in which one understands Buddhism by oneself or one who can apply Buddhism in daily life.
 Bodhisattvas (Bo-satsu): in which one who seeks Enlightenment and tries to help other to attain Buddhahood.

Chapter Two: Expedient Means

SUMMARY

Sakyamuni Buddha emerged from his deep meditation and began expounding the profound and immeasurable wisdom of the Buddhas. The teachings in this chapter can be summarized into four points:

1. All things we perceive within our five senses exist only temporarily. They are manifested in a thousand different ways. They are all equally important in mutual existence. However, they constantly change while existing harmoniously with each other throughout this universe. All is contained within the law of the Truth.
2. Therefore, all beings are manifestations of the Truth (the Buddha's Wisdom) and possess Buddha nature.
3. The Buddha appeared in the world to expound the Truth. The Buddhas have appeared in order for all beings to realize their Buddha nature, to practice the Bodhisattva's way and to eventually attain enlightenment.
4. Since people were not at first able to understand the Truth because of their closed mindedness due to their material life styles, the Buddha taught many different teachings according to their capacity, such as the doctrines for the people of Sravakahood (Shomon), Pratyekabuddhahood (Engaku) and Bodhisattvas (Bosatsu). However, these are all expedient teachings which lead all beings to the Truth of the One Vehicle, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Thus expedients and the true teaching cannot be separated from each other.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the World-Honored One calmly arose from his samadhi²⁹ and addressed Shariputra, saying: "The wisdom of the Buddhas³⁰ is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it.

"What is the reason for this? A Buddha has personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of Buddhas and has fully carried out an immeasurable number of religious practices. He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known. He has realized the Law that is profound and never known

²⁹ samadhi : Concentration of the mind on a single subject. In this chapter, samadhi signifies deep meditation. Sakyamuni Buddha arose from his deep meditation and is going to reveal the long-awaited most important Dharma.

³⁰The wisdom of the Buddhas : The wisdom to realize the three truths of all phenomena; equality, difference, and totality. For example:

1. All living beings are equal because they have Buddha nature and are able to become Buddhas,
2. All people are different in race, sex, education, background, age, etc.;
3. Therefore, we must see all phenomena in their totality.

before, and preaches it in accordance with what is appropriate³¹, yet his intention is difficult to understand.

"Shariputra, ever since I attained Buddhahood I have through various causes and various similes widely expounded my teachings and have used countless expedient means³² to guide living beings and cause them to renounce attachments. Why is this? Because the Thus Come One is fully possessed by both expedient means and the paramita³³ of wisdom³⁴.

"Shariputra, the wisdom of the Thus Come One is expansive and profound. He has immeasurable [mercy], unlimited [eloquence], power, fearlessness, concentration, emancipation, and samadhis, and has deeply entered the boundless and awakened to the Law never before attained.

"Shariputra, the Thus Come One knows how to make various kinds of distinctions and to expound the teachings skillfully. His words are soft and gentle and delight the hearts of the assembly.

"Shariputra, to sum it up: the Buddha has fully realized the Law that is limitless, boundless, never attained before.

"But stop, Shariputra, I will say no more. Why? Because what the Buddha has achieved is the rarest and most difficult-to-understand Law. The true entity of all phenomena³⁵ can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, inherent cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end."³⁶

³¹Dharma according to the capacities of all living beings: The Buddha always expounds teachings according to the capacity of understanding of the listeners.

³²innumerable expedients: Expedient means to tell untruths in order to lead others to the truth. Furthermore, a lie can therefore signify telling untruths for the teller's sake or benefit.

³³Paramita: Refers to the six practices, the perfection of which ferries one beyond the sea of suffering and mortality to Nirvana. The six Paramitas are the following: Dana, charity or giving, including the bestowing of truth on others; Sila, keeping the discipline; Ksanti, patience under suffering and insult; Virya, zeal and progress; Dhyana, meditation or contemplation; Prajna, wisdom, the power to discern reality or truth. It is the perfection of the last one -- Prajna -- that ferries sentient beings across the ocean of Samsara (the sea of incarnate life) to the shores of Nirvana.

³⁴the paramita of insight: It is one of the paramitas and means to completely realize the three different ways of seeing: ku, ke and chu.

³⁵the reality of all things: It is to completely realize the views of ku, ke and chu, and also to realize the process of how it was consisted in the past, is progressing in the present, and will manifest itself in the future. For instance, it was a tree, then it is a table now, and later it will be fire wood.

³⁶The Ten Suchnesses: The Buddha Sakyamuni liked to analyze the universal truth in many different ways. One of these ways is the Ten Suchnesses in Chapter 2, "Expedient" of the Lotus Sutra. He separated the reality of all things into ten parts in order to examine their appearances, nature, bodies, powers, activities, primary and environmental causes, effect, rewards, and the aforementioned nine factors within every entity. Every person has a face. The facial expression of a person changes to reflect how he or she feels at any given moment. For instance, a gentle face appears to show his serenity. An angry face often reflects feelings of anger. The nature of gentleness and anger dwell in one's mind and body. All physical bodies possess appearances and minds. "Nyoze-so" means "such an appearance," "Nyoze-Sho" means "such a nature," and "Nyoze-tai" means "such a physical manifestation

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The hero of the world is unfathomable.
Among heavenly beings or the people of the world, among all living beings,
none can understand the Buddha.
The Buddha's power, fearlessness, emancipation and samadhis and the
Buddha's other attributes no one can reckon or fathom.
Earlier, under the guidance of countless Buddhas he fully acquired and
practiced various ways, profound, subtle and wonderful doctrines that
are hard to see and hard to understand.
For immeasurable millions of kalpas he has been practicing these ways until in
the place of practice he achieved the goal.
I have already come to see and know completely this great goal and
recompense, the meaning of these various natures and characteristics.
I and the other Buddhas of the ten directions can now understand these things.
This Law cannot be described; words fall silent before it.
Among the other kinds of living beings there are none who can comprehend it,
except the many bodhisattvas³⁷ who are firm in the power of faith.

of a thing;" therefore, all things have various appearances, characters, and bodies. You may think an object like a desk or a chair does not possess inherent nature because they don't have minds. But they do depending on the material that has been used in the construction. A wooden desk can have a warm "feeling" or nature, while a steel chair can have a cold nature. Ice is cold, fire is hot, so as are all other things.

All things also have their own individual powers and activities. The floor has the power to support our bodies and furnishings. Pillars have the power to support the ceiling and the roof. Power, therefore, dwells within these objects. When this power appears outwardly, it becomes an activity. "Nyozē-riki" means "such a potential power," while Nyozē-sa means such a interaction. A man is said to have stronger power than a woman, so he can carry a hundred-pound sack of rice by himself. A woman is said to have tender power, so she can take care of a patient better than a man.

When something happens, there are always primary causes or "Nyozē-in" and environmental causes or "Nyozē-en." To strike a match is a primary cause, but whether you strike it in the air or in water, the result and reward will naturally differ. When you strike a match in air, it produces fire to burn a thing or things, "Nyozē-ka" and food will be cooked, that is "Nyozē-ho." If a match is struck in water, it will never ignite because the environmental cause is wrong. The law of cause and effect does not always bring the same reward. For example, even though seeds are planted in soil at the same time, some seeds will grow while others won't depending upon their surrounding environmental factors. Therefore, we must consider our environmental impacts very carefully.

The above mention factors are equally endowed within all things. That is "Nyozē Hon Matsu Ku Kyo To." If all of these factors harmonize with each other, there is happiness and peace. In reality it is not always so; however, since even if a direct cause is good, the result may be bad. Even if a person has a good character, if he does not show it or act, people will not accept him as a gentleman. This is an example of disharmony.

Thus, the Ten Suchnesses show the reality of all things.

³⁷ Bodhisattva: (Skt) "one whose essence is wisdom". One of the three vehicles for whom the philosophy is taught, depending on their capacity to understand.

Śrāvakaḥood (Sho-mon) : in which one understands Buddhism by listening, or one who understands Buddhism by reasoning. Also referred to as 'voice-hearers.'

Pratyekabuddhaḥood (En-gaku) : in which one understands Buddhism by oneself or one who can apply Buddhism in daily life.

Bodhisattvas (Bo-satsu) : in which one who seeks Enlightenment and tries to help other to attain Buddhaḥood.

The many disciples of the Buddhas in the past have given offerings to the Buddhas, have already cut off all outflows and now are dwelling in their last incarnation.

But even such persons as they have not the power needed.

Even if the whole world were filled with men like Shariputra, though they exhausted their thoughts and pooled their capacities, they could not fathom the Buddha's knowledge.

Even if ten directions were all filled with men like Shariputra or like the other disciples, though they filled the lands in the ten directions and exhausted their thoughts and pooled their capacities, still they could not understand it.

If pratyekabuddhas, acute in understanding, without outflows, in their last incarnation, should fill the worlds in the ten directions, as numerous as bamboos in a grove, though they should join together with one mind for a million or for countless kalpas, hoping to conceive of the Buddha's true wisdom, they could not understand the smallest part of it.

If bodhisattvas newly embarked on their course should give offerings to numberless Buddhas, completely mastering the intent of the various doctrines and also able to preach the Law effectively, like so many rice and hemp plants, bamboos or reeds, filling the lands in the ten directions, with a single mind, with their wonderful knowledge, for kalpas numerous as Ganges sands should all together pool their thoughts and capacities, they could not understand the Buddha's knowledge.

If bodhisattvas who never regress, their number like Ganges sands, with a single mind should join in pondering and seeking, they could not understand it either.

I also announce to you, Shariputra, that this profound subtle and wonderful Law without outflows, incomprehensible, I have now attained in full.

Only I understand its characteristics, and the Buddhas of the ten directions do likewise.³⁸

Shariputra, you should know that the words of the various Buddhas never differ.

Toward the Law preached by the Buddhas you must cultivate a great power of faith.

The world-honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth.

³⁸ The Buddha here refers to the inability to describe or teach the wisdom fully to anyone that doesn't already possess it. It is not an attempt to impress or talk down to his followers ... it is just a 'what's so.'

I announce this to the assembly of voice-hearers and to those who seek the vehicle of the pratyekabuddha; I have enabled people to escape the bonds of suffering and to attain nirvana.

The Buddha, through the power of expedient means, has shown them the teachings of the three vehicles prying living beings loose from this or that attachment³⁹ and allowing them to attain release.

At that time among the great assembly there were voice-hearers, Arhats (Bodhisattvas) whose outflows had come to an end, Ajnata Kuandinya and the others, twelve hundred persons. And there were monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who had conceived a desire to become voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas. Each of these had this thought: *Now for what reason does the World-Honored One so earnestly praise expedient means and state that the Law attained by the Buddha is profound and difficult to understand, that it is very difficult to comprehend the meaning of the words he preaches, that not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas can do so? If the Buddha preaches but one doctrine of emancipation, then we too should be able to attain this Law and reach the state of Nirvana. We cannot follow the gist of what he is saying now.*

At that time Shariputra understood the doubts that were in the minds of the four kinds of believers, and he himself had not fully comprehended. So he addressed the Buddha, saying, *World-Honored One, what causes and conditions lead you to earnestly praise expedient means, the foremost device of the Buddhas, the profound, subtle and wonderful Law that is difficult to understand? From times past I have never heard this kind of preaching from the Buddha. Now the four kinds of believers all have doubts. We beg that the World-Honored One earnestly praise this Law that is profound, subtle and wonderful, difficult to understand?"*

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*Sun of wisdom, great sage and venerable one, at long last you preach this Law.
You yourself declare you have attained power, fearlessness, samadhis,
concentration, emancipation, and these other attributes, and the Law
that is beyond comprehension.*

*This Law attained in the place of practice no one is capable of questioning you
about.*

My intention is hard to fathom, and no one can question me."

No one questions, yet you yourself preach, praising the path you walk on.

Your wisdom is very subtle and wonderful, that which all the Buddhas attain.

³⁹ Attachments in this case refer to all the trappings of the samsara world (external existence) to which people cling.

The arhats who are without outflows and those who seek nirvana now have all fallen into the net of doubt, wondering for what reason the Buddha preaches this.

Those who seek to become pratyekabuddhas, monks and nuns, heavenly beings, dragons and spirits, along with the gandharvas and others, look at one another, filled with perplexity, gazing upward at the most honored of two-legged beings.

What is the meaning of all this?

I beg the Buddha to explain it for us.

Among the assembly of voice-hearers the Buddha has said I am foremost, yet now I lack the wisdom to solve these doubts and perplexities.

Have I in fact grasped the ultimate Law, or am I still on the path of practice?

The sons born from the Buddha's mouth press palms together, gaze upward and wait.

We beg you to put forth subtle and wonderful sounds and at this time explain to us how it really is.

The heavenly beings, dragons, spirits, and the others, their numbers like Ganges sands, the bodhisattvas seeking to be Buddhas in a great force of eighty thousand, as well as the wheel-turning sage kings come from ten thousands of millions of lands, all press their palms and with reverent minds wish to hear the teaching of perfect endowment.

At that time the Buddha addressed Shariputra, saying, "Stop, stop! There is no need to speak further. If I speak of this matter, then the heavenly and human beings throughout the worlds will all be astonished and doubtful."

Shariputra once more spoke to the Buddha, saying, "World-Honored One, we beg you to preach! We beg you to preach! What is the reason? Because this assembly of countless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhyas of living beings in the past have seen the Buddhas; their faculties are vigorous and acute and their wisdom is bright. If they hear the Buddha preach, they will be capable of reverent belief."

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*Dharma King, none more highly honored, speak, we beg you, without reserve!
In this assembly of numberless beings are those capable of reverent belief.*

The Buddha repeated, "Stop, Shariputra! If I speak of this matter, the heavenly and human beings and asuras throughout the worlds will all be astonished and doubtful. The monks who are overbearingly arrogant will fall into a great pit."

At that time the World-Honored One repeated what he had said in verse form:

Stop, stop, no need to speak!
My Law is wonderful and difficult to ponder.
Those who are overbearingly arrogant when they hear it will never show
reverent belief.

At that time Shariputra once more spoke to the Buddha, saying, "*World-Honored One, we beg you to preach! We beg you to preach! In this assembly at present the persons like myself number in the hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions. In age after age we have already attended the Buddhas and received instruction. People of this kind are certain to be capable of reverent belief. Throughout the long night they will gain peace and rest and will enjoy many benefits.*"

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*Supremely honored among two-legged beings, we beg you to preach this
foremost Law.
I who am regarded as the Buddha's eldest son ask you to favor us by preaching
distinctions.
The countless members of this assembly are capable of according reverent
belief to this Law.
The Buddhas have already in age after age taught and converted them in this
manner.
All with a single mind and palms pressed together desire to hear and receive
the Buddha's words.
I and the other twelve hundred of our group, as well as the others who seek to
become Buddhas, beg that for the sake of this assembly you will favor us
by preaching distinctions.
When we hear this Law we will be filled with great joy.*

At that time the World-Honored One said to Shariputra, "*Three times you have stated your earnest request. How can I do other than preach? Now you must listen attentively and carefully ponder. For your sake I will now analyze and explain the matter.*"

When he had spoken these words, there were some five thousand monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen in the assembly who immediately rose from their seats, bowed to the Buddha, and withdrew. What was the reason for this? These persons had roots of guilt that were deep and manifold, and in addition they were overbearingly arrogant. What they had not attained

they supposed they had attained, what they had not understood they supposed they had understood. And because they had this failing, they did not remain where they were.

The World-Honored One was silent and did not try to detain them.

At this time the Buddha said to Shariputra, "Now this assembly of mine is free of branches and leaves, made up solely of the steadfast and truthful. Shariputra, it is well that these persons of overbearing arrogance have withdrawn. Now listen carefully and I will preach for you."

Shariputra said, *"So be it, World-Honored One. We are eager to listen!"*

The Buddha said to Shariputra, "A wonderful Law such as this is preached by the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, at certain times. But like the blooming of the udumbara, such times come very seldom. Shariputra, you and the others must believe me. The words that the Buddhas preach are not empty or false.

"Shariputra, the Buddhas preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, but the meaning is difficult to understand. Why is this? Because we employ countless expedient means, discussing causes and conditions and using words of simile and parable to expound the teachings. This Law is not something that can be understood through pondering or analysis. Only those who are Buddhas can understand it. Why is this? Because the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone. Shariputra, what does it mean to say that the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone?

"The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, to allow them to attain purity. That is why they appear in the world. They wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to cause living beings to awaken to the Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. Shariputra, this is the one great reason for which the Buddhas appear in the world."

The Buddha said to Shariputra, "The Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the Bodhisattvas. All the things they do are at all times done for this one purpose. They simply wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings and enlighten them to it.

"Shariputra, the Thus Come Ones have only a single Buddha vehicle which they employ in order to preach the Law to living beings. They do not have any other vehicle a second one or a third one. Shariputra, the Law preached by all the Buddhas of the ten directions is the same as this.

"Shariputra, the Buddhas of the past used countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines are all for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. These living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, are all eventually able to attain wisdom embracing all species⁴⁰.

"Shariputra, when the Buddhas of the future make their appearance in the world, they too will use countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines will all be for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. And these living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, will all eventually be able to attain wisdom embracing all species.

"Shariputra, the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, who exist at present in the countless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, and millions of Buddha lands in the ten directions, benefit and bring peace and happiness to living beings in large measure, these Buddhas too use countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines are all for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. And these living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, are all eventually able to attain wisdom embracing all species.

"Shariputra, these Buddhas simply teach and convert the Bodhisattvas. They do it because they wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings. They do it because they wish to use the Buddha wisdom to enlighten living beings. They do it because they wish to cause living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom.

"Shariputra, I too will now do the same, I know that living beings have various desires; attachments that are deeply implanted in their minds. Taking cognizance of this basic nature of theirs, I will therefore use various causes and conditions, words of simile and parable, and the power of expedient means, and expound the Law for them. Shariputra, I do this so that all of them may attain the one Buddha vehicle⁴¹ and wisdom embracing all species.

⁴⁰ The Insight of the Buddha : It is to realize the Buddha's wisdom or the reality of all things. Everything is constantly changing. For instance, we exist within the continual process of change from the birth to death. Birth, old age, disease and death are all integral parts of our lives. Therefore, neither unhappiness nor happiness can last forever. We must prepare for what may happen in the future.

All things exist because of relationship to others; thus they themselves have no substance. For example, we cannot exist without food, water, air. We cannot be born without parents. You cannot produce what you are wearing now by yourself. Every being and every thing relies on others. Therefore, we have an obligation to appreciate others. We put our hands together in respect to others and as a sign of that appreciation we say, "Because of you, I am able to exist today!"

⁴¹ One Vehicle, Two or Three?

Three vehicles are as follows:

1. Sravaka or hearers (Shomon): in which one understands Buddhism by listening to others' talking.

"Shariputra, when the age is impure and the times are chaotic, then the defilements of living beings are grave, they are greedy and jealous and put down roots that are not good. Because of this, the Buddhas, utilizing the power of expedient means, apply distinctions to the one Buddha vehicle and preach as though it were three.

"Shariputra, if any of my disciples should claim to be an arhat or a pratyekabuddha and yet does not heed or understand that the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the bodhisattvas, then he is no disciple of mine, he is no arhat or pratyekabuddha.

"Again, Shariputra, if there should be monks or nuns who claim that they already have attained the status of arhat, that this is their last incarnation, that they have reached the final nirvana, and that therefore they have no further intention of seeking anuttara-samyaksambodhi, then you should understand that such as these are all persons of overbearing arrogance. Why do I say this? Because if they are monks who have truly attained the status of arhat, then it would be unthinkable that they should fail to believe this Law. The only exception would be in a time after the Buddha had passed away, when there was no Buddha present in the world. Why is this? Because after the Buddha has passed away it will be difficult to find anyone who can embrace, recite, and understand the meaning of sutras such as this. But if persons at that time encounter another Buddha, then they will attain decisive understanding with regard to this Law.

2. Pratyekabuddha or private Buddhas (Engaku): in which one understands Buddhism by oneself in daily life.

3. Bodhisattva (Bosatsu): in which one seeks Enlightenment and also tries to lead others attain Buddhahood.

All living beings have various desires and attachments deep in their minds. Therefore, Buddhas expound various teachings to them with stories of previous lives, parables, similes and discourses. That is to say, they explain Buddhism with various expedients according to their natures. Buddhism may appear to have many different vehicles, but the Buddha explains that in reality there is only One Vehicle:

"I expound various teachings to all living beings only for the purpose of revealing the One Buddha-Vehicle. There is no other vehicle, not a second or a third."

He continues, "I do all this for the purpose of causing them to realize the teaching of the One Buddha-Vehicle, that is, to obtain the knowledge of the equality and differences of all things, Sāriputra! There is not a second vehicle in the worlds of the ten quarters. How can there be a third?"

He further explains, "Living beings are so full of illusions, so greedy, and so jealous that they implant many roots of evil. Therefore, the Buddhas divide the One Buddha-Vehicle into three as an expedient."

"I expounded the teaching of the Three Vehicles only as an expedient."

Shingyo Suguro explains the Three Vehicles in his book, Introduction to the Lotus Sutra, "Since the Three Vehicles symbolize all the sects of Buddhism united through this principle, the One Vehicle could also mean the unity of all the religions of the world, non-Buddhist as well as Buddhist. In reality, however, we all live in a world of relativity. We cannot ignore the fact that different opinions and different understandings of the world have always existed. According to the Lotus Sutra, this diversity of opinions should be appreciated and understood as valid steps we are taking on the road to the human ideal of the ultimate truth and ultimate value."

"Shariputra, you and the others should with a single mind believe and accept the words of the Buddha. The words of the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, are not empty or false. There is no other vehicle; there is only the one Buddha vehicle.

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

There are monks and nuns who behave with overbearing arrogance, laymen full of self-esteem, laywomen who are lacking in faith.

Among the four kinds of believers, the likes of these number five thousand. They fail to see their own errors, are heedless and remiss with regard to the precepts, clinging to their shortcomings, unwilling to change.

But these persons of small wisdom have already left; the chaff among this assembly has departed in the face of the Buddha's authority.

These persons were of paltry merit and virtue, incapable of receiving this Law. This assembly is now free of branches and leaves, made up only of those steadfast and truthful.

Shariputra, listen carefully, for the Law which the Buddhas have attained, through the power of countless expedient means they preach for the benefit of living beings.

The thoughts that are in the minds of living beings, the different types of paths they follow, their various desires and natures, the good and bad deeds they have done in previous existences-- all these the Buddha takes cognizance of, and then he employs causes, similes and parables, words that embody the power of expedient means, in order to gladden and please them all.

Sometimes he preaches sutras, verses, stories of the previous lives of disciples, stories of the previous lives of the Buddha, of unheard-of things.

At other times he preaches regarding causes and conditions, uses similes, parables, passages of poetry or discourses.

For those of dull capacities who delight in a little Law, who greedily cling to birth and death, who, despite the innumerable Buddhas, fail to practice the profound and wonderful way but are perplexed and confused by a host of troubles-- for these I preach nirvana.

I devise these expedient means and so cause them to enter into the Buddha wisdom.

Up to now I have never told you that you were certain to attain the Buddha way.

The reason I never preached in that manner was that the time to preach so had not yet come.

But now is the very time when I must decisively preach the Great Vehicle.

I use these nine devices, adapting them to the living beings when I preach my basic aim being to lead them into the Great Vehicle, and that is why I preach this sutra.

There are sons of the Buddha whose minds are pure, who are gentle and of acute capacities, who under innumerable Buddhas have practiced the profound and wonderful way.

For these sons of the Buddha I preach this sutra of the Great Vehicle.

And I predict that these persons in a future existence will attain the Buddha way.

Because deep in their minds they think of the Buddha and practice and uphold the pure precepts, they are assured they will attain Buddhahood, and hearing this, their whole bodies are filled with great joy.

The Buddha knows their minds and their practices and therefore preaches for them the Great Vehicle.

When the voice-hearers and bodhisattvas hear this Law that I preach, as soon as they have heard one verse they will all without doubt be certain of attaining Buddhahood.

In the Buddha lands of the ten directions there is only the Law of the one vehicle, there are not two, there are not three, except when the Buddha preaches so as an expedient means, merely employing provisional names and terms in order to conduct and guide living beings and preach to them the Buddha wisdom.

The Buddhas appear in the world solely for this one reason, which is true; the other two are not the truth.

Never do they use a lesser vehicle to save living beings and ferry them across. The Buddha himself dwells in this Great Vehicle, and adorned with the power of meditation and wisdom that go with the Law he has attained, he uses it to save living beings.

He himself testifies to the unsurpassed way, the Great Vehicle, the Law in which all things are equal.

If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person, I would be guilty of stinginess and greed, but such a thing would be impossible.

If a person will believe and take refuge in the Buddha, the Thus Come One will never deceive him, nor will he ever show greed or jealousy, for he has rooted out evil from among the phenomena.

Therefore throughout the ten directions the Buddha alone is without fear.

I adorn my body with the special characteristics and shine my light upon the world.

I am honored by numberless multitudes and for them I preach the emblem of the reality of things.

Shariputra, you should know that at the start I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us, and what I long ago hoped for has now been fulfilled.

I have converted all living beings and caused them all to enter the Buddha way.

If when I encounter living beings I were in all cases to teach them the Buddha way, those without wisdom would become confused and in their bewilderment would fail to accept my teachings.

I know that such living beings have never in the past cultivated good roots but have stubbornly clung to the five desires, and their folly and craving have given rise to affliction.

Their desires are the cause whereby they fall into the three evil paths, revolving wheel-like through the six realms of existence and undergoing every sort of suffering and pain.

Having received a tiny form in the womb, in existence after existence they constantly grow to maturity.

Persons of meager virtue and small merit, they are troubled and beset by manifold sufferings.

They stray into the dense forest of mistaken views, debating as to what exists and what does not, and in the end cling to such views, embracing all sixty-two of them.

They are profoundly committed to false and empty doctrines, holding firmly to them, unable to set them aside.

Arrogant and puffed up with self-importance, fawning and envious, insincere in mind, for a thousand, ten thousand, a million kalpas they will not hear the Buddha's name, nor will they hear the correct Law-- such people are difficult to save.

For these reasons, Shariputra, I have for their sake established expedient means, preaching the way that ends all suffering and showing them nirvana.

But although I preach nirvana, this is not a true extinction.

All phenomena from the very first have of themselves constantly borne the marks of tranquil extinction.

Once the sons of the Buddha have carried out this path, then in a future existence they will be able to become Buddhas.

I have employed the power of expedient means to unfold and demonstrate this doctrine of three vehicles, but the World-Honored Ones, every one of them, all preach the single vehicle way.

Now before this great assembly I must clear away all doubts and perplexities.

There is no discrepancy in the words of the Buddhas, there is only the one vehicle, not two.

For numberless kalpas in the past countless Buddhas who have now entered extinction, a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million types in numbers incapable of calculation – such World-Honored Ones, using different types of causes, similes, and parables, the power of countless expedient means, have expounded the characteristics of teachings.

These World-Honored Ones have all preached the doctrine of the single vehicle, converting countless living beings and causing them to enter the Buddha way.

And these great sage lords, knowing what is desired deep in the minds of the heavenly and human beings and the other living things throughout all the worlds, have employed still other expedient means to help illuminate the highest truth.

If there are living beings who have encountered these past Buddhas, and if they have listened to their Law, presented alms, or kept the precepts, shown forbearance, been assiduous, practiced meditation and wisdom, and so forth, cultivating various kinds of merit and virtue, then persons such as these all have attained the Buddha way.

After the Buddhas have passed into extinction, if persons are of good and gentle mind, then living beings such as these have all attained the Buddha way.

After the Buddhas have passed into extinction, if persons make offerings to the relics, raising ten thousand or a million kinds of towers, using gold, silver and crystal, seashell and agate, carnelian, lapis lazuli, pearls to purify and adorn them extensively, in this way erecting towers; or if they raise up stone mortuary temples or those of sandalwood or aloes, hovenia or other kinds of timber, or of brick, tile clay or earth; if in the midst of the broad fields they pile up earth to make a mortuary temple for the Buddhas, or even if little boys at play should collect sand to make a Buddha tower, then persons such as these have all attained the Buddha way.

If there are persons who for the sake of the Buddha fashion and set up images, carving them with many distinguishing characteristics, then all have attained the Buddha way.

Or if they make things out of the seven kinds of gems, of copper, red or white copper, pewter, lead, tin, iron wood, or clay, or use cloth soaked in lacquer or resin to adorn and fashion Buddha images, then persons such as these have all attained the Buddha way.

If they employ pigments to paint Buddha images, endowing them with the characteristics of hundredfold merit, if they make them themselves or have other make them, then all have attained the Buddha way.

Even if little boys in play should use a piece of grass or wood or a brush, or perhaps a fingernail to draw an image of the Buddha, such persons as these bit by bit will pile up merit and will become fully endowed with a mind of great compassion; they all have attained the Buddha way.

Merely by converting the bodhisattvas they bring salvation and release to numberless multitudes.

And if persons, in the presence of such memorial towers, such jeweled images and painted images, should with reverent minds make offerings of flowers, incense, banners or canopies, or if they should employ persons to make music, striking drums or blowing horns or conch shells, playing pipes, flutes, zithers, harps, balloon guitars, cymbals and gongs, and if these many kinds of wonderful notes are intended wholly as an offering; or if one with a joyful mind sings a song in praise of the Buddha's virtue, even if it is just one small note, then all who do these things have attained the Buddha way.

If someone with a confused and distracted mind should take even one flower and offer it to a painted image, in time he would come to see countless Buddhas.

Or if a person should bow or perform obeisance, or should merely press his palms together, or even should raise a single hand, or give no more than a slight nod of the head, and if this were done in offering to an image, then in time he would come to see countless Buddhas.

And if he himself attains the unsurpassed way and spreads salvation abroad to countless multitudes, he will enter the nirvana of no remainder as a fire dies out when the firewood is exhausted.

If persons with confused and distracted minds should enter a memorial tower and once exclaim, "Hail to the Buddha!" Then all have attained the Buddha way.

If from past Buddhas when they were in the world or after their extinction, they should be those who heard this Law, then all have attained the Buddha way.

The World-Honored Ones of the future, whose numbers will be incalculable, these Thus Come Ones will also employ expedient means to preach the Law, and all these Thus Come Ones through countless expedient means will save and bring release to living beings so that they enter the Buddha's wisdom which is free of outflows.

If there are those who hear the Law, then not one will fail to attain Buddhahood.

The original vow of the Buddhas was that the Buddha way, which they themselves practiced, should be shared universally among living beings so that they too may attain this same way.

The Buddhas of future ages, although they preach hundreds, thousands, millions a countless number of doctrines, in truth do so for the sake of the single vehicle.

The Buddhas, most honored of two-legged beings, know that phenomena have no constantly fixed nature; that the seed of Buddhahood sprouts through causation, and for this reason they preach the single vehicle.

But that these phenomena are part of an abiding Law, that the characteristics of the world are constantly abiding-- this they have come to know in the place of practice and as leaders and teachers they preach expedient means.

The presently existing Buddhas of the ten directions, whom heavenly and human beings make offerings to, who in number are like Ganges sands, they have appeared in the world in order to bring peace and comfort to living beings, and they too preach the Law in this way.

They understand the foremost truth of tranquil extinction and therefore employ the power of expedient means, and though they point out various different paths, in truth they do so for the sake of the Buddha vehicle.

They understand the actions of living beings, the thoughts that lie deep in their minds, the deeds they have carried out in the past, their desires, their nature, the power of their exertions, and whether their capacities are acute or dull, and so they employ various causes and conditions, similes, parables, and other words and phrases, adapting what expedient means are suitable to their preaching.

Now I too am like this; in order to bring peace and comfort to living beings I employ various different doctrines to disseminate the Buddha way.

Through the power of my wisdom I know the nature and desires of living beings and through expedient means I preach these doctrines, causing all living beings to attain joy and gladness.

Shariputra, you should understand that I view things through the Buddha eye, I see the living beings in the six paths, how poor and distressed they are, without merit or wisdom, how they enter the perilous road of birth and death, their sufferings continuing with never a break, how deeply they are attached to the five desires, like a yak enamored of its tail, blinding themselves with greed and infatuation, their vision so impaired they can see nothing.

They do not seek the Buddha, with his great might, or the Law that can end their sufferings, but enter deeply into erroneous views, hoping to shed suffering through great suffering.

For the sake of these living beings I summon up a mind of great compassion.

When I first sat in the place of practice and gazed at the tree and walked around it, for the space of three times seven days I pondered the matter in this way.

The wisdom I have attained, I thought, is subtle, wonderful, the foremost. But living beings, dull in capacity, are addicted to pleasure and blinded by stupidity.

With persons such as this, what can I say, how can I save them?

At that time the Brahma kings, along with the heavenly king Shakra, the Four Heavenly Kings who guard the world, and the heavenly king Great Freedom, in company with other heavenly beings and their hundreds and thousands of followers, reverently pressing their palms together and bowed, begging me to turn the wheel of the Law.

Immediately I thought to myself that if I merely praised the Buddha vehicle, then the living beings, sunk in their suffering, would be incapable of believing in this Law.

And because they rejected the Law and failed to believe it, they would fall into the three evil paths.

It would be better if I did not preach the Law but quickly entered into nirvana. Then my thoughts turned to the Buddhas of the past and the power of expedient means they had employed, and I thought that the way I had now attained should likewise be preached as three vehicles.

When I thought in this manner, the Buddhas of the ten directions all appeared and with Brahma sounds comforted and instructed me.

"Well done, Shakyamuni!" they said.

"Foremost leader and teacher, you have attained the unsurpassed Law. But following the example of all other Buddhas, you will employ the power of expedient means.

We too have all attained the most wonderful, the foremost Law, but for the sake of living beings we make distinctions and preach the three vehicles.

People of small wisdom delight in a small Law, unable to believe that they themselves could become Buddhas.

Therefore we employ expedient means, making distinctions and preaching various goals.

But though we preach the three vehicles, we do it merely in order to teach the bodhisattvas."

Shariputra, you should understand this.

When I heard these saintly lions and their deep, pure subtle, wonderful sounds, I rejoiced, crying "Hail to the Buddhas!"

Then I thought to myself, I have come into this impure and evil world, and as these Buddhas have preached, I too must follow that example in my actions.

After I had thought of the matter in this way, I set out at once for Varanasi. The marks of tranquil extinction borne by all phenomena cannot be explained in words, and therefore I used the power of expedient means to preach to the five ascetics.⁴²

This I termed turning the wheel of the Law, and also with regard to "the sound of nirvana," and "arhat," "Dharma" and Sangha," I used these terms to indicate distinctions.

"From infinite kalpas in the past I have extolled and taught the Law of nirvana, ending the long sufferings of birth and death."

This is how I customarily preached.

Shariputra, you should know this.

When I looked at the Buddha sons, I saw incalculable thousands, ten thousands, millions who had determined to seek the way of the Buddha, everyone with a respectful and reverent mind, all coming to the place of the Buddha, persons who in the past had listened to other Buddhas and heard the Law preached through expedient means.

Immediately the thought came to me that the reason the Thus Come One has appeared is so he may preach the Buddha wisdom.

Now is precisely the time to do so.

Shariputra, you should understand that persons of dull capacity and small wisdom, who are attached to appearances, proud and overbearing, are incapable of believing in this Law.

Now I, joyful and fearless, in the midst of the bodhisattvas, honestly discarding expedient means, will preach only the unsurpassed Way.

When the bodhisattvas hear this Law, they will be released from all entanglements of doubt.

The twelve hundred Arhats, they too will all attain Buddhahood.

Following in the same fashion that the Buddhas of the three existences employ in preaching the Law, I now will do likewise, preaching a Law that is without distinctions.

The times when the Buddhas appear in the world are far apart and difficult to encounter.

And even when they appear in the world it is difficult for them to preach this Law.

⁴² The first five disciples of the Buddha.

Throughout incalculable, innumerable kalpas it is rare that one may hear this Law, and a person capable of listening to this Law, such a person is likewise rare.

It is like the udumbara flower which all the world loves and delights in, which heavenly and human beings look on as something rare, but which appears only once in many ages.

If a person hears this Law, delights and praises it, even if he utters just one word, then he has made offerings to all the Buddhas of the three existences.

But a person like this is very rarely found, rarer than the udumbara flower.

You should have no doubts.

I being king of the doctrines, make this announcement to the entire great assembly.

I employ only the single vehicle way to teach and convert the bodhisattvas.

I have no voice-hearer disciples.

You, Shariputra, and the voice-hearers and bodhisattvas, you should

understand that this wonderful Law is the secret crux of the Buddhas.

In this evil world of the five impurities those who merely delight in and are attached to the desires, living beings such as this in the end will never seek the Buddha way.

When evil persons in ages to come hear the Buddha preach the single vehicle, they will be confused, will not believe or accept it, will reject the Law and fall into the evil paths.

But when there are those with sense of shame, persons of purity who have determined to seek the Buddha way, then for the sake of such as these one should widely praise the way of the single vehicle.

Shariputra, you should understand this.

The Law of the Buddhas is like this.

Employing ten thousand, a million expedient means, they accord with what is appropriate in preaching the Law.

Those who are not versed in this matter cannot fully comprehend this.

But you and the others already know how the Buddhas, the teachers of the world, accord with what is appropriate in employing expedient means.

You will have no more doubts or perplexities but, your minds filled with great joy, will know that you yourselves will attain Buddhahood.

Commentary from
Rev. Shokai Kanai's
Lectures on the Lotus Sutra

The sutras of Theravada Buddhism discuss in detail about how one should behave prudently. Therefore, people in later ages referred to the sutras as the Lesser Vehicle. The sutras of Mahayana Buddhism produced a great degree of philosophical speculation and salvation for all living beings; therefore, people called the sutras the Great Vehicle. Although Sakyamuni Buddha revealed various teachings according to the level of understanding of his audience, the main purpose was for all living beings to become the same as the Buddha. The Lotus Sutra reveals that there are no differences in purpose within the three vehicles (Shomon, Engaku and Bosatsu), or within the Lesser or Great Vehicles. In other words, there are many different methods to teach, but there is only one purpose, that is, to attain Buddhahood. But it does not mean that any method is fine. Lesser methods should be brought up to a higher level. To keep morality is fine, but to keep it by oneself is not enough. One must realize that there is higher individuality than in just preserving morality.

How can one lead others to the One Vehicle?: Shaku-buku or Sho-ju? Shaku-buku means to conquer evil aggressively. "What you are doing is bad. So do my way which is always right!"

Sho-ju means to receive or to embrace others warmly. "You are all right, but there is a better way."

For example: There are ten floors which go up to the top. One person is on the top floor and wishes others come up to the top floor. A person of shaku-buku will say, "You are foolish to stay on the fifth floor. Hurry come up here to the top just like I have." A person of Sho-ju will say, "It is O.K. to stay at the fifth floor, but the top is even better, so hurry and come up."

The sutras before the Lotus Sutra revealed that they separated the three vehicles into hearers, private Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The Buddha stated in these sutras that people who belong to the vehicles of hearers and private Buddhas are not able to become Buddhas. He did not mean; however, that he gave up on the people of the two vehicles. He instead mean that one should not satisfied with these stages, but there is the highest level to achieve of Buddha just as I have."

Thus, the Buddha says in the Lotus Sutra: "Know this, Sâriputra! I once vowed that I would cause all living beings to become exactly as I am."

What are the practices to attain Buddhahood?

Erect stupas. Make the stupa of the Buddha with heaps of sand. Carve an image of the Buddha. Make an image of the Buddha. Draw or cause others to draw in color a picture of the Buddha. Offer flowers, incense, streamers, and canopies to the image or picture of the Buddha. Bow to the image of the Buddha or just join your hands together towards it. Or cause others to do the same.

Shingyo Suguro says in the book, "This teaching states that whenever someone shows sincere faith in the Buddha by performing a good deed, no matter how tiny it may be, this act sets him on the path to Buddhahood, and he or she is sure to become a Buddha eventually. Even though such a person is not yet a Buddha, he or she is on the way, and deserves respect as a future Buddha."

THREE WAYS TO LOOK AT A THING

Why do we repeat to chant the Nyoze-so, Nyoze-tai, ...Nyoze-honmatsu-kukyoto?

It is because there are three different ways to look at a thing. They are equality (ku), difference (ke), and totality (chu). It is based on T'ien-tai's "Three Kinds of Truth; ku, ke and chu." According to this doctrine, nothing exists (ku) by itself because things exist temporally (ke) only depending on other existence; therefore, we must look at all things in their totality (chu).

For instance, let's take an example of a table. A table must have a flat top supported by four legs. If I pull each of these legs off, it is no longer a table; just simple pieces of woods. Therefore, the table as such, existed only temporally.

Another example: I exist today because my parents existed. I also exist because of air, water, heat, food, and other people. If there is no air, water, food or others; I can not exist. I exist temporally because there are air, water, food and others.

Another way to look at all thing in three different ways, according to the Buddha's teaching, everyone is equal (ku) because everyone poses a Buddha nature in which he or she is able to someday become a Buddha. Everyone is equal, but everyone is different (ke) because there are the wise and the foolish, rich and poor, males and females. Women have the privilege of bearing children while men can't. We are equal but different (chu).

Although everyone has a nose, a mouth, and eyes (ku), the shapes of them vary as do fingerprints (ke). Therefore we are equal but different (chu).

Parents love their children equally (ku), but the ways they treat an eighteen year old boy from the two year old girl will naturally differ (ke). If the parents give them the same food in the same quantities, the parents are not being realistic. The parents love their children equally, but they treat each child differently respecting the child's age, sex, and interest. Wise parents treat their children with totality of each individual (chu).

Therefore, peace and happiness never come from insisting on equality only nor on differences only. We have to realize the equality within the differences and the differences within equality. Knowing individual differences, but respecting his or her interests, talents, education, and physical condition is the way forwards peace and harmony. Everyone is equal under the U.S. Constitution, however, we must respect other people's different cultures, backgrounds, and languages. It is the way to bring peace to America.

To remind ourselves of these teachings, we repeat the last phrases of the Hoben-pon chapter three times.

Chapter Three: Simile and Parable

SUMMARY

Chapter 2 discussed every person's innate Buddha nature. Everyone who practices the Bodhisattva way will be able to attain Buddhahood. When the congregation heard this message of Sakyamuni Buddha, they were delighted to hear the teaching of the One Vehicle, which they had never heard before. The vehicle holders of shomon (hearers) and engaku (self-taught) were so joyful that they began to dance because they had been previously taught that people of these two vehicles would not be able to attain Buddhahood.

In Chapter 3, however, Sariputra is assured of his future Buddhahood with the name of Flower-Light Buddha, if he continues to practice the One Buddha Vehicle.

The theoretical teaching of the One Buddha Vehicle expounded in Chapter 2 is illustrated by the parable of the "Three Toy Carts and the Burning House" in Chapter 3.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time Shariputra's mind danced with joy. Then he immediately stood up, pressed his palms together, gazed up in reverence at the face of the Honored-One, and said to the Buddha, *"Just now, when I heard from the World-Honored One, this voice of the Law, my mind seemed to dance and I gained what I had never had before. Why do I say this? Because in the past when I heard a Law of this kind from the Buddha and saw how the bodhisattvas received prophecies that in time they would attain Buddhahood,⁴³ I and the others felt that we had no part in the affair. We were deeply grieved to think we would never gain the immeasurable insight of the Thus Come One.*

"World-Honored One, I have constantly lived in the mountain forest or alone under the trees, sometimes sitting, sometimes walking around, and always I have thought to myself, since I and the others all alike have entered into the nature of the Law, why does the Thus Come One use the Law of the Lesser Vehicle to bring us salvation?"

"But the fault is ours, not that of the World-Honored One. Why do I say this? If he had been willing to wait until the true means for attaining anuttara-samyak-sambodhi was preached, then we would surely have obtained release through the Great Vehicle. But we failed to understand that the Buddha was employing expedient means and preaching what

⁴³ It is a certificate to become a Buddha. It is not a diploma but more like a certificate for entering a college. If you accomplish such and such conditions, then you will become a Buddha. What are these conditions? They are the ways of Bodhisattva, seeking truth and leading others to the truth.

was appropriate to the circumstances. So when we first heard the Law of the Buddha, we immediately believed and accepted it, supposing that we had gained understanding.

"World-Honored One, for a long time now, all day and throughout the night, I have repeatedly taxed myself with this thought. But now I have heard from the Buddha what I had never heard before, a Law never known in the past, and it has ended all my doubts and regrets. My body and mind are at ease and I have gained a wonderful feeling of peace and security. Today at last I understand that truly I am the Buddha's son,⁴⁴ born from the Buddha's mouth, born through conversion to the Law, gaining my share of the Buddha's Law!"

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*When I heard the sound of this Law, I gained what I had never had before.
My mind was filled with great joy, I was released from all bonds of the net of
doubt.*

*From past times I have received the Buddha's teachings and have not been
denied the Great Vehicle.*

*The Buddha's sound is very rarely heard, but it can free living beings from
distress.*

*Already I have put an end to outflows, and hearing this, am freed from care and
distress.*

*I lived in the mountain valleys or under the forest trees, sometimes sitting,
sometimes walking around, and constantly I thought of this matter--
how severely I taxed myself!*

*"Why have I been deceived?" I said. "I and the others are sons of the Buddha too,
all alike have entered the Law that is without outflows, yet in times to
come we will never be able to expound the unsurpassed way.*

*The golden body, the thirty-two features, the ten powers, the various
emancipations-- though all alike share a single Law, these we will
never attain!*

*The eighty types of wonderful characteristics, the eighteen unshared
properties-- merits such as these are all lost to us!"*

*When I was walking around alone, I saw the Buddha among the great
assembly, his fame filling the ten directions, bringing benefit far and*

⁴⁴ All Buddhists are followers of Buddha's teachings. In the other words, we are reborn through the Buddha's teachings. Sakyamuni Buddha is our father. We are his children; therefore, we inherit the Buddha's teachings and the Buddha's merits, and we transfer them to others. This is our task.

wide to living beings, and I thought to myself, I am deprived of such benefits!

How greatly have I been deceived!

Constantly, day and night, whenever I pondered over this, I wanted to ask the World-Honored One whether I had indeed been deprived or not.

Constantly, when I saw the World-Honored One praising the bodhisattvas, then day and night I would mull this matter over.

But now as I listen to the voice of the Buddha, I see he preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, using this hard-to-conceive doctrine of no outflows to lead people to the place of practice.

Formerly I was attached to erroneous views, acting as teacher to the Brahmans. But the World-Honored One, knowing what was in my mind, rooted out my errors and preached nirvana.

I was freed of all my errors and gained understanding of the Law of emptiness.

At that time my mind told me I had reached the stage of extinction, but now I realize that was not true extinction.

If the time should come when I can become a Buddha, then I will possess all the thirty-two features and heavenly and human beings, the many yakshas, dragons, spirits and others will hold me in reverence.

When that time comes, then I can say that at last all has been wiped out without residue.

In the midst of the great assembly, the Buddha declared that I will become a Buddha.

When I heard the sound of this Law my doubts and regrets were all wiped away.

At first, when I heard the Buddha's preaching, there was great astonishment and doubt in my mind.

Is this not a devil pretending to be the Buddha, trying to vex and confuse my mind? I thought.

But the Buddha employed various causes, similes, and parables, expounding eloquently.

His mind was peaceful as the sea, and as I listened, I was freed from the net of doubt.

The Buddha said that in past ages the countless Buddhas who have passed into extinction rested and abided in the midst of expedient means, and all likewise preached this Law.

The Buddhas of the present and future, whose numbers are beyond calculation, they too will use expedient means in expounding this same Law.

*Thus the present World-Honored One, being born and later leaving his family,
attaining the way and turning the wheel of the Law, likewise employs
expedient means in preaching.*

The World-Honored One preaches the true way.

Papiyas would not do that.

Therefore I know for certain this is not a devil pretending to be the Buddha.

But because I fell into the net of doubt I supposed this to be the devil's work.

*Now I hear the Buddha's soft and gentle sound, profound, far-reaching, very
subtle and wonderful, expounding and discoursing on the pure Law, and
my mind is filled with great joy.*

My doubts and regrets are forever ended, I will rest and abide in true wisdom.

*I am certain I will become a Buddha, to be revered by heavenly and human
beings, turning the wheel of the unsurpassed Law and teaching and
converting the bodhisattvas.*

At that time the Buddha said to Shariputra, "Now, in the midst of this great assembly of heavenly and human beings, shramanas, Brahmans and so forth, I say this. In the past, under twenty thousand million Buddhas, for the sake of the unsurpassed way I have constantly taught and converted you. And you throughout the long night followed me and accepted my instruction. Now, because I want to make you recall to mind the way that you originally vowed to follow⁴⁵, for the sake of the voice-hearers I am preaching this Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law,⁴⁶ a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas.

⁴⁵ The vows by Bodhisattvas in previous lives. In Mahayana Buddhism, all Buddhists consider themselves to be Bodhisattvas who try to attain enlightenment while also helping others to do the same. Besides the original vows, the Bodhisattvas have specific vows depending on each individual's environment and circumstances like Amida's Forty-eight Vows. Likewise, you may have observed the original vow during your past life. You may also have your own specific vows in this life.

THE FOUR GREAT VOWS:

1. Sentient being are innumerable, I vow to save them all.
2. Our evil desires are inexhaustible, I vow to quench them all.
3. The Buddha's teachings are immeasurable, I vow to study them all.
4. The Way of the Buddha is unexcelled, I vow to attain the Path Sublime.

All Buddhist sects observe these Four Great Vows although the actual wording may vary slightly. Although these vows sound very difficult, we must try to observe these vows little by a little.

⁴⁶ Lotus flowers symbolize the teachings of the Buddha. These flowers are beautiful and not influenced by soiled water. They also have flowers and seeds at the same time which signify the law of cause, condition and effect.

Dharma means laws or truth, especially the Universal Laws through which the Buddha attained Enlightenment. The Dharma also includes family rules, traffic laws, nation's constitutions, in addition to the Seal of the Three Laws which Buddhism is distinguished from other religions. We must follow these laws.

"Namu Myohō Renge Kyō," means "I devote myself to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma." Thus, those who chant the Sacred Title must respect the rules and laws where he or she lives, besides the Buddha's teachings.

"Shariputra, in ages to come, after a countless, boundless inconceivable number of kalpas have passed, you will make offerings⁴⁷ to some thousands, ten thousands millions⁴⁸ of Buddhas, and will honor and uphold the correct Law. You will fulfill every aspect of the way of the bodhisattva and will be able to become a Buddha with the name Flower Glow Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One.

"Your realm will be called Free from Stain, the land will be level and smooth, pure and beautifully adorned, peaceful, bountiful and happy. Heavenly and human beings will flourish there. The ground will be of lapis lazuli, roads will crisscross it in eight directions, and ropes of gold will mark their boundaries. Beside each road will grow rows of seven-jeweled trees which will constantly flower and bear fruit. And this Flower Glow Thus Come One will employ the three vehicles to teach and convert living beings.

"Shariputra, when this Buddha appears, although it will not be an evil age, because of his original vow he will preach the Law through the three vehicles. His kalpa will be called Great Treasure Adornment. Why will it be called Great Treasure Adornment? Because in that land bodhisattvas will be looked on as a great treasure. Those bodhisattvas will be countless, boundless, inconceivable in number, beyond the reach of reckoning or of simile and parable. Without the power of Buddha wisdom, one cannot understand how many.. Whenever these bodhisattvas wish to walk anywhere, jeweled flowers will uphold their feet.

"These bodhisattvas will not have just conceived the desire for enlightenment, but all will have spent a long time planting the roots of virtue.⁴⁹ Under countless hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, millions of Buddhas they will have carried out Brahma practices in a flawless manner, and will have been perpetually praised by the Buddhas. Constantly they will have cultivated Buddha wisdom, acquiring great transcendental

⁴⁷ There are three kinds of offerings:

1. Material offerings such as money, flower, incense, cloth, etc.,
2. Offerings of Action: such as explaining about Buddhism or Nichiren's words,
3. Spiritual offerings such as placing one's hands together towards the Gohonzon, the Buddha, priests, etc.

⁴⁸ How could it be possible for us to make offerings to many thousands of billions of Buddhas today? How many Buddha's names can you say? Let me see: Sakyamuni, Amida, Mahavairocana, Many Treasures, the Buddha of Healing, and so on. These are only five among billions of Buddhas.

When one realizes the law of the Engi or dependent origination, he or she is called a Buddha. Nichiren Shonin says that those who chant the Odaimoku are Buddhas. You make many offerings to all Nichiren priests and lay people not only to the statues of the Buddha and St. Nichiren at the altar. In this way, you are making offerings to many thousands of Buddhas.

⁴⁹ We have not heard the Lotus Sutra for first time in this life. We already had some relationship with the sutra during our previous lives. For this same reason, whether we are happy or unhappy today, it is due to the causes that we have created in the past. Do not try to blame others. Even if you are unhappy today, try to change your life style with the power of the Odaimoku and the Lotus Sutra. You may or may not change your character, but you can definitely change your life style. Consequently, your future will become bright.

powers and thoroughly understanding the gateways to all the doctrines. They will be upright in character, without duplicity, firm in intent and thought. Bodhisattvas such as this will abound in that land.

"Shariputra, the life span of the Buddha Flower Glow will be twelve small kalpas, not counting the times when he is still a prince and before he becomes a Buddha. The people of his land will have a life span of eight small kalpas. When Flower Glow Thus Come One has lived for twelve small kalpas, he will prophesy that the bodhisattva Firm Full will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. He will announce to the monks, "This bodhisattva Firm Full will be the next to become a Buddha. He will be named Flower Feet Safely Walking, tathagata, arhat, samyak-sambuddha. His Buddha land will be like mine."

"Shariputra, after the Buddha Flower Glow has passed into extinction, the era of the Correct Law will last for thirty-two small kalpas, and the era of the Counterfeit Law will last for another thirty-two small kalpas."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Shariputra, in ages to come you will become a Buddha, of universal wisdom,
venerable, bearing the name Flower Glow, and you will save countless
multitudes.

You will make offerings to numberless Buddhas, be endowed with all the
Bodhisattva practices, the ten powers and other blessings, and will
realize the unsurpassed way.

After countless kalpas have passed, your kalpa will be named Great Treasure
Adornment.

Your world will be called Free from Stain, pure, without flaw or defilement.
Its land will be made of lapis lazuli, its roads bounded by ropes of gold, and
seven-jeweled trees in a jumble of colors will constantly bear blossoms
and fruit.

The bodhisattvas of that realm will always be firm in intent and thought.
Transcendental powers and paramitas-- each will be endowed with all of
these, and under numberless Buddhas they will diligently study the
bodhisattva way.

Thus these great men will be converted by the Buddha Flower Glow.

When that Buddha was still a prince, he gave up his country, abandoned
worldly glory, and in his final incarnation left his family and attained
the Buddha way.

Flower Glow Buddha will continue in the world for a life span of twelve small
kalpas.

The numerous people of his land will have a life span of eight small kalpas.
 After that Buddha has passed into extinction, the Correct Law will endure in
 the world for thirty-two small kalpas, saving living beings far and wide.
 When the correct law has passed away, the Counterfeit Law will endure for
 thirty-two kalpas.
 The Buddha's relics will circulate widely; heavenly and human beings
 everywhere will make offerings to them.
 The actions of Flower Glow Buddha will all be as I have said.
 This most saintly and venerable of two-legged beings will be foremost and
 without peer.
 And he will be none other than you-- you should rejoice and count yourself
 fortunate!

At that time, when the four kinds of believers, namely, monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, and the heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, and others in the great assembly saw how Shariputra received from the Buddha this prophecy that he would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, their hearts were filled with great joy and danced without end. Each one removed the upper robe that he or she was wearing and presented it as an offering to the Buddha. Shakra Devanam Indra, King Brahma, and the countless sons of gods likewise took their wonderful heavenly robes, heavenly mandarava flowers and great mandarava flowers and offered them to the Buddha. The heavenly robes they had scattered remained suspended in the air and turned round and round of themselves. Heavenly beings made music, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand varieties, all at the same time in the midst of the air, raining down quantities of heavenly flowers and speaking these words: *"In the past at Varanasi the Buddha first turned the wheel of the Law. Now he turns the wheel again, the wheel of the unsurpassed, the greatest Law of all!"*

At that time the sons of gods, wishing to state their meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

In the past at Varanasi you turned the wheel of the Law of the four noble truths,⁵⁰ making distinctions, preaching that all things are born and become extinct, being made up of the five components.

⁵⁰ The Four Noble Truths.. is a basic concept in Buddhism which explains the cause of suffering and the way to liberate ourselves from suffering. This was one of the first doctrines taught by Sakyamuni Buddha after his Enlightenment:

1. Ku-tai or "All existence is suffering": Our life is full of sufferings such as birth, disease, old age, death, separation from loved ones, living with hated ones, not-receiving what we wish to have, etc.

2. Jit-tai or "The cause of suffering is illusion and desire": We see many obituaries in the newspaper everyday, but we do not suffer when we see these announcements. We do feel sad, however, only when we find that it is someone we know has died, because we have attachments to that person.

3. Met-tai or "Nirvana is the realm free from suffering": When we eradicate suffering, Nirvana is there.

*Now you turn the wheel of the most wonderful, the unsurpassed great Law.
This Law is very profound and abstruse; there are few who can believe it.
Since times past often we have heard the World-Honored One's preaching, but
we have never heard this kind of profound, wonderful and superior Law.
Since the World-Honored One preaches this Law, we all welcome it with joy.
Shariputra with his great wisdom has now received this venerable prophecy.
We too in the same way will surely be able to attain Buddhahood, throughout
all the many worlds the most venerable, the unsurpassed goal.
The Buddha way is difficult to fathom, but you will preach with expedient
means, according to what is appropriate.
The meritorious deeds we have done in this existence or past existences, and the
blessings gained from seeing the Buddha-- all these we will apply to
the Buddha way.*

At that time Shariputra said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, now I have no mere doubts or regrets. In person I have received from the Buddha this prophecy that I will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. These twelve hundred persons here whose minds are free -- in the past they remained at the level of learning, and the Buddha constantly taught and converted them, saying, My Law can free you from birth, old age, sickness and death and enable you at last to achieve nirvana. These persons, some of whom were still learning and some who had completed their learning, each believed that, because he had shed his views of 'self,' and also his views of 'existing' and 'not existing,' he had attained nirvana. But now from the World-Honored One they hear what they had never heard before, and all have fallen into doubt and perplexity.*

"Very well, World-Honored One. I beg that for the sake of the four kinds of believers you will explain the causes and conditions and make it possible for them to shed their doubts and regrets."

At that time the Buddha said so Shariputra, **"Did I not tell you earlier that when the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, cite various causes and conditions and use similes, parables, and other expressions, employing expedient means to preach the Law, it is all for the sake of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi? Whatever is preached is all for the sake of converting the bodhisattvas.**

4. Do-tai or "The way to destroy suffering": We practice the Eight-Fold Paths of Right Views, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation.

The four noble truths are particularly stressed in Hinayana. A person who pursues these truths is called a shomon or a hearer.

"Moreover, Shariputra, I too will now make use of similes and parables to further clarify this doctrine. For through similes and parables those who are wise can obtain understanding.

"Shariputra, suppose that in a certain town in a certain country there was a very rich man. He was far along in years and his wealth was beyond measure. He had many fields, houses and menservants. His own house was big and rambling, but it had only one gate. A great many people--a hundred, two hundred, perhaps as many as Five Hundred--lived in the house. The halls and rooms were old and decaying, the walls crumbling, the pillars rotten at their base, and the beams and rafters crooked and aslant.

"At that time a fire suddenly broke out on all sides, spreading through the rooms of the house. The sons of the rich man, ten, twenty perhaps thirty, were inside the house. When the rich man saw the huge flames leaping up on every side, he was greatly alarmed and fearful and thought to himself, I can escape to safety through the flaming gate, but my sons are inside the burning house enjoying themselves and playing games, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. The fire is closing in on them, suffering and pain threaten them, yet their minds have no sense of loathing or peril and they do not think of trying to escape!

"Shariputra, this rich man thought to himself, I have strength in my body and arms. I can wrap them in a robe or place them on a bench and carry them out of the house. And then again he thought, this house has only one gate, and moreover it is narrow and small.

"My sons are very young, they have no understanding, and they love their games, being so engrossed in them that they are likely to be burned in the fire. I must explain to them why I am fearful and alarmed. The house is already in flames and I must get them out quickly and not let them be burned up in the fire!

"Having thought in this way, he followed his plan and called to all his sons, saying, 'You must come out at once!' But though the father was moved by pity and gave good words of instruction, the sons were absorbed in their games and unwilling to heed them. They had no alarm, no fright, and in the end no mind to leave the house. Moreover, they did not understand what the fire was, what the house was, what the danger was. They merely raced about this way and that in play and looked at their father without heeding him.

"At that time the rich man had this thought: the house is already in flames from this huge fire. If I and my sons do not get out at once, we are certain to be burned. I must now invent some expedient means that will make it possible for the children to escape harm.

"The father understood his sons and knew what various toys and curious objects each child customarily liked and what would delight them. And so he said to them, The kind of

playthings you like are rare and hard to find. If you do not take them when you can, you will surely regret it later. For example, things like these goat-carts, deer-carts and ox-carts. They are outside the gate now where you can play with them. So you must come out of this burning house at once. Then whatever ones you want, I will give them all to you!

"At that time, when the sons heard their father telling them about these rare playthings, because such things were just what they had wanted, each felt emboldened in heart and, pushing and shoving one another, they all came wildly dashing out of the burning house.

"At that time the rich man, seeing that his sons had gotten out safely and all were seated on the open ground at the crossroads and were no longer in danger, was greatly relieved and his mind danced for joy. At that time each of the sons said to his father, "the playthings you promised us earlier, the goat-carts and deer-carts and ox-carts--please give them to us now!"

"Shariputra, at that time the rich man gave to each of his sons a large carriage of uniform size and quality. The carriages were tall and spacious and adorned with numerous jewels. A railing ran all around them and bells hung from all four sides. A canopy was stretched over the top, which was also decorated with an assortment of precious jewels. Ropes of jewels twined around, a fringe of flowers hung down, and layers of cushions were spread inside, on which were placed vermilion pillows. Each carriage was drawn by a white ox, pure and clean in hide, handsome in form and of great strength, capable of pulling the carriage smoothly and properly at a pace fast as the wind. In addition, there were many grooms and servants to attend and guard the carriage.

"What was the reason for this? This rich man's wealth was limitless and he had many kinds of storehouses that were all filled and overflowing. And he thought to himself, 'There is no end to my possessions. It would not be right if I were to give my sons small carriages of inferior make. These little boys are all my sons and I love them without partiality. I have countless numbers of large carriages adorned with seven kinds of gems. I should be fair-minded and give one to each of my sons. I should not show any discrimination. Why? Because even if I distributed these possessions of mine to every person in the whole country I would still not exhaust them, much less could I do so by giving them to my sons!'

"At that time each of the sons mounted his large carriage, gaining something he had never had before, something he had originally never expected. Shariputra, what do you think of this? When this rich man impartially handed out to his sons these big carriages adorned with rare jewels, was he guilty of falsehood or not?"

Shariputra said, *"No, World-Honored One. This rich man simply made it possible for his sons to escape the peril of fire and preserve their lives. He did not commit a falsehood. Why do I say this? Because if they were able to preserve their lives, then they had already obtained a plaything of sorts. And how much more so when, through an expedient means, they are rescued from that burning house! World-Honored One, even if the rich man had not given them the tiniest carriage, he would still not be guilty of falsehood. Why? Because this rich man had earlier made up his mind that he would employ an expedient means to cause his sons to escape. Using a device of this kind was no act of falsehood. How much less so, then, when the rich man knew that his wealth was limitless and he intended to enrich and benefit his sons by giving each of them a large carriage."*

The Buddha said to Shariputra, *"Very good, very good. It is just as you have said. And Shariputra, the Thus Come One is like this. That is, he is a father to all the world. His fears, cares and anxieties, ignorance and misunderstanding, have long come to an end, leaving no residue. He has fully succeeded in acquiring measureless insight, power and freedom from fear and gaining great supernatural powers and the power of wisdom. He is endowed with expedient means and the paramita of wisdom, his great pity and great compassion are constant and unflagging; at all times he seeks what is good and will bring benefit to all."*

"He is born into the threefold world,⁵¹ a burning house, rotten and old. In order to save living beings from the fires of birth, old age, sickness and death, care suffering, stupidity, misunderstanding, and the three poisons; to teach and convert them and enable them to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi."

"He sees living beings seared and consumed by birth, old age, sickness and death, care and suffering,⁵² sees them undergo many kinds of pain because of their greed and attachment and striving they undergo numerous pains in their present existence, and later they undergo the pain of being reborn in hell or as beasts or hungry spirits. Even if they are

⁵¹ The triple world is the world of unenlightened men. It is divided into three:

- I. The world of desire, whose inhabitants have appetite and sexual desire.
- II. The world of form, whose inhabitants have neither appetite nor sexual desire such as rocks and plants.
- III. The formless world, whose inhabitants have no physical forms such as air, gas.

We are living in this triple world of the burning house that is filled with suffering. Buddhism starts with the concept that "All existence is suffering." People may think that Buddhism is too pessimistic, but it is not so. Biological suffering is a part of the process of life. Buddhism teaches us how to react to suffering.

⁵² There are eight kinds of suffering which including the above four. The other four are:

the suffering derived from being separated from loved ones,
the sufferings derived from being together with people we dislike,
the suffering derived from not being able to obtain what one wants, and
the suffering derived from being attached to the five elemental aggregates of which one's body, mind and environment are composed.

Shinjo Suguro, the author of the Introduction to the Lotus Sutra, says, "All existence is suffering' is not a pessimistic view of life. Rather, it can be the reverse image of a positive view -- strive to live a better life... the establishment of a world without conflict where each individual considers the happiness and interests of others to be the same as his own. This is the Buddha's Pure Land."

reborn in the heavenly realm or the realm of human beings, they undergo the pain of poverty and want, the pain of parting from loved ones, the pain of encountering those they detest--all these many different kinds of pain.

"Yet living beings drowned in the midst of all this, delight and amuse themselves, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. They feel no sense of loathing and make no attempt to escape. In this burning house, which is the threefold world, they race about to east and west, and though they encounter great pain, they are not distressed by it.

"Shariputra, when the Buddha sees this, then he thinks to himself, I am the father of living beings and I should rescue them from their sufferings and give them the joy of the measureless and boundless Buddha wisdom so that they may find their enjoyment in that.

"Shariputra, the Thus Come One also has this thought: if I should merely employ supernatural powers and the power of wisdom; if I should set aside expedient means and for the sake of living beings should praise the Thus Come One's insight, power and freedom from fear, then living beings would not be able to gain salvation. Why? Because these living beings have not yet escaped from birth, old age, sickness, death, care and suffering, but are consumed by flames in the burning house that is the threefold world. How could they be able to understand the Buddha's wisdom?

"Shariputra, that rich man, though he had strength in his body and arms, did not use it. He merely employed a carefully contrived expedient means and thus was able to rescue his sons from the peril of the burning house, and afterward gave each of them a large carriage adorned with rare jewels. And the Thus Come One does the same. Though he possesses power and freedom from fear, he does not use these. He merely employs wisdom and expedient means to rescue living beings from the burning house of the threefold world, expounding to them the three vehicles, the vehicle of the voice-hearer, that of pratyekabuddha, and that of the Buddha.

"He says to them, 'You must not be content to stay in this burning house of the threefold world! Do not be greedy for its coarse and shoddy forms, sounds, scents, tastes and sensations! If you become attached to them and learn to love them, you will be burned up! You must come out of this threefold world at once so that you can acquire the three vehicles, the vehicles of the voice-hearer, the pratyekabuddha and the Buddha. I promise you now that you will get them, and that promise will never prove false. You have only to apply yourselves with diligent effort!'

"The Thus Come One employs this expedient means to lure living beings into action. And then he says to them, 'You should understand that these doctrines of the three vehicles are all praised by the sages. They are free, without entanglements, leaving nothing further to

depend upon or seek. Mount these three vehicles, gain roots that are without outflows, gain powers, awareness, the way, meditation, emancipation, samadhis, and then enjoy yourselves. You will gain the delight of immeasurable peace and safety.'

"Shariputra, if there are living beings who are inwardly wise in nature, and who attend the Buddha, the World-Honored One, hear the Law, believe and accept it, and put forth diligent effort, desiring to escape quickly from the threefold world and seeking to attain nirvana, they shall be called [those who ride] the vehicle of the voice hearer.

"They are like those sons who left the burning house in the hope of acquiring goat-carts.

"If there are living beings who attend the Buddha, the World-Honored One, hear the Law, believe and accept it, and put forth diligent effort, seeking wisdom that comes of itself, taking solitary delight in goodness and tranquility, and profoundly understanding the causes and conditions of all phenomena, they shall be called [those who ride] the vehicle of the pratyekabuddha. They are like the sons who left the burning house in the hope of acquiring deer-carts.

"If there are living beings who attend the Buddha, the World-Honored One, hear the Law, believe and accept it, and put forth diligent effort, seeking comprehensive wisdom, the insight of the Thus Come One, powers and freedom from fear, who pity and comfort countless living beings, bring benefit to heavenly and human beings, and save them all, they shall be called [those who ride] the Great Vehicle. Because the bodhisattvas seek this vehicle, they are called mahasattvas. They are like the sons who left the burning house in the hope of acquiring ox-carts.

"Shariputra, that rich man, seeing that his sons had all gotten out of the burning house safely and were no longer threatened, recalled that his wealth was immeasurable and presented each of his sons with a large carriage. And the Thus Come One does likewise. He is the father of all living beings. When he sees that countless thousands of millions of living beings, through the gateway of the Buddha's teaching, can escape the pains of the threefold world, the fearful and perilous road, and gain the delights of nirvana, the Thus Come One at that time has this thought: I possess measureless, boundless wisdom, power, fearlessness, the storehouse of the Law of the Buddhas. These living beings are all my sons. I will give the Great Vehicle to all of them equally so that there will not be those who gain extinction by themselves, but that all may do so through the extinction of the Thus Come One.

"To all the living beings who have escaped from the threefold world he then gives the delightful gifts of the meditation, emancipation, and so forth, of the Buddhas. All these are

uniform in characteristics, uniform in type, praised by the sages, capable of producing pure, wonderful, supreme delight.

"Shariputra, that rich man first used three types of carriages to entice his sons, but later he gave them just the large carriage adorned with jewels, the safest, most comfortable kind of all. Despite this, that rich man was not guilty of falsehood. The Thus Come One does the same, and he is without falsehood. First he preaches the three vehicles to attract and guide living beings, but later he employs just the Great Vehicle to save them. Why? The Thus Come One possesses measureless wisdom, power, freedom from fear, the storehouse of the Law. He is capable of giving to all living beings the Law of the Great Vehicle. But not all of them are capable of receiving it.

"Shariputra, for this reason you should understand that the Buddhas employ the power of expedient means. And because they do so, they make distinctions in the one Buddha vehicle and preach it as three."

The Buddha, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Suppose there was a rich man who had a large house.
This house was very old, and decayed and dilapidated as well.
The halls, though lofty, were in dangerous condition beams and rafters were slanting
and askew, foundations and steps were crumbling.
Walls were cracked and gaping and the plaster had fallen off of them.
The roof thatch was in disrepair or missing, the tips of the eaves had dropped off.
The fences surrounding it were crooked or collapsed and heaped rubbish was piled all
around.
Some Five Hundred persons lived in the house.
Kites, owls, hawks, eagles, crows, magpies, doves, pigeons, lizards, snakes, vipers,
scorpions, centipedes and millipedes, newts and ground beetles, weasels,
raccoon dogs, mice, rats, hordes of evil creatures scurried this way and that.
Places that stank of excrement overflowed in streams of filth where dung beetles and
other creatures gathered.
Foxes, wolves and jackals gnawed and trampled in the filth or tore apart dead bodies,
scattering bones and flesh about.
Because of this, packs of dogs came racing to the spot to snatch and tear, driven by
hunger and fear, searching everywhere for food, fighting, struggling and
seizing, baring their teeth, snarling and howling.
That house was fearful, frightening, so altered was its aspect.
In every part of it there were goblins and trolls, yakshas and evil spirits who feed on
human flesh or on poisonous creatures.

The various evil birds and beasts bore offspring, hatched and nursed them, each hiding and protecting its young, but the yakshas outdid one another in their haste to seize and eat them.

And when they had eaten their fill, their evil hearts became fiercer than ever; the sound of their wrangling and contention was terrifying indeed.

Kumbhanda demons crouched on clumps of earth or leaped one or two feet off the ground, idling, wandering here and there, amusing themselves according to their whims.

Sometimes they seized a dog by two of its legs and beat it till it had lost its voice, or planted their feet on the dog's neck, terrifying it for their own delight.

Again there were demons with large tall bodies, naked in form, black and emaciated constantly living there, who would cry out in loud ugly voices, shouting and demanding food.

There were other demons whose throats were like needles, or still other demons with heads like the head of an ox, some feeding on human flesh, others devouring dogs.

Their hair like tangled weeds, cruel, baleful, ferocious, driven by hunger and thirst, they dashed about shrieking and howling.

The yakshas and starving spirits and the various evil birds and beasts hungrily pressed forward in all directions, peering out at the windows.

Such were the perils of this house, threats and terrors beyond measure.

This house, old and rotting, belonged to a certain man and that man had gone nearby and he had not been out for long when a fire suddenly broke out in the house.

In one moment from all four sides the flames rose up in a mass.

Ridgepoles, beams, rafters, pillars exploded with a roar, quivering, splitting, broke in two and came rumbling down as walls and partitions collapsed.

The various demons and spirits lifted their voices in a great wail, the hawks, eagles and other birds, the kumbhanda demons, were filled with panic and terror, not knowing how to escape.

The evil beasts and poisonous creatures hid in their holes and dens, and the pishacha demons, who were also living there, because they had done so little that was good, were oppressed by the flames and attacked one another, drinking blood and gobbling flesh.

The jackals and their like were already dead by this time and the larger of the evil beasts vied in devouring them.

Foul smoke swirled and billowed up, filling the house on every side.

The centipedes and millipedes, the poisonous snakes and their kind, scorched by the flames, came scurrying out of their lairs, whereupon the kumbhanda demons pounced on them and ate them.

In addition, the starving spirits, the fire raging about their heads, hungry, thirsty, tormented by the heat, raced this way and that in terror and confusion. Such was the state of that house, truly frightening and fearful; malicious injury, the havoc of fire— many ills, not just one, afflicted it.

At this time the owner of the house was standing outside the gate when he heard someone say, "A while ago your various sons, in order to play their games, went inside the house.

They are very young and lack understanding and will be wrapped up in their amusements."

When the rich man heard this, he rushed in alarm into the burning house, determined to rescue his sons and keep them from being burned by the flames.

He urged his sons to heed him, explaining the many dangers and perils, the evil spirits and poisonous creatures, the flames spreading all around, the multitude of sufferings that would follow one another without end, the poisonous snakes, lizards and vipers, as well as the many yakshas and kumbhanda demons, the jackals, foxes and dogs, hawks, eagles, kites, owls, ground beetles and similar creatures driven and tormented by hunger and thirst, truly things to be feared.

His sons could not stay in such a perilous place, much less when it was all on fire! But the sons had no understanding and although they heard their father's warnings, they continued engrossed in their amusements, never ceasing their games.

At that time the rich man thought to himself: My sons may behave in this manner, adding to my grief and anguish.

In this house at present there is not a single joy, and yet my sons, wrapped up in their games, refuse to heed my instructions and will be destroyed by the fire!

Then it occurred to him to devise some expedient means, and he said to his sons, "I have many kinds of rare and marvelous toys, wonderful jeweled carriages, goat-carts, deer-carts, carts drawn by big oxen.

They are outside the gate right now you must come out and see them!
I have fashioned these carts explicitly for you.
You may enjoy whichever you choose, play with them as you like!

When the sons heard this description of the carts, at once they vied with one another in dashing out of the house, till they reached the open ground, away from all peril and danger.

When the rich man saw that his sons had escaped from the burning house and were standing in the crossroads, he seated himself on a lion seat, congratulating himself in these words: "Now I am content and happy.

These sons of mine have been very difficult to raise.
Ignorant, youthful, without understanding, they entered that perilous house with its many poisonous creatures and its goblins to be feared.

The roaring flames of the great fire rose up on all four sides, yet those sons of mine still clung to their games.
But now I have saved them, caused them to escape from danger.

That is the reason, good people, I am content and happy."
At that time the sons, seeing their father comfortably seated, all went to where he was and said to him: "Please give us the three kinds of jeweled carriages you promised us earlier.

You said if we came out of the house you'd give us three kinds of carts and we could choose whichever we wished.

Now is the time to give them to us!"

The rich man was very wealthy and had many storehouses.

With gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashells, agate, and other such precious things he fashioned large carriages beautifully adorned and decorated, with railings running around them and bells hanging from all sides.

Ropes of gold twisted and twined, nets of pearls stretched over the top, and fringes of golden flowers hung down everywhere.

Multicolored decorations wound around and encircled the carriages, soft silks and gauzes served for cushions, with fine felts of most wonderful make valued at thousands or millions, gleaming white and pure, to spread over them.

There were large white oxen, sleek, stalwart, of great strength, handsome in form, to draw the jeweled carriages, and numerous grooms and attendants to accompany and guard them.

These wonderful carriages the man presented to each of his sons alike.

The sons at that time danced for joy, mounting the jeweled carriages, driving off in all directions, delighting and amusing themselves freely and without hindrance.

I say this to you, Shariputra- I am like this rich man.

I, most venerable of the sages, am the father of this world and all living beings are my children.

But they are deeply attached to worldly pleasures and lacking in minds of wisdom.

There is no safety in the threefold world; it is like a burning house, replete with a multitude of sufferings, truly to be feared, constantly beset with the griefs and pains of birth, old age, sickness and death, which are like fires raging fiercely and without cease.

The Thus Come One has already left the burning house of the threefold world and dwells in tranquil quietude in the safety of forest and plain.

But now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children.

Now this place is beset by many pains and trials.

I am the only person who can rescue and protect others, but though I teach and instruct them, they do not believe or accept my teachings, because, tainted by desires, they are deeply immersed in greed and attachment.

So, I employ an expedient means, describing to them the three vehicles, causing all living beings to understand the pains of the threefold world, and then I set forth and expound a way whereby they can escape from the world.

If these children of mine will only determine in their minds to do so, they can acquire all the three understandings and the six transcendental powers, can become pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas who never regress.

I say to you, Shariputra, for the sake of living beings I employ these similes and parables to preach the single Buddha vehicle.

If you and the others are capable of believing and accepting my words, then all of you are certain to attain the Buddha way.

This vehicle is subtle, wonderful, foremost in purity; throughout all worlds it stands unsurpassed.

The Buddha delights in and approves it, and all living beings should praise it, offer it alms and obeisance.

There are immeasurable thousands of millions of powers, emancipations, meditations, wisdoms, and other attributes of the Buddha.

But if the children can obtain this vehicle, it will allow them day and night for unnumbered kalpas to find constant enjoyment, to join the bodhisattvas and the multitude of voice-hearers in mounting this jeweled vehicle and proceeding directly to the place of practice.

For these reasons, though one should seek diligently in the ten directions, he will find no other vehicles except when the Buddha preaches them as an expedient means.

I tell you, Shariputra, you and the others are all my children, and I am a father to you. For repeated kalpas you have burned in the flames of manifold sufferings, but I will save you all and cause you to escape from the threefold world.

Although earlier I told you that you had attained extinction, that was only the end of birth and death, it was not true extinction.

Now what is needed is simply that you acquire Buddha wisdom.

If there are bodhisattvas here in this assembly, let them with a single mind listen to the true Law of the Buddhas.

Though the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, employ expedient means, the living beings converted by them are all bodhisattvas.

If there are persons of little wisdom who are deeply attached to love and desire, because they are that way, the Buddha preaches for them the rule of suffering.

Then the living beings will be glad in mind, having gained what they never had before.

The rule of suffering which the Buddha preaches is true and never varies.

If there are living beings who do not understand the root of suffering, who are deeply attached to the causes of suffering and cannot for a moment put them aside, because they are that way, the Buddha uses expedient means to preach the way.

As to the cause of all suffering, it has its root in greed and desire.

If greed and desire are wiped out, it will have no place to dwell.

To wipe out all suffering~ this is called the third rule.

For the sake of this rule, the rule of extinction, one practices the way.

And when one escapes from the bonds of suffering this is called attaining emancipation.

By what means can a person attain emancipation?

Separating oneself from falsehood and delusion~ this alone may be called emancipation.

But if a person has not truly been able to emancipate himself from everything, then the Buddha will say he has not achieved true extinction, because such a person has not yet gained the unsurpassed way.

My purpose is not to try to cause them to reach extinction.

I am the Dharma King, free to do as I will with the Law.

To bring peace and safety to living beings~ that is the reason I appear in the world.

I say to you, Shariputra, this Dharma seal of mine I preach because I wish to bring benefit to the world.

You must not recklessly transmit it wherever you happen to wander.

If there is someone who hears it, responds with joy and gratefully accepts it, you should know that person is an avivartika.

If there is someone who believes and accepts the Law of this sutra, that person has already seen the Buddhas of the past, has respectfully offered alms to them and listened to this Law.

If there is someone who can believe what you preach then that person has seen me, and has also seen you and the other monks and the bodhisattvas.

This Lotus Sutra is preached for those with profound wisdom.

If persons of shallow understanding hear it, they will be perplexed and fail to comprehend.

As for all the voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas, in this sutra there are things that are beyond their powers.

Even you, Shariputra, in the case of this sutra were able to gain entrance through faith alone.

How much more so, then, the other voice-hearers.

Those other voice-hearers it is because they have faith in the Buddha's words that they can comply with this sutra, not because of any wisdom of their own.

Also, Shariputra, to persons who are arrogant or lazy or taken up with views of the self, do not preach this sutra.

Those with the shallow understandings of ordinary persons, who are deeply attached to the five desires, cannot comprehend it when they hear it.

Do not preach it to them.

If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra, immediately he will destroy all the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world.

Or perhaps he will scowl with knitted brows and harbor doubt or perplexity.

Listen and I will tell you the penalty this person must pay.

Whether the Buddha is in the world or has already entered extinction, if this person should slander a sutra such as this, or on seeing those who read, recite, copy and uphold this sutra, should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them, the penalty this person must pay listen, I will tell you now: When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell, be confined there for a whole kalpa, and when the kalpa ends, be born there again.

He will keep repeating this cycle for a countless number of kalpas.

Though he may emerge from hell, he will fall into the realm of beasts, becoming a dog or jackal, his form lean and scruffy, dark, discolored, with scabs and sores, something for men to make sport of.

Or again he will be hated and despised by men, constantly plagued by hunger and thirst, his bones and flesh dried up, in life undergoing torment and hardship, in death buried beneath the tiles and stones.

Because he cut off the seeds of Buddhahood he will suffer this penalty.

If he should become a camel or be born in the shape of a donkey, his body will constantly bear heavy burdens and have the stick or whip laid on it.

He will think only of water and grass and understand nothing else.

Because he slandered this sutra, this is the punishment he will incur.

Or he will be born as a jackal who comes to the village, body all scabs and sores, having only one eye, by the boys beaten and cuffed, suffering grief and pain, sometimes to the point of death.

And after he has died he will be born again in the body of a serpent, long and huge in size, measuring Five Hundred yojanas, deaf, witless, without feet, slithering along on his belly, with little creatures biting and feeding on him, day and night undergoing hardship, never knowing rest.

Because he slandered this sutra, this is the punishment he will incur.

If he should become a human being, his faculties will be blighted and dull, he will be puny, vile, bent, crippled, blind, deaf, hunchbacked.

The things he says people will not believe, the breath from his mouth will be constantly foul, he will be possessed by devils, poor and lowly, ordered around by others, plagued by many ailments, thin and gaunt, having no one to turn to. Though he attached himself to others, they would never think of him; though he might gain something, he would at once lose or forget it.

Though he might practice the art of medicine and by its methods cure someone's disease, the person would grow sicker from some other malady and perhaps in the end would die.

If he himself had an illness, no one would aid or nurse him, and though he took good medicine, it would only make his condition worse.

If others should turn against him, he would find himself plundered and robbed. His sins would be such that they would bring unexpected disaster on him.

A sinful person of this sort will never see the Buddha, the king of the many sages, preaching the Law, teaching and converting.

A sinful person of this sort will constantly be born amid difficulties, crazed, deaf, confused in mind, and never will hear the Law.

For countless kalpas numerous as Ganges sands he will at birth become deaf and dumb, his faculties impaired, will constantly dwell in hell, strolling in it as though it were a garden, and the other evil paths of existence he will look on as his own home.

Camel, donkey, pig, dog- these will be the forms he will take on.

Because he slandered this sutra, this is the punishment he will incur.

If he should become a human being, he will be deaf, blind, and dumb.

Poverty, want, all kinds of decay will be his adornment; water blisters, diabetes, scabs, sores, ulcers, maladies such as these will be his garments.

His body will always smell bad, filthy and impure.

Deeply attached to views of self, he will grow in anger and hatred; aflame with licentious desires, he will not spurn even birds or beasts.

Because he slandered this sutra, this is the punishment he will incur.

I tell you, Shariputra, if I were to describe the punishments that fall on persons who slander this sutra, I could exhaust a kalpa and never come to the end.

For this reason I expressly say to you, do not preach this sutra to persons who are without wisdom.

But if there are those of keen capacities, wise and understanding, of much learning and strong memory, who seek the Buddha way, then to persons such as this it is permissible to preach it.

If there are persons who have seen hundreds and thousands and millions of Buddhas, have planted many good roots and are firm and deeply committed in mind, then to persons such as this it is permissible to preach it.

If there are persons who are diligent, constantly cultivating a compassionate mind, not begrudging life or limb, then it is permissible to preach it.

If there are persons who are respectful, reverent with minds set on nothing else, who separate themselves from common folly to live alone among mountains and waters, then to persons such as this it is permissible to preach it.

Again, Shariputra, if you see a person who thrusts aside evil friends and associates with good companions, then to a person such as this it is permissible to preach it.

If you see a son of the Buddha observing the precepts, clean and spotless as a pure bright gem, seeking the Great Vehicle Sutra, then to a person such as this it is permissible to preach it.

If a person is without anger, upright and gentle in nature, constantly pitying all beings, respectful and reverent to the Buddhas, then to a person such as this it is permissible to preach it.

Again, if a son of the Buddha in the midst of the great assembly should with a pure mind employ various causes and conditions, similes, parables, and other expressions to preach the Law in unhindered fashion, to a person such as this it is permissible to preach it.

If there are monks who, for the sake of comprehensive wisdom, seek the Law in every direction, pressing palms together, gratefully accepting, desiring only to accept and embrace the sutra of the Great Vehicle and not accepting a single verse of the other sutras, to persons such as this it is permissible to preach it.

If a person, earnest in mind, seeks this sutra as though he were seeking the Buddha's relics, and having gained and gratefully accepted it, that person shows no intention of seeking other sutras and has never once given thought to the writings of the non-Buddhist doctrines, to a person such as this it is permissible to preach it.

I tell you Shariputra, if I described all the characteristics of those who seek the Buddha way, I could exhaust a kalpa and never be done.

Persons of this type are capable of believing and understanding.

Therefore for them you should preach the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law.

Chapter Four: Belief and Understanding

SUMMARY

It is not enough to maintain a feeling of blind belief. Understanding helps faith, while belief and understanding develop into action.

The Four Great Shomons or hearers of the Law of Buddhism were overjoyed to hear the Dharma that they had never heard before and to see that Sâriputra, one of their fellow shomons, was assured of his own future Buddhahood with the name of Flower-Light Buddha in the preceding chapter. So they commented that it was just as if they had obtained innumerable treasures without seeking them. Then they revealed the parables of "The Rich Man and His Poor Son."

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time, when the men of lifelong wisdom Subhuti, Mahakatyayana, Mahakashyapa, and Mahamaudgalyayana heard from the Buddha a Law that they had never known before, and heard the World-Honored One prophesy that Sâriputra would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, their minds were moved as seldom before and danced for joy. At once they rose from their seats, arranged their robes, bared their right shoulders⁵³ and bowed their right knees to the ground. Pressing their palms together with a single mind, they bent their bodies in a gesture of respect and, gazing up in reverence at the face of the Honored One, said to the Buddha: *"We stand at the head of the monks and are all of us old and decrepit. We believed that we had already attained nirvana and that we were incapable of doing more, and so we never sought to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.*

"It has been a long time since the World-Honored One first began to expound the Law. During that time we have sat in our seats, our bodies weary and inert, meditating solely on the concepts of emptiness, non-form, and non-action. But as to the pleasures and transcendental power of the Law of the bodhisattva or the purifying of Buddha lands and the salvation of living beings—these our minds took no joy in. Why is this? Because the World-Honored One had made it possible for us to transcend the threefold world and to attain the enlightenment of nirvana.

⁵³ It was the custom in India to expose one's shoulder, which denoted a sincere heart. Consequently, priests and lay people in Nichiren Shu put their kesa on from their left shoulders and not from their right shoulders.

Moreover, we are old and decrepit. When we heard of this anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, which the Buddha uses to teach and convert the bodhisattvas, our minds were not filled with any thought of joy or approval. But now in the presence of the Buddha we have heard this voice-hearer receive a prophecy that he will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi and our minds are greatly delighted. We have gained what we have never before. Suddenly we have been able to hear a Law that is rarely encountered, something we never expected up to now, and we look upon ourselves as profoundly fortunate. We have gained great goodness and benefit, an immeasurably rare jewel, something unsought that came of itself.⁵⁴

"World-Honored One, we would be pleased now to employ a parable to make clear our meaning. Suppose there was a man, still young in years, who abandoned his father, ran away,⁵⁵ and lived for a long time in another land, for perhaps ten, twenty, or even fifty years. As he drew older, he found himself increasingly poor and in want.⁵⁶ He hurried about in every direction, seeking clothing and food, wandering farther and farther afield until by chance he turned his steps in the direction of his homeland.⁵⁷

The father meanwhile had been searching for his son without success and had taken up residence in a certain city. The father's household was very wealthy, with immeasurable riches and treasures.⁵⁸ Gold, silver, lapis Lazuli, coral, amber, and crystal beads all filled and overflowed from his storehouses. He had many grooms and menservants, clerks and attendants, and elephants, horses, carriages, oxen, and goats beyond number. He engaged in profitable ventures at home and in all the lands around, and also had dealings with many merchants and traveling vendors.

"At this time the impoverished son wandered from village to village, passing through various lands and towns, till at last he came to the city where his father was residing. The father thought constantly of his son, but though he had been parted from him for over fifty years, he had never told anyone else about the matter. He merely pondered to himself, his heart filled with regret and longing. He thought to himself that he was old and decrepit. He had great wealth and possessions, gold silver and rare treasures that filled and overflowed from his storehouses, but he had no son, so that if one day he should die, the wealth and possessions would be scattered and lost, for there was no one to entrust them to.

⁵⁴ This does not mean that we just sit and wait for treasures to appear. As you will see in the following parable how the son improved his mental attitude in stages covering a span of 20 years, we must struggle for improvement in daily life. Enlightenment is to be achieved within the turmoil of our daily life, not in silent seclusion. Let us always try to improve ourselves, inspire our children, grandchildren, and society step by step.

⁵⁵ He ran away from his father: Signifies our selfish conduct that neglects the great life of the universe.

⁵⁶ Poor son: Signifies human beings who are poor mentally compared to the Buddha.

⁵⁷ Home country: Means the great life of the universe.

⁵⁸ The wealthy man: Denotes the Eternal Buddha, origin of the great life of the universe.

"This was the reason he constantly thought so earnestly of his son. And he also had this thought: If I could find my son and entrust my wealth and possessions to him, then I could feel contented and easy in mind and would have no more worries.

"World-Honored One, at that time the impoverished son drifted from one kind of employment to another until he came by chance to his father's house.⁵⁹ He stood by the side of the gate, gazing far off at his father, who was seated on a lion throne, his legs supported by a jeweled footrest, while Brahmans, noblemen, and householders, uniformly deferential, surrounded him. Festoons of pearls worth thousands or tens of thousands adorned his body, and clerks, grooms and menservants holding white fly whisks stood in attendance to left and right. A jeweled canopy covered him, with flowered banners hanging from it, perfumed water had been sprinkled over the ground, heaps of rare flowers were scatted about, and precious objects were ranged here and there, brought out, put away, handed over and received. Such were the many different types of adornments, the emblems of prerogative and marks of distinction.

"When the impoverished son saw how great was his father's power and authority, he was filled with fear and awe and regretted he had ever come to such a place.⁶⁰ Secretly he thought to himself; This must be some king, or one who is equal to a king. This is not the sort of place where I can hire out my labor and gain a living. It would be better to go to some poor village where, if I work hard, I will find a place and can easily earn food and clothing. If I stay here for long, I may be seized and pressed into service! Having thought in this way, he raced from the spot.

"At that time the rich old man, seated on his lion throne, spied his son and recognized him immediately. His heart was filled with great joy and at once he thought: Now I have someone to entrust my storehouses of wealth and possessions to! My thoughts have constantly been with this son of mine but I had no way of seeing him. Now suddenly he had appeared of himself, which is exactly what I would have wished. Though I am old and decrepit, I still care what becomes of my belongings.

"Thereupon he dispatched a bystander to go after the son as quickly as possible and bring him back. At that time the messenger raced swiftly after the son and laid hold of him. The impoverished son, alarmed and fearful, cried out in an angry voice, I have done nothing wrong! Why am I being seized? But the messenger held on to him more tightly than ever and forcibly dragged him back.

⁵⁹ The son happened to come to the house of his father: Means that we unconsciously seek the Eternal Buddha.

⁶⁰ The poor son was frightened by his powerful father: Denotes that we often afraid to know the truth.

"At that time the son thought to himself, I have committed no crime and yet I am taken prisoner. Surely I am going to be put to death! He was more terrified than ever and sank to the ground, fainting with despair.

"The father, observing this from a distance, spoke to the messenger, saying, I have no need of this man. Don't force him to come here, but sprinkle cold water on his face so he will regain his senses. Then say nothing more to him!"

"Why did he do that? Because the father knew that his son was of humble outlook and ambition, and that his own rich and eminent position would be difficult for the son to accept. He knew very well that this was his son, but as a form of expedient means he refrained from saying to anyone, 'this is my son.'

"The messenger said to the son, 'I am releasing you now. You may go anywhere you wish.' The impoverished son was delighted, having gained what he had not had before, and picked himself up from the ground and went off to the poor village in order to look for food and clothing.

"At that time the rich man, hoping to entice his son back again, decided to employ an expedient means and send two men as secret messengers, men who were lean and haggard and had no imposing appearance. 'Go seek out that poor man and approach him casually. Tell him you know a place where he can earn twice the regular wage.⁶¹ If he agrees to the arrangement, then bring him here and put him to work. If he asks what sort of work he will be put to, say that he will be employed to clear away excrement,⁶² and that the two of you will be working with him.'

"The two messengers then set out at once to find the poor man, and when they had done so, spoke to him as they had been instructed. At that time the impoverished son asked for an advance on his wages and then went with the men to help clear away excrement.

"When the father saw his son, he pitied and wondered at him. Another day, when he was gazing out the window, he saw his son in the distance, his body thin and haggard, filthy with excrement, dirt, sweat and defilement. The father immediately took off his necklaces, his soft fine garments and his other adornments and put on clothes that were ragged and soiled. He smeared dirt on his body, took in his right hand a utensil for removing excrement, and assuming a gruff manner, spoke to the laborers, saying, 'Keep at your work! You mustn't be lazy!' By employing this expedient means, he was able to approach his son.

⁶¹ A double day's pay: Signifies those who practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra receive more merits than practicing other teachings.

⁶² He should clear dirt: Means that we must cleanse our dirty minds attached to our own self and materials.

Later he spoke to his son again, saying, Now then, young man! You must keep on at this work and not leave me anymore. I will increase your wages,⁶³ and whatever you need in the way of utensils, rice, flour, salt, vinegar, and the like you should be in no worry about. I have an old servant I can lend you when you need him. You may set your mind at ease. I will be like a father to you, so have no more worries. Why do I say this? Because I am well along in years, but you are still young and sturdy. When you are at work, you are never deceitful or lazy or speak angry or resentful words. You don't seem to have any faults of that kind the way my other workers do. From now on, you will be like my own son.' And the rich man proceeded to select a name and assign it to the man as though he were his child.

"At this time the impoverished son, though he was delighted at such treatment, still thought of himself as a person of humble station who was in the employ of another. Therefore the rich man kept him clearing away excrement for the next twenty years. By the end of this time, the son felt that he was understood and trusted, and he could come and go at ease, but he continued to live in the same place as before.

"World-Honored One, at that time the rich man fell ill and knew he would die before long. He spoke to his impoverished son, saying, "I now have great quantities of gold, silver, and rare treasures that fill and overflow from my storehouses. You are to take complete charge of the amounts I have and of what is to be handed out and gathered in. This is what I have in mind, and I want you to carry out my wishes. Why is this? Because from now on, you and I will not behave as two different persons. So you must keep your wits about you and see that there are no mistakes or losses."

"At that time the impoverished son, having received these instructions, took over the surveillance of all the goods, and gold, silver and rare treasures, and the various storehouses, but never thought of appropriated for himself so much as the cost of a single meal. He continued to live where he had before, unable to cease thinking of himself as mean and lowly.

"After some time had passed, the father perceived that his son was bit by bit becoming more self-assured and magnanimous in outlook, that he was determined to accomplish great things and despised his former low opinion of himself. Realizing that his own end was approaching, he ordered his son to arrange a meeting with his relatives and the king of the country, the high ministers, and the noblemen and householders. When they were all gathered together, he proceeded to make this announcement: "Gentlemen, you should know that this is my son, who was born to me. In such-and-such a city he abandoned me and ran away, and for over fifty years he wandered about suffering hardship. His original name is such-and-such, and my name is such-and-such. In the past, when I was still living in my native city, I worried about him and so I set out in search of him. Sometime after, I suddenly

⁶³ Stay here, work hard, then I will pay you more: Denotes salvation in a lower stage for salvation in a gradual higher level.

chanced to meet up with him. This is the truth my son, and I will in truth am his father. Now everything that belongs to me, all my wealth and possessions, shall belong entirely to this son of mine. Matters of outlay and income that have occurred in the past this son of mine is familiar with."⁶⁴

"World-Honored One, when the impoverished son heard these words of his father, he was filled with great joy, having gained what he never had before, and he thought to himself, I originally had no mind to covet or seek such things. Yet now these stores of treasures have come of their own accord!

"World-Honored One, this old man with his great riches is none other than the Thus Come One, and we are all like the Buddha's sons. The Thus Come One constantly tells us that we are his sons. But because of the three sufferings, World-Honored One, in the midst of birth and death we undergo burning anxieties, delusions, and ignorance, delighting in and clinging to lesser doctrines. But today the World-Honored One causes us to ponder carefully, to cast aside such doctrines, the filth of frivolous debate.

"We were diligent and exerted ourselves in this matter until we had attained nirvana, which is like one day's wages. And once we had attained it, our hearts were filled with great joy and we considered that this was enough. At once we said to ourselves, "Because we have been diligent and exerted ourselves with regard to the Buddhist Law, we have gained this breadth and wealth of understanding."

"But the World-Honored One, knowing from past times how our minds cling to unworthy desires and delight in lesser doctrines, pardoned us and let us be, not trying to explain to us by saying, You will come to possess the insight of the Thus Come One, your portion of the store of treasures!" Instead the World-Honored One employed the power of expedient means, preaching to us the wisdom of the Thus Come One in such a way that we might heed the Buddha and attain nirvana, which is only day's wages. And because we considered this to be a great gain, we had no wish to pursue the Great Vehicle.⁶⁵

"In addition, though we expounded and set forth the Buddha wisdom for the sake of the Bodhisattvas, we ourselves did not aspire to attain it. Why do I say this? Because the Buddha, knowing that our minds delight in lesser doctrines, employed the power of expedient means to preach in a way that was appropriate for us. So we did not know that we were in truth the sons of the Buddha. But now at least we know it.

⁶⁴ Inheriting his father's wealth: Signifies our own awakening to the great life of the universe.

⁶⁵ The wealthy man is the Eternal Buddha while the poor son is those of us who do not realize that we are indeed the Buddha's children. We often ask the Buddha, "Give me this! Give me that!" This is still a stage of the shomon who is base and mean. Through the advice of the Buddha, if we put forth continuous effort without giving up, although it may take time, we will receive the precious treasure of Buddhahood without expectation.

"With regard to the Buddha wisdom, the World-Honored One is never begrudging. Why do I say this? From times past we have in truth been the sons of the Buddha, but we delighted in nothing but lesser doctrines. If we had the kind of mind that delighted in great ones, than the Buddha would have preached the Law of the Great Vehicle for us.

"Now in this sutra the Buddha expounds only the one vehicle. And in the past, when in the presence of the bodhisattvas he disparaged the voice-hearers as those who delight in a lesser doctrine, the Buddha was in fact employing the Great Vehicle to teach and convert us. Therefore we say that, though originally we had no mind to covet or seek such a thing, now the great treasure of the Dharma King has come to us of its own accord. It is something that the sons of the Buddha have a right to acquire, and now they have acquired all of it."

At that time, Mahakashyapa, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*We today have heard the Buddha's voice teaching and we dance for joy, having
gained what we never had before.
The Buddha declares that the voice-hearers will be able to attain Buddhahood.
This cluster of unsurpassed jewels has come to us unsought.
It is like the case of a boy who, when still young without understanding, abandoned his
father and ran away, going far off to another land, drifting from one country to
another for over fifty years, his father, distressed in thought, searched for him in
every direction till, worn out with searching, he halted in a certain city.
There he built a dwelling where he could indulge the five desires.
His house was large and costly, with quantities of gold, silver, seashell, agate, pearls,
lapis lazuli, elephants, horses, oxen goats, palanquins, and carriages, fields for
farming, menservants, grooms, and other people in great number.
He engaged in profitable ventures at home and in all the lands around, and had
merchants and traveling vendors stationed everywhere.
Thousands, ten thousands, millions surrounded him and paid reverence; he enjoyed the
constant favor and consideration of the ruler.
The officials and power clans all joined in paying him honor, and those who for one
reason or another flocked about him were many.
Such was his vast wealth, the great power and influence he possessed.
But as he grew old and decrepit he recalled his son with greater distress than ever, day
and night thinking of nothing else: "Now the time of my death draws near.
Over fifty years have passed since that foolish boy abandoned me.
My storehouses full of goods- what will become of them?"
At this time the impoverished son was searching for food and clothing, going from
village to village, from country to country, sometimes finding something, other*

times finding nothing, starving and emaciated, his body broken out in sores and ring worm.

As he moved from place to place he arrived in time at the city where his father lived, shifting from one job to another until he came to his father's house.

At that time the rich man had spread a large jeweled canopy inside his gate and was seated on a lion throne, surrounded by his dependents and various attendants and guards.

Some were counting out gold, silver, and precious objects, or recording in ledgers the outlay and income of wealth.

The impoverished son, observing how eminent and distinguished His father was, supposed he must be the king of a country or the equal of a king.

Alarmed and full of wonder, he asked himself why he had come here.

Secretly he thought to himself, if I linger here for long I will perhaps be seized and pressed into service!

Once this thought had occurred to him, he raced from the spot, and inquiring where there was a poor village, went there in hopes of gaining employment.

The rich man at the time, seated on his lion throne, saw his son in the distance and silently recognized who he was.

Immediately he instructed a messenger to hurry after him and bring him back.

The impoverished son, crying out in terror, sank to the ground in distress.

"This man has seized me and is surely going to put me to death!

To think that my search for food and clothing should bring me to this!"

The rich man knew that his son was ignorant and self-abasing.

"He will never believe my words, will never believe I am his father."

So he employed an expedient means, sending some other men to the son, a one-eyed man, another puny and uncouth, completely lacking in imposing appearance, saying, "Speak to him and tell him I will employ him to remove excrement and filth, and will pay him twice the regular wage."

When the impoverished son heard this he was delighted and came with the messengers and worked to clear away excrement and filth and clean the rooms of the house.

From the window the rich man would constantly observe his son, thinking how his son was ignorant and self-abasing and delighted in such menial labor.

At such times the rich man would put on dirty ragged clothing, take in hand a utensil for removing excrement and go to where his son was, using this expedient means to approach him, encouraging him to work diligently.

"I have increased your wages and given you oil to rub on your feet.

I will see that you have plenty to eat and drink, mats and bedding that are thick and warm."

*At times he would speak severely: "You must work hard!"
Or again he will say in a gentle voice, "You are like a son to me."
The rich man, being wise, gradually permitted his son to come and go in the house.
After twenty years had passed, he put him in charge of household affairs, showing him
his gold, silver, pearls, crystal, and the other things that were handed out or
gathered in, so that he would understand all about them, though the son
continued to live outside the gate, sleeping in a hut of grass, for he looked upon
himself as poor, thinking, "None of these things are mine."
The father knew that his son's outlook was gradually becoming broader and more
magnanimous, and wishing to hand over his wealth and goods, he called
together his relatives, the king of the country and the high ministers, the
noblemen and householders.
In the presence of this great assembly he declared, "This is my son who abandoned me
and wandered abroad for a period of fifty years.
Since I found him again, twenty years have gone by.
Long ago, in such-and-such a city, when I lost my son, I traveled all around searching
for him until eventually I came here.
All that I possess, my house and people, I hand over entirely to him so he may do with
them as he wishes."
The son thought now in the past he had been poor, humble and self-abasing in outlook,
but now he had received from his father this huge bequest of rare treasures,
along with the father's house and all his wealth and goods.
He was filled with great joy, having gained what he never had before.
The Buddha too is like this.
He knows our fondness for the petty, and so he never told us, "You can attain
Buddhahood."*

*Instead he explained to us how we could become free of outflows, carry out the Lesser
Vehicle and be voice-hearer disciples.
Then the Buddha commanded us to preach the supreme way and explain that those
who practice this will be able to attain Buddhahood.
We received the Buddha's teaching and for the sake of the great bodhisattvas made
use of causes and conditions, various similes and parables, a variety of words
and phrases, to preach the unsurpassed way.
When the sons of the Buddha heard the Law through us, day and night they
pondered, diligently and with effort practicing it.
At that time the Buddha bestowed prophecies on them, saying, "In a future existence
you will be able to attain Buddhahood."
The various Buddhas in their Law of the secret storehouse set forth the true facts for
the sake of Bodhisattvas alone; it is not for our sake that they expound the true
essentials.*

*The case is like that of the impoverished son who was able to approach his father.
Though he knew of his father's possessions, at heart he had no longing to appropriate
them.*

*Thus, although we preached the treasure storehouse of the Law of the Buddha, we did
not seek to attain it ourselves, and in this way our case is similar.*

We sought to wipe out what was within ourselves, believing that was sufficient.

We understood only this one concern and knew nothing of other matters.

*Though we might hear or purifying the Buddha lands, of teaching and converting
living beings, we took no delight in such things.*

Why is this?

*Because all phenomena are uniformly empty, tranquil, without birth, without
extinction, without bigness, without smallness, without outflows, without action.*

And when one ponders in this way, one can feel no delight or joy.

*Through the long night, with regard to the Buddha wisdom we were without greed,
without attachment, without any desire to possess it.*

We believed that with regard to the Law we possessed the ultimate.

*Through the long night we practiced the Law of emptiness, gaining release from the
threefold world and its burden of suffering and care.*

We dwelt in our final existence, in the nirvana of remainder.

*Through the teaching and conversion of the Buddha we gained a way that was not
vain, and in doing so we repaid the debt we owed to the Buddha's kindness.*

*Although for the sake of the Buddha's sons we preached the Law of the Bodhisattva,
urging them to seek the Buddha way, yet we ourselves never aspired to that
Law.*

*We were thus abandoned by our guide and teacher because he had observed what
was in our minds.*

From the first he never encouraged us or spoke to us of true benefit.

*He was like the rich man who knew that his son's ambitions were lowly and who used
the power of expedient means to soften and mold his son's mind so that later he
could entrust to him all his wealth and treasure.*

The Buddha is like this, resorting to a rare course of action.

*Knowing that some have a fondness for the petty, he uses the power of expedient
means to mold and temper their minds, and only then teaches them the great
wisdom.*

*Today we have gained what we never had before; what we previously never hoped for
has now come to us of itself.*

We are like the impoverished son who gained immeasurable treasure.

*World-Honored One, now we have gained the way, gained its fruit; through the Law
of no outflows we have gained the undefiled eye.*

Through the long night we observed the pure precepts of the Buddha and today for the first time we have gained the fruit, the recompense.

In the Law of the Dharma King we have long carried out brahma practices; now we obtain the state of no outflows, the great unsurpassed fruit.

Now we have become voice-hearers in truth, for we will take the voice of the Buddha way and cause it to be heard by all.

Now we have become true arhats, for everywhere among the heavenly and human beings, devils and Brahmas of the various worlds we deserve to receive offerings.

The World-Honored One in his great mercy makes use of a rare thing, in pity and compassion teaching and converting, bringing benefit to us.

In numberless millions of kalpas who could ever repay him?

Though we offer him our hands and feet, bow our heads in respectful obeisance, and present all manners of offerings, none of us could we pay him.

Though we lift him on the crown of our heads, bear him on our two shoulders for kalpas numerous as Ganges sands reverence him with all our hearts; though we come with delicate foods, with countless jeweled robes, with articles of bedding, various kinds of potions and medicines; with ox-head sandalwood and all kinds of rare gems, construct memorial towers and spread the ground with jeweled robes; though we were to do all this by way of offering for kalpas numerous as Ganges sands, still we could not repay him.

The Buddhas possess rarely known, immeasurable, boundless, unimaginable great transcendental powers.

Free of outflows, free of action, these kings of the doctrines for the sake of the humble and lowly exercise patience in these matters; to common mortals attached to appearances they preach in accordance with what is appropriate.

With regard to the Law, the Buddhas are able to exercise complete freedom.

They understand the various desires and joys of living beings, as well as their aims and abilities, and can adjust to what they are capable of, employing innumerable similes to expound the Law for them.

Utilizing the good roots laid down by living beings in previous existences, distinguishing between those whose roots are mature and those whose roots are not yet mature, they exercise various calculation, discriminations and perceptions, and then take the one vehicle way and in accordance with what is appropriate, preach it as three.

Chapter Five: The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs

SUMMARY

In the previous chapter, the Buddha revealed that understanding helps faith. Understanding and faith invites action. In this chapter, He reveals faith becomes the way to keep the precepts. When faith and keeping precepts are firm, one will be able to attain the Buddha's wisdom. He relates a story of the same rain and different plants.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the World-Honored One said to Mahakashyapa and the other major disciples: "Excellent, excellent, Kashyapa. You have given an excellent description of the true blessings of the Thus Come One. It is just as you have said. The Thus Come One indeed has immeasurable, boundless, asamkhyas of blessings, and though you and the others were to spend immeasurable millions of kalpas in the effort, you could never finish describing them.

"Kashyapa, you should understand this. The Thus Come One is king of the doctrines. In what he preaches, there is nothing that is vain. With regard to all the various doctrines, he employs wisdom as an expedient means in expounding them. Therefore the doctrines that he expounds all extend to the point where there is comprehensive wisdom. The Thus Come One observes and understands the end to which all doctrines tend. And he also understands the workings of the deepest mind of all living beings, penetrating them completely and without hindrance. And with regard to the doctrines he is thoroughly enlightened, and he reveals to living beings the totality of wisdom.

"Kashyapa, it is like the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and the medicinal herbs, widely ranging in variety, each with its own name and hue, that grow in the hills and streams, the valleys and different soils of the thousand-millionfold world. Dense clouds spread over them, covering the entire thousand-millionfold world and in one moment saturating it all. The moisture penetrates to all the plants, trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs equally, to their big roots, big stems, big limbs and big leaves.⁶⁶ Each of the trees, big and

⁶⁶ Roots symbolize faith while stems -- precept; branches -- firm practice; and leaves -- Buddha Wisdom.

The roots of trees and grasses produce stems, branches and leaves, so as faith produces precepts. Our firm belief and precepts will help us reach toward Buddha Wisdom. When one has faith, he or she naturally keeps the precepts. When one does not have belief in the rule of a community such as traffic rules, observing a rule can make one feel uncomfortable.

It is like stems coming from the roots. When stems grow little by little, branches appear here and there. Branches symbolize one's firm belief and practice. When your belief becomes strong and your practice steady and continuous, other's criticism and your own desire will not bother you; then, you will receive the Buddha Wisdom - just as branches produce leaves.

small,⁶⁷ depending upon whether it is superior, middling or inferior in nature, receives its allotment. The rain falling from one blanket of clouds accords with each particular species and nature, causing it to sprout and mature, to blossom and bear fruit. Though all these plants and trees grow in the same earth and moistened by the same rain, each has its differences and particulars.⁶⁸

"Kashyapa, you should understand that the Thus Come One is like this. He appears in the world like a great cloud rising up. With a loud voice he penetrates to all the heavenly and human beings and the asuras of the entire world, like a great cloud spreading over the thousand-millionfold lands. And in the midst of the great assembly, he addresses these words, saying: "I am the Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. Those who have not yet crossed over I will cause to cross over, those not yet freed I will free, those not yet at rest I will put to rest, those not yet in nirvana I will cause to attain nirvana. Of this existence and future existences I understand the true circumstances. I am one who knows all things, sees all things, understands the way, opens up the way, preaches the way. You heavenly and human beings, asuras and others, you must all come here so that I may let you hear the Dharma!"

"At that time living beings of countless thousands, ten thousands, millions of species come to the place where the Buddha is, to listen to the Dharma. The Thus Come One then observes whether they are diligent in their efforts or lazy. And in accordance with each is capable of hearing, he preaches the Law for them in an immeasurable variety of ways so that all of them are delighted and are able to gain excellent benefits therefrom.⁶⁹

"Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences, when they will receive joy through the way and again be able to hear the Law.⁷⁰ And having heard the Law, they

⁶⁷In your garden, there are different flower plants, shrubs, and trees in different sizes. With these different plants, sizes, and colors, your garden keeps in shape and retains beauty. It is the same with human beings. There are millions and billions of people different in talent and abilities. It is the same with human society. There are many varied differences. These differences keep society strong and developing.

⁶⁸The Buddha Sâkyamuni expounded the Dharma to all living beings equally just as the rain showers the entire earth. However, those who hear the Dharma will accept it differently according to their own individual capacities. Therefore, the Buddha revealed many different teachings for different levels of understanding. But the Buddha's real Dharma is for all people to attain Buddha Wisdom.

⁶⁹The later chapters of the Lotus Sutra reveal many different ways of gaining material satisfaction. However, it does not mean that if you practice the sutra, you will not have any mishaps or misfortune. "Peaceful" means the matter of mind or spirit, it does not mean of circumstances or environment. Buddhism is not meant to be a tool to search for material gain, but to seek the truth.

⁷⁰Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra reveals the eternal life, therefore, we may be able to be born in a better place than here after death. However you should not just wish to be born in a better place, but we should wish to be free from suffering by firm belief and continuous practice. So as the Buddha says as follows at the end of this chapter:

"Study and practice it continuously, and you will become Buddhas."

will escape from obstacles and hindrances, and with regard to the various doctrines will be able to exercise their powers to the fullest, so that gradually they can enter into the way. It is like the rain falling from that great cloud upon all the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs. Each, depending upon its species and nature, receives its full share of moistening and is enabled to sprout and grow.

"The Law preached by the Thus Come One is of one form, one flavor, namely, the form of emancipation, the form of separation, the form of extinction, which in the end comes down to a wisdom embracing all species. When the living beings hear the law of the Thus Come One, though they may embrace, read and recite it, and practice it as it dictates, they themselves do not realize or understand the blessings they are gaining thereby. Why is this? Because only the Thus Come One understands the species, the form, the substance, the nature of these living beings, he knows what things they dwell on, what things they ponder, that things they practice. He knows what Law they dwell on, what Law they ponder, what Law they practice, through what Law they attain what Law.

"Living beings exist in a variety of environments, but only the Thus Come One sees the true circumstances and fully understands them without hindrance. It is like those plants and trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs that do not themselves know whether they are superior, middling or inferior in nature. But the Thus Come One knows that this is the Law of one form, one flavor, namely, the form of emancipation, the form of separation, the form of extinction, the form of ultimate nirvana, of constant tranquility and emptiness. The Buddha understands all this. But because he can see the desires that are in the minds of living beings, he guides and protects them, and for this reason does not immediately preach to them the wisdom that embraces all species.

"You and the others, Kashyapa, have done a very rare thing, for you can understand how the Thus Come One preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, you can have faith in it, you can accept it. Why do I say this? Because the fact that the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate is hard to comprehend, hard to understand."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The Dharma King, destroyer of being, when he appears in the world accords with the desires of living beings, preaches the Law in a variety of ways.
The Thus Come One, worthy of honor and reverence, is profound and far-reaching in wisdom.

The Lotus Sutra advises us to strive for our goals continuously not to instantly gain material substances.

For long he remained silent regarding the essential, in no hurry to speak at once.
If those who are wise hear of it they can believe and understand it, but those without
wisdom will have doubts and regrets and for all time will remain in error.
For this reason, Kashyapa, he adjusts to the person to gain a correct view.
Kashyapa, you should understand that it is like a great cloud that rises up in the world
and covers it all over.

This beneficent cloud is laden with moisture, the lightening gleams and flashes, and
the sound of thunder reverberates afar, causing the multitude to rejoice.
The sun's rays are veiled and hidden, a clear coolness comes over the land; masses of
darkness descend and spread- you can almost touch them.
The rain falls everywhere, coming down on all four sides, its flow and saturation are
measureless, reaching to every area of the earth, to the ravines and valleys of
the mountains and streams, to the remote and secluded places where row
plants, bushes, medicinal herbs, trees large and small, a hundred grains, rice
seedlings, sugar cane, grape vines.
The rain moistens them all, none fails to receive its full share, the parched ground is
everywhere watered, herbs and trees alike grow lush.
What falls from the cloud is water of a single flavor, but the plants and trees, thickets
and groves, each accept the moisture that is appropriate to its portion.
All the various trees, whether superior, middling or inferior, take that is fitting for
large or small and each is enabled to sprout and grow.
Root, stem, limb, leaf, the glow and hue of flower and fruit- one rain extends to them
and all are able to become fresh and glossy, whether their allotment of
substance, form and nature is large or small, the moistening they receive is one,
but each grows and flourishes in its own way.

The Buddha is like this when he appears in the world, comparable to a great cloud
that covers all things everywhere, having appeared in the world, for the sake of
living beings he makes distinctions in expounding the truth regarding
phenomena.

The great sage, the World-Honored One, to heavenly and human beings, in the midst
of all beings, pronounces these words: I am the Thus Come One, most honored of
two-legged beings.

I appear in the world like a great cloud that showers moisture upon all the dry and
withered living beings, so that all are able to escape suffering, gain the joy of
peace and security, the joys of this world and the joy of nirvana.

All you heavenly and human beings of this assembly, listen carefully and with one
mind!

All of you should gather around and observe the one of unexcelled honor.
I am the World-Honored One, none can rival me.

In order to bring peace and security to living beings I have appeared in the world and for the sake of this great assembly I preach the sweet dew of the pure Law.

This Law is of a single flavor, that of emancipation, nirvana.

With a single wonderful sound I expound and unfold its meaning; constantly for the sake of the Great Vehicle I create causes and conditions.

I look upon all things as being universally equal, I have no mind to favor this or that, to love one or hate another.

I am without greed or attachment and without limitation or hindrance.

At all times, for all things I preach the Law equally; as I would for a single person, that same way I do for numerous persons, constantly I expound and preach the Law, never have I done anything else, coming, going, sitting, standing, never to the end growing weary or disheartened.

I bring fullness and satisfaction to the world, like rain that spreads its moisture everywhere, eminent and lowly, superior and inferior, observers of precepts, violators of precepts, those fully endowed with proper demeanor, those not fully endowed, those of correct views, of erroneous views, of keen capacity, of dull capacity- I cause the Dharma rain on all equally, never lax or neglectful.

When all the various living beings hear my Law, they receive it according to their power, dwelling in their different environments.

Some inhabit the realm of human and heavenly beings, of wheel-turning sage kings, Shakra, Brahma and the other kings- these are the inferior medicinal herbs.

Some understand the Law of no outflows, are able to attain nirvana, to acquire the six transcendental powers and gain in particular the three understandings, or live alone in mountain forests, constantly practicing meditation and gaining the enlightenment of pratyekabuddhas- these are the middling medicinal herbs.

Still others seek the place of the World-Honored One, convinced that they can become Buddhas, putting forth diligent effort and practicing meditation- these are the superior medicinal herbs.

Again there are sons of the Buddha who devote their minds solely to the Buddha way, constantly practicing mercy and compassion, knowing that they themselves will attain Buddhahood, certain of it and never doubting- these I call small trees.

Those who abide in peace in their transcendental powers, turning the wheel of non-regression, saving innumerable millions of hundreds of thousands of living beings- bodhisattvas such as these I call large trees.

The equality of the Buddha's preaching is like a rain of a single flavor, but depending upon the nature of the living being, the way in which it is received is not uniform, just as the various plants and trees each receive the moisture in a different manner.

The Buddha employs this parable as an excellent means to open up and reveal the matter, using various kinds of words and phrases and expounding the single Law, but in terms of the Buddha wisdom this is no more than one drop of the ocean.

I rain down the Dharma rain, filling the whole world, and this single-flavored Dharma is practiced by each according to the individual's power.

It is like those thickets and groves, medicinal herbs and trees which, according to whether they are large or small, bit by bit grow lush and beautiful.

The Law of the Buddhas is constantly of a single flavor, causing the many worlds to attain full satisfaction everywhere; by practicing gradually and stage by stage, all beings can gain the fruits of the way.

The voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas inhabit the mountain forests, dwelling in their final existence, hearing the Law and gaining its fruits- we may call them medicinal herbs that grow and mature each in its own way, if there are Bodhisattvas who are steadfast and firm in wisdom, who fully comprehend the threefold world and seek the supreme vehicle, these we call the small trees that achieve growth and maturity.

Again there are those who dwell in meditation, who have gained the strength of transcendental powers, have heard of the emptiness of all phenomena, greatly rejoice in it in their minds and emit countless rays of light to save living beings- these we call large trees that have gained growth and maturity.

In this way, Kashyapa, the Law preached by the Buddha is comparable to a great cloud which, with a single-flavored rain, moistens human flowers so that each is able to bear fruit.

Kashyapa, you should understand that through various causes and conditions, various kinds of simile and parable, I open up and reveal the Buddha way.

This is an expedient means I employ and the same is true of the other Buddhas.

Now for you and the others I preach the utmost truth: none in the multitude of voice-hearers has entered the stage of extinction.

What you are practicing is the bodhisattva way, and as you gradually advance in practice and learning you are all certain to attain Buddhahood.

Chapter Six: Bestowal of Prophecy

SUMMARY

The previous chapter ends with the words, "Study and practice it continuously, and you will become Buddhas." In this chapter, Sâkyamuni Buddha gives assurance of future Buddhahood to four of his ten great disciples. The assurance is more like a provisional charter. The real certificate of Buddhahood will be given when they finish many courses of studies and practices. Although it is a temporary certificate, it is a great encouragement for the four disciples and for us.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the World-Honored One, having finished reciting these verses, made an announcement to the great assembly, speaking in these words: "This disciple of mine Mahakashyapa in future existences will be able to enter the presence of three thousand billion Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, to offer alms, pay reverence, honor and praise them, widely proclaiming the innumerable great doctrines of the Buddhas.⁷¹ And in his final incarnation he will be able to become a Buddha named Light Bright Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One.

"His land will be called Light Virtue and his kalpa will be called Great Adornment. The life span of this Buddha will be twelve small kalpas. His Correct Law will endure in the world for twenty small kalpas, and his Counterfeit Law for twenty small kalpas.

"His realm will be majestically adorned, free of defilement or evil, shards or rubble, thorns or briars, or the unclean refuse of latrines. The land will be level and smooth, without high places or sags, pits or knolls. The ground will be of lapis lazuli, with rows of jeweled trees and ropes of gold to mark the boundaries of the roads. Jeweled flowers will be scattered around, and everywhere will be pure and clean. The bodhisattvas of that realm will number countless thousands of millions, and the multitude of voice-hearers will likewise be

⁷¹ Regarding the offerings to thousand and billions of Buddhas, in the later chapters of the Lotus Sutra, practices that are more realistic are revealed.

innumerable. There will be no workings of the devil, and although the devil and the devil's people will be there, they will protect the Law of the Buddha."⁷²

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

“I announce this to the monks: when I employ the Buddha eye to observe
Kashyapa here, I see that in a future existence, after innumerable kalpas
have passed, he will be able to attain Buddhahood.
In future existences he will offer alms and enter the presence of three thousand
billion Buddhas, World-Honored Ones.
For the sake of the Buddha wisdom he will carry out brahma practices
meticulously and will offer alms to the unexcelled ones, the most
honored of two-legged beings.
After he has done so, and has practiced all the unsurpassed types of wisdom, in
his final incarnation he will be able to become a Buddha.
His land will be pure and clean, the ground of lapis lazuli.
Many jeweled trees will line the roadsides, with golden ropes to mark the roads,
and those who see it will rejoice.
It will constantly emit a pleasing fragrance, with heaps of rare flowers scattered
around and many kinds of strange and wonderful things for its
adornment.
The land will be level and smooth, without hills or depressions.
The multitude of bodhisattvas will be beyond calculation, their minds subdued
and gentle, having attained great transcendental powers, and they will
uphold and embrace the Great Vehicle scriptures of the Buddhas.
The multitude of voice-hearers will be free of outflows, in their last incarnation,
sons of the Dharma King, and their number too will be beyond
calculation- even when one looks with the heavenly eye one cannot
determine their number.
This Buddha will have a life span of twelve small kalpas, and his Counterfeit
Law for twenty small kalpas.
Light Bright World-Honored One will be of this description.

At that time the great Maudgalyayana, Subhuti and Mahakatyayana, all of them trembling with agitation, pressed their palms together with a single mind and gazed up at the World-Honored One, their eyes never leaving him for an instant. Joining their voices in a single sound, they spoke in verse form, saying:

⁷² For the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, all devils and demons become protectors for them. A good example is Kishimo-jin or Hariti. She had many children and fed them on the babies of others. When she heard the Buddha's teachings, she repented her sins and vowed to protect Buddhism and its practitioners. This is revealed in Chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra.

*“Great hero and stalwart, World-Honored One, Dharma King of the Shakyas,
because you have pity on us, favor us with the Buddha voice!
If, because you understand our innermost minds, it would be like sweet dew
bathing us, washing away fever and imparting coolness.
Suppose that someone coming from a land of famine should suddenly
encounter a great king’s feast.
His heart still filled with doubt and fear, he would not dare to eat the food at
once, but if he were instructed by the king to do so, then he would
venture to eat.”⁷³*

*We now are like such a person, for whenever we recall the errors of the Lesser
Vehicle, we do not know what we should do to gain the Buddha’s
unsurpassed wisdom.*

*Though we hear the Buddha’s voice telling us that we will attain Buddhahood,
in our hearts we still harbor anxiety and fear, like that person who did
not dare to eat.*

*But now if the Buddha’s prophecy is bestowed upon us, then joy and peace of
mind will quickly be ours.*

*Great hero and stalwart, World-Honored One, your constant desire to set the
world at ease.*

*We beg you to bestow such a prophecy on us, as you would instruct a starving
person to eat.*

At that time the World-Honored One, understanding the thoughts in the minds of his major disciples, made this announcement to the monks: *“Subhuti here in future existences will enter the presence of three hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Buddhas, offering alms, paying reverence, honoring and praising them. He will constantly carry out brahma practices and fulfill the bodhisattva way, and in his final incarnation he will be able to attain Buddhahood. His title will be Rare Form Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. His kalpa will be named Possessed of Jewels and his realm will be named Jewel Born. The land will be level and smooth, the ground made of crystal, it will be adorned with jeweled trees and be free of hills and pits, rubble and thorns and the filth from latrines. Jeweled flowers will cover the ground and everywhere will be pure and clean. The people of his realm will all dwell on jeweled terraces, in rare and wonderful towers and*

⁷³ These phrases are always quoted when Nichiren-Shu priests hold the Segaki memorial services. Segaki is a ceremony of making offerings to the hungry spirits. It is held for the repose of the souls of the dead. Segaki flags made of five different colors are also hung during the ceremony with the above phrases written on the flags.

The phrases are used for the repose of the souls of the dead, but they also assure us of our future Buddhahood. We shall feel as cool and as refreshed as if we were sprinkled with nectar.

pavilions. His voice-hearer disciples will be countless, boundless, beyond the scope of calculation or simile. The multitude of bodhisattvas will number countless thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas. The life span of this Buddha will be twelve small kalpas, his Correct Law will endure in the world for twenty small kalpas, and his Counterfeit Law for twenty small kalpas. This Buddha will constantly dwell in midair, preaching the Law for the assembly and saving numberless multitudes of bodhisattvas and voice-hearers."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

"You multitude of monks, I now announce this to you.
All of you with a single mind should hear what I say, my major disciple Subhuti
is destined to become a Buddha with the title Rare Form.
He will offer alms to countless tens of thousands and millions of Buddhas.
By following the practices of the Buddhas he will gradually fulfill the great
way, and in his final incarnation will acquire the thirty-two features.
He will be imposing, exceptional, wonderful, like a jeweled mountain.
His Buddha land will be foremost in adornment and purity; no living beings
who sees it will fail to love and delight in it.
There in the midst, that Buddha will save unreckonable multitudes.
In that Buddha's Law will be many bodhisattvas, all of them with keen
capacities, turning the wheel of non-regression.
That land will constantly be adorned with bodhisattvas.
The multitude of voice-hearers will be beyond calculation, all gaining the
three understandings and exercising the six transcendental powers.
They will dwell in the eight emancipations and possess great authority and
virtue.
The Law preached by that Buddha will manifest immeasurable transcendental
powers and transformations of a wondrous nature.
Heavenly and human beings in numbers like the Ganges sands will all press
their palms together, listen to and receive the Buddha's words.
That Buddha will have a life span of twelve small kalpas, his Correct Law will
endure in the world for twenty small kalpas and his counterfeit Law for
twenty small kalpas.

At that time the World-Honored One once more spoke to the multitude of monks:
"Now I say this to you. Great Katyayana here in future existences will present various articles
as offerings and will serve eight thousand million Buddhas, paying honor and reverence to
them. After these Buddhas have passed into extinction, he will raise a memorial tower for
each one measuring a thousand yojanas in height and exactly Five Hundred yojanas in both
width and depth. It will be made of gold, silver lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl and

carnelian, with these seven precious substances joined together. Numerous flowers, necklaces, paste incense, powdered incense, incense for burning, silken canopies, streamers and banners will be presented as offerings to the memorial towers. And after this has been done, he will once more make offerings to twenty thousands of millions of Buddhas, and will repeat the entire process.

"When he has finished offering alms to all the Buddhas, he will fulfill the way of the bodhisattva and will become a Buddha with the title Jambunada Gold Light Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One.

"His land will be level and smooth, the ground made of crystal, adorned with jeweled trees, with ropes of gold to mark the boundaries of the roads. Wonderful flowers will cover the ground, everywhere will be pure and clean, and all who see it will rejoice. The four evil paths of existence, hell and the realms of hungry spirits, beasts and asuras, will not exist there. There will be many heavenly and human beings, and multitudes of voice-hearers and bodhisattvas in innumerable tens of thousands of millions will adorn the land. That Buddha's life span will be twelve small kalpas, his Correct Law will endure in the world for twenty small kalpas, and his Counterfeit Law will endure in the world for twenty small kalpas."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

"You multitude of monks, listen all of you with a single mind, for in what I speak there is nothing that departs from the truth.
Katyayana here will give various kinds of fine and wonderful articles as offerings to the Buddhas, and after the Buddhas have entered extinction he will raise seven-jeweled towers and present flowers and incense as offerings to their relics.

And in his final incarnation he will gain Buddha wisdom and achieve impartial and correct enlightenment.

His land will be pure and clean and he will save innumerable ten thousands of millions of living beings, and will receive offerings from all the ten directions.

This Buddha's brilliance no one will be able to equal.

His Buddha title will be Jambu Gold Light.

Bodhisattvas and voice-hearers, cutting off all forms of existence, countless and immeasurable in number, will adorn his land.

At that time the World-Honored One spoke to the great assembly: "Now I say to you. Great Maudgalyayana here will present various kinds of articles as offerings to eight thousand Buddhas, paying honor and reverence to them. After these Buddhas have passed into extinction, for each of them he will raise a memorial tower measuring a thousand yojanas in height and exactly Five Hundred yojanas in width and depth. It will be made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl, and carnelian, with these seven precious substances joined together. Numerous flowers, necklaces, paste incense, and powdered incense, incense for burning, silken canopies, streamers and banners will be presented as offerings. After this has been done, he will also make offerings to two hundred ten thousand million Buddhas, repeating the process.

"Then he will be able to become a Buddha with the title Tamalapatra Sandalwood Fragrance Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. His kalpa will be named Joy Replete and his realm Mind Delight. The land will be level and smooth, the ground made of crystal, jeweled trees will adorn it, pearls and flowers will be scattered around, everywhere will be pure and clean, and all who see it will rejoice. There will be many heavenly and human beings, and the bodhisattvas and voice-hearers will be immeasurable in number. That Buddha's life span will be twenty-four small kalpas, his Correct Law will endure in the world for forty small kalpas, and his counterfeit Law for forty small kalpas."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

This disciple of mine, the great Maudgalyayana, when he has cast off his present body, will be able to see eight thousand, two hundred ten thousand million Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, and for the sake of the Buddha way will offer alms, honor and reverence them.

Where these Buddhas are he will constantly carry out brahma practices and for immeasurable kalpas will uphold and embrace the Buddha law.

When these Buddhas have passed into extinction he will raise seven-jeweled towers, with golden implements to mark the spot for all time and flowers, incense and music presented as offerings in the memorial towers of the Buddhas.

Step by step he will fulfill all the duties of the bodhisattva way and in the land called Mind Delight will be able to become a Buddha named Tamalapatra Sandalwood Fragrance.

This Buddha's life span will be twenty-four kalpas.

Constantly for the sake of heavenly and human beings he will expound the Buddha way.

Voice-hearers innumerable as Ganges sands, with the three understandings and six
transcendental powers, will display great authority and virtue.
Countless bodhisattvas will be of firm will, diligent in effort, and with regard to the
Buddha wisdom none will ever retrogress.
After this Buddha has passed into extinction, his Correct Law will endure for forty
small kalpas, and his Counterfeit law will be likewise.
My various disciples, fully endowed with dignity and virtue, number Five Hundred,
and every one will receive such a prophecy.
In a future existence all will be able to attain Buddhahood.
Concerning the causes and conditions of past existences as they pertain to me and you
I will now preach.
You must listen carefully.

Chapter Seven: The Parable of the Phantom City

SUMMARY

Chapter 7 reveals that the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are always the same in any era; that all Buddhas attained enlightenment through the doctrines of the Lotus Sutra. However, a process is used to lead all living beings to the Lotus Sutra. This is referred to as the method of ho-ben, which in this chapter takes the form of a parable about a magic city.

A very long time ago, there was a Buddha called Great-Universal-Wisdom Tathagata. This Buddha had formerly been a king of a country and had 16 princes. When their father attained Buddhahood, the sixteen sons also wished to become Buddhas and renounced their royal titles. Later, they all became Buddhas under the guidance of the Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha through the Lotus Sutra. Among them, the 13th prince became Amitâbha Buddha and the 16th was Sakyamuni Buddha.

When the king became Great-Universally-Excelling-Wisdom Buddha, he preached the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve Causes and Causation.

However, these teachings are intended only for individual salvation and the doctrines are for people of the realms of shomon and engaku. They are not the teachings for Bodhisattvas. When a congregation was not ready to comprehend the Lotus Sutra, the Buddhas taught the lesser vehicle teachings, however as a method to lead them to the way of Mahayana. To illustrate this process, Sakyamuni Buddha revealed this chapter.

The Buddha is like the leader of the treasure hunt. He knows the bad road that is comprised of birth, death and illusion. Those who are satisfied with the magic city are the people of the shomon and engaku. Although they may think that they have reached enlightenment, they have not reached it yet. It is similar to their satisfaction with the magic city. Real Enlightenment is farther away and obtained by practicing the way of Bodhisattva.

This parable also teaches that we sometimes need expedients. Kito or special blessing or prayers in Nichiren Sect is one of those expedients. Prayers for material satisfaction are necessary for some people, but the final the goal is to reach the treasure land which signifies attaining Buddhahood.

This parable also shows us that a part of the Lotus Sutra was composed during the time of the silk road trade. Trade merchants traveled through long and huge deserts and passed through many countries throughout the Silk Road. An oasis along the journey was used to rest for a while before getting the real treasures that existed beyond the oasis.

Chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra is an introduction to Chapter 16 that reveals the existence of the Eternal Buddha. Although the physical body of Sakyamuni Buddha is dead in Nirvana, his teachings remain forever.

TRANSLATION TEXT

The Buddha made this announcement to the monks: “Once in the distant past, an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkhya number of kalpas ago, there was at that time a Buddha named Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. His land was named Well Constituted and his kalpa was named Great Form.

“Now monks, since that Buddha passed into extinction, a very great, a very long time had passed.⁷⁴ Suppose, for example, that someone took all the earth particles in the thousand-million-fold world and ground the up to make ink powder, and as he passed through the thousand lands of the east, he dropped one grain of the ink powder no bigger in size than a speck of dust. Again., when he passed through another thousand lands, he dropped another grain of ink. Suppose he went on in this way until he had finished dropping all the grains of the ink made from the earth particles. Now what is your opinion? Do you think that, with regard to those lands, the masters of calculation or the disciples of calculation would be able to determine the number of lands that had been visited in the process, or would they not?”

“That would be impossible, World-Honored One.”

“Now monks suppose that one should take the earth of all the lands this man had passed through, whether he dropped a grain of ink there or not, and should pound it into dust. And suppose that one particle of dust should represent one kalpa. The kalpas that had elapsed since that Buddha entered extinction would still exceed the number of dust particles by immeasurable, boundless, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands millions of asamkhya kalpas. But because I employ the Thus Come One's power to know and see, when I look at that far-off time it seems like today.”⁷⁵

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

⁷⁴ Our solar system consists from ten major planets such as the Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. One solar system times 1,000 is called the Small One Thousand Worlds. The small one thousand worlds times 1,000 is called the Medium One Thousand Worlds. The Medium size worlds times 1,000 is called the Large One Thousand Worlds or Sanzen Daisen Sekai. One thousand times one thousand times one thousand makes one billion.

Supposed someone smashed all the earth-articles of one billion worlds into ink-powder, how many particles are there? That huge number of particles times another 1,000 makes a countless number. This depiction is called the “Three Thousand Dust-Atom aeons.” The sutra says that the Buddha existed way before the three thousand dust-atom eons ago. So the Buddha is eternal.

⁷⁵ This signifies that the insight of the Buddha many aeons ago and today is both the same. Absolute truth does not change, wherever or whenever it is.

When I think of it, in the past, immeasurable, boundless kalpas ago, there was a Buddha, most honored of two-legged beings, named Great Universal Wisdom Excellence.

If a person should use his strength to smash the ground of the thousand-million-fold world, should completely crush its earth particles and reduce them all to powdered ink, and if when he passed through a thousand lands he should drop one speck of ink, and if he continued in this manner until he had exhausted all the specks of ink, and if one then took the soil of the lands he had passed through, both those he dropped a speck in and those he did not, and once more ground their earth into dust, and then took one grain of dust to represent one kalpa—the number of tiny grains of dust would be less than the number of kalpas in the past when that Buddha lived.

Since that Buddha passed into extinction, an immeasurable number of kalpas such as this have passed.

The Thus Come One, through his unhindered wisdom, knows the time when that Buddha passed into extinction and his voice-hearers and bodhisattvas as though he were witnessing that extinction right now.

You monks should understand that the Buddha wisdom is pure, subtle, wonderful, without outflows, without hindrance, reaching to and penetrating immeasurable kalpas.

The Buddha announced to the monks: "The Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellent had a life span of Five Hundred and forty ten thousand million nayutas of kalpas. This Buddha at first sat in the place of practice and, having smashed the armies of the devil, was on the point of attaining anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, but the doctrines of the Buddhas did not appear before him. This state continued for one small kalpa, and so on for ten small kalpas, the Buddha sitting with legs crossed, body and mind unmoving, but the doctrines of the Buddhas still did not appear before him."⁷⁶

"At that time the heavenly beings of the Trayastrimsha heaven had earlier spread a lion seat measuring one yojana in height underneath a bodhi tree for the Buddha, intending that the Buddha should sit on this when he attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. As soon as the Buddha took his seat there, the Brahma kings caused a multitude of heavenly flowers to rain down, covering the ground for a hundred yojanas around. From time to time a fragrant

⁷⁶ Generally speaking in our daily lives, when we are so busy and in pressing times, we do not get sick or become involved in mishap. However, when we relax and think everything is all right now, sickness or mishaps often occur. It is the same with the king in this chapter, although he defeated the army of Mara, he still could not attain Buddhahood. He had repeatedly defeated Mara, but the result was no-enlightenment. One's goal is not that easy to reach as he or she may think. We must, however, continue to strive to attain Buddhahood.

wind would come up and blow the withered flowers away, whereupon new ones would rain down. This continued without interruption for the space of ten small kalpas as an offering to the Buddha. Up until the time he entered extinction, such flowers constantly rained down. The four Heavenly Kings as their offering to the Buddha constantly beat on heavenly drums, while the other heavenly beings played heavenly musical instruments, all for ten small kalpas. Until the Buddha entered extinction, such was the state of affairs.

"Now, monks, the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence passed ten small kalpas before him and he was able to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.⁷⁷ Before the Buddha left the householder's life, he had sixteen sons, the first of whom was named Wisdom Accumulated. These sons, each had various kinds of rare objects and toys of one kind or another, but when they heard that their father had attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, they all threw aside their rare objects and went to where the Buddha was. Their mothers, weeping, followed after them.

"Their grandfather, who was a wheel-turning sage king, along with a hundred chief ministers, as well as hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million of his subjects, all together surrounded the sons and followed to the place of practice, all wishing to draw close to the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One, to offer alms, pay honor, venerate and praise him. When they arrived. They touched their heads to the ground and bowed before his feet. When they had finished circling the Buddha, they pressed their palms together with a single mind, gazed up in reverence at the World-Honored One, and recited these verses of praise, saying:

The World-Honored One, of great authority and virtue, in order to save living beings spent immeasurable millions of years and at last succeeded in becoming a Buddha, all your vows have now been fulfilled- it is well-- no fortune could be greater!

The World-Honored One is vary rarely met with; having taken his seat, ten small kalpas pass, his body and his hands and feet rest in stillness, never moving, his mind constantly calm and placid, never in turmoil or disorder.

In the end he attains eternal tranquility and extinction, resting in the Law of no outflows.

Now as we observe the World-Honored One in tranquility, having completed the Buddha way, we gain excellent benefits and praise and congratulate him with great joy.

⁷⁷ The king, the father of the sixteen sons finally reached to Nirvana after practicing for ten small kalpas. All of us who read the Lotus Sutra could be in the process to become a Buddha. Who will be a next person to become a Buddha?

Living beings undergo constant suffering and anguish, benighted, without teacher or guide, not realizing there is a way to end suffering, not knowing how to seek emancipation.

Through the long night increasingly they follow evil paths, reducing the multitude of heavenly beings; from darkness they enter into darkness, to the end never hearing the Buddha's name.

But now the Buddha has attained the unexcelled, the tranquility of the Law of no outflows.

We and the heavenly and human beings hereby obtain the greatest benefit. For this reason all of us bow our heads, dedicate our lives to the one of unexcelled honor.

At that time the sixteen princes, having praised the Buddha in these verses, urged the World-Honored One to turn the wheel of the Law, speaking all together in these words: "World-Honored One, expound the law. By doing so, you will bring tranquility to and will comfort and benefit heavenly and human beings in large measure. They repeated this request in verse form, saying:

World hero without peer, you who adorn yourself with a hundred blessings, you have attained unsurpassed wisdom-- we beg you to preach for the sake of the world.

Save and free us and other kinds of living beings.

Draw distinctions, enlighten us and allow us to attain wisdom.

If we can gain Buddhahood, then all living beings can do likewise.

World-Honored One, you know the thoughts that living beings hold deep in their minds.

You know the paths they tread and you know the strength of their wisdom, their pleasures, the blessings they have cultivated, the actions they have carried out in past existences, World-Honored One, all this you know already- now you must turn the unsurpassed wheel!

The Buddha announced to the monks: "When the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, Five Hundred ten thousand million Buddha worlds in each of the ten directions trembled and shook in six different ways. The dark and secluded places within those lands, where the light of the sun and moon is never able to penetrate, were able to see one another, and they all exclaimed, saying, 'How is it that living beings have suddenly come into existence in this place?'

"Also the palaces of the various heavenly beings in those lands and the Brahma palaces trembled and shook in six different ways and a great light shone everywhere,

completely filling the worlds and surpassing the light of the heavens.⁷⁸ At that time in Five Hundred ten thousand million lands in the eastern direction the Brahma palaces shone with the brilliant light that was twice its ordinary brightness, and the Brahma kings each thought to himself. Now the brilliance of the palace is greater than ever in the past. What can be the cause of this phenomenon?⁷⁹

"At that time the Brahma kings visited one another to discuss this matter. Among them was a great Brahma king named Save All who, on behalf of the multitude of Brahma kings, spoke these verses, saying:

Our palaces have a brilliance never known in the past.
What is the cause of this?
Each of us seeks an answer.
Is it because of the birth of some heavenly being of great virtue, or because the
Buddha has appeared in this world that this great light shines
everywhere in the ten directions?

"At that time the Brahma kings of Five Hundred ten thousand million lands, accompanied by their palaces, each king taking his outer robe and filling it with heavenly flowers, journeyed together to the western region to observe the signs there. They saw the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One in the place of practice, seated on a lion seat underneath a bodhi tree, with heavenly beings, dragon kings, gandharvas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human, and nonhuman beings surrounding him and paying reverence. And they saw the sixteen princes entreating the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Law.

"At once the Brahma kings touched their heads to the ground and bowed before the Buddha, circled around him a hundred thousand times, and took the heavenly flowers and scattered them over the Buddha. The flowers they scattered piled up like Mount Sumeru. They also offered them as alms to the Buddha's bodhi tree. This bodhi tree was ten yojanas in height. When they had finished offering the flowers, each one took his place and presented it to the Buddha, speaking these words: 'We hope you will bestow comfort and benefit on us. We beg you to accept and occupy these palaces that we present.'

⁷⁸ The rays of the sun and the moon are often symbolized the truth in not only Buddhism but also other religions. The spiritual world is only described physically by the light. The Buddha Land in the Lotus Sutra is called, "Jo Jakko Do," or the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light." Tranquil refers to the nature of the truth and the light, to wisdom. Compassion of the Buddhas illuminates even where the rays of the sun and the moon cannot reach. It reaches even to the world of hell.

⁷⁹ The ray of the Buddha's compassion illuminated not only the place where the Buddha resided but also ten directions of the universe. Gods and men throughout the ten quarters of the universe consequently tried to locate the place where the light originated. Eventually they found Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha sitting on the lion-like seat under a Bodhi-tree in the place of enlightenment surrounded by gods, dragon-kings, men and non-human beings.

"At that time the Brahma kings, in the presence of the Buddha, with a single mind and joined voices recited these verses of praise:

World-Honored One, vary rarely met with, one whom it is difficult to encounter, endowed with immeasurable blessings, capable of saving everyone, great teacher of heavenly and human beings, you bestow pity and comfort on the world.

Living beings in the ten directions all receive benefit everywhere. In the Five Hundred ten thousand million lands from which we come, we have put aside the joy of deep meditation in order to offer alms to the Buddha.

Because of our good fortune in previous existences our palaces are very richly adorned.

Now we present them to the World-Honored One, begging that he be kind enough to accept them.

"At that time, when the Brahma kings had finished praising the Buddha in verse, they each spoke these words: 'We beg the World-Honored One to turn the wheel of the Law, save living beings, and open up the way to nirvana!'

"Then the Brahma kings with a single mind and joined voices spoke in verse form, saying:

World hero, most honored of two-legged beings, we beg you to expound the Law.

Through the power of your great mercy and compassion, save living beings in their suffering and anguish!

"At that time the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One silently agreed to do so. Now, monks, in Five Hundred ten thousand million lands in the southeast, the Brahma kings each observed that his palace was shining with a brilliant light such as had never been known in the past. Dancing for joy, entering a frame of mind seldom experienced, they went about visiting one another and discussing these things together.

"At that time there was among the assembly a great Brahma king named Great Compassion who on behalf of the multitude of Brahma kings, spoke in verse form, saying:

What cause is in operation that such a sign should be manifest?

Our palaces display a brilliance never known before.

Is it because of the birth of some heavenly being of great virtue, or because the Buddha has appeared in the world?

We have never seen such a sign and with a single mind we seek the reason.
Though we must travel a thousand, ten thousand a million lands, together we
will search out the cause of this light.
Likely it is because a Buddha has appeared in the world to save living beings
in their suffering.

"At that time the Five Hundred ten thousand million brahma kings, accompanied by their palaces, each king taking his outer robe and filling it with heavenly flowers, journeyed together to the northwestern region to observe the signs there. They saw the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One in the place of practice, seated on a lion seat beneath a bodhi tree, with heavenly beings, dragon kings, gandharvas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings surrounding him and paying reverence. And they saw the sixteen princes entreating the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Law.

"At once the Brahma kings touched their heads to the ground and bowed before the Buddha, circled him a hundred thousand times, and then took the heavenly flowers and scattered them over the Buddha. The flowers they scattered piled up like Mount Sumeru. They also offered them as alms to the Buddha's bodhi tree. When they had finished offering the flowers, each one took his palace and presented it to the Buddha, speaking these words: 'We hope you will bestow comfort and benefit on us. We beg you to accept and occupy these palaces that we present.'

"At that time the Brahma kings, in the presence of the Buddha, with a single mind and joined voices recited these verses of praise:

Sage lord, heavenly being among heavenly beings, voiced like the kalavinka
bird, you who pity and comfort living beings, we now pay honor and
reverence.

The World-Honored One is vary rarely met with, appearing only once in many
long ages.

One hundred and eighty kalpas have passed in vain without a Buddha, when
the three evil paths were everywhere and the multitude of heavenly
beings was reduced in number.

Now the Buddha has appeared in the world to be an eye for living beings.
The world will hurry to him and he will save and guard one and all.
He will be a father to living beings, comforting and benefiting them.

We through the good fortune of past existences, now we are able to encounter
the World-Honored One!

"At that time, after the Brahma kings had recited these verses in praise of the Buddha, they each spoke these words: "We beg the World-Honored One to pity and comfort one and all, to turn the wheel of the Law and cause the heavenly beings

"Then the Brahma kings with a single mind and joined voices spoke in verse form, saying:

Great sage, turn the wheel of the Law, reveal the characteristics of teachings,
save living beings in their suffering and anguish, allow them to attain
great joy.

When living beings hear this Law they will gain the way or be reborn in
heaven; those in the evil paths will be reduced in number and those
patient in goodness will increase.

"At that time the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One silently agreed to do so. Now, monks, in Five Hundred ten thousand million lands in the southern region the Brahma kings each observed that his palace was shining with a brilliant light such as had never been in the past. Dancing with joy, entering a frame of mind seldom experienced, they went about visiting with one another and discussing these things together, saying, 'What is the reason our palaces put forth this brilliant light?'

"Among their group there was a great Brahma king named Wonderful Law who, on behalf of the multitude of Brahma kings, spoke in verse form, saying:

Our palaces shine with exceeding brilliance.
This cannot be without reason- it is well we should inquire.
In the past hundred thousand kalpas such a sign has never been seen.
It is because some heavenly being of great virtue has been born, or because the
Buddha has appeared in the world.

"At that time the Five Hundred ten thousand million Brahma kings, accompanied by their palaces, each king taking his outer robe and filling it with heavenly flowers, journeyed together to the northern region to observe the signs there. They saw the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One in the place of practice, seated on a lion seat beneath a bodhi tree, with heavenly and human beings, dragon kings, gandharvas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings surrounding him and paying reverence. And they saw the sixteen princes entreating the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Law.

"At that time the Brahma kings touched their heads to the ground and bowed before the Buddha, circled around him a hundred thousand times, and then took the heavenly flowers and scattered them over the Buddha. The flowers they scattered piled up like Mount Sumeru. They also offered them as alms to the Buddha's bodhi tree. When they had finished

offering the flowers, each one took his palace and presented it to the Buddha, speaking these words: 'We hope you will bestow comfort and benefit on us. We beg you to accept and occupy these palaces that we present.'

"At that time the Brahma kings, in the presence of the Buddha, with a single mind and joined voices recited these verses of praise:

World-Honored One, most difficult to encounter, destroyer of all earthly
desires, one hundred and thirty kalpas have pass and now at last we can
see you.
Living beings in their hunger and thirst are made full with the rain of the
Dharma.
One such as was never seen in the past, one of immeasurable wisdom, like the
udumbara flower today at last appears directly before us.
Our palaces because they receive your light are wonderfully adorned.
World-Honored One, of great mercy and compassion, we beg you to accept
them.

"At that time, after the Brahma kings had recited these verses in praise of the Buddha, they each spoke these words: 'We beg the World-Honored One to turn the wheel of the Law and cause the heavenly beings, devils, Brahma kings, shramanas, and Brahmans throughout the world all to gain peace and tranquility and to attain salvation.'

At that time the Brahma kings with a single mind and joined voices recited in praise, saying;

We beg the most honored of heavenly and human beings to turn the wheel of
the unsurpassed Law.
Strike the great Dharma drum, blow the great Dharma conch, rain down the
great Dharma rain all around to save immeasurable living beings!
We direct all our faith and entreaties to you~ let your profound and far-
reaching voice sound out!

"At that time the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One silently agreed to do so. In the southwestern region, and so on to the lower region, a similar succession of events occurred.

"At that time in the upper region, the Brahma Kings of Five Hundred ten thousand million lands all observed that the palaces where they were residing shone with a brilliant light such as had never been known in the past. Dancing with joy, entering a frame of mind

seldom experienced, they went about visiting one another and discussing these things together, saying, 'What is the reason our palaces puts forth this bright light?'

"Among their group there was a Brahma king named Wonderful Law who, on behalf of the multitude of Brahma kings, spoke in verse form, saying:

Now what is the reason that our places glow and shine with such authority and virtue, adorned as never before?

A wonderful sign of this kind has never been seen or heard of in the past.

It is because some heavenly being of great virtue has been born, or because the Buddha has appeared in the world.

"At that time the Five Hundred ten thousand million Brahma kings, accompanied by their palaces, each king taking his outer robe and filling it with heavenly flowers, journeyed together to the lower region to observe the signs there. They saw the Great Universal wisdom Excellence Thus Come One in the place of practice, seated on a lion seat beneath a bodhi tree, with heavenly beings, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings surrounding him and paying reverence. And they saw the sixteen princes entreating the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Law.

"At that time the Brahma kings touched their heads to the ground and bowed before the Buddha, circled around him a hundred thousand times, and then took the heavenly flowers and scattered them over the Buddha. The flowers they scattered piled up like Mount Sumeru. They also offered them as alms to the Buddha's bodhi tree. When they had finished offering the flowers, each one took his place and presented it to the Buddha, speaking these words: 'We hope you will bestow comfort and benefit on us. We beg you to accept and occupy these palaces that we present.'

"At that time the Brahma kings, in the presence of the Buddha, with a single mind and joined voices recited these verses of praise:

How fine, that we may see the Buddhas, sage and venerable ones who save the world, capable of rescuing and releasing living beings from the hell of the threefold world!

Venerable among heavenly and human beings, of universal wisdom, you pity and have mercy on the mass of burgeoning creatures, you are capable of opening the gates of sweet dew and broadly saving one and all.

Formerly, immeasurable kalpas passed in vain when no Buddha was present.

The time had not yet come for the World-Honored One to appear, and all in the ten directions were in constant darkness.

Those in the three evil paths increased in number and the realm of the asuras flourished; the multitude of heavenly beings was reduced, and many when they died fell into the evil paths.

Since no one could attend the Buddha and hear the Law, constantly people followed ways that were not good and their physical strength and wisdom all diminished and declined.

Because of the sinful deeds they had done, they lost all delight or the thought of delight.

They rested in heretical doctrines and had no knowledge of good customs or rules.

Unable to be converted by the Buddha, constantly they fell into the evil paths. But now you, the Buddha, who will be the eye of the world, after this long time have at last come forth.

In order to bring pity and comfort to living beings you have appeared in the world.

You have transcended the world to gain correct enlightenment; we are filled with delight and admiration.

We and all others in the assembly rejoice, delighting in what we have never known before.

Our palaces because they receive your light are wonderfully adorned.

Now we present them to the World-Honored One, hoping he will have pity and accept them.

We beg that the merit gained through these gifts may be spread far and wide to everyone, so that we and other living beings all together may attain the Buddha way.⁸⁰

"At that time, after the Five Hundred ten thousand million Brahma kings had recited these verses in praise of the Buddha, they each spoke to the Buddha, saying: 'We beg the World-Honored One to turn the wheel of the Law, bringing peace and tranquility to many, bringing salvation to many.' Then the Brahma kings spoke in verse form, saying:

World-Honored One, turn the wheel of the Law, strike the Dharma drum of sweet dew, save living beings in their suffering and anguish, open up and show us the way to nirvana!

We beg you to accept our entreaties and with a great, subtle and wonderful sound to bring pity and comfort by expounding the Law you have practiced for immeasurable kalpas.

⁸⁰ This phrase is very famous. It is rephrased in the Nichiren Shu prayer as follows: "May all beings be blessed with this merit and together with us to attain Buddhahood." I hope you can memorize this phrase and finish your prayer always with this phrase every day. It is a Bodhisattva's spirit. It is the way of faith for Mahayana Buddhists. This spirit is quite different from a religion that claims, "If you do not believe this, you will go to hell."

At that time the Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Thus Come One, receiving entreaties from the Brahma kings of the ten directions and from the sixteen princes, immediately gave three turnings to the twelve-spoked wheel of the Law. Neither shramana, Brahman, heavenly being, devil, Brahma, nor any other being in the world was capable of such a turning. He said, 'Here is suffering, here is the origin of suffering, here is the annihilation of suffering, here is the path on the annihilation of suffering.'⁸¹

"Then he broadly expounded the Law of the twelve-linked chain of causation: ignorance causes action, action causes consciousness, consciousness causes name and form, name and form cause the six sense organs, the six sense organs cause contact, contact causes sensation, sensation causes desire, desire causes attachment, attachment causes existence, existence causes birth, birth causes old age and death, worry and grief, suffering and anguish.

81 As I mentioned before the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination are the teachings of Hinayana Buddhism, which is limited salvation on an individual basis. These teachings are steps, which lead all beings to the Lotus Sutra.

The Four Noble Truths:

These truths comprise a basic concept in Buddhism, which explains the cause of suffering and the way of deliverance therefrom.

They are as follows:

1. All existence is suffering.
2. The cause of suffering is illusion and desire.
3. Nirvana is the realm free from suffering.
4. The means for the attainment of Nirvana is the practice of the eightfold noble path.

The Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination:

1. IGNORANCE or MUMYO, is the cause of all illusion.
2. PREDISPOSITION or GYO, ignorance produces predisposition. Ignorance and predisposition cause one to be born in this world.
3. CONSCIOUSNESS or SHIKI, is the first stage of consciousness after conception that takes place in the womb. It is one's prepossessed character.
4. MENTAL FUNCTIONS & MATTER or MYO-SHIKI is the stage of forming one's body and mind inside a mother's womb. Today we can see inside a mother's womb by x-ray and say, "This is the head, and these are hands and legs." It is a stage of objects and the naming of each of these objects.
5. THE SIX SENSES or ROKUNYU. In this stage, the five organs and the mind are connected. It still takes place in the mother's womb. Today it is said that education in the womb is very important because it will affect the future of the baby to be born.
6. CONTACT or SOKU. A baby is born in this stage. To be born in this world is a great contact for the new born.
7. PERCEPTION or JU. In this stage, one feels good or bad, has a sense of pleasure or dislike, feels comfortable or uncomfortable and so forth. It is a stage which lasts from the birth of a baby until one's early teens.
8. DESIRE or AI, In this stage one wishes to keep the things and matters that he or she feels good, prefer, comfortable and so forth while keep the negative away from him or her.
9. ATTACHMENT or SHU. In this stage, one creates attachments to things and matters which he or she feels good, pleasing, comfortable, and so forth. One will be happy when he or she is able to keep what he or she likes to keep, but one will hate and suffer when the opposite occurs. It is a stage of adolescents. However this attachment causes one to be born again in the next life.
10. EXISTENCE or U. In this stage, one discriminates against others. Our daily lives are full of discrimination; profit or non-profit, good or bad, "mine" or "others," black or white, long or short, etc. It is our life in this world.
11. BIRTH or SHO Thus, we will be born again in the next life because of suffering in the preceding stage.
12. OLD AGE & DEATH or RO-SHI. One gets old eventually and dies.

Thus we repeat countless lives from the past, present and future.

Ignorance originally creates repetition of birth and death. If you do not want to be born again, you must attain enlightenment or truth. If you would like to be born again, let us try to improve ourselves even a bit day by day, year after year and life after life.

If ignorance is wiped out, then action will be wiped out. If action is wiped out, then consciousness will be wiped out. If consciousness is wiped out, then name and form will be wiped out. If name and form are wiped out, then the six sense organs will be wiped out, then contact will be wiped out. If contact is wiped out, then sensation will be wiped out. If sensation is wiped out, then desire is wiped out. If desire is wiped out, then birth will be wiped out. If birth is wiped out, then old age and death will be wiped out. If birth is wiped out, then old age and death, worry and grief, suffering and anguish will be wiped out.

"When the Buddha in the midst of the great assembly of heavenly and human beings expounded this Law, six hundred ten thousand million nayutas of persons, because they ceased to accept any of the things of the phenomenal world and because their minds were able to attain liberation from the outflows, all achieved profound and wonderful meditation practice, acquired the three understandings and the six transcendental powers, and were endowed with the eight emancipations. And when he expounded the second, third and fourth Laws, living beings equal the a thousand ten thousand millions of Ganges sands of nayutas, because they likewise ceased to accept any of the things of the phenomenal world, were able to liberate their minds from the outflows. From that time on, the multitude of voice-hearers became immeasurable, boundless, incapable of being counted.

"At that time the sixteen princes all left their families while still young boys and became shramaneras.⁸² Their faculties were penetrating and sharp, their wisdom was bright and comprehending. Already in the past they had offered alms to a hundred thousand ten thousand million Buddhas, had carried out brahma practices in a flawless manner, and had striven to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.⁸³ All together they addressed the Buddha, saying: World-Honored One, these innumerable thousands, ten thousands, millions of voice-hearers of great virtue have all ready achieved success. World-Honored One, now it is fitting that you should preach the Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi for our sake is that, once we have heard it, we all may join in practicing and studying it. World-Honored One, we are determined to attain the insight of the Thus Come One. Deep in our minds we have this in thought, as the Buddha himself must know.'

"At that time the Buddha, responding to pleas from the shramaneras, passed a period of twenty thousand kalpas and then at last, in the midst of the four kinds of believers, preached the Great Vehicle sutra entitled the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. After he had

⁸² Listening to the Buddha's teachings of lesser vehicle: the Four Noble Truths, the Eight Fold Paths and the Twelve Dependent Causations, The princes were glad to hear them and took ordination to be priests. This stage is not fully priests yet. In Nichiren Shu, we call this stage as "sha-mi." A shami needs a lot of guidance and practice under advise of his master.

⁸³ The relationship of the king and his sixteen sons are not only this world but also in previous existences. They had practiced offerings, keep the Lotus Sutra, memorized the phrases, and also preached other people the sutra. We, must have practiced the Lotus Sutra in our previous lives, therefore, we are able to meet this sangha again in this present life.

preached the sutra, the sixteen shramaneras, for the sake of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, all together accepted and embraced it, recited and intoned it, penetrated and understood it.

"When the Buddha preached this sutra, the sixteen bodhisattva shramaneras all took faith in it and accepted it, and among the multitude of voice-hearers there were also those who believed in it and understood it. But the other thousand ten thousand million types of living beings all gave way to doubt and perplexity.

"The Buddha preached this sutra for a period of eight thousand kalpas, never once stopping to rest. After he had preached this sutra, he entered a quiet room and dwelled in meditation for a period of eighty-four thousand kalpas.

"At this time the sixteen bodhisattva shramaneras, knowing that ascended a Dharma seat and likewise for a period of eighty-four thousand kalpas for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly preached the distinctions put forth in the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law. In this way each of them one by one saved living beings equal in number to six hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges sands, instructing them, bringing them benefit and joy, and causing them to set their minds upon anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.⁸⁴

"The Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha, after passing eighty-four thousand kalpas, arose from his samadhi and approached the Dharma seat. Seating himself calmly, he addressed the whole of the great assembly, saying: these sixteen bodhisattva shramaneras are of a kind very rarely to be found, their faculties penetrating and sharp, their wisdom bright and company of those Buddhas they have constantly carried brahma practices, received and embraced the Buddha wisdom, and expounded it to living beings, causing them to enter therein. Now all of you should from time to time associate closely with them and offer them alms. Why? Because if any of you, voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas, are able to take faith in the sutra teachings preached by these sixteen bodhisattvas, and will accept and embrace them and never disparage them, then such persons will all be able to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, the wisdom of the Thus Come One."

The Buddha, addressing the monks, said: "These sixteen bodhisattvas have constantly desired to expound this Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law. The living beings converted by each one of these bodhisattvas are equal in number to six hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges sands. Existence after existence these living beings are reborn in company with that Bodhisattva, hear the Law from him, and all have faith in and understand it. For this reason they have been able to encounter forty thousand million Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, and have never ceased to do so down to the present.

⁸⁴ Listening to Great-Universally-Excelling-Wisdom Buddha who was their father, the sixteen sons renounced the palace, began practicing the Bodhisattva ways and eventually attained Buddhahood. The 13th son was named Amida, and the 16th, Sakyamuni. Therefore Amida and Sakyamuni were brothers in their former lives.

"You monks, I will now tell you this. These disciples of the Buddha, these sixteen shramaneras, have now all attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. In the lands in the ten directions they are at present preaching the Law, with immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and voice-hearers for their retinue. Two of these shramaneras have become Buddhas in the eastern region. One is named Akshobhya and lives in the Land of Joy. The other is named Sumeru Peak. Two are Buddhas in the southeastern region, one named Lion Voice, the other named Lion Appearance. Two are Buddhas in the southern region, one named Void-Dwelling, the other named Ever Extinguished. Two are Buddhas in the south-western region, one named Emperor Appearance, the other named Brahma Appearance. Two are Buddhas in the western region, one named Amitayus, the other named Saving All from Worldly Suffering. Two are Buddhas in the northwestern region, one named Tamalapatra Sandalwood Fragrance Transcendental Power, the other named Sumeru Appearance. Two are Buddhas in the northern region, one named Cloud Freedom, the other named Cloud Freedom King. Of the Buddhas of the northeastern region, one is named Destroying all Worldly Fears, The sixteenth is I, Shakyamuni Buddha, who in this saha land gave attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

"Monks, when I and these others were shramaneras, each one of us taught and converted living beings equal in number in immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Ganges sands. They heard the Law from us and attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Some of these living beings are now dwelling in the ranks of voice-hearers. But we have constantly instructed them in anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and these persons should be able, through this Law, to enter into the Buddha Way, albeit gradually. Why do I say this? Because the wisdom of the Thus Come One is difficult to believe and difficult to understand. Those living beings equal in number to immeasurable Ganges sands who converted at that time are you who are now monks, and those who, after I have entered extinction, in ages to come will be voice-hearer disciples.

"After I have entered extinction, there will be other disciples who will not hear this sutra and will not understand or be aware of the practices carried out by the Bodhisattvas, but who, through the blessings they have been able to attain, will conceive an idea of extinction and enter into what they believe to be nirvana. At that time I will be a Buddha in another land and will be known by a different name. Those disciples, though they have conceived an idea of extinction and entered into what they take to be nirvana, will in that other land seek the Buddha wisdom and will be able to hear this sutra. For it is only through the Buddha vehicle that one can attain extinction. There is no other vehicle, if one excepts the various doctrines that the Thus Come Ones preach as an expedient means.

"Monks, if a Thus Come One knows that the time has come to enter nirvana, and knows that the members of the assembly are pure and clean, firm in faith and understanding,

thorough in their comprehension of the Law of emptiness and deeply entered into meditation practice, then he will call together the assembly of bodhisattvas and voice-hearers and will preach this sutra for them. In the world there are not two vehicles whereby one may attain extinction. There is only the one Buddha vehicle for attaining extinction and one alone.

"Monks, you must understand this. The Thus Come One in his use of expedient means penetrates deeply into the nature of living beings. He knows how their minds delight in petty doctrines and how deeply they are attached to the five desires. And because they are like this, when he expounds nirvana, he does so in such a way that these persons, hearing it, can readily believe and accept it.

"Let us suppose there is a stretch of bad road Five Hundred yojanas long, steep and difficult, wild and deserted, with no inhabitants around, a truly fearful place. And suppose there are a number of people who want to pass over this road so they can reach a place where there are rare treasures. They have a leader, of comprehensive wisdom and keen understanding, who is thoroughly acquainted with this steep road, knows the layout of its passes and defiles, and is prepared to guide the group of people and go with them over this difficult terrain.

"The group he is leading, after going part way on the road, become disheartened and say to the leader, 'We are utterly exhausted and fearful as well. We cannot go any farther. Since there is still such a long distance ahead, we would like now to turn around and go back.'

"The leader, a man of many expedients, thinks to himself, 'What a pity that they should abandon the many rare treasures they are seeking and want to turn and go back! Having had this thought, he resorts to the power of expedient means and, when they have gone three hundred yojanas along the steep road, conjures up a city. He says to the group, 'Don't be afraid! You must not turn back, for now here is a great city where you can stop, rest, and do just as you please. If you enter this city you will be completely at ease and tranquil. Then later, if you feel you can go on to the place where the treasure is, you can leave the city.'

"At that time the members of the group, being utterly exhausted, are overjoyed in mind, exclaiming over such an unprecedented event, 'Now we can escape from this dreadful road and find ease and tranquility!' The people in the group thereupon press forward and enter the city where, feeling that they have been saved from their difficulties, they have a sense of complete ease and tranquility.

"At that time the leader, knowing that the people have become rested and are no longer fearful or weary, wipes out the phantom city and says to the group, 'You must go now. The place where the treasure is, is close by. That great city of a while ago was a mere phantom that I conjured up so that you could rest.'

"Monks, the Thus Come One is in a similar position. He is now acting as a great leader for you. He knows that the bad road of birth and death and earthly desires is steep, difficult, long and far-stretching, but that it must be traveled, it must be passed over. If living beings hear only of the one Buddha vehicle, then they will not want to see the Buddha, will now want to draw near him, but will immediately think to themselves, The Buddha road is long and far reaching and one must labor diligently and undergo difficulties over a long period before he can ever attain success!

"The Buddha knows that the minds of the living beings are timid, weak and lowly, and so, using the power of expedient means, he preaches two nirvanas in order to provide a resting place along the road. If living beings choose to remain in these two stages, then the Thus Come One will say to them, 'You have not yet understood that is to be done. This stage where you have chosen to remain is close to the Buddha wisdom. But you should observe and ponder further. This nirvana that you have attained is not the true one. It is simply that the Thus Come One, using the power of expedient means, has taken the one Buddha vehicle and, making distinctions, has preached it as three.'

"The Buddha is like that leader who, in order to provide a place to rest, conjured up a great city and then, when he knew that the travelers were already rested, said to them, 'The place where the treasure is, is nearby. This city is not real. It is merely something I conjured up.'"

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha sat in the place of practice for ten kalpas, but the Law of the Buddha did not appear before him and he could not attain the Buddha way.

The assembly of heavenly gods, dragon kings, asuras and others constantly rained down heavenly flowers as alms offered to that Buddha.

The heavenly beings beat on heavenly drums and made many kinds of music.

A fragrant wind blew away the withered flowers, whereupon fresh and beautiful ones rained down.

When ten small kalpas had passed, then at last he was able to attain the Buddha way.

The heavenly beings and people of the world in their hearts all felt like dancing.

That Buddha's sixteen sons all, in company with their followers, a thousand ten thousand million of them gathered around, all came to the place of the Buddha, touching heads to the ground, bowing at the Buddha's feet and entreating him to turn the wheel of the Law, saying, "Saintly Lion, let the Dharma rain fall in full upon us and all others!"

The World-Honored One is very difficult to encounter; only once in a long time does he appear.

In order to bring enlightenment to the many beings he shakes and moves the regions all around.

In the worlds in the eastern direction in Five Hundred ten thousand million lands the palaces of the Brahma kings glowed with a light they had never known in the past.

When the Brahma kings saw this sign they came in search of the Buddha's place scattering flowers as a form of offering, at the same time presenting their palaces, entreating the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Law and praising him in verses.

The Buddha knew that the time had not yet come, and though they entreated, he sat in silence.

In the other three directions and the four directions in between and in the upper and lower regions, the same occurred, the Brahma kings scattering flowers, presenting their palaces, entreating the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Law, saying, "The World-Honored One is very difficult to encounter.

We beg you in your great mercy and compassion to open wide the gates of sweet dew and turn the wheel of the unsurpassed Law."

The World-Honored One, immeasurable in wisdom, accepted the entreaties of the assembly and for their sake proclaimed various doctrines, the four noble truths, the twelve-linked chain of causation, describing how, from ignorance to old age and death, all are produced through the cause of birth, saying, "With regard to these many faults and vexations, you should understand this about them."

When he expounded this Law, six hundred ten thousand million trillion beings were able to exhaust the limits of sufferings, all attaining the status of arhat.

The second time he preached the Law a multitude like a thousand Ganges sands ceased to accept the things of the phenomenal world and they too were able to become arhats.

Thereafter those who attained the way were immeasurable in number- one might calculate for ten thousand million kalpas and never be able to reckon their extent.

At that time the sixteen princes left their families and became shramaneras.

All together they entreated that Buddha to expound the Law of the Great Vehicle, saying, "We and our attendants are all certain to attain the Buddha way.

We desire the wisdom eye of foremost purity such as the World-Honored One possesses."

The Buddha understood their boyish minds and the actions they had carried out in past existences, and employing immeasurable causes and conditions and various similes and parables, he preached the six paramitas and matters

concerning transcendental powers, distinguishing the true Law, the way practiced by bodhisattvas, preaching this Lotus Sutra in verses as numerous as the Ganges sands.

When the Buddha had finished preaching the sutra he entered into meditation in a quiet room, with a single mind sitting in a single place for eighty-four thousand kalpas.

The shramaneras knew the Buddha would not yet emerge from meditation and so for the assembly of immeasurable millions they preached the unsurpassed wisdom of the Buddha, each one sitting in a Dharma seat, preaching this Great Vehicle sutra.

And after the Buddha had entered peaceful tranquility, they continued to proclaim, helping to convert others to the Law.

The living beings saved by each one of those shramaneras were equal in number to six hundred ten thousand million Ganges sands.

After that Buddha had passed into extinction, those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers.

And these sixteen shramaneras, having fully carried out the Buddha way, at present are dwelling in the ten directions, where each has attained correct enlightenment.

The persons who heard the Law at that time are each in a place where there is one of these Buddhas, and those who remain at the stage of voice-hearer are gradually being instructed in the Buddha way.

I myself was numbered among the sixteen and in the past preached for you.

For this reason I will employ an expedient means to lead you in the pursuit of Buddha wisdom; because of these earlier causes and conditions I now preach the Lotus Sutra.

I will cause you to enter the Buddha way~ be attentive and harbor no fear!

Suppose there was a stretch of steep bad road, in a remote wasteland with many harmful beasts, a place moreover without water or grass, one dreaded by people.

A group of countless thousands and ten thousands wanted to pass over this steep road, but the road was very long and far-stretching, extended Five Hundred yojanas.

At this time there was a leader, well informed, possessing wisdom, of clear understanding and determined mind, capable of saving endangered persons from manifold difficulties.

The members of the group were all weary and disheartened and said to their leader, "We are now exhausted with fatigue and wish at this point to turn around and go back."

The leader thought to himself, These people are truly pitiful!

Why do the wish to turn back and miss the many rare treasures ahead?
At that time he thought of an expedient means, deciding to exercise his
transcendental powers.

He conjured up a great walled city and adorned its mansions, surrounding them with
gardens and groves, channels of flowing water, ponds and lakes, with double
gates and tall towers and pavilions, all filled with men and women.

As soon as he had created this illusion, he comforted the group, saying, "Have no fear-
you can enter this city and each amuse himself as he pleases."

When the people had entered the city, they were all overjoyed in heart.

All had a feeling of ease and tranquility, telling themselves that they had been saved.

When the leader knew they were rested, he called them together and announced,

"Now you must push forward-- this is nothing more than a phantom city.

I saw that you were weary and exhausted and wanted to turn back in mid-journey.

Therefore I used the power of expedient means to conjure up this city for the moment.

Now you must press forward diligently so that together you may reach the place
where the treasure is."

I too do likewise, acting as a leader to all beings.

I see the seekers of the way growing disheartened in mid-journey, unable to pass over
the steep road of birth and death and earthly desires, and therefore I see the
power of expedient means and preach nirvana to provide them with rest,
saying, "Your sufferings are extinguished, you have carried out all there is to be
done."

When I know they have reached nirvana and all have attained the stage of arhat,
then I can call the great assembly together and preach the true Law for them.

The Buddhas through the power of expedient means make distinctions and preach
three vehicles, but there is only the single Buddha vehicle-- the other two
nirvanas are preached to provide a resting place.

Now I expound the truth for you- what you have attained is not extinction.

For the sake of the comprehensive wisdom of the Buddha you must expend great
effort and diligence.

If you gain enlightenment in the Law of the Buddha with its comprehensive wisdom
and ten powers and are endowed with the thirty-two features, then this will be
true extinction.

The Buddhas in their capacity as leaders preach nirvana to provide a rest.

But when they know you have become rested, they lead you onward to the Buddha
wisdom.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ "The Buddhas, the Leaders, expound the teaching of Nirvana in order to give a rest. When they see them having already had a rest, they lead them to the wisdom of the Buddha."

Chapter Eight: Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples

SUMMARY

Purna and the Five Hundred congregations were very pleased to hear the Buddha Sakyamuni's logical and consistent teachings, stories of his and his disciples' previous lives, parables and the assurance of future Buddhahood of these disciples. They felt like dancing with joy.

Upon seeing Purna's joyful reaction, the Buddha also taught how Purna had practiced and preached the Lotus Sutra to others during his previous lives. Then the Buddha gave assurance of future Buddhahood to Purna, Kaundinya Bhiksu and other Five Hundred arhats.

Meanwhile, the Five Hundred arhats rejoiced at the Buddha's assurance of their future Buddhahood and expressed their gratitude by telling a parable of "The Gem Fastened Inside the Garment."

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time Purna Maitrayaniputra, hearing from the Buddha this Law as it was expounded through wisdom and expedient means and in accordance with what was appropriate, and also hearing the prophecy that the major disciples would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, hearing matters relating to causes and conditions of previous existences, and hearing how the Buddha possesses great freedom and transcendental powers, obtained what he had never before, and his mind was purified and felt like dancing. Immediately he rose from his seat, advanced to a position in front of the Buddha, touched his head to the ground and bowed to the Buddha's feet. Then he withdrew to one side, gazed up in reverence at the face of the Honored One, his eyes never leaving it for an instant, and thought to himself: the World-Honored One is very extraordinary, very special, his actions rarely to be encountered! Adapting himself to the various natures of the people of this world and employing expedient means and insight, he preaches the Law for them, drawing living beings away from their greed and attachment to this or that. The Buddha's blessings are such that we cannot set them forth in words. Only the Buddha, the World-Honored One, is capable of knowing the wish that we have had deep in our hearts from the start.

At that time the Buddha said to the monks: "Do you see this Purna Maitrayaniputra? I have always commended him as being foremost among those who preach the Law. And I have always praised his various blessings, his diligence in protecting, upholding, aiding and proclaiming my Law, his ability in teaching, benefiting and delighting the four kinds of believers, the thoroughness with which he understands the correct Law of the Buddha, the great degree to which he enriches those who carry out its brahma practices. If one excepts the

Thus Come One, there is no other who can so thoroughly exemplify the eloquence of its theories.

"You should not suppose that Purna is capable of protecting, upholding, aiding and proclaiming my Law only. In the presence of ninety million Buddhas of the past too he protected, upheld, aided and proclaimed the correct Law of the Buddhas. Among all those who at that time preached the Law, he was likewise foremost.

"In addition, concerning the Law of emptiness preached by the Buddhas he has clear and thorough understanding, he has gained the four unlimited kinds of knowledge, and is at all times capable of preaching the Law in a lucid and pure manner, free of doubts and perplexities. He is fully endowed with the transcendental powers of a bodhisattva. Throughout his allotted life span he constantly carries out brahma practices, so that the other people living in the era of that particular Buddha all think, 'Here is a true voice-hearer!'

"And Purna by employing this expedient means has brought benefit to immeasurable hundreds and thousands of living beings, and has converted immeasurable asamkhyas of persons, causing them to turn toward anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. In order to purify the Buddha lands he constantly devotes himself to the Buddha's work, teaching and converting living beings.

"Monks, Purna was foremost among those who preached the Law in the time of the seven Buddhas. He is also foremost among those who preach the Law in my presence now. And he will likewise be foremost among those who preach the Law in the time of the future Buddhas who appear in the present Wise Kalpa, in all cases protecting, upholding, aiding and proclaiming the Law of the Buddha. In the future too he will protect, uphold, aid and proclaim the Law of immeasurable, boundless Buddhas, teaching, converting and enriching immeasurable living beings and causing them to turn toward anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.⁸⁶ In order to purify the Buddha lands he will constantly apply himself with diligence, teaching and converting living beings.

Little by little he will become fully endowed with the way of the bodhisattva, and when immeasurable asamkhyas kalpas have passed, here in the land where he is dwelling he will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. He will be called Law Bright Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone,

⁸⁶ When one becomes a Buddha, he can see the lives of all beings throughout the past, present and future. Our existence does not span only the present lifetime. We have had past lives. We will have future lives. Our existence is eternal. Therefore what we are doing now will affect us in our future lives.

understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One.⁸⁷

"This Buddha will have thousand-millionfold worlds equal in number to Ganges sands as his Buddha land. The ground will be made of the seven treasures and level as the palm of a hand, without hills or ridges, ravines or gullies. The land will be filled with terraces and towers made of the seven treasures, and the heavenly palaces will be situated close by in the sky, so that human and heavenly beings can communicate and be within sight of each other.⁸⁸ There will be no evil paths of existence there, nor will there be any women.⁸⁹ All living beings will be born through transformation and will be without lewd desires.⁹⁰ They will gain great transcendental powers, their bodies will emit a bright glow,⁹¹ and they will be able to fly at will.⁹² They will be firm in intent and thought, diligent and wise, and all alike will be adorned with golden color and the thirty-two features. All the living beings in that land will regularly take two kinds of food, one being the food of Dharma joy, the other the food of meditation delight.⁹³ There will be immeasurable asamkhyas, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of bodhisattvas there, who will gain great transcendental powers and the four unlimited kinds of knowledge, and will be skilled and capable in teaching and converting the different varieties of living beings. The number of voice-hearers will be beyond the power of calculation or reckoning to determine. All will be fully endowed with the six transcendental powers, the three understandings, and the eight emancipations.

"This Buddha land will thus possess measureless blessings of this kind that will adorn and complete it. The kalpa will be named Treasure Bright and the land named Good and Pure. The Buddha's life span will be immeasurable asamkhyas kalpas, his Law will endure for

⁸⁷ In order that Purna be called the Dharma-Brightness Tathagata, there is an attached condition that follows: He will always make efforts to teach all living beings strenuously. Even though we come to the Nichiren Buddhist Temple for ten or twenty years, it is not such a simple matter to attain Buddhahood. However, as we continue to come to the temple and keep up with our faith, it is certain we are getting closer towards reaching Nirvana - step by step.

⁸⁸ When people in the human realm and the deities in the heavenly realm can communicate with each other, this world will always be peaceful and joyful. When we chant the Odaimoku, we can sometimes communicate to the deities in the heavenly realm. This is called kannno-doko, or communication between the Buddha and human beings.

⁸⁹ Women are often looked down even today in some parts of the world. Even within the United States of America, women only recently received the right to vote after the World War I. In Mahayana Buddhism, men and women are equal because everyone has the Buddha-seed. We should interpret the above quotation in the Lotus Sutra as illustrating there is no difference between men and women to become Buddhas.

⁹⁰ This signifies that they will be reborn not through the medium of a mother or an egg or moisture but by their own karma or spiritual wisdom. When we change our thought, we can be reborn as a different person not physically, but spiritually.

⁹¹ We emit light from our bodies. It is called an aura. Light surely affects our surroundings, such as when a noble or a cheerful person enters a room, everyone in the room becomes cheerful.

⁹² This means that when we attain Buddhahood, we will be free like the wind because there will be no obstruction for us to attach ourselves to. "It does not matter that I live in a small house or a large house."

⁹³ The closer to Nirvana we become, the more we delight in reading and chanting the sutra while enjoying keeping calm. Although we offer food at the altar, the best offering to all the Buddhas, St. Nichiren and our ancestors is to chant the Lotus Sutra and its title, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." We should keep a Butsudan, or a family altar, in a quiet room within our homes if we can.

a very long time, and after the Buddha has passed into extinction, towers adorned with the seven treasures will be erected to him throughout the entire land."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

You monks, listen carefully!

The way followed by the sons of the Buddha, because they are well learned in expedient means, is wonderful beyond conception.

They know how most beings delight in a little Law and are fearful of great wisdom.

Therefore the bodhisattvas pose as voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas, employing countless expedient means to convert the different kinds of living beings.

They proclaim themselves to be voice-hearers and say they are far removed from the Buddha way, and so bring emancipation to immeasurable multitudes, allowing them all to achieve success.

Limited in aspiration, lazy and indolent though the multitudes are, bit by bit they are led to the attainment of Buddhahood.

Inwardly, in secret, the sons act as bodhisattvas, but outwardly they show themselves as voice-hearers.

They seem to be lessening desires out of hatred for birth and death, but in truth they are purifying the Buddha lands.

Before the multitude they seem possessed of the three poisons or manifest the signs of heretical views.

My disciples in this manner use expedient means to save living beings.

If I were to describe all the different ways, the many manifestations they display in converting others, the living beings who heard me would be doubtful and perplexed in mind.

Now this Purna in the past diligently practiced the way under a thousand million Buddhas, proclaiming and guarding the Law of those Buddhas.

In order to seek out unsurpassed wisdom he went to where the Buddhas were, became a leader among their disciples, one of wide knowledge and wisdom.

He showed no fear in what he expounded and was able to delight the assembly.

Never was he weary or disheartened in assisting the work of the Buddhas.

Already he had passed over into great transcendental powers and possessed the four unlimited kinds of knowledge.

He knew whether the capacities of the multitude were keen or dull and constantly preached the pure Law.

He expounded such principles as these, teaching a multitude of thousands of millions, causing them to reside in the Great Vehicle Law and himself purifying the Buddha lands.

And in the future to will offer alms to immeasurable, countless Buddhas, protecting, aiding and proclaiming their correct Law and himself purifying the Buddha lands, constantly employing various expedient means, preaching the Law without fear, saving multitudes beyond calculation, causing them to realize comprehensive wisdom.

He will offer alms to the Thus Come Ones, guarding and upholding the treasure storehouse of the Law.

And later he will become a Buddha known by the name Law Bright.

His land will be called Good and Pure and will be composed of the seven treasures.

The kalpa will be named Treasure Bright.

The Multitude of bodhisattvas will be very numerous, numbering immeasurable millions, all having passed over into great transcendental powers, endowed with dignity, virtue, strength, filling the entire land.

Voice-hearers too will be numberless, with the three understandings and eight emancipations, having attained the four unlimited kinds of knowledge-- such as these will be monks of the Order.

The living beings of that land will all be divorced from lewd desires.

They will be born in a pure manner by the process of transformation, with all the features adorning their bodies.

With Dharma joy and meditation delight to feed upon, they will have no thought of other food.

There will be no women there and none of the evil paths of existence.

The monk Purna has won all these blessings to the fullest and will acquire a pure land such as this, with its great multitude of worthies and sages.

Of the countless matters pertaining to it I have now spoken only in brief.

At that time the twelve hundred arhats, being free in mind, thought to themselves, We rejoice at gaining that we have never had before. If the World-Honored One should give each of us a prophecy of enlightenment such as he has given to this other major disciples, would that be a cause for delight?

The Buddha, knowing that this thought was in their minds, said to Mahakashyapa: 'on these twelve hundred arhats who are now before me I will one by one bestow a prophecy that they will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Among this assembly is a major disciple of mine, the monk Kaundinya he will offer alms to sixty-two thousand million Buddhas, and after that will become a Buddha. He will be designated Universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. Five-hundred arhats, including Uruvilvakashyapa, Gayakashyapa, Nadikashyapa, Kalodayin, Udayin,

Aniruddha, Revata, Kapphina, Bakkula, Chunda, Svagata, and others, will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. All will have the same designation, being called Universal Brightness."

The World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The monk Kaundinya will see immeasurable Buddhas and after asamkhya kalpas have passed will at last achieve impartial and correct enlightenment.

Constantly he will emit a great bright light, will be endowed with transcendental powers, and his name will be known in all ten quarters, respected by one and all.

Constantly he will preach the unsurpassed way; therefore he will be named Universal Brightness.

His realm will be pure and clean, his bodhisattvas brave and spirited.

All will ascend the wonderful towers, travel to the lands in the ten directions, in order to offer unsurpassed articles as gifts to the various Buddhas.

After they have offered these alms their minds will be filled with great joy and they will speedily return to their native lands-- such will be their supernatural powers.

The life span of this Buddha will be sixty thousand kalpas, his Correct Law will endure twice that time, his Counterfeit Law twice that time again, and when his Law is extinguished, heavenly and human beings will grieve.

The Five Hundred monks will one by one become Buddhas, all with the same name, Universal Brightness.

Each will bestow a prophecy on his successor, saying, "After I have entered extinction, you, so-and-so, will become a Buddha.

The world in which you carry out conversions will be like mine today."

The adornment and purity of their lands, their various transcendental powers, their bodhisattvas and voice-hearers, their Correct Law and

Counterfeit Law, the number of kalpas in their life span-- all will be as I have described above.

Kashyapa, now you know the future of these Five Hundred who are free in mind.

The remainder of the multitude of voice-hearers will also be like this.

As for those not in this gathering, you must expound and preach to them.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ This is the highlight of Chapter 8 in which Pruna, Kaunidnya and the Five Hundred arhats received assurance of future Buddhahood. However, the more important message throughout this chapter is the phrase that follows the above quotation, "All the other Sravakas also will become Buddha. Tell this to the Sravakas." This signifies that not only the Sravakas who attended the assembly at the Vulture Peak but also the five thousand sravakas who have left the Buddha in Chapter 2 are also able to receive the assurance of Buddhahood from Kasyapa. This also includes those who live in the Period of the Last Law.

At that time the Five Hundred arhats in the presence of the Buddha, having received a prophecy of enlightenment, danced for joy. Immediately they rose from their seats, advanced to a position in front of the Buddha, touched their heads to the ground and bowed to the Buddha's feet. They bewailed their error, reproving themselves and saying, *World-Honored One, we always used to think to ourselves, We have already attained the ultimate extinction. But now we know that we were like persons of no wisdom. Why? Because, although we were capable of attaining the wisdom of the Thus Come One, we were willing to content ourselves with petty wisdom.*

"World-Honored One, it was like the case of a man who went to the house of a close friend and, having become drunk on wine, lay down to sleep. At that time the friend had to go out on official business. He took a priceless jewel, sewed it in the lining of the man's robe, and left it with him when he went out. The man was asleep drunk and knew nothing about it. When he got up, he set out on a journey to other countries. In order to provide himself with food and clothing he had to search with all his energy and diligence, encountering very great hardship and making do with what little he could come by.

"Later, the close friend happened to meet him by chance. The friend said, How absurd, old fellow! Why should you have to do all this for the sake of food and clothing? In the past I wanted to make certain you would be able to live in ease and satisfy the five desires, and so on such-and-such a day and month and year I took a priceless jewel and sewed it in the lining of your robe. It must still be there now. But you did not know about it, and fretted and wore yourself out trying to provide a living for yourself. What nonsense! Now you must take the jewel and exchange it for goods. Then you can have whatever you wish at all times and never experience poverty or want."

"The Buddha is like this friend. When he was still a bodhisattva, he taught and converted us, inspiring in us the determination to seek comprehensive wisdom. But in time we forget all that, became unaware, unknowing. Having attained the way of the arhat, we supposed we had gained extinction. Finding it difficult to provide for our livelihood, as it were, we made do with what little we could come by. However, we not yet lost the desire for comprehensive wisdom. And now the World-Honored One awakens us and makes us aware, speaking these words: Monks, what you have acquired is not the ultimate extinction. For a long time I caused you to cultivate the good roots of Buddhahood, and as an expedient means I showed you the outward signs of nirvana, but you supposed that you had in truth attained nirvana."

"World-Honored One, now we understand. In fact we are bodhisattvas and have received a prophecy that we will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Fro this reason we are filled with great joy, having gained what we never had before."

At that time Ajnata Kaundinya and the others, wishing to state their meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

We have heard the sound of this prophecy assuring us of unsurpassed ease and tranquility; we rejoice in gaining what we never had before and make obeisance to the Buddha of measureless wisdom.

Now in the presence of the World-Honored One we bewail our faults and errors. Of the Buddha's immeasurable treasure we have gained only a small portion of nirvana, and like ignorant and foolish persons have taken that to be sufficient. We are like the poor and impoverished man who went to the house of a close friend. The house was a very prosperous one and he served many trays of delicacies. The friend took a priceless jewel, sewed it in the lining of the poor man's robe, gave it without a word and then went away, and the man, being asleep, knew nothing of it.

After the man had gotten up, he journeyed here and there to other countries, seeking food and clothing to keep himself alive, finding it very difficult to provide for his livelihood.

He made do with what little he could get and never hoped for anything finer, unaware that in the lining of his robe he had a priceless jewel.

Later the close friend who had given him the jewel happened to meet the poor man and after sharply rebuking him, showed him the jewel sewed in the robe.

When the poor man saw the jewel his heart was filled with great joy, for he was rich, possessed of wealth and goods sufficient to satisfy the five desires.

We are like that man.

Through the long night the World-Honored One constantly in his pity teaches and converts us, causing us to plant the seeds of an unsurpassed aspiration.

But because we are without wisdom, we are unaware of this, unknowing.

Having gained a small portion of nirvana, we are satisfied and seek nothing more.

But now the Buddha awakens us, saying 'This is not really extinction, when you have gained the Buddha's unsurpassed wisdom, then that will be true extinction!'

Now we have heard from the Buddha these prophecies and descriptions of adornment, and how each in turn will bestow a prophecy on his successor, and in body and mind we are filled with joy.

Chapter Nine: Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adepts

SUMMARY

This chapter is a continuation of the Chapter Eight. Here the Buddha assures Ananda, Rahula and the other "hearers" or Sravakas, both those who had something more to learn and those who had nothing more to learn.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time Ananda and Rahula⁹⁵ thought to themselves, whenever we reflect, we consider how delightful it would be if we should receive a prophecy of enlightenment! Immediately they rose from their seats, advanced to a position in front of the Buddha, touched their heads to the ground and bowed to the Buddha's feet. Together they spoke to the Buddha, saying:

"World-Honored One, we too should have a share of this! We have put all our trust in the Thus Come One alone, and we are well known to the heavenly and human beings and asuras of all the world. Ananda constantly attends the Buddha and guards and upholds the Dharma storehouse, and Rahula is the Buddha's son. If the Buddha should bestow on us a prophecy that we will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, then our wishes will be fulfilled and the longings of the multitude will likewise be satisfied."

At that time two thousand of the voice-hearers disciples, both learners and adepts who had nothing who had nothing more to learn, all rose from their seats, bared their right shoulders, advanced to a position in front of the Buddha, pressed their palms together with a single mind and, gazing up in reverence at the World-Honored One, repeated the wish expressed by Ananda and Rahula and then stood to one side.

At that time the Buddha said to Ananda: "In a future existence you will become a Buddha with the name Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, and trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. You will offer alms to sixty-two million Buddhas and will guard and uphold their Dharma storehouses, and after that you will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. You will teach and convert bodhisattvas as numerous as twenty thousand ten thousand million Ganges sands and will cause them to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Your land will be named Ever Standing Victory Banner, its soil will be

⁹⁵ Ananda is a cousin of Buddha Sakyamuni while Rauhula is the son of Buddha Sakyamuni.

clean and pure and made of lapis lazuli. The kalpa will be named Wonderful Sound Filling Everywhere. The life span of that Buddha will be immeasurable thousands, ten thousands millions of asamkhyas of kalpas—though men should calculate and reckon thousands, ten thousands, millions of immeasurable asamkhyas of kalpas, they could never ascertain the life span of the Buddha and the Counterfeit Law will endure in the world for twice the time of the correct law. Ananda, this Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King Buddha will be praised alike by Thus Come Ones of the ten directions who are equal in number to immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of Ganges sands, and they will extol his blessings."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

I now say to the monks that Ananda, upholder of the Law, will give alms to the
Buddhas and after will achieve correct enlightenment.
His name will be Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King Buddha.
His land will be clean and pure, named ever Standing Victory Banner.
He will teach and convert bodhisattvas in numbers like Ganges sands.
This Buddha will possess great dignity and virtue, his renown will fill the ten
directions.
His life span will be immeasurable because he takes pity on living beings.
His Correct Law, twice that again.
His Counterfeit Law, twice again.
As numerous as Ganges sands will be the countless living beings who in the
midst of the Buddha's Law will plant causes and conditions leading to
the Buddha way.

At that time in the assembly eight thousand bodhisattvas who had newly conceived the determination to attain enlightenment all thought to themselves, We have never heard of even a great bodhisattva receiving a prophecy such as this. For what reason should these voice-hearers receive such a prediction?

At that time the World-Honored One, knowing the thought that was in the mind of these bodhisattvas, said to them: "Good men, when Ananda and I were at the place of Void King Buddha, we both at the same time conceived the determination to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Ananda constantly delighted in wide knowledge [of the Law], I constantly put forth diligent effort. Therefore I have already succeeded in attaining anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, while Ananda guards and upholds my Law. And he will likewise guard the Dharma storehouses of the Buddha of future existences and will teach, convert and bring success to the multitude of bodhisattvas. Such was his original vow, and therefore he has received this prophecy."

When Ananda in the presence of the Buddha heard this prophecy delivered to him and heard of the land and adornments he was to receive, all that he had vowed to achieve was realized and his mind was filled with great joy, for he had gained what he had never had before. Immediately he recalled to mind the Dharma storehouses of immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas of the past, and he could fully comprehend them without hindrance, as though he had just now heard them. He also recalled his original vow.

At that time Ananda spoke in verse form, saying:

*The World-Honored One, very rarely met with, has caused me to recall the
past, the Law of immeasurable Buddhas, as though I had heard it today.
Now I have no more doubts but dwell securely in the Buddha way.
As an expedient means I act as attendant, guarding and upholding the Law of
the Buddhas.*

At that time the Buddha said to Rahula: In a future existence you will become a Buddha with the name Stepping on Seven Treasure Flowers Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. You will offer alms to Buddhas and Thus Come Ones as numerous as the dust particles of ten worlds. In all cases you will be the eldest son of those Buddhas, just as you are my son now. The adornments of the land of Stepping on Seven Treasure Flowers Buddha, the number of kalpas in his life span, the disciples he converts, his Correct Law and Counterfeit Law will not differ from those of the Thus Come One Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King. You will be the eldest son of that Buddha, and after that you will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*When I was crown prince Rahula was my eldest son.
Now that I have gained the Buddha way he receives the Dharma and is my
Dharma son.
In existences to come he will see immeasurable millions of Buddhas.

As eldest son to all of them, with a single mind he will seek the Buddha way.
The covert actions of Rahula I alone am capable of knowing.
He manifests himself as my eldest son, showing himself to living beings.*

With immeasurable millions, thousands, ten thousands of blessings beyond count, he dwells securely in the Buddha's Law and thereby seeks the unsurpassed way.

At that time the World-Honored One observed the two thousand learners and adepts, mild and gentle in will, serenely clean and pure, gazing at the Buddha with a single mind. The Buddha said to Ananda, "Do you see these two thousand learners and adepts?"

"Yes, I see them."

"Ananda, these persons will offer alms to Buddhas and Thus Come Ones equal in number to the dust particles of fifty worlds, paying honor and reverence to them, guarding and upholding their Dharma storehouses. In their final existence they will all at the same time succeed in becoming Buddhas in lands in the ten directions. All will have the identical designation, being called Jewel Sign Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. Their life span will be one kalpa, and the adornment of their lands, their voice-hearers and bodhisattvas, Correct Law and Counterfeit Law will be all cases the same."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning in verse form, saying:

These two thousand voice-hearers who now stand in my presence- on all of them I bestow a prophecy that in a future existence they will become Buddhas.

The Buddhas to whom they offer alms will be numerous as the dust particles described above.

They will guard and uphold the Dharma storehouses and after that will gain correct enlightenment.

Each will have a land in one of the ten directions and all will share the same name and designation.

All at the same time will sit in the place of practice and thereby will gain proof of unsurpassed wisdom.

All will be named Jewel Sign and their lands and disciples, their Correct Law and Counterfeit Law will all be identical and without difference.

All will employ transcendental powers to save living beings in the ten directions.

Their renown will spread everywhere around and in due time they will enter nirvana.

At that time, when the two thousand learners and adepts heard the Buddha bestow this prophecy, they danced for joy and spoke in verse form, saying:

*World-Honored One, bright lamp of wisdom, we hear your voice bestowing
this prophecy and our hearts are filled with joy as though we were
bathed in sweet dew!*

The Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha:

1. Sâriputra, the most brilliant. Flower-Light Tathagata in Chapter 3.
2. Mahâ-Kâsyapa, the foremost in asceticism = Light Tathagata in Chapter 6,
3. Subhuti, the one who most understood emptiness = Beautiful-Form Tathagata in Chapter 6,
4. Maka-Katyayna, the most skilled debater = Jambunada-Gold-Light Tathagata in Chapter 6,
5. Maka-Maudgalyayana, who possessed supernatural powers = Tamalapattracandana-Fragrance Tathagata in Chapter 6,
6. Purana, the best preacher = Dharma-Brightness Tathagata in Ch. 8,
7. Kaundinya Bhiksu, the Divine Eye = Universal-Brightness Tathagata in Chapter 8,
8. Ananda, who possessed excellent memory = Mountain-Sea-Wisdom-Supernatural-Power-King Tathagata in Chapter 9
9. Rahula = walking-On-Flower-Of-Seven-Treasures Tathagata in Chapter 9.
10. Upali, the foremost in upholding the Precepts = His name was not listed in Chapter 1 of the Lotus Sutra. He might be absent.

Thus, from Chapters two through nine, the Lotus Sutra has presented the renowned disciples of Sakyamuni one after another and tells us that they are assured of their future Buddhahood.

Chapter Ten: The Teacher of the Law

SUMMARY

A teacher of the Dharma is any person who propagates the Buddha's teachings regardless if they are ordained or not. This chapter explains who the teacher of the Dharma is and what the teacher must do. Also this chapter tells that it is very important to support the teacher.

In the preceding chapters, Sakyamuni Buddha talks to shomon or 'hearers' like Shariptura and Maudgalyayana, but from this chapter, he talks to Bodhisattvas. The physical body of the Buddha will die. After his death, the teachers of the Dharma are necessary. They must practice compassion, gentleness, patience and equality to all living beings.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time the World-Honored One addressed Bodhisattva Medicine King. And through him the eighty thousand great men, saying: "Medicine King, do you see in this great assembly the immeasurable number of heavenly beings, dragons kings, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, as well as monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, those who seek to become voice-hearers, who seek to become pratyekabuddhas, or those seek the Buddha way? Upon these various kinds of beings who in the presence of the Buddha listen to one verse or one phrase of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law and for a moment think of it with joy I will bestow on all of them a prophecy that they will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

The Buddha said to Medicine King: "In addition, if after the Thus Come One has passed into extinction there should be someone who listens to the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, even one verse or one phrase, and for a moment thinks of it with joy, I will likewise bestow on him a prophesy that he will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Again if there are persons who embrace, read, recite, expound and copy the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, even only one verse, and look upon this sutra with the same reverence as they would the Buddha, presenting various offerings of flowers, incense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, silken canopies, streamers and banners, clothing and music, and pressing their palms together in reverence, then, Medicine King, you should understand million Buddhas that such person have already offered alms to a hundred

thousand million Buddhas and in the place of the Buddhas have fulfilled their great vow, and because they take pity on living beings they have been born in this human world.⁹⁶

"Medicine King, if someone should ask what living beings will be able to attain Buddhahood in a latter-day existence, then you should show him all these people in a latter-day existence are certain to attain Buddhahood. Why? Because if good men and good women embrace, read, recite, expound and copy the Lotus Sutra, even one phrase of it, offer various kinds of alms to the sutra, flowers, incense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, silken canopies, streamers and banners, clothing and music, and press their hands together in reverence, then these persons will be looked up to and honored by all the world. Alms will be offered to them such as would be offered to the Thus Come One. You should understand that these persons are great bodhisattvas who have succeeded in attaining anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Pitying living beings, they have vowed to be born among them where they may broadly expound and make distinctions regarding the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law. How much more so is this true, then, of those who embrace the entire sutra and offer various types of alms to it!

"Medicine King, you should understand that these persons voluntarily relinquish the reward due for their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they may broadly expound this sutra. If one of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One's work. And how much more so those who in the midst of the great assembly broadly expound the sutra for others!

"Medicine King, if there should be an evil person who, his mind destitute of goodness, should for the space of a kalpa appear in the presence of the Buddha and constantly curse and revile the Buddha, that person's offense would still be rather light. But if there were a person who spoke only one evil word to curse or defame the lay persons or monks or nuns who read and recite the Lotus Sutra, then his offense would be very grave.

⁹⁶ In the era of the Latter Law, a lot of unbelievable crimes are happening, but if there are some people who rejoice at hearing a phrase of the Lotus Sutra, they are the people who will eliminate the darkness of this world. For such people, Buddha assures their future Buddhahood. You who rejoice in this study class of the Lotus Sutra are the persons to be assured attainment of Buddhahood. The Five Practices for the Teacher of the Dharma:

1. To Keep,
2. To Read,
3. To Recite,
4. To Expound, and
5. To Copy the Lotus Sutra.

Among the five practices, to keep the sutra is the most important. Other practices are supporting methods to keep the sutra.

"Medicine King, these persons who read and recite the Lotus Sutra—you should understand that these persons adorn themselves with the adornments of the Buddhas they are borne upon the shoulders of the Thus Come One. Wherever they may go, one should greet them with bows, with palms pressed single-mindedly together, with reverence and alms, with respect and praise, flowers, incense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, silken canopies, streamers and banners, clothing, delicacies and the making of music. The finest alms that can be offered to a person should be offered to them. Heavenly treasures should be scattered over them, the treasure hoards of heaven should be given them as gifts. Why do I say this? Because these persons delight in expounding the Law. And if one listens to them for even a moment, he will immediately attain the ultimate anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

An that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If you wish to abide in the Buddha way and successfully gain the wisdom that comes of itself, you should be constantly diligent in offering alms to those who embrace the Lotus Sutra.

If you have a wish to quickly obtain wisdom regarding all species of things, you should embrace this sutra and at the same time give alms to those who do so.

If one is capable of embracing the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, know that such a person is an envoy of the Buddha who thinks with pity of living beings.

Those who are capable of embracing the Lotus of the Wonderful Law relinquish their claim to the pure land and out of pity for living beings are born here.

Know that persons such as these freely choose where they will be born, and choose to be born in this evil world so they may broadly expound the unsurpassed Law.

You should offer heavenly flowers and incense, robes decked with heavenly treasures, the wonderful treasure hoards of heaven as alms to those who preach the Law.

In the evil world following my extinction if there are those who can embrace this sutra, you should press your palms together in reverence and offer alms to them as you would to the World-Honored One.

The choicest delicacies, all that is sweet and tasty, along with various types of clothing you should offer as alms to these Buddha sons in hopes you may hear a moment of their preaching.

If there are those in a later age who can accept and embrace this sutra, they are my envoys sent out among the people to perform the Thus Come One's work.

If for the space of a kalpa one should constantly harbor a mind destitute of good and with angry looks should revile the Buddha, he will be committing an offense of immeasurable gravity.

But if toward those who read, recite and embrace this Lotus Sutra one should even for a moment direct evil words, his offense will be even greater.

If there is someone who seeks the Buddha way and during a certain kalpa presses palms together in my presence and recites numberless verses of praise, because of these praises of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable blessings.

And if one lauds and extols those who uphold this sutra, his good fortune will be even greater.

For the space of eighty million kalpas, with the most wonderful shapes and sounds, with that which is pleasing to smell, taste and touch, offer alms to the upholders of this sutra!

If you have offered alms in this manner and have heard the teachings for even a moment, then you will experience joy and good fortune, saying, "I have gained great benefit!"

Medicine King, now I say to you, I have preached various sutras, and among those sutras the Lotus is foremost!

At that time the Buddha spoke once more to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Medicine King, saying: "The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands millions, among the sutras I have preached,⁹⁷ now preach,⁹⁸ and will preach,⁹⁹ this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand. Medicine King, this sutra is the storehouse of the secret crux of the Buddhas, it must not be distributed recklessly transmitted to others. It has been guarded by the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, and from times past until now has never been openly expounded, and since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?¹⁰⁰

"Medicine King, you should know that after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, if there are those who can copy, uphold, read and recite this sutra, offer alms to it and expound it for others, then the Thus Come One will cover them with his robe, and they will also be protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas who are now present in other regions. Such persons possess the power of great faith, the power of aspiration, the power of good roots, you should know that such persons lodge in the same place as the Thus Come One, and the Thus Come One pats them on the head with his hand.

"Medicine King, in any place whatsoever where this sutra is preached, where it is read, where it is recited, where it is copied, or where a roll of it exists, in all such places there should be erected towers made of the seven kinds of gems, and they should be made very high and

⁹⁷ All sutras before the Lotus Sutra revealed are in this group.

⁹⁸ This phrase refers to the Lotus Sutra.

⁹⁹ The Meditation Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra are in this group.

¹⁰⁰ A person tends to be jealous towards those superior to himself. By hearing the Lotus Sutra that the teacher of the Dharma will become a Buddha, some people may hate it with jealousy. That is one of many reasons why Nichiren Daishonin was persecuted so many times.

broad and well adorned. There is no need to enshrine the relics of the Buddha there.¹⁰¹ Why? Because in such towers the entire body of the Thus Come One is already present. All kinds of flowers, incense, necklaces, silken canopies. Streamers and banners, music and hymns should be offered as alms to these towers. And they should be accorded reverence, honor and praise. If when people see these towers they bow in obeisance and offer alms, then you should know that such persons have all drawn near to anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

"Medicine King, suppose there is a man who is parched with thirst and in need of water. On an upland plateau he begins digging a hole in search of water, but he sees that the soil is dry and knows that water is still far away. He does not cease his efforts, however, and bit by bit he sees the soil becoming damper, until gradually he has worked his way into mud. Now he is determined in his mind to go on, for he knows that he is bound to be nearing water.

"The way of the bodhisattva is the same as this. As long as a person has not yet heard. Not yet understood. And not yet been able to practice this Lotus Sutra, then you should know that person is still far away from anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Why? Because all bodhisattvas who attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi in all cases do so through this sutra. This sutra opens the gate of expedient means and shows the form of true reality.¹⁰² This storehouse of the Lotus Sutra is hidden deep and far away where no person can reach it. But the Buddha, teaching, converting and leading to success the bodhisattvas, opens it up for them.

"Medicine King, if there are bodhisattvas who, on hearing this Lotus Sutra, respond with surprise, doubt and fear, then you should know that they are bodhisattvas who have only newly embarked on their course. And if there are voice-hearers who, on hearing this sutra, respond with surprise, doubt, and fear, then you should know that they are persons of overbearing arrogance.

"Medicine King, if there are good men and good women who, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, wish to expound this Lotus Sutra for the four kinds of believers, how should they expound it? These good men and good women should enter the Thus Come One's room put on the Thus Come One's robe, sit in the Thus Come One's seat, and then for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly expound this sutra.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ This does not mean that it is all right for us to neglect the ashes of the Buddha Sakyamuni but do not need to attach to enshrine the ashes. Rather we must consider the words and characters of the Lotus Sutra are the Buddha himself. Therefore in "Kaikyō-gō," we read, "The letters that compose the sutra are all in all the Buddha in his Manifestation."

¹⁰² During a funeral service in Nichiren-Shū, this phrase is always read by an Officiant or his assistant to lead the soul of the dead to the spiritual Buddha realm after knocking an edge of a casket to make sure to awaken them to the truth.

¹⁰³ The Buddha Sakyamuni advises to the people who expound the Lotus Sutra that they should have great compassion towards all living beings, should be gentle and patient, and to see equality of all things without attachment to one thing. The Buddha also encourages the teacher of the Dharma saying, "If he is hated and threatened with swords, sticks, tile-pieces or stone, I will manifest men and dispatch them to him in order to protect him."

"The 'Thus Come One's room' is the state of mind that shows great pity and compassion toward all living beings. The 'Thus Come One's robe' is the mind that is gentle and forbearing. The 'Thus Come One's seat' is the emptiness of all phenomena. One should seat oneself comfortably therein and after that, with a mind never lazy or remiss, should for the sake of the bodhisattvas and the four kinds of believers broadly expound this Lotus Sutra.

"Medicine King, I will send persons conjured up by magic to other lands to gather together assemblies to listen to the Law, and I will also send monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen conjured up by magic to listen to the preaching of the Law, believe and accept it, and abide by it without violation. If the preachers of the Law are in an empty and silent place, I will at that time send large numbers of heavenly beings, dragons, spirits, gandharvas, asuras, and others to listen to their preaching of the law. Though I should be in another land, from time to time I will make it possible for the preachers of the Law to see my body. If they should forget a phrase of this sutra, I will appear and prompt them so that they are able to recite the text correctly and in full."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If you wish to put aside all sloth and remissness, you must listen to this sutra, it is hard to get a chance to hear this sutra, and believing and accepting it too is hard.

If a person is thirsty and wants water he may dig a hole in the high plateau, but as long as he sees the soil dry he knows the water is still far away.

But bit-by-bit he sees the soil grow damp and muddy and then he knows for certain he is nearing water.

Medicine King, you should understand that people are like this- if they do not hear the Lotus Sutra, they will be far removed from the Buddha's wisdom, but if they hear this profound sutra which defines the Law of the voice-hearer, if they hear this king of the sutras and afterward carefully ponder it, then you should know such persons are close to the wisdom of the Buddha.

If a person expounds this sutra, he should enter the Thus Come One's room, put on the Thus Come One's robe, sit in the Thus Come One's seat, confront the assembly without fear and broadly expound it for them, making distinctions.

Great pity and compassion are the room.

Gentleness and patience are the robe.

The emptiness of all phenomena is the seat, and from that the position one should expound the Law for them.

If when a person expounds this sutra there is someone who speaks ill and reviles him or attacks him with swords and staves, tiles and stones, he should think of the Buddha and for that reason be patient.

In a thousand, ten thousand, million lands I will manifest my pure and durable body and for immeasurable millions of kalpas will expound the Law for living beings. If after I have entered extinction there are those who can expound this sutra, I will send the four kinds of believers, magically conjured, monks and nuns and men and women of pure faith, to offer alms and cause them to listen to the Law; they will lead and guide living beings, assemble them and cause them to listen to the Law.

If someone thinks to do evil to the preachers with swords and staves or with tiles and stones, I will dispatch persons magically conjured who will act to guard and protect them.

If those who expound the Law are alone in an empty and silent place, and in that stillness where no human voice sounds they read and recite this sutra at that time I will manifest my pure and radiant body for them.

If they forget a passage or a phrase I will prompt them so they will be thorough and effective.

If persons endowed with these virtues should expound to the four kinds of believers and read and recite the sutra in an empty place, I will enable all of them to see my body.

And if the expounders are in an empty and silent place I will send heavenly beings, dragon kings, yakshas, spirits and others to be an assembly and listen to the Law.

Persons such as this will delight in expounding the Law, making distinctions and encountering no hindrance.

Because the Buddhas guard and keep them in mind.

They will be able to bring joy to the great assembly.

If one stays close to the teachers of the Law he will speedily gain the bodhisattva way.

By following and learning from these teachers he will see Buddhas as numerous as the Ganges sands.

Chapter Eleven: The Emergence of the Treasure Tower

SUMMARY

Thereupon a stupa of the seven treasures sprung up from underground and hung in the sky before the Buddha. A loud voice of praise was heard from within the stupa, "Excellent, excellent, what you, Sakyamuni Buddha, have expounded is all true." Seeing these supernatural phenomena, the congregations were so surprised and wondered why these things occurred. The Buddha explains that Many-Treasure or Taho Buddha is in the stupa and the Buddha always appears when the Lotus Sutra is expounded, and he praises the truth of the teachings.

Answering the wish of the congregation to see the Buddha in the stupa, Sakyamuni Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows. The illumination caused the Buddhas of the worlds of the ten directions to summon them to Sakyamuni and Many-Treasure Buddhas. At that moment, Sakyamuni Buddha purified the place. He repeated this three times.

Then the Buddha Sakyamuni ascends into the air to open the door of the stupa. Many-Treasure Buddha offered him half of his seat. Since the seat of the two Buddhas is too high for the congregation to see, Sakyamuni raises them up into the sky by his supernatural powers.

Then he says to them, "I shall soon enter into Nirvana. Is there anyone who is willing to expound the Lotus Sutra in this world after my extinction? I wish to hand it on to someone so that it can be perpetuated."

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time in the Buddha's presence there was a tower adorned with the seven treasures, Five Hundred yojanas in height and two hundred and fifty yojanas in width and depth, that rose up out of the earth and stood suspended in the air.¹⁰⁴ Various kinds of precious objects adorned it. It had five thousand railings, a thousand, ten thousand rooms, and numberless streamers and banners decorated it. Festoons of jewels hung down and ten thousand million jeweled bells were suspended from it. All four sides emitted a fragrance of tamalapatra and sandalwood that pervaded the whole world. Its banners and canopies were made of the seven treasures, namely, gold, silver, lapis Lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl, and carnelian, and it as so high it reached to the heavenly places of the Four Heavenly Kings. The

¹⁰⁴ When a Buddha appears, his stupa or palace also moves as he moves (cf. P.138). You may wonder how a house can move together with a person. However when we move to some other place, we naturally need a place to live. The place could be a rented apartment room, a house, a mansion or an estate. It depends on one's karma, ability and status. Therefore the stupa of Taho Buddha shows his virtue. Since the stupa is decorated with the seven treasures, he has tremendous virtue and goodness. Moreover the stupa means one's Buddha nature. The ground means the society in which one lives. The springing up of the stupa means that salvation in Buddhism is not given from heaven, rather one must strive for himself by his own effort.

gods of the Trayastrimsha heaven rained down heavenly mandarava flowers as an offering to the treasure tower, and the other heavenly beings and the dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, an assembly of thousands, ten thousands, millions, offered all kinds of flowers, incense, necklaces, streamers, canopies and music as alms to the treasure tower, paying it reverence, honor and praise.

At that time a loud voice issued from the treasure tower, speaking words of praise: *"Excellent, excellent! Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, that you can take a great wisdom of equality, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful law, and preach it for the sake of the great assembly! It is as you say, as you say. Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, all that you have expounded is the truth!"*¹⁰⁵

At that time the four kinds of believers saw the great treasure tower suspended in the air, and they heard the voice that issued from the tower. All experienced the joy of the Law, marveling at this thing they had never known before. They rose from their seats, pressed their palms together in reverence, and then retired to one side.

At that time there was a bodhisattva and mahasattva named Great Joy of Preaching, who understood the doubts that were in the minds of the heavenly and human beings, asuras and other beings of all the world. He said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, for what reason has this treasure tower risen up out of the earth? And why does this voice issue from its midst?"*¹⁰⁶

At that time the Buddha said: *"Bodhisattva Great Joy of Preaching, in the treasure tower is the complete body of a Thus Come One. Long ago, an immeasurable thousand, ten thousand million of asamkhyas of worlds to the east, in a land called Treasure Purity, there was a Buddha named Many Treasures. When this Buddha was originally carrying out the bodhisattva way, he made a great vow, saying, 'If after I have become a Buddha and entered extinction, in the lands in the ten directions there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is*

¹⁰⁵ In our society, there are many differences like the rich and poor, the wise and fool, black and white, male and female; however, Buddhas see no difference because everyone has Buddha nature, so everyone can become a Buddha. It is one of the reasons why the Lotus Sutra is excellent.

¹⁰⁶ Bodhisattva Great-Eloquence raised this question. He always represents the congregation to ask questions and to make requests in this chapter.

'Many-Treasure Tathagata caused his stupa to spring up from under ground in order to hear the Lotus Sutra direct from me. Now he praised me.'

Sakyamuni Buddha answers the Bodhisattva and says that in his last life, Many-Treasure Buddha once lived in a world named Pure-Treasure, located at a great distance to the East. When he was still a Bodhisattva, he made a vow: "If anyone expounds the Lotus Sutra after I become a Buddha and pass away, I will cause my stupa to spring up before him, wherever he may be, so that I may be able to prove the authenticity of the sutra." That was the reason Taho Buddha sprung up from underground and why he praised Sakyamuni Buddha.

All Buddhas have their own vows. For example, Sakyamuni Buddha vowed to save all living beings on this earth while Amida Buddha made 48 vows to lead the people who have trust in him to the Pure Land in the West after their death.

preached, then my funerary tower, in order that I may listen to the sutra, will come forth and appear in that spot to testify to the sutra and praise its excellence.'

"When that Buddha had finished carrying out the Buddha way and was on the point of passing into extinction, in the midst of the great assembly of heavenly and human beings he said to the monks, 'After I have passed into extinction, if there are those who wish to offer alms to my complete body, then they should erect a great tower.' That Buddha, through his transcendental powers and the power of his vow, insures that, throughout the worlds in the ten directions, no matter in what place, if there are those who preach the Lotus Sutra, this treasure tower will in all cases come forth and appear in their presence, and his complete body will be in the tower, speaking words of praise and saying, Excellent, excellent!

"Great Joy of Preaching, now this tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, because it heard the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, has come forth out of the ground and speaks words of praise, saying, Excellent, Excellent!"

At this time Bodhisattva Great Joy of Preaching, knowing the supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, spoke to the Buddha, saying, "*World-Honored One, we wish to see the body of this Buddha.*"¹⁰⁷

The Buddha said to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Great Joy of Preaching, "This Many Treasures Buddha has taken a profound vow, saying, 'When my treasure tower, in order to listen to the Lotus Sutra comes forth into the presence of one of the Buddhas, if there should be those who wish me to show my body to the four kinds of believers, then let the various Buddhas who are emanations of that Buddha and who are preaching the Law in the worlds in the ten directions all return and gather around that Buddha in a single spot. Only when that has been done will my body become visible.' Great Joy Preaching, I will now gather together the various Buddhas that are emanations of my body and that are preaching the Law in the worlds in the ten directions."

Great Joy of Preaching said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I and the others also wish to see these Buddhas that are emanations of the World-Honored One, and to make obeisance to them and offer alms."

At that time the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair [between his eyebrows], immediately making visible the Buddhas in the eastern region in lands as

¹⁰⁷ Responding to Great-Eloquence Bodhisattva's request, Sakyamuni Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows. The ray of light illumined all ten directions of the world. Illuminated by the light, those Buddhas in the ten directions came pouring into Mt. Sacred Eagle with their bodhisattvas. These Buddhas are his replicas. Sakyamuni Buddha can produce Buddhas in his likeness by his supernatural powers and dispatch them to the worlds of the ten quarters for propagation. Now they have come to hear this sutra directly from Sakyamuni. This idea of the replica is first introduced here in the Lotus Sutra.

numerous as Five Hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges sands. The earth in all these lands was made of crystal, and the lands were adorned with jeweled trees and jeweled robes. Countless thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas filled them, and everywhere were hung jeweled curtains, with jeweled nets covering them over. The Buddhas in these lands preached the various doctrines of the Law with great and wonderful voices, and one could see immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas filling all these lands and preaching the Law for the assembly. In the southern, western and northern regions as well, and in the four intermediate quarters and up and down, wherever the beam from the tuft of white hair, a characteristic feature of the Buddha, shone, the same was true.

At that time the Buddhas of the ten directions each spoke to his multitude of bodhisattvas, saying, *"Good men, now I must go to the saha world, to the place where Shakyamuni Buddha is, and also offer alms to the treasure tower of Many Treasures Thus Come One."*

The saha world thereupon immediately changed into a place of cleanness and purity.¹⁰⁸ The ground was made of lapis lazuli, jeweled trees adorned it, and ropes of gold marked off the eight highways. There were no villages, towns or cities, great seas of rivers, mountains, streams or forests; great jeweled incense was burning there and mandarava flowers covered the ground all over. Jeweled nets and curtains were spread above, hung with jeweled bells, and the members of this assembly alone were gathered there, all other heavenly and human beings having been moved to another region.

At that time the Buddhas, each with a great bodhisattva to act as his attendant, arrived in the saha world and proceeded to a position beneath one of the jeweled trees. Each of these jeweled trees was Five Hundred yojanas high and adorned with branches, leaves, flowers and fruit in due proportion. Under all the jeweled trees were lion seats five yojanas in height, and these too were decorated with large jewels. At that time each of the Buddhas took one of these seats, seating himself in cross-legged position. In this way the seats were filled throughout the thousand-million-fold world, but still there was no end even to the emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha arriving from merely one direction.

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha, wishing to provide space for all the Buddhas that were emanations of his body, in addition transformed two hundred ten thousand million nayutas of lands in each of the eight directions, making them all clean and pure and without hells, hungry spirits, beasts or asuras. He also moved all their heavenly and human beings to another region. The ground in these lands that he had transformed was also made of lapis

¹⁰⁸ Sakyamuni Buddha purified the land three times. These symbolize the limitless power of the Buddha Sakyamuni. The idea that "The Saha World is identical with the Pure Land of Tranquil Light" originated from this chapter. The land was purified not because all replicas of the Buddha came, but because it was the place where the important teaching of the Lotus Sutra was going to be revealed.

lazuli, Jeweled trees adorned them, each tree Five Hundred yojanas high and adorned with branches, leaves, flowers and fruit in due proportion. There were jeweled lion seats under all the trees, five yojanas in height and ornamented with various kinds of treasures, these lands too were without great seas or rivers, or any kingly ranges of mountains such as the Muchilinda Mountains, Mahamuchilinda Mountains, Iron Encircling Mountains, Great Iron Encircling mountains, or Mount Sumeru. The whole area comprised a single Buddha land, a jeweled region level and smooth. Curtains crisscrossed with festoons of jewels were spread everywhere, banners and canopies hung down, great jeweled incense burned, and heavenly jeweled flowers covered the ground all around.

Shakyamuni Buddha, in order to provide seats for all the Buddhas that were arriving, once more transformed two hundred ten thousand million nayutas of lands in each of the eight directions, making them all clean and pure and without hells, hungry spirits, beasts or asuras. He also moved all the heavenly and human beings to another region. The ground in these lands that he had transformed was likewise made of lapis lazuli. Jeweled trees adorned the lands, each tree Five Hundred yojanas in height and adorned with branches, leaves, flowers and fruit in due proportion. There were jeweled lion seats under all the trees, five yojanas in height and ornamented with great jewels, these lands too were without great seas or rivers, or any kingly ranges such as the Muchilinda Mountains, Great Mahamuchilinda Mountains, iron Encircling Mountains, Great Iron Encircling Mountains, or Mount Sumeru, the whole area comprising a single Buddha land, a jeweled region level and smooth. Curtains crisscrossed with festoons of jewels were spread everywhere, banners and canopies hung down, great jeweled incense burned, and heavenly jeweled flowers covered the ground all around.

At that time the emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha from the eastern region, Buddhas in lands equal in number to hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of Ganges sands, each preaching the Law, had assembled there. And bit by bit the Buddhas from the ten directions all came and assembled in this way and were seated in the eight directions. At this time each of the directions was filled with Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, in four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of lands.

At that time the Buddhas, each seated on a lion seat under one of the jeweled trees, all dispatched their attendants to go and greet Shakyamuni Buddha. Each Buddha presented his attendant with a handful of jeweled flowers and said, *“Good man, you must go to Mount Gridhrakuta to the place where Shakyamuni Buddha is and speak to him as I instruct you. Say, ‘Are your illnesses few, and your worries few? In spirit and vigor are you well and happy? And are the bodhisattvas and voice-hearers all well and at peace?’ Then take these jeweled flowers and scatter them over the Buddha as an offering, and say, The Buddha So-and-so would like to participate in the opening of this treasure tower.”*

All the Buddhas dispatched their attendants to speak in this manner. At that time Shakyamuni Buddha saw the Buddhas that were his emanations all assembled, each sitting on a lion seat, and heard all these Buddhas say that they wished to participate in the opening of the treasure tower. Immediately he rose from his seat and stationed himself in midair. All the four kinds of believers likewise stood up, pressed their palms together and gazed at the Buddha with a single mind.

Shakyamuni Buddha with the fingers of his right hand then opened the door of the tower of seven treasures.¹⁰⁹ A loud sound issued from it, like the sound of a lock and crossbar being removed from a great city gate, and at once all the members of the assembly caught sight of Many Treasures Thus Come One seated on a lion seat inside the treasure tower, his body whole and unimpaired, sitting as though engaged in meditation. And they heard him say, "excellent, excellent, Shakyamuni Buddha! You have preached this Lotus Sutra in a spirited manner. I have come here in order that I may hear this sutra."

At that time the four kinds of believers, observing this Buddha who had passed into extinction immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas in the past speaking in this way, marveled at what they had never known before and took the masses of heavenly jeweled flowers and scattered them over Many Treasures Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha.

At that time Many Treasures Buddha offered half of his seat in the treasure tower to Shakyamuni Buddha, saying, "*Shakyamuni Buddha, sit here!*"¹¹⁰ Shakyamuni Buddha at once entered the tower and took half of the seat, seating himself in cross-legged position.

At that time the members of the great assembly, seeing the two Thus Come Ones seated cross-legged on the lion seat in the tower of seven treasures, all thought to themselves, These Buddhas are seated high up and far away! If only the Thus Come Ones would employ their transcendental powers to enable all of us to join them there in the air!¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ It is very ceremonial. The door cannot be opened until all the Buddhas of his replicas had arrived and sat on their seats and their attendants wished to see the stupa opened. Everyone is waiting with their hands together in Gassho. The sound of the opening the door made a sound as large as the noise of the removal of the bolt and lock at a gate of a great city. Finally the door was open.

¹¹⁰ There are many different forms of Sakyamuni Buddha. When you see a statue of two Buddhas sitting side by side with a stupa between them symbolizes chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra, this shows that Sakyamuni Buddha is preaching the Lotus Sutra. Many-Treasure Buddha is a past Buddha while Sakyamuni Buddha is the present Buddha; therefore both Buddhas sitting together means transcendence of time and space. Sakyamuni Buddha reveals the truth that is more spiritual while Many-Treasure Buddha appears with materialistic seven treasures; that is to say, the truth can be proved with the physical. For example we can see the existence of gravity by dropping an object. Further more, it means that the Lotus Sutra reveals the oneness of spirituality and reality, mental world and physical world, and spirit and matter.

¹¹¹ Answering the request of the great multitude, the Buddha raised them up to the sky. The aim is not for them to walk or stay in the sky but to be ambitious and to improve themselves. It is sometime important to get out of our fixed ideas and to see things from different view points. When we go up to the top of a mountain, everything looks so small. We feel free from the sufferings down below.

Immediately Shakyamuni Buddha used his transcendental powers to lift the members of the great assembly up into the air. And in a loud voice he addressed all the four kinds of believers, saying, "Who is capable of broadly preaching the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law in this saha world?¹¹² Now is the time to do so, for before long the Thus Come One will enter nirvana. The Buddha wishes to entrust this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law to someone so that it may be preserved."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

This holy lord, this World-Honored One, though he passed into extinction long ago,
still seats himself in the treasure tower, coming here for the sake of the Law.
You people, why then do you not also strive for the sake of the Law?
This Buddha passed into extinction an endless number of kalpas ago, but in many
places he comes to listen to the Law because such opportunities are hard to
encounter.
This Buddha originally made a vow, saying, "After I have passed into extinction,
wherever I may go, in whatever place, my constant aim will be to hear the Law!"
In addition, these emanations of my body, Buddhas in immeasurable numbers like
Ganges sands, have come, desiring to hear the Law, and so they may see Many
Treasures Thus Come One who has passed into extinction.

Each has abandoned his wonderful land, as well as his host disciples, the heavenly and
human beings, dragons and spirits, and all the offerings they give him, and has
come to this place on purpose to make certain the Law will long endure.
In order to seat these Buddhas I have employed transcendental powers, moving
immeasurable multitudes, causing lands to be clean and pure, leading each of
these Buddhas to the foot of a jeweled tree, adorned as lotus blossoms adorn a
clear cool pond.
Beneath these jeweled trees are lion seats, and the Buddhas seat themselves on them,
adorning them with their brilliance like a huge torch burning in the darkness
of the night.
A wonderful incense exudes from their bodies, pervading the lands in the ten
directions.
Living beings are wrapped in the aroma, unable to restrain their joy, as though a great
wind were tossing the branches of small trees.
Through this expedient means they make certain that the Law will long endure.

¹¹² Sakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra for eight years before his death. His body was also mortal. He realized his death was approaching; therefore he asked someone to take over his place. But he also warned that it would not be an easy task to expound the Lotus Sutra.

So I say to the great assembly: After I have passed into extinction, who can guard and uphold, read and recite this sutra?

Now in the presence of the Buddha let him come forward and speak his vow!

This Many Treasures Buddha, though he passed into extinction long ago, because of his great vow roars the lion's roar.

Many Treasures Thus Come One, I myself, and these emanation Buddhas who have gathered there, surely know this is our aim.

You sons of the Buddha, who can guard the Law?

Let him make a great vow to ensure that it will long endure!

He who is capable of guarding the Law of this sutra will thereby have offered alms to me and to Many Treasures.

This Many Treasures Buddha dwelling in his treasure tower journeys constantly throughout the ten directions for the sake of this sutra.

One who guards this sutra will also have offered alms to the emanation Buddhas who have come here adorning and making brilliant all the various worlds.

If one preaches this sutra, he will be able to see me and Many treasures Thus Come One and these emanation Buddhas.

All you good men, each of you must consider carefully!

This is a difficult matter- it is proper you should make a great vow.

The other sutras number as many as Ganges sands, but though you expound those sutras, that is not worth regarding as difficult.

If you were to seize Mount Sumeru and fling it far off to the measureless Buddha lands, that too would not be difficult.

If you used the toe of your foot to move a thousand-million-fold world, booting it far away to other lands, that too would not be difficult.

If you stood in the Summit of Being heaven and for the sake of the assembly preached countless other sutras, that too would not be difficult.

But if after the Buddha has entered extinction, in the time of evil, you can preach this sutra, that will be difficult indeed!

If there were a person who took the empty sky in his hand and walked all around with it, that would not be difficult.

But if after I have passed into extinction one can write out and embrace this sutra and cause others to write it out, that will be difficult indeed!

If one took the great earth, placed it on his toenail, and ascended with it to the Brahma heaven, that would not be difficult.

But if after the Buddha has passed into extinction, in the time of evil, one can even for a little while read this sutra, that will be difficult indeed!

If, when the fires come at the end of the kalpa, one can load dry grass on his back and enter the fire without being burned, that would not be difficult.

But after I have passed into extinction if one can embrace this sutra and expound it to even one person, that will be difficult indeed!

If one were to embrace this storehouse of eighty-four thousand doctrines, the twelve divisions of the sutras, and expound it to others, causing listeners to acquire the six transcendental powers- though one could do that, that would not be difficult.

But after I have entered extinction if one can listen to and accept this sutra and ask about its meaning, that will be difficult indeed!

If a person expounds the Law, allowing thousands, ten thousands, millions, immeasurable number of living beings equal to Ganges sands to become arhats endowed with the six transcendental powers, though one might confer such benefits that would not be difficult.

But after I have entered extinction if one can honor and embrace a sutra such as this one, that will be difficult indeed!

For the sake of the Buddha way in immeasurable numbers of lands from the beginning until now I have widely preached many sutras, and among them this sutra is foremost.

If one can uphold this, he will be upholding the Buddha's body.

All you good men, after I have entered extinction who can accept and uphold, read and recite this sutra?

Now in the presence of the Buddha let him come forward and speak his vow!

This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas.

A person who can do this wins the admiration of the Buddhas.

This is what is meant by valor, this is what is meant by diligence.

This is what is called observing the precepts and practicing dhuta.

This way one will quickly attain the unsurpassed Buddha way.

And if in future existences one can read and uphold this sutra, he will be a true son of the Buddha, dwelling in a land spotless and good.

If after the Buddha has passed into extinction one can understand the meaning of this sutra, he will be the eyes of the world for heavenly and human beings.

If in that fearful age one can preach this sutra for even a moment, he will deserve to receive alms from all heavenly and human beings.

Chapter Twelve: Devadatta

SUMMARY

There are two topics in this chapter. One is the Enlightenment by an evil-minded person, and the other is Enlightenment by a female.

Devadatta was a cousin of Sakyamuni Buddha. Their age must be about the same. They both were very smart and talented; therefore, they competed often on various occasions. It is said that they challenged each other to marry Yasodhara. As a result of the games, Sakyamuni won over Devadatta and married Yasodhara.

Devadatta was jealous of the Buddha's fame and position. He tried to take over the Buddha's Sangha. Once, he wounded the Buddha by pushing off a cliff a huge rock onto a trail where the Buddha was traveling. He also tried to murder Sakyamuni with an angry elephant. Devadatta disturbed the Buddha's Sangha by misguiding his disciples.

Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra reveals the relationship between Sakyamuni and Devadatta. Although Devadatta is infamous as an evil person, he will attain Buddhahood in the future because he has been Sakyamuni's teacher in one of his previous existences.

The last half of this chapter shows the attainment of enlightenment by a female with an example of an eight year old daughter of Dragon-King. According to Hindu customs at the time in India, females were considered to be sinful. They cannot enter the five superior existences:

- 1) a Brahman heavenly-king-Bonten,
- 2) heavenly-king-Sâkra,
- 3) King Mara (king of devils),
- 4) a powerful holy king to rule the entire nation,
- 5) a Buddha.

However, breaking the tradition, the eight year old daughter of the Dragon-King proved the attaining of enlightenment by a woman with the Buddha's acceptance of her gem. Then she transformed herself into a boy and supernaturally performed the Bodhisattva practices required by tradition.

The enlightenment by the evil person and the woman are not surprising in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. It teaches that all living beings - male, female, young, old, human, non human - are potential Buddhas.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time the Buddha addressed the bodhisattvas, the heavenly and human beings, and the four kinds of believers saying: *Immeasurable kalpas in the past, I sought the Lotus*

Sutra without ever flagging.¹¹³ During those many kalpas, I constantly appeared as the ruler of a kingdom who made a vow to seek the unsurpassed bodhi. His mind never wavered or turned aside, and in his desire to fulfill the six paramitas¹¹⁴ he diligently distributed alms, never stinting in heart, whether the gift was elephants or horses, the seven rare articles, countries, cities, wife, children, maidservants, or his own head, eyes, marrow and brain, his own flesh and limbs. He did not begrudge even his own being and life. At that period the human life span was immeasurably long. But for the sake of the Law this king abandoned his kingdom and throne, delegated the government to the crown prince, sounded drums and sent out proclamations, seeking the Law in four directions and saying, 'Who can expound the Great Vehicle for me? To the end of my life I will be his provider and servant!'

"At that time there was a seer who came to the king and said, 'I have a Great Vehicle text called the Sutra of the Wonderful Law. If you will never disobey me, I will expound it for you.'

"When the king heard these words of the seer, he danced for joy. At once he accompanied the seer, providing him with whatever he needed, picking fruit, drawing water, gathering firewood, setting out meals, even offering his own body as a couch and seat, never stinting in body or mind.¹¹⁵ He served the seer in this manner for a thousand years, all for the sake of the Law, working diligently acting as a provider and seeing to it that the seer lacked for nothing."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

I recall those departed kalpas of the past when in order to seek the great Law,
though I was the ruler of a worldly kingdom, I was not greedy to satisfy
the five desires but instead struck the bell, crying in four quarters, "Who
possesses the great Law?
If he will explain and preach it for me I will be his slave and servant!"

¹¹³ The Lotus Sutra always talks of the three times: past, present and future. Buddha Sakyamuni sought the Lotus Sutra in his former lives, too. The Lotus Sutra here does not mean the sutra written in letters rather it implies the absolute truth.

¹¹⁴ The Six Paramitas are the six kinds of practice by which bodhisattvas are able to attain enlightenment. They are giving, keeping precepts, perseverance, assiduity, meditation and wisdom. Here the king in the Buddha's previous life, first practices giving. The king never grudged elephants, horses, the treasures, countries, wives, children or servants. He did not spare his head, eyes, marrow, brain, flesh, hands, feet or even his life.

We are ordinary people, we spare our bodies, spouses and children. But we can donate money, labor and time. We can teach, or we can smile to others. They are all parts of giving.

¹¹⁵ The king prepared drinks, foods, firewood and bedding for Ashita the Hermit for many years. He never felt tired in body and mind. Is not this what a mother is doing everyday? In this chapter, there is no indication that the hermit teaches the dharma. In other words, what we are doing everyday is the practices of the Bodhisattva. Without daily lives, the practices of Bodhisattvas are useless.

At that time there was a seer named Asita who came and announced to this great King, "I have a subtle and wonderful Law, rarely known in this world.

If you will undertake religious practice I will expound it for you."

When the king heard the seer's words his heart was filled with great joy.

Immediately he accompanied the seer, providing him with whatever he needed, gathering firewood, fruit and wild rice, presenting them at appropriate times with respect and reverence.

Because the wonderful Law was then his thoughts he never flagged in body or mind.

For the sake of living beings everywhere he diligently sought the great Law, taking no heed for himself or for the gratification of the five desires.

Therefore the ruler of a great kingdom through diligent seeking was able to acquire this Law and eventually to attain Buddhahood, as I will now explain to you.

The Buddha said to his monks: "The king at that time was I myself, and this seer was the man who is now Devadatta.¹¹⁶ All because Devadatta was a good friend to me, I was able to become fully endowed with this six paramitas, pity, compassion, joy, and indifference, with the thirty-two features, the eighty characteristics, the purple-tinged golden color, the ten powers, the four kinds of fearlessness, the four methods of winning people, the eighteen unshared properties, and the transcendental powers and the power of the way. The fact that I have attained impartial and correct enlightenment and can save living beings on a broad scale is all due to Devadatta who was a good friend."

Then the Buddha said to the four kinds of believers: "Devadatta, after immeasurable kalpas have past, will attain Buddhahood.¹¹⁷ He will be called Heavenly King Thus Come One, worthy of offerings of right and universal knowledge, perfect parity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, on itself worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. This world will be called Heavenly Way, and at the same time Heavenly King Buddha will abide in the world for twenty medium kalpas, broadly preaching the Wonderful Law for the sake of living beings. Living beings numerous as Ganges sands will attain the fruit of arhatship. Immeasurable numbers of living beings will conceive that desire to become pratyekabuddhas, living beings numerous as Ganges sands will conceive a desire for the unsurpassed way, will gain that truth of birthlessness, and will

¹¹⁶ Senchu Murano translated the word, "zen-chishiki" as a teacher. But the word, "zen-chishiki" has a deeper meaning. Literally zen means good, while chishiki, wisdom. Other translators of the sutra use "friend" or "friendship" for the word chishiki.

The relationship of the Devadatta and the Buddha cannot be separated with the relationship between the king and the hermit. Because of that relationship, the wicked Devadatta will become a Buddha.

¹¹⁷ It is said that Devadatta fell into a crack in the ground at the time of an earthquake and went into hell. I wonder, what he is doing for innumerable kalpas? I guess he is repenting his wrong conducts.

never regress. After Heavenly King Buddha enters parinirvana, his Correct Law will endure in the world for twenty medium kalpas. The relics from his whole body will be housed in a tower built of the seven treasures, sixty yojanas in height and forty yojanas in width and depth. All the heavenly and human beings will take assorted flowers, powdered incense, incense for burning, paste incense, clothing, necklaces, steamers and banners, jeweled canopies, music and songs of praise that offer them with obeisance to the wonderful seven-jeweled tower. Immeasurable numbers of living beings will attain the fruits of arhatship, numerous living beings will become enlightened as pratyekabuddhas, and unimaginable numbers of living beings will conceive a desire for bodhi and will in reach the level of no regression."

The Buddha said to the monks: "In future ages if there are good men or good women who, on hearing the Devadatta Chapter of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, believe and revere it with pure hearts harbor no doubts or perplexities, they will never fall into hell or the realm of hungry spirits or of beasts, but will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and in the place where they are born they will constantly hear this sutra. If they are born among human or heavenly beings, they will enjoy exceedingly wonderful delights, and if they are born in the presence of the Buddha, they will be born by transformation from lotus flowers."

At that time there was a bodhisattva who was among the followers of Many Treasures World-Honored One from the lower region and whose name was Wisdom Accumulated. He said to Many Treasures Buddha, "*Shall we return to our homeland?*"

Shakyamuni Buddha said to Wisdom Accumulated, 'good man, wait a little while. There is a bodhisattva named Manjushri here whom you should see. Debate and discuss the wonderful Law with him, and then you may return to your homeland."

At that time Manjushri was seated on a thousand-petaled lotus blossom big as a carriage wheel, and the bodhisattvas who had come with them were also seated on jeweled lotus blossoms. Manjushri had emerged in a natural manner from the palace of the dragon king Sagara in the great ocean and was suspended in the air.¹¹⁸ Proceeding to Holy Eagle Peak, he descended from the lotus blossom and, having entered the presence of the Buddhas, bowed his head and paid obeisance to the feet of the two World-Honored Ones. When he had concluded these gestures of respect, he went to where Wisdom Accumulated was and exchanged greetings with him, and retired then retired and sat at one side.

¹¹⁸ Manjusri was probably the first overseas minister. The country could be present Ceylon. His propagation was not only to the sea but also to the sky which symbolize that the Buddha's compassion reaches to all living beings in the ocean, on the earth and in the sky.

Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated questioned Manjushri, saying, *"When you went to the palace of the dragon king, how many living beings did you convert?"*

Manjushri replied, *"The number is immeasurable, incapable of calculation. The mouth cannot express it, the mind cannot have fathom it. Wait a moment and there will be proof."*

Before he had finished speaking, countless bodhisattvas seated on jeweled lotus blossoms emerged from the Ocean proceeded to Holy Eagle Peak, where they remained suspended in the air. These bodhisattvas all had been converted and saved by Manjushri. They had carried out all the bodhisattva practices and discussed and expounded the six paramitas with one another. Those who had originally been voice-hearers expounded the practices of the voice-hearer when they were in the air, but now all were practicing the Great Vehicle principle of emptiness.

Manjushri said to Wisdom Accumulated, *"The work of teaching and converting carried out that in the ocean was as you can see."*

At that time Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated recited these verses of praise:

*Of great wisdom and virtue, brave and stalwart, you have converted and saved
immeasurable beings.
Now those in this great assembly, as well as I myself, have all seen them.
You expound the principle of the true entity, open up the Law of the single
vehicle, broadly guiding the many beings, causing them quickly to
attain bodhi.*

Manjushri said, *"When I was in the ocean I constantly expounded the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law alone."*

Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated questioned Manjushri, saying, *"This sutra is a profound, subtle and wonderful, a treasure among sutras, a rarity in the world. Are there perhaps any living beings who, by earnestly and diligently practicing this sutra, have been able to attain Buddhahood quickly?"*

Manjushri replied, *"There is the daughter of the dragon king Sagara, who was just turned eight. Her wisdom has keen roots and she is good at the understanding the root activities and of living beings. She has mastered the dharanis, has been able to accept and embrace all the store house of profound secrets preached by the Buddhas, has entered deep into meditation, thoroughly grasping the doctrines, and in the space of an instant conceived the desire for bodhi and reached the level of no regression. Her eloquence knows no hindrance, and she thinks of living beings with compassion as though they were her own*

children. She is fully endowed with blessings, and when it comes to conceiving in mind and expounding by mouth, she is subtle, wonderful, comprehensive and great. Kind, compassionate, benevolent, yielding, she is gentle and refined in will, capable of attaining bodhi."¹¹⁹

Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated said, *"When I observe Shakyamuni Thus Come One, I see that for immeasurable kalpas he carried out harsh and difficult practices, accumulated merit, piling up virtue, seeking the way to the bodhisattva without ever resting. I observe that throughout the thousand-million fold world there is not a single spot tiny as a mustard seed where this bodhisattva failed to sacrifice body and life the sake of living beings. Only after he had done that was he able to complete the bodhi way. I cannot believe that this girl in the space of the instant could actually achieve correct enlightenment."*

Before his words had come to an end, the dragon king's daughter suddenly appeared before the Buddha, bowed her head in obeisance, and then retired to one side, reciting these verses of praise:

*He profoundly understands the signs of guilt and good fortune and illuminates
the ten directions everywhere.
His subtle, wonderful pure Dharma body is endowed with the thirty-two
features; the eighty characteristics adorn his Dharma body.
Heavenly and human beings gaze up in awe, dragons and spirits all pay honor
and respect; among all living beings, none who do not hold him in
reverence.
And having heard his teachings, I have attained bodhi - the Buddha alone can
bear witness to this.
I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle to rescue living beings from
suffering.*

At that time Shariputra said to the dragon girl, *"You suppose that in this short time you have been able to attain the unsurpassed way. But this is difficult to believe. Why? Because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law."¹²⁰ How could you attain the unsurpassed bodhi? The road to Buddhahood is long and far-reaching. Only after*

¹¹⁹ Dragon-King Sagara is present together with other dragon-kings in the congregation in Chapter 1. Dai-Chidoron, a commentary on a sutra by Nagarjuna, comments that the dragon-kings are manifestations of great bodhisattvas in order to save animals. I am not sure that the daughter of Dragon-King Sagara who attained enlightenment is animal or human being. She could be a person or a dragon.

It was unbelievable for the people in India at that time that a woman could become a Buddha. Women have almost always been neglected in most countries until very recently. Even in the United States, woman got the power to vote in 1920 after World War I.

¹²⁰ Women were considered defiled in India at that time. A woman could not be a heavenly leader named Bonten or Taishaku, a leader of devils, a leader of a country or a Buddha according to tradition in India. Today we know a few female presidents and female prime ministers in some countries. I wonder when a woman will become a president in the United States. I guess it would be easier for a woman to become a Buddha than to become the president of the United States.

one has spent immeasurable kalpas pursuing austerities, accumulating deeds, practicing all kinds of paramitas, can one finally achieve success.¹²¹ Moreover, a woman is subject to the five obstacles. First, she cannot become a Brahma heavenly king. Second, she cannot become the king Shakra. Third, she cannot become a devil king. Fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning sage king. Fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. How then could a woman like you be able to attain Buddhahood so quickly?"

At that time the dragon girl had a precious jewel worth as much as the thousand-million-fold world which she presented to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately accepted it. The dragon girl said to Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated to the venerable one, Shariputra, *"I presented the precious jewel and the World-Honored One accepted it - was that not quickly done?"*

They replied, *"Very quickly!"*

The girl said, *"Employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood. It shall be even quicker than that!"*

At that time the members of the assembly all saw the dragon girl in the space of an instant change into a man and carry out all the practices of a bodhisattva, immediately proceeding to the Spotless World of the south, taking a seat on a jeweled lotus, and attaining impartial and correct enlightenment. With the thirty-two features and the eighty characteristics, he expounded the wonderful Law for all living beings everywhere in the ten directions.¹²²

¹²¹ We have already learned that Buddha Sakyamuni had practiced the ways of Bodhisattvas in many previous lives. Then finally he was born as a prince of Kapilavasthu, India. After he renounced the luxurious life in the palace, he became a homeless monk. After six years of ascetic practices, he meditated under a Bodhi tree and at last attained Enlightenment. This is the way we have learned and other schools of Buddhism teach. However chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra reveals that he has been a Buddha since eternal kalpas ago.

Because the prince became a Buddha, we are not required to practice the ways of Bodhisattva for innumerable kalpas. For instance when you drive a car; Do you have to make an engine, a body, sterling wheels, etc. by yourself? You don't need to do so. You just need a key and know how to drive. When you use a computer, you do not need to know how the computer works. The hard parts have been done by someone else. We receive their hard work and use the car and computer comfortably.

Today it is an instant time. You do not need to understand the whole meaning of the Lotus Sutra. For those who do not like to study, Nichiren Shonin presented us the Odaimoku for our instant salvation. Of course study and practice help you understand Buddhism, but even an ignorant person who cannot read and write can be a Buddha instantly by faith.

¹²² Many people have explained why the girl had to change into a boy. I know a few reasons, but these explanations were made by men. I would like to know how a woman would explain why the girl had to change her appearance and body to a boy.

Some of the reasons explained by men are:

- 1) because in order to break one of the Hindu customs at that time, once you were born as a slave you could never change from that cast,
- 2) because a man were considered superior than a woman,
- 3) because the Lotus Sutra teaches equality of a man and a woman.

At that time in the saha world to a the bodhisattvas, voice-hearers, gods, dragons and others of the eight kinds of guardians, human and non-human beings all from a distance saw the dragon girl become a Buddha and preach the law to all the human and heavenly beings in the assembly at that time. Their hearts were filled with great joy and all from a distance paid reverent obeisance. Immeasurable living beings, hearing the Law, understood it and were able to reach the level of no regression. Immeasurable living beings received prophecies that they would gain the away. The Spotless World quaked and trembled in six different ways. Three thousand living beings of the saha world remained on the level of no regression. Three thousand living beings conceived a desire for bodhi and received prophecies of enlightenment. Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated, Shariputra and all the other members of the assembly silently believed an accepted these things.

Chapter Thirteen: Admonition to Embrace the Sutra

SUMMARY

At the end of Chapter 11, Sakyamuni Buddha says: "I shall soon enter into Nirvana. Is there anyone who is willing to expound the Lotus Sutra in this world after my extinction? I wish to hand it on to someone, so that it can be perpetuated."

Chapter 13 is the response from Medicine-King Bodhisattva (Yaku-0 Bosatsu) and twenty thousand other Bodhisattvas who vowed to the Buddha that they would keep, read, recite and expound the sutra. But they said they will do so in some other worlds rather than on this earth because the people of this world have many evils.

Meantime, the Buddha gave assurance of attaining Buddhahood to his step-mother and his wife.

At this time, there were eighty billion nayuta of bodhisattvas who made up their minds to expound the sutra and vowed to endure any hardship and persecutions on the earth.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the Bodhisattva and mahasattva Medicine King, along with the bodhisattva and mahasattva Great Joy of Preaching and twenty thousand bodhisattva followers who were accompanying them, all in the presence of the Buddha took this vow, saying: *"We beg the World-Honored One to have no further worry. After the Buddha has entered extinction we will honor, embrace, read, recite and preach this sutra. Living beings in the evil age to come will have fewer and fewer good roots. Many will be overbearingly arrogant and greedy for offerings and other forms of gain, increasing the roots that are not good and moving farther away than ever from emancipation. But although it will be difficult to teach and convert them, we will summon up the power of great patience and will read and recite this sutra, embrace, preach, and copy it, offering it many kinds of alms and never begrudging our bodies or lives."*

At that time in the assembly there were Five Hundred arhats who received a prophecy of enlightenment. They said to the Buddha, *"World-Honored One, we too make a vow. In lands other than this one we will broadly preach this sutra."*

Also there were eight thousand persons, some still learning, others with nothing more to learn, who received a prophecy of enlightenment. They rose from their seats, pressed their palms together and, turning toward the Buddha, made this vow: *"World-Honored One, we too in other lands will broadly preach this sutra. Why? Because in this saha world the people are given to corruption and evil, beset by overbearing arrogance, shallow in blessings, irascible, muddled, fawning and devious, and their hearts are not sincere."*

At that time the Buddha maternal aunt, the nun Mahaprajapati, and the six thousand nuns who accompanied her, some still learning, others with nothing more to learn, rose from their seats, pressed their palms together with a single mind and gazed up at the face of the honored one, their eyes never leaving him for instance.

At that time the World-Honored One said to Gautami, "Why do you look at the Thus Come One in that perplexed manner? In your heart are you perhaps worrying that I have failed to mention your name among those of received a prophecy of the attainment of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi? But Gautami, I earlier made a general statement saying that all the voice-hearers had received such a prophecy.¹²³ Now if you would like to know the prophecy for you, I will say that in ages to come, amid the Law of sixty-eight thousands of millions of Buddhas, you will be a great teacher of Law, and the six thousand nuns, some still learning, some already sufficiently learned, will accompany you as teachers of the Law. In this manner you will bit by bit fulfill the way of the bodhisattva until you are able to become a Buddha with the name Gladly Seen by All Living Beings Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. Gautami, this Gladly Seen by All Living Beings Buddha will confer a prophecy upon the six thousand bodhisattvas, to be passed from one to another, that they will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi."

At that time the mother of Rahula, the nun Yashodhara, thought to herself, the World-Honored One in his bestowal of prophecies has failed to mention my name alone!

The Buddha said to Yashodhara,¹²⁴ "In future ages, amid the Law of hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas, you will practice the deeds of a bodhisattva, will be a great teacher of the Law, and will gradually fulfill the Buddha way.¹²⁵ Then in a good land you will become a Buddha named Endowed with a Thousand Ten Thousand Glowing Marks Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. The life span of this Buddha will be immeasurable asamkhya kalpas."

¹²³ Gautami (Kyodonmi) is Sakyamuni Buddha's step-mother. His paternal mother, Queen Maya, passed away seven days after his birth. Gautami is Queen Maya's younger sister who raised Gautama Shidhartha just like his real mother. Her Buddhist name is Maha-Prajapati Bhiksuni (sanskrit) which means the Way of Great Love.

¹²⁴ Yasodhara was Sakyamuni Buddha's wife before his renunciation. She is Rahula's mother.

Yasodhara and Gautami took ordination within the Order of Nuns after Buddha's father passed away in his advanced age. They were the last persons whom the Buddha gave future assurance of attainment of Annuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

¹²⁵ The Buddha says Yasodhara will walk the Way of Buddhahood and that Gautami will complete the Way of Bodhisattva in due time. The Way of Bodhisattva means to act for others, for the people and for society.

It is necessary for us to behave in a manner that benefits others and society.

At that time the nun Mahaprajapati, the nun Yashodhara, and their followers were all filled with great joy, having gained what they had never had before. Immediately in the presence of the Buddha they spoke in verse form, saying:

*World-Honored One, leader and teacher, you bring tranquility to heavenly
and human beings.
We have heard these prophecies and our minds are peaceful and satisfied.*

The nuns, having recited these verses, said to the Buddha, *World-Honored One, we too will be able to go to lands in other regions and broadly propagate this sutra.*

At that time the World-Honored One looked at the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas. These bodhisattvas had all reached the level of avivartika, turned the un-regressing wheel of the Law, and had gained dharanis. They rose from their seats, advanced before the Buddha and, pressing their palms together with a single mind, thought to themselves, if the World-Honored One should order us to embrace and preach this sutra, we would do as the Buddha instructed and broadly propagate this Law. And then they thought to themselves, But the Buddha now is silent and gives us no such order. What shall we do?

At that time the bodhisattvas, respectfully complying with the Buddha's will and at the same time wishing to fulfill their own original vows, proceeded in the presence of the Buddha to roar the Lion's roar and to make a vow, saying: *World-Honored One, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction we will travel here and there, back and forth through the worlds in the ten directions so as to enable living beings to copy this sutra, receive, embrace, read and recite it, understand and preach its principles, practice it in accordance with the Law, and properly keep it in their thoughts. All this will be done through the Buddha's power and authority. We beg that the World-Honored One, though in another region, will look on from afar and guard and protect us.*

At that time the bodhisattvas joined their voices together and spoke in verse form, saying:

*We beg you not to worry.
After the Buddha has passed into extinction, in an age of fear and evil we will preach
far and wide.¹²⁶*

¹²⁶ Responding to the Buddha's request to expound the Lotus Sutra after his Nirvana, the eighty billion nayuta Bodhisattvas spoke up to expound the sutra. They reached a high level of accomplishment, the stage of irrevocability. They are ready to endure any difficulties and persecutions called the Three Groups of Strong Enemies. The Three Groups of Strong Enemies.

There will be many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill of us and will attack us with swords and staves, but we will endure all these things.

In that evil age there will be monks with perverse wisdom and hearts that are fawning and crooked who will suppose they have attained what they have not attained, being proud and boastful in heart.

Or there will be forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement, who will claim they are practicing the true way, despising and looking down on all humankind.

Greedy for profit and support, they will preach the law to white-robed laymen and will be respected and revered by the world as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers.

These men with evil in their hearts, constantly thinking of worldly affairs, will borrow the name of forest-dwelling monks and take delight in proclaiming our faults, saying things like this:

"These monks are greedy for profit and support and therefore they preach non-Buddhist doctrines and fabricate their own scriptures to delude the people of the world.

Because they hope to gain fame and renown thereby they make distinctions when preaching this sutra."

Because in the midst of the great assembly they constantly try to defame us, they will address the rulers, high ministers, Brahmans and householders, as well as other monks, slandering and speaking evil of us, saying, "These are men of perverted views who preach non-Buddhist doctrines!"

But because we revere the Buddha we will bear all these evils.

Though they treat us with contempt, saying, "You are all no doubt Buddhas!"

All such words of arrogance and contempt we will endure and accept.

In a muddied kalpa, in an evil age there will be many things to fear.

Evil demons will take possession of others and through them curse, revile and heap shame on us.

But we, reverently trusting in the Buddha, will put on the armor of perseverance.

In order to preach this sutra we will bear these difficult things.

We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way.

In ages to come we will protect and uphold what the Buddha has entrusted to us.

This the World-Honored One must know.

1 - All kinds of ignorant people will speak ill of the expounders of the sutra. They may even attack the expounders with swords and clubs.

2 - There will be cunning monks who think that they have obtained what they have not. Their minds will be filled with arrogance. They will speak ill of the expounders of the sutra.

3 - Some monks will live in remote, quiet places pretending to practice the Way, but really despising ordinary people. They will be greedy for money, and expound the Dharma for pay. People will respect them like Arahats who have attained supernatural powers. These leaders will encourage powerful people like kings, ministers, and the Nobles to persecute the expounders of the Lotus Sutra.'

The evil monks of that muddied age, failing to understand the Buddha's expedient means, how he preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, will confront us with foul language and angry frowns; again and again we will be banished to a place far removed from towers and temples.

All these various evils, because they keep in mind the Buddha's orders, we will endure. If in the settlements and towns of those who seek the Law, we will go to wherever they are and preach the Law entrusted by the Buddha.

We will be envoys of the World-Honored One, facing the assembly without fear.

We will preach the law with skill, for we desire the Buddha to rest in tranquility.

In the presence of the World-Honored One and of the Buddhas who have gathered from the ten directions to proclaim this vow.

The Buddha must know what is in our hearts.

Chapter Fourteen: Peaceful Practices

SUMMARY

In the previous chapter, Medicine-King Bodhisattva and another twenty thousand Bodhisattvas vowed to Buddha Sakyamuni that they would keep, read, recite and expound the Lotus Sutra. But they said they would do so in some other worlds rather than on this earth. They said this because the people of this world have many evils. Then, there were eighty billion nayuta of bodhisattvas who made up their minds to expound the sutra and vowed to endure any physical hardship or persecution on the earth. Thus, the previous chapter 13 discusses the hardship from outside of the preacher and teachers of the Dharma.

On the contrary, this chapter tends to emphasize the preachers' spiritual readiness. They should not seek after glory, vanity, selfish profit and so forth. Socrates once said,

"One who cannot defeat himself never can win others."

Keeping his philosophy in the preachers' mind, they must practice the four kinds of peaceful practices: body, mouth, mind, and vows.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time Manjushri, Dharma prince, bodhisattva and mahasattva, said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, these bodhisattvas undertake something that is very difficult. Because they revere and obey the Buddha, they have taken a great vow that in the evil age hereafter they will guard, uphold, read, recite and preach this Lotus Sutra. World-Honored One, in the evil age hereafter, how should these bodhisattvas, mahasattvas go about preaching this sutra?"*

The Buddha said to Manjushri: *"If these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas in the evil age hereafter wish to preach this sutra they should abide by four rules.¹²⁷ First they should abide by the practices and associations proper for bodhisattvas so that they can expound this sutra for the sake of living beings. Manjushri, what do I mean by the practices of a bodhisattva or mahasattva? If a bodhisattva or mahasattva takes his stand on perseverance, is gentle and compliant, never violent, and never alarmed in mind; and if with regard to phenomena he takes no action but observes the true entity of phenomena without acting or making any distinction, then this one might call the practices of a bodhisattva and mahasattva.¹²⁸*

¹²⁷ These four sets are:

Peaceful practice of the body,
Peaceful practice of the mouth,
Peaceful practice of mind, and
Peaceful practice of vows.

¹²⁸ There are two practices of the body -- Performing proper practices and approaching proper people.

"As for the associations proper for them, bodhisattvas and mahasattvas should not associate closely with rulers, princes, high ministers or heads of offices. They should not associate closely with non-Buddhists, Brahmans or Jains, or with those who compose works of secular literature or books extolling the heretics, nor should they be closely associated with Lokayatas or anti-Lokayatas. They should not be closely associated with hazardous amusement, boxing or wrestling, or with actors or others engaging in various kinds of illusionary entertainment, or with the chandalas, persons engaging in raising pigs, engaged in raising pigs, sheep, chickens or dogs, or those who engage in hunting or fishing or other evil activities. If such persons at times come to one, then one may preach the Law for them, but one should expect nothing from it. Again one should not associate with monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen who seek to become voice-hearers, nor should one question or visit them. One should not stay with them in the same room, or in the place where one exercises, or in the lecture hall. One should not join them in their activities. If at times they come to one, one should preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, but should expect nothing from it.

"Manjushri, the bodhisattva or mahasattva should not, when preaching the Law to women, do so in a manner that could arouse thoughts of desire in them, nor should he delight in seeing them. If he enters the house of another person, he should not engage in talk with the young girls, unmarried women or widows. Nor should he go near the five types of unmanly men or have any close dealings with them. He should not enter another person's house alone. If for some reason it is imperative to enter alone, he should concentrate his full mind on thoughts of the Buddha. If he should preach the Law for a woman, he should not bear his teeth in laughter or let his chest become exposed. He should not have any intimate dealings with her even for the sake of the Law, much less for any other purpose.

Performing proper practices means that the preachers should always practice the virtue of patience, be mild and meek. They should not be rash and timorous. They should not attach themselves to anything, nor should they not be attached to non-attachment.

Approaching proper people are:

- (1) A preacher should avoid people with great political power, such as kings, ministers, or other high government officials.
- (2) He should not approach those who preach heresy, or who waste time writing about worldly affairs.
- (3) He should not approach people who entertain the public by risking their lives or the lives of others.
- (4) He should not approach those who make their living by killing living beings.
- (5) He should not approach, question, or should not stay with any persons who seek the teaching of the Lesser Vehicle. If he is approached by them, he should expound the Dharma with moderation, but not request any payment.
- (6) He should not expound the Dharma to any woman he desires.
- (7) He should not approach eunuchs.
- (8) He should never enter anyone's house uninvited.
- (9) He should not be too friendly with a woman, even to expound the Dharma to her.
- (10) He should not keep young children with him.

These rules are sound discriminatory, but it is not so. These are the preachers' attitude of mind; that is to say, not to be influenced by those people, to avoid being too friendly and not to echo these people's opinions. The Lotus Sutra is the teaching of equality; therefore, we must teach the teachings to everyone, but we must be careful not to be influenced by these people's earthly opinions.

"He should not delight in nurturing underage disciples, shramaneras or children, and should not delight in sharing the same teacher with them. He should constantly take pleasure in sitting in meditation, being in quiet surroundings and learning to still his mind. Manjushri, these are what I call the things he should first of all associate himself with.

"Next, the bodhisattva or mahasattva should view all phenomena as empty, that being their true entity.¹²⁹ They do not turn upside down, do not move, do not regress, do not revolve. They are like empty space, without innate nature, beyond the reach of all words. They are not born, do not emerge, do not arise. They are without name, without form, without true being. They are without volume, without limits, without hindrance, without barriers. It is only through causes and conditions that they exist, and come to be taken upside down, to be born. Therefore I say that one should constantly delight in viewing the form of phenomena as this. This is what I call the second thing that the bodhisattva or mahasattva should associate himself with."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If there are bodhisattvas who in the evil age hereafter wish with fearless hearts to preach this sutra, these are the places they should enter and the persons they should closely associate with.

At all times shun rulers and the princes of kingdoms, high ministers, heads of offices, those engaged in hazardous amusements as well as chandalas, non-Buddhists and Brahmans.

One should not associate with persons of overbearing arrogance or those who stubbornly adhere to the Lesser Vehicle and are learned in its three storehouses.

Monks who violate the precepts, arhats who are so in name only, nuns who are fond of jesting and laughter, or women lay believers who are profoundly attached to the five desires or who seek immediate entry into extinction ~ all these one should not associate with.

If there are persons who come with good hearts to the place of the bodhisattva in order to hear the Buddha way, then the bodhisattva with a fearless heart but without harboring expectations should preach the Law for them.

But widows and unmarried women and the different kinds of unmanly men ~ all these he should not associate with or treat with intimacy.

¹²⁹ The bodhisattva who preaches to others for salvation must know the doctrine of that Nothing Is Eternal, but the preacher should not be attached to this doctrine only, because there is the Eternal Teaching ("Myo-Ho") and the Eternal Buddha. The Lotus Sutra emphasizes the transcendent equality among differences, and the differences within equality. Everyone's potentiality of attaining Buddhahood is the teaching of equality, but we must realize that there are many different ways to lead people to Buddhahood.

Also he must not associate with slaughterers or flesh-carvers, those who hunt animals or catch fish, or kill to do harm for profit.

Those who peddle meat for a living or display women and sell their favors ~ all persons such as this one should never associate with.

Those engaged in hazardous sports, wrestling, or other kinds of amusements, women of lascivious nature ~ never associate with any of these.

Never go alone into an enclosed place to preach the Law to a woman.

When you preach the Law, let there be no jesting or laughter.

When you enter a village to beg for food, take another monk with you; if there is no other monk around, with a single mind concentrate on the Buddha.

These are what I call proper practices and associations.

By being careful about these two, one can preach in a peaceful manner.

One should not speak in terms of superior medial or inferior doctrines, of doctrines of the conditioned or unconditioned, or the real or the not real.

Again one should not make distinctions by saying "This is a man," "This is a woman."

Do not try to apprehend phenomena, to understand or to see them.

These are what I call the practices of the bodhisattva.

All phenomena are empty, without being, without any constant abiding, without arising or extinction.

This I call the position the wise person associates himself with.

From upside-down-ness come distinctions, that phenomena exist, do not exist, are real, or not real, are born, are not born.

Place yourself in quiet surroundings, learn to still your mind, remain tranquil, and unmoving, like Mount Sumeru.

Look upon all phenomena as having no existence, like empty space, as without firmness or hardness, not born, not emerging, not moving, and regressing, constantly abiding in a single form ~ this I call the place to draw near to.

If after I have entered extinction there are monks who take up these practices and these associations, then when they preach this sutra they will be free of quailing and timidity.

If a bodhisattva will at times enter a quiet room and with the correct mental attitude will view phenomena according to the doctrine, and then, rising from his meditation, will for the sake of the ruler, the princes, ministers and people, the Brahmans and others, unfold, propagate, expound and preach this sutra, then his mind will be tranquil, free of quailing and timidity.

Manjushri, these I call the first set of rules for the bodhisattva to abide by to enable him in later ages to preach the Lotus Sutra.

"Furthermore, Manjushri, after the Thus Come One has passed into extinction, in the Latter Day of the Law, if one wishes to preach this sutra, you should abide by these peaceful practices. When he opens his mouth to expound or when he reads the sutra, he should not

delight in speaking of the faults of other people or scriptures.¹⁵⁰ He should not display contempt for other teachers of the Law or speak of other people's tastes or shortcomings.¹⁵¹ With regard to the voice-hearers he should not refer to them by name and describe their faults, or name them and praise their good points. Also he should not allow his mind to become filled with resentment or hatred. Because he is good at cultivating this kind of peaceful mind, his listeners will not oppose his ideas. If he is asked difficult questions, he should not reply in terms of the Law of a Lesser Vehicle. He should explain things solely in terms of the Great Vehicle so that people will be able to acquire wisdom embracing all species."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The bodhisattva should at all times delight in preaching the Law in a tranquil manner. On pure and clean ground he should spread his sitting mat, anoint his body with oil, wash away dust and impurities, put on a new clean robe and make himself both inwardly and outwardly pure. Seating himself comfortably in the Dharma seat, he should preach the Law in accordance with questions.

¹⁵⁰ This paragraph explains the Peaceful Practice of the Mouth. They are:

(1) A preacher of this sutra should not point out the faults of other sutras or their adherents.

(2) They should not despise other preachers of the Dharma.

(3) They should not speak of either the merits or the demerits of the preachers, and should not mention "hearers" by name when criticizing their teachings or even when praising them.

(4) They should not feel hostile toward anybody, and should freely answer any questions addressed to them.

In Senchu Murano's translation, the word "negatte" in the Kumarajiva's translation is missing. "Negatte" means a pleasant mind as in I am superior than another, but it contains the meaning that one must point out his or her mistakes.

The preacher must not joyfully point out the faults of others and must not joyfully despise other preachers, but he or she must point out the mistakes of others. Nichiren Daishonin criticized other sects and priests, however, he never belittled other sects or priests. He uses respectful or honorable words to address them.

For comparison, Kubota Tsugunami and Yuyama Akira translated the same sentence: "When he expounds or recites this Sutra he should not take pleasure in talking about the faults of people or of the Sutra." Bunno Kato translates it: "He takes no pleasure in telling of the error of others of the sutras." They use the terms, "not take pleasure" or "he takes no pleasure" for the term, "negatte."

¹⁵¹ This paragraph explains the peaceful practices of the mind, maintaining the right mental attitude while expounding the Lotus Sutra. There are four points:

(1) A Bodhisattva must not be jealous of others, or flatter them, or deceive them.

(2) He should not despise anyone who studies the way to Buddhahood by any other method, speak ill of them, or point out their faults.

(3) He should not disturb or perplex those who seek any of the Three Vehicles, and never tell them, "You are far from enlightenment. You cannot attain the knowledge of the equality and differences of all things because you are licentious and lazy in seeking enlightenment."

(4) He should not get involved in meaningless quarrels with the followers of other schools of thought.

If one does this third peaceful practice, he or she will be able to expound the Dharma without disturbance. This method is called "sho-ju" in Japanese.

If there are monks or nuns, men lay believers, women lay believers, rulers and princes, officials, gentlemen and common people, with a mild expression he should preach for them the subtle and wonderful doctrines.

If there are difficult questions he should answer them in accordance with the doctrines, employing causes and conditions, similes and parables to expound and make distinctions, and through these expedient means cause all listeners to aspire to enlightenment, to increase their benefits little by little and enter the Buddha way.

He should put aside all ideas of laziness, all thought of negligence or ease, remove himself from cares and worries and with a compassionate mind preach the Law. Day and night constantly he should expound the teachings of the unsurpassed way, employing causes and conditions, immeasurable similes and parables to instruct living beings and cause them all to be joyful.

Clothing and bedding, food, drink, medicine ~ with regard to such things he should have no expectations but with a single mind concentrate upon the reasons for preaching the Law, desiring to complete the Buddha way and to cause those in the assembly to do likewise.

That will bring great gain to them, an offering of peace.

After I have passed into extinction if there are monks who are able to expound this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law their minds will be free of the jealousy and anger, of all worry and hindrance.

No one will trouble them, curse or revile them.

They will know no fear, no attacks by sword or staff, nor will they ever be banished, because they abide in patience.

Wise persons will be good at cultivating their minds like this and be able to abide in peace as I have described above.

The blessings of such persons are beyond calculation, simile or parable; thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas would not suffice to describe them.

"Also, Manjushri, if a bodhisattva or mahasattva in the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish, should accept and embrace, read and recite this sutra, he must not harbor a mind marked by jealousy, fawning or deceit. And he must not be contemptuous of or revile those who study the Buddha away or seek out their shortcomings.

"If there are monks, nuns, laymen, or laywomen who seek to become voice-hearers, seek to become pratyekabuddhas, or seek the bodhisattva way, one must not trouble them by causing them to have doubts or regrets, by saying to them, 'You are far removed from the way and in the end will never be able to attain wisdom embracing all species. Why? Because you are self-indulgent and willful people who are negligent of the way!'

"Also one should never engage in frivolous debate over the various doctrines or dispute or wrangle over them. With regard to all living beings one should think of them with great compassion. With regard to the Thus Come Ones, think of them as kindly fathers; with regard to the bodhisattvas, think of them as great teachers. Toward the great bodhisattvas of the ten directions at all times maintain a serious mind, paying them due reverence and obeisance. To all living beings preach the Law and in an equitable manner. Because a person is heedful of the Law, that does not mean one should vary the amount of preaching. Even to those who show a profound love for the Law one should not on that account preach at greater length.¹³²

"Manjushri, if among these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas there are those who in the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish, succeed in carrying out this third set of peaceful practices, then when they preach this Law they will be free from anxiety and confusion, and will find good fellow students to read and recite this sutra with. They will attract a large assembly of persons who come to listen and assent. After they have listened, they will embrace; after they have embraced, they will recite; after they have recited, they will preach; and after they have preached, they will copy, or will cause others to copy, and will present offerings to the sutra rolls, treating them with reverence, respect and praise."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If you wish to preach this sutra, you must set aside jealousy, hatred, arrogance, a mind that is fawning, deceitful, false, and constantly practice honest and upright conduct.

Do not look with contempt on others or hold frivolous debates on the doctrine. Do not cause others to have doubts or regrets by saying, "You will never become a Buddha!"

When a son of the Buddha preaches the Law he is at all times gentle and full of forbearance, having pity and compassion on all, never giving way to a negligent or a slothful mind.

The great bodhisattvas of the ten directions out of pity for the multitude carry out the way.

One should strive to respect and read and revere them, saying, "These are great teachers!"

¹³² This paragraph explains the peaceful practices of resolution. The preacher should have great loving-kindness toward both clergy and laity, and great compassion toward those who are not Bodhisattvas. The reason is that people do not understand that the Buddha expounded expedient teachings according to the capacities of living beings, and they neither believe it nor understand it. Therefore, when a Bodhisattva attains supreme-perfect-enlightenment, he or she will resolve to lead all people to the Lotus Sutra, and by means of his acquired supernatural powers and wisdom, cause them to understand the law. Thus, we must vow to lead all sentient beings to Buddhahood with great compassion. It is the first vow of the Four Great Vows; "Sentient being are innumerable, I vow to save them all."

Regarding the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, learn to think of them as unsurpassed fathers.

Wipe out the mind of pride and arrogance and preach the Law without hindrance.

Such is the third set of rules; wise persons should guard and obey them.

If with a single mind they observe these peaceful practices, they will be respected by immeasurable multitudes.

"Manjushri, if among these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas there are those who in the age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish, accept and embrace the Lotus Sutra, toward the believers who are still in the household or those who have left the household they should cultivate a mind of great compassion, and toward those who are not bodhisattvas they should also cultivate a mind of great compassion, and should think to themselves: These persons have made a great error. Though the Thus Come One as an expedient means preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, they do not listen, do not know, do not realize, do not inquire, do not believe, do not understand. But although these persons do not inquire about, do not believe and do not understand this sutra, when I have attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, wherever I happen to be, I will employ my transcendental powers and the power of wisdom to draw them to me to cause them to abide in this Law.

"Manjushri after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, if among these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas there are those who will succeed in carrying out this fourth set of rules, then when they preach the Law they will commit no error. Monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, and rulers, princes, great ministers, common people, Brahmans and householders will constantly offer them alms and will revere, respect and praise them. The heavenly beings in the sky, in order to listen to the Law, will constantly follow and attend them. If they are in a settlement or town or in a quiet and deserted place or a forest and people come and want to ask them difficult questions, the heavenly beings day and night will for the sake of the Law constantly guard and protect them and will cause all the listeners to rejoice. Why? Because this sutra is protected by the supernatural powers of all the Buddhas of the past, future, and present.

"Manjushri, as for this Lotus Sutra, throughout immeasurable numbers of lands one cannot even hear its name, much less be able to see it, accept and embrace, read and recite it. Manjushri, suppose, for example, that there is a powerful wheel-turning sage king who wants to use his might to subdue other countries, but the petty rulers will not heed his commands. At that time the wheel-turning king calls up his various troops and sets out to attack. If the king sees any of his fighting forces who have won distinction in battle, he is greatly delighted and immediately rewards the persons in accordance with their merits, handing out fields, houses, settlements and towns, or robes and personal adornments, or perhaps giving out various precious objects such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, coral or amber, or elephants,

horses, carriages, men and women servants, and people. Only the bright jewel that is in his topknot he does not give away. Why? Because this one jewel exists only on the top of the King's head, and if he were to give it away, his followers would be certain to express great consternation and alarm.

"Manjushri, the Thus Come One is like this. He uses the power of meditation and wisdom to win Dharma lands and become king of the threefold world. But the devil kings are unwilling to obey and submit. The worthy and sage military leaders of the Thus Come One engage them in battle, and when any of the Buddha's soldiers achieve distinction, the Buddha is delighted in heart and in the midst of the four kinds of believers he preaches various sutras, causing their hearts to be joyful. He presents them with meditations, emancipations, roots and powers that are free of outflows, and other treasures of the Law. He also presents them with the city of nirvana, telling them that they have attained extinction, guiding their minds and causing them all to rejoice. But he does not preach the Lotus Sutra to them.

"Manjushri, when the wheel-turning king sees someone among his soldiers who has gained truly great distinction, he is so delighted in heart that he takes the unbelievably fine jewel that has been in his topknot for so long and has never been recklessly given away, and now gives it to this man. And the Thus Come One does the same. In the threefold world he acts as the great Dharma king. He uses the Law to teach and convert all living beings, watches his worthy and sage armies as they battle with the devils of the five components, the devils of earthly desires, and the death devil. And when they have won great distinction and merit, wiping out the three poisons, emerging from the threefold world, and destroying the nets of the devils, at that time the Thus Come One is filled with great joy. This Lotus Sutra is capable of causing all living beings to attain comprehensive wisdom. It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe. It has not been practiced before, but now I preach it.

"Manjushri, this Lotus Sutra is foremost among all that is preached by the Thus Come One. Among all that is preached it is the most profound. And it is given at the very last, the way that profound ruler did when he took the bright jewel he had guarded for so long and finally gave it away.

"Manjushri this Lotus Sutra is the secret storehouse of the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones. Among the sutras, it holds the highest place. Through the long night I have guarded and protected it and have never recklessly propagated it. But today for the first time I expound it for your sake."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoken in verse form, saying:

Constantly practice perseverance, have pity on all beings, and do your best to expound and preach the sutra praised by the Buddha.

In the latter age hereafter those who embrace this sutra should, without regard to persons in the household, persons who have left it, or persons who are not bodhisattvas, cultivate pity and compassion, saying, "If they do not listen to and do not believe this sutra they will be committing a great error.

If I gain the bodhisattva away I will employ expedient means and preach this Law for them, causing them to abide in it.

Suppose there is a powerful wheel-turning king.

His soldiers have won merit in battle and he rewards them with various articles, elephants, horses, carriages, adornments for their person, fields and houses, settlements and towns, or gives them clothing, various kinds of precious objects, men and women servants, wealth and goods, delightedly bestowing all these.

But if there is someone brave and stalwart who can carry out difficult deeds, the king will remove the bright jewel from his topknot and present it to the man.

The Thus Come One is like this.

He acts as king of the doctrines, possessing the great power of perseverance and the precious storehouse of wisdom, and with his great pity and compassion he converts the age in accordance with the Law.

He sees all persons as they undergo suffering and anxiety, seeking to gain emancipation battling with the devils, and for the sake of the living beings he preaches various doctrines, employing great expedient means and preaching these sutras.

And when he knows that living beings have gained powers through them, then at the very last for their sake he preaches this Lotus Sutra, like the king who unbinds his topknot and gives away his bright jewel.

This sutra is to be honored as highest among all sutras.

Constantly I guard and protect it, and do not purposely reveal it.

But now the time is right for me to preach it to you.

After I have entered extinction if someone seeks the Buddha away and hopes to be able in tranquility to expound this sutra, then he should associate himself closely with the four rules described.

Anyone who reads this sutra will at all times be free of worry and anxiety; likewise he will be without illness or pain, his expression fresh and bright.

He will not be born in poverty or want, in humble or ugly circumstances.

Living beings will delight to see him and look up to him as a worthy sage.

The young sons of heavenly beings will wait on him and serve him.

Swords and staves will not touch him and poison will have no power to harm him.

If people speak ill and revile him, their mouths will be closed and stopped up.

He will stroll about without fear like the lion king.

The brilliance of his wisdom will be like the shining of the sun; even in his dreams he will see only wonderful things.
He will see the Thus Come Ones seated in their lion seats surrounded by multitudes of monks and preaching the Law.
And he will see dragons, spirits, asuras and others, numerous as Ganges sands, reverently pressing their palms together.
He will see himself there and will preach the Law for them.
Again he will see Buddhas, their bodies marked by a golden hue, emitting immeasurable rays that light up all things, employing Brahma sounds to expound the doctrines.
For the four kinds of believers the Buddha will preach the unsurpassed Law, and he will see himself among them pressing his palms together and praising the Buddha.
He will hear the Law and delight and will offer alms.
He will obtain dharanis and proof of the wisdom without regression.
And when the Buddha knows that his mind has entered deep into the Buddha way, then he will give him a prophecy that he will attain the highest, the correct enlightenment.
"You, good man, in an age to come will attain immeasurable wisdom, the great way of the Buddha.
Your land will be adorned and pure, incomparably broad and great, with the four kinds of believers who press their palms together and listen to the Law.
Again he will see himself in the midst of mountains and forests practicing the good Law, understanding the true nature of all phenomena, deeply entering meditation and seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions.
Of Buddhas, their bodies of golden hue, adorned with the marks of a hundred kinds of good fortune, of listening to the Law and preaching it to the people - such will be the good dreams he constantly dreams.
Again he will dream he is king of a country but casts aside palaces and attendants and the superb and wonderful objects of the five desires, repairs to the place of practice and under the bodhi tree seats himself in a lion seat, seeking the way, and after seven days gains the wisdom of the Buddhas.
Having succeeded in the unsurpassed way, he rises and turns the wheel of the Law, preaching the Law for the four kinds of believers, for thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas preaching the wonderful Law free of outflows, saving immeasurable living beings.
And afterward he will enter nirvana like smoke coming to an end when a lamp goes out.
If in that evil age hereafter someone preaches this foremost Law, that person will gain great benefits, blessings such as have been described above.

Chapter Fifteen: Emerging from the Earth

SUMMARY

At the end of chapter 13 the Buddha says, "I shall soon enter into Nirvana. Is there anyone who is willing to expound the Lotus Sutra in this world after my extinction? I wish to hand it on to someone so that it can be perpetuated." In chapter 14, there were eighty billion nayuta of bodhisattvas who made up their minds to expound the sutra and vowed to endure any hardship or persecutions on the earth. However the Buddha has not responded to them.

As chapter 15 begins, countless numbers of bodhisattvas from the other worlds said that they would expound the sutra in this Saha-world. But Sakyamuni Buddha surprised them by saying; "No. You don't need to do so, because there are already countless bodhisattvas in this world. They are the ones who will expound this sutra in this Saha-world." When he said it, the ground quaked and cracked, and countless bodhisattvas appeared from underground. Among them, there were four leaders: Superior-Practice, Limitless-Practice, Pure-Practice and Steadily-Established-Practice Bodhisattvas.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who had gathered from the lands of the other directions, greater in number than sands of eight Ganges, stood up in the midst of the great assembly, pressed their palms together, bowed in obeisance and said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, if you will permit us in the age after the Buddha has entered extinction to diligently and earnestly protect, read, recite, copy and offer alms to this sutra in the saha world, we will preach it widely throughout this land!"*

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas: *"Leave off, good men! There is no need for you to protect this sutra. Why? Because in this saha world of mine there are bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who are as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges, and each of these bodhisattvas has a retinue equal to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. After I have entered extinction these persons will be able to protect, read, recite and widely preach this sutra."*¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Sakyamuni Buddha did not respond to the proposals from Bodhisattvas from other worlds in the previous chapters, but this time he refused their proposal saying as follows: "No, good men! I do not want you to protect or keep this sutra because there are Bodhisattvas-mahasattvas sixty thousand times as many as the sands of the River Ganges in this world." He refused helpers from other worlds. It means that the problems in this world must be solved among the people on this earth. "Do not rely on others." "Do not run away from suffering on this earth. We must solve our problems by ourselves." The Lotus Sutra teaches self-esteem and self-support. The Buddha always encourages us to do things by ourselves. He trusts us. We do not know how many sand-particles there are at the River Ganges, they must be countless. The countless Buddhists existed in the past and will exist in the future. The number may go up to much higher than the sixty thousand times as many as the sands of the River Ganges because the sutra talks about countless years in the past and countless years in the future. Therefore it is not surprising to hear that "There are Bodhisattvas-mahasattvas sixty thousand times as many as the sands of the River Ganges in this world."

When the Buddha spoke these words, the earth of the thousand millionfold countries of the saha world all trembled and split open, and out of it emerged at the same instant immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas.¹⁵⁴ The bodies of these bodhisattvas were all golden in hue, with the thirty-two features and an immeasurable brightness. Previously they all had been dwelling in the world of empty space beneath the saha world.¹⁵⁵ But when these bodhisattvas heard the voice of the Shakyamuni Buddha speaking, they came up from below.

Each one of these bodhisattvas was the leader of his own great assembly, and each brought with him a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. To say nothing of those who brought retinues equal to the sands of fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, or ten thousand Ganges. Or a retinue equal to as little as the sands of one Ganges, half a Ganges, one fourth of a Ganges, or as little as one part in a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayutas of Ganges. Or those whose retinue was only one thousand ten thousand million nayutas. Or only a million ten thousand. Or only a thousand ten thousand, a hundred ten thousand, or just ten thousand. Or only one thousand, one hundred, or ten. Or who brought with them only five, four, three, two or one disciple. Or those who came alone, preferring to carry out solitary practices. Such were they, then, immeasurable, boundless, beyond anything that can be known through calculation, simile or parable.

After these bodhisattvas that emerged from the earth, they each one proceeded to the wonderful tower of seven treasures suspended in the sky where Many Treasures Thus Come One and Shakyamuni Buddha were. On reaching it, they turned to the two World-Honored Ones, bowed their heads and made obeisance at their feet. They also all performed obeisance to the Buddhas seated on lion thrones underneath the jeweled trees. Then they circled around to the right three times, pressed their palms together in a gesture of respect, utilizing the bodhisattvas' various methods of praising to deliver praises, and then took up a position to one side, gazing up in joy at the two World-Honored Ones. While these bodhisattvas and

¹⁵⁴ It is important to say that they spring up from underground. For instance, the seeds of grass and plants are kept underground during winter. When spring has come they spring up from underground almost simultaneously. The buds are very soft and easily broken, but even still, the buds are strong enough to break and crack the hard ground. Some buds are strong enough to crack asphalt or concrete. It is wonderful and mystic. It is "MYO-HO." We must strive hard just like the buds. We must have strong determination and inner power to live strong lives.

The Bodhisattvas from underground are the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra today.

¹⁵⁵ Is it wonderful that there is sky not only above us but also underground? But you should not take the word literally. The sky is "ku" in Japanese and Chinese. It means void, nothingness, no-attachment, equality, etc. The Bodhisattvas from underground have lived in the stage of no-attachment. They were educated under the guidance of the Eternal Buddha in the remote past. Although they had reached to no-attachment, hearing the voice of Buddha's request to expound the Lotus Sutra on this earth, they returned to live with us on this earth full of sufferings. Again, we are the Bodhisattvas from underground.

mahasattvas who had emerged from the earth were employing the bodhisattva's various methods of praising to praise the Buddhas, an interval of fifty small kalpas passed by.

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha sat silent, and the four kinds of believers likewise all remained silent for fifty small kalpas, but because of the supernatural powers of the Buddha, it was made to seem to the members of the great assembly like only half a day.

At that time the four kinds of believers, also because of the supernatural powers of the Buddha, saw these bodhisattvas filling the sky over immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, and millions of lands. Among these bodhisattvas were four leaders. The first was called Superior Practices, the second was called Boundless Practices, the third was called Pure Practices, and the fourth was called Firmly Established Practices.¹³⁶ These four bodhisattvas were the foremost leaders and guiding teachers among all the group. In the presence of the great assembly, each one of these pressed his palms together, gazed at Shakyamuni Buddha and inquired: *"World-Honored One, are your illnesses few, are your worries few, are your practices proceeding comfortably? Do those whom you propose to save readily receive instruction? Does the effort not cause the World-Honored One to become weary and spent?"*¹³⁷

At that time the four great bodhisattvas spoke in verse form saying:

*Is the World Honored One comfortable, with few illnesses, few worries?
In teaching and converting living beings, can you do so without fatigue and
weariness?
And do living beings receive instruction readily or not?
Does it not cause the World-Honored One to become weary and spent?*

¹³⁶ It is said that these four great Bodhisattvas are the leaders in the Degeneration Era of the Dharma. The names of the four Bodhisattvas appear next to Sakyamuni Buddha and Taho Buddha on Nichiren Shonin's Mandala Gohonzon. It is also said that Nichiren is the rebirth of Superior-Practice Bodhisattva.

¹³⁷ Thus, the four Bodhisattvas from underground asked how the Buddha is doing. Responding to their questions, he replied as follows:

"I am peaceful. I am in good health. The living beings are ready to be saved. They do not fatigue me because I already taught them in their consecutive previous existence, and also because they have already honored the past Buddhas respectfully and planted the roots of good."

When we do unwanted or disliked works, we get tired easily. When we enjoy work on something, we will not get tired easily and will not feel stress. Buddha Shakyamuni really enjoyed expounding his teachings because he knows our past, present and future. He knows that we will become Buddhas. So when we have a dream for the future and work hard on an aim, we are able to enjoy what we are doing.

Those who practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra had some relation with its teachings in the past. They must have accepted the teachings and practiced them before. With these relationships of cause and effect, we are practicing the teachings and will attain Buddhahood in the future because we are the Buddha's beloved children.

At that time in the midst of the great assembly of bodhisattvas the World-Honored One spoke these words: "Just so, just so, good men! The Thus Come One is well and happy, with few ills and few worries.

"The living beings are readily converted and saved and I am not weary and spent. Why? Because for age after age in the past the living beings have constantly received my instruction. And also they have offered alms and paid reverence to the Buddhas of the past and have planted various good roots. So when these living beings see me for the first time and listen to my preaching, they all immediately believe and accept it, entering into the wisdom of the Thus Come One, with the exception of those who earlier practiced and studied the Lesser Vehicle. And now I will make it possible for these persons to listen to this sutra and enter the wisdom of the Buddha."

At that time the [four] great bodhisattvas spoke in verse form, saying:

*Excellent, excellent, Great hero, World-Honored One!
The living beings are readily converted and saved.
They know how to inquire about the most profound wisdom of the Buddha, and
having heard, they believe and understand it.
We are accordingly overjoyed.*

At that time the World-Honored One praised the great bodhisattvas who led the group, saying: "Excellent, excellent, good men! You know how to rejoice in your hearts for the Thus Come One."

At that time the bodhisattva Maitreya and the multitude of bodhisattvas equal in number to the sands of eight thousand Ganges all thought to themselves: *Never in the past have we seen or heard of such a great multitude of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas as these who have emerged from the earth and now stand before the World-Honored One pressing their palms together, offering alms, and inquiring about the Thus Come One.*¹³⁸

At that time the bodhisattva and mahasattvas Maitreya, knowing the thought that was in the minds of the bodhisattvas as numerous as the sands of eight thousand Ganges, and wishing also to resolve his own doubts, pressed his palms together, turned to the Buddha and made this inquiry in verse form:

*Immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions, a great host of bodhisattvas such as
was never seen in the past - I beg the most honored of two-legged beings to*

¹³⁸ Maitreya Bodhisattvas asked the above questions representing all congregations who have gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle. They are Buddha's disciples, relatives, Bodhisattvas from other worlds, gods, spiritual beings and others. They have never seen these bodhisattvas from underground before. They wondered where they came from and why they were there.

explain where they have come from, what causes and conditions bring them together!

Huge in body, with great transcendental powers, unfathomable in wisdom, firm in their intent and thought, with the power of great perseverance, the kind living beings delight to see - where have they come from?

Each one of these bodhisattvas brings with them a retinue immeasurable in number like the sands of the Ganges.

Some of these great bodhisattvas bring numbers equal to sixty thousand Ganges sands. And this great multitude with a single mind seek the Buddha way.

These great teachers equal in number to sixty thousand Ganges sands together come to offer alms to the Buddha and to guard and uphold this sutra.

More numerous are those with followers like the sands of fifty thousand Ganges, those with followers like the sands of forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, ten thousand, one thousand, one hundred, or the sands of the single Ganges, half a Ganges, one-third, one-fourth, or only one part in a million ten thousand; those with one thousand, ten thousand nayutas, ten thousand, a million disciples, or half a million- they are more numerous still.

Those with a million or ten thousand followers, a thousand or a hundred, fifty or ten, three, two or one, or those who come alone without followers, delighting in solitude, all coming to where the Buddha is- they are even more numerous than those described above.

If one should try to use an abacus to calculate the number of this great multitude, though he spent as many kalpas as Ganges sands he could never know the full sum.

This host of bodhisattvas with their great dignity, virtue and diligence - who preached the Law for them, who taught and converted them and brought them to this? Under whom did they first set their minds on enlightenment, what Buddha's Law do they praise and proclaim?

What sutra do they embrace and carry out, what Buddha way do they practice? These bodhisattvas possess transcendental powers and the power of great wisdom. The earth in four directions trembles and splits and they all emerged from out of it. World-Honored One, from times past I have seen nothing like this!

I beg you to tell me where they come from, the name of the land. I have constantly journeyed from land to land but never have I seen such a thing! In this whole multitude there is not one person that I know.

Suddenly they have come up from the earth - I beg you to explain the cause. The members of this great assembly now, the immeasurable hundreds, thousands, millions of bodhisattvas, all want to know these things.

Regarding the causes that govern the beginning and end of this multitude of bodhisattvas, possessor of immeasurable virtue, World-Honored One, we beg you to dispel the doubts of the assembly!

At that time the Buddhas who were emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha and had arrived from immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of lands in other directions, were seated cross-legged on lion seats under the jeweled trees in the eight directions. The attendants of these Buddhas all saw the great multitude of bodhisattvas who had emerged from the earth in the four directions of the thousand-million-fold world and were suspended in the air, and each one said to his respective Buddha: *"World-Honored One, this great multitude of immeasurable, boundless asamkhyas of bodhisattvas - were did they come from?"*

At the time each of the Buddhas spoke to his attendants, saying: *"Good men, wait a moment.¹⁵⁹ There is a bodhisattva and mahasattva named Maitreya who has received a prophecy from Shakyamuni Buddha that he will be the next thereafter to become a Buddha. He has already inquired about this matter and the Buddha is now about to answer him. You should take this opportunity to listen to what he says."*

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha said to the bodhisattva Maitreya: *"Excellent, excellent, Ajita that you should question the Buddha about this great affair. All of you with a single mind should don the armor of diligence and determine to be firm in intent. The Thus Come One wishes now to summon forth and declare the wisdom of the Buddhas, the freely exercised transcendental power of the Buddhas, the power of the Buddhas that has the lion's ferocity, the fierce and greatly forceful power of the Buddhas."*

At the time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*Be diligent and of a single mind, for I wish to explain this affair.
Have no doubts or regrets - the Buddha wisdom is hard to fathom.
Now you must put forth the power of faith, abiding in patience in goodness.*

*A Law which in the past was never heard you will now be able to hear.
Now I will bring you ease and consolation - do not harbor doubts or fears.
The Buddha has nothing but truthful words, his wisdom cannot be measured.
This foremost Law that he has gained is very profound, incapable of analysis.*

¹⁵⁹ Before answering Maitreya's questions, the Buddha wanted to give him assurance of his Attaining Buddhahood. It is Maitreya Bodhisattva who will be a Buddha immediately after Sakyamuni Buddha. He is believed to be living in the Tusita Heaven, waiting for the time when he will come down to this world and succeed Sakyamuni Buddha. It is said that he will appear in this world five billion six hundred and seventy million years after the pari-nirvana of Sakyamuni. Maitreya Buddha could be you!

He will now expound it ~ you must listen with a single mind.

At that time the World-Honored One, having spoken these verses, said to the bodhisattva Maitreya: "With regard to this great multitude I now say to you. Ajita, these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who in immeasurable and countless asamkhyas have emerged from the earth and whom you have never seen before in the past ~ when I had attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi in this saha world, I converted and guided these bodhisattvas, trained their minds and caused them to develop a longing for the way. These bodhisattvas all have been dwelling in the world of empty space underneath the saha world. They read, recite, understand the various scriptures, ponder them, make distinctions and keep them correctly in mind.

"Ajita, these good men take no delight in being in the assembly and indulging in much talk. Their delight is constantly to be in a quiet place, exerting themselves diligently and never resting. Nor do they linger among human or heavenly beings, but constantly delight in profound wisdom, being free from all hindrances. And they constantly delight in the law of the Buddhas, diligently and with a single mind pursuing unsurpassed wisdom."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Ajita, you should understand this.

These great bodhisattvas for countless kalpas have practiced the Buddha wisdom.

All have been converted by me; I caused them to set their minds on the great way.

These are my sons, they dwell in this world, constantly carrying out dhuta practices, preferring a quiet place, rejecting the fret and confusion of the great assembly, taking no delight in much talk.

In this manner these sons study and practice my way and Law.

And in order that day and night with constant diligence they may seek the Buddha way, in this saha world they dwell in the empty space in its lower part.

Firm in the power of will and concentration, with constant diligence seeking wisdom, they expound various wonderful doctrines and their minds are without fear.

When I was in the city of Gaya, seated beneath the bodhi tree, I attained the highest, the correct enlightenment and turned the wheel of the unsurpassed Law.

Therefore I taught and converted them, caused them for the first time to set their minds on the way.

Now all of them dwell in the stage of no regression, and all in time will be able to become Buddhas.

What I speak now are true words - with a single mind you must believe them!¹⁴⁰

Ever since the long distant past I have been teaching and converting this multitude.

At that time the bodhisattva and mahasattva Maitreya, as well as the countless other bodhisattvas, found doubts and perplexities rising in their minds. They were puzzled at this thing that had never happened before and thought to themselves: *How could the World-Honored One in such a short space of time have taught and converted an immeasurable, boundless asamkhya number of great bodhisattvas of this sort enabled them to dwell in anuttara-samyak-sambodhi?*

Thereupon Maitreya said to the Buddha: *World-Honored One, when the Thus Come One was crown prince, you left the palace of the Shakyas and sat in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya, and there attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Barely forty years or more have passed since then. World-Honored One, how in that short time could you have accomplished so much work as a Buddha? Was it through the authoritative powers of the Buddha, or through the blessings of the Buddha, that you were able to teach and convert such an immeasurable number of great bodhisattvas and enable them to achieve anuttara-samyak-sambodhi? World-Honored One, a multitude of great bodhisattvas such as this - a person might spend a thousand, ten thousand, a million kalpas counting them and never be able to reach the end or discover the limit! Since the far distant past, in the dwelling place of immeasurable, boundless numbers of Buddhas, they must have planted good roots, carried*

¹⁴⁰ The Buddha finally answered Maitreya's questions. He says: "It is true that you have never seen any of these countless Bodhisattvas who have sprung up from beneath the earth. But I, Sakyamuni, have been teaching them in the World of Endurance ever since I attained Buddhahood. ... It may appear to you as if, after I attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi tree near the city of Gaya some 40 and odd years ago, I then taught them for the first time, and let them enter the way to Buddhahood. But TO TELL THE TRUTH, I HAVE BEEN EXPOUNDING THE LAW TO THEM SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL." This phrase is the introduction to the next chapter, "Duration of the Life of the Tathagata (Buddha)."

The concept of the Eternal Buddha has never been revealed before. Therefore the people do not understand what the Buddha said and elicited a new question as follows:

"It is difficult for anyone in the world to believe this. It is as difficult to believe a handsome, black-haired man twenty-five years old who points to men a hundred years old and says, 'They are my sons,' or to believe men a hundred years old who point to a young man and say, 'This is our father. He brought us up.' You (Sakyamuni Buddha) are like the young man. It is not long since you attained enlightenment."

Ascetics of Theravada Buddhism aim to escape from our world of sorrows, stand aloof from its problems, and attain a pure state of consciousness. This can make them indifferent to the world. They easily forget to fulfill the most important task in religion to save ordinary people.

On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism, beginning from the point of view of ordinary people, asserts that the state of enlightenment can be realized only in the midst of this world, because Bodhisattvas cannot save people without living and working here sharing in the evil and misery that exist. Bodhisattvas, of course, are themselves pure, and they are never contaminated by the vice and evil of their environments. They are like lovely lotus flowers, which rise from out of the mud at the bottom of the water.

out the bodhisattva way, and engaged, constantly in Brahma practices. World-Honored One, it is hard for the world to believe such thing!

Suppose, for example, that a young man of twenty-five, with ruddy complexion and hair still black, should point to someone who was a hundred years old and say, 'This is my son!' or that the hundred year old man should point to the youth and say, 'This is my father who sired and raised me!' This would be hard to believe, and so too is what the Buddha says.

"It has in fact not been long since you attained the way. But this great multitude of bodhisattvas have already for immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas applied themselves diligently and earnestly for the sake of the Buddha way. They have learned to enter into, emerge from and dwell in immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of samadhis, have acquired great transcendental powers, have over a long period carried out brahma practices, and have been able step by step to practice various good doctrines, becoming skilled in questions and answers, a treasure among persons, something seldom known in all the worlds. And today, World-Honored One, you tell us that, in the time since you attained the Buddha way, you have caused these persons for the first time to aspire to enlightenment, have taught, converted and led them, and directed them toward anuttara-samyak-sambodhi!

"World-Honored One, it is not long since you attained Buddhahood, and yet you have been able to carry out this great meritorious undertaking! We ourselves have faith in the Buddha, believing that he preaches in accordance with what is appropriate, that the words spoken by the Buddha are never false, and that the Buddha's knowledge is in all cases penetrating and comprehensive. Nevertheless, in the period after the Buddha has entered extinction, if bodhisattvas who have just begun to aspire to enlightenment should hear these words, they will perhaps not believe or accept them but will be led to commit the crime of rejecting the Law. Therefore, World-Honored One, we beg you to explain so we may put aside our doubts, and so that, in future ages when good men hear this matter, they will not entertain doubts!

At that time the bodhisattva Maitreya, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

*In the past the Buddha departed from the Shakya clan, left his household, and near
Gaya set under the bodhi tree.*

*Little time has passed since then, yet these sons of the Buddha are immeasurable in
number!*

*Already for a long time they have practiced the Buddha way, dwelling in
transcendental powers and the power of wisdom, skillfully learning the
bodhisattva way, unsoiled by worldly things like the lotus flower in the water.*

Emerging from the earth, all display a reverent and respectful mind, standing in the presence of the World-Honored One.

This is difficult to fathom – How can one believe it?

The Buddha attained the way very recently, yet those he has helped to gain success are so many!

We beg you to dispel the doubts of the assembly, to make distinctions and explain the truth of the matter.

It is though a young man just turned twenty-five were to point to a hundred year old man with gray hair and wrinkled face and say, I sired him!

And the old man were to say, This is my father!

The father youthful, the son old – no one in the world could believe this!

World-Honored One, your case is similar.

Only very recently you attained the way.

These bodhisattvas are firm in will, in no way timid or immature.

For measurable kalpas they have been practicing the bodhisattva way.

They are clever at difficult questions and answers, their minds know no fear.

They have firmly cultivated a persevering mind, upright in dignity and virtue.

They are praised by the Buddhas of the ten directions as able and adept at preaching distinctions.

They have no wish to remain among the crowd but constantly favor a state of meditation, and in order to seek the Buddha way they have been dwelling in the space under the earth.

This we have heard from the Buddha and have no doubts in the matter.

But for the sake of future ages we beg the Buddha to explain and bring about understanding.

If with regard to this sutra one should harbor doubt and fail to believe, he will fall at once into the evil paths.

So we beg you now to explain.

These immeasurable bodhisattvas – how in such a short time did you teach them, cause them to have aspiring minds, and to dwell in the stage of no regression?

Chapter Sixteen: The Life Span of the Tathagata

SUMMARY

In the preceding chapter, the countless number of bodhisattvas appeared from underground. Bodhisattva Maitreya asked Sakyamuni how the Buddha could teach these countless people during the forty odd years after his enlightenment.

This chapter answers the question and explains the existence of an everlasting and immortal Buddha. It explains what we should worship as Gohonzon, or the Most Venerable One, and how we should adore the Gohonzon.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time the Buddha spoke to the Bodhisattvas and all the great assembly: "Good men, you must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One." And again he said to the great assembly: You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One." And once more he said to the great assembly: "You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One."¹⁴¹

At that time the bodhisattvas and the great assembly, with Maitreya as their leader, pressed their palms together and addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-Honored One, we beg you to explain. We will believe and accept the Buddha's words." They spoke in this manner three times, and then said once more: "We beg you to explain it. We will believe and accept the Buddha's words."¹⁴²

At that time the World-Honored One, seeing that the bodhisattvas repeated their request three times and more, spoke to them, saying: "You must listen carefully and hear of the Thus Come One's secret and his transcendental powers. In all the worlds the heavenly and human beings and asuras all believe that the present Shakyamuni Buddha, after leaving the palace of the Shakyas, seated himself in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya and there attained annuttara-samyak-sambodhi. But good men, it has been immeasurable,

¹⁴¹ This chapter begins with the above words that Sakyamuni Buddha repeated three times. It signifies how important this chapter is. It is hard for us, ordinary people, to understand the Buddha's words logically, so we must believe them.

Tathagata is one of the epithets of a Buddha, and it means one who comes "thus." Thus, the Tathagata had already attained Enlightenment a long time ago. He was supposed to stay in the realm of truth, but he appeared again in this world in order to save all living beings. Thus the Eternal Buddha comes here in order for us to attain Buddhahood just like him.

¹⁴² Responding to the Buddha, the congregation repeated three times: "We will receive your words by faith." Then at the fourth time, the Buddha finally started to tell the truth. It was a solemn ceremony to repeat the phrases four times; it symbolizes how important this chapter is. The same thing happened in chapter 2, "Expedients." The Buddha said to Sâriputra; "No more, Sâriputra, will I say because the Dharma attained by the Buddhas is the highest Truth, rare to hear and difficult to understand." Sâriputra asked: "Explain all this." They exchanged the dialogs three times, then the Buddha finally said: "you asked me three times with enthusiasm. How can I leave the Dharma un-expended? Listen to me attentively." Thus, the Buddha began to reveal the highest truth in chapter 2. This is a ritual act.

boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood.¹⁴³

"Suppose a person were to take Five Hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya thousand-million-fold worlds and grind them to dust. Then, moving eastward, each time he passes Five Hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya worlds he drops a particle of dust. He continues eastward in this way until he has finished dropping all the particles.¹⁴⁴ Good men, what is your opinion? Can the total number of all these worlds be imagined or calculated?"

The bodhisattva Maitreya and the others said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, these worlds are immeasurable, boundless--one cannot calculate their number, nor does the mind have the power to encompass them. Even all the voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas with their wisdom free of outflows could not imagine or understand how many there are. Although we abide in the stage of avivartika, we cannot comprehend such a matter. World-Honored One, these worlds are immeasurable and boundless."*

At that time the Buddha said to the multitude of great bodhisattvas: "Good men, now I will state this to you clearly. Suppose all these worlds, whether they received a particle of dust or not, are once more reduced to dust. Let one particle represent one kalpa. The time that has passed since I attained Buddhahood surpasses this by a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya kalpas.

¹⁴³ The sutras except the Lotus Sutra accept only the historical Buddha: Sakyamuni Buddha who left Kapila Palace of the Sakya Clan, sat under the Bodhi Tree, attained Buddhahood, and died at the age of 80. The historical Buddha is mortal and tangible. He is also called "Shaku-butsumi." On the other hand, "Hom-butsumi" is the original and eternal Buddha who became the Buddha many hundreds of thousand of billions of nayutas of kalpas ago.

Shaku-butsumi is a manifestation of the Hom-butsumi. Hom-butsumi is the Buddha who has no beginning and no end, just like a circle. If there is a beginning, there must be also an end, like a line.

Therefore, Siddhartha Gautama who was born in Kapila Palace was already a Buddha at the time of his birth, but in order to show us that we could become Buddhas like him, he renounced his kingdom and practiced many religious exercises and meditation; as the result, he became a Buddha.

Here, we can see three different types of the Buddha: the Original Buddha, the Manifested Buddha, and the Reward Buddha. Although there are many Buddhas, only Sakyamuni Buddha has these three types of the Buddha within himself.

¹⁴⁴ This phrase means eternal. The similar explanation was revealed in chapter 7: "Suppose someone smashed all the earth-particles of one thousand million Sumeru-worlds into ink-powder. Then he went to the east on the world at a distance of one thousand worlds from this world. Then he repeated the inking of a dot on the world at every distance of one thousand worlds until the ink-powder was exhausted."

Comparing a distance of Five Hundred thousand billion nayuta asamkhya worlds in Chapter 16 and a distance of one thousand worlds from this world in Chapter 7, the former is a much longer distance. In any case, it explains eternity.

"Ever since then I have been constantly in this saha world, preaching the Law, teaching and converting, and elsewhere I have led and benefited living beings in hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas and asamkhyas of lands.¹⁴⁵

"Good men, during that time I have spoken about the Buddha Burning Torch and others, and described how they entered nirvana. All this I employed as an expedient means to make distinctions.

"Good men, if there are living beings who come to me, I employ my Buddha eye to observe their faith and to see if their other faculties are keen or dull, and then depending upon how receptive they are to salvation, I appear in different places and preach to them under different names,¹⁴⁶ and describe the length of time during which my teachings will be effective. Sometimes when I make my appearance I say that I am about to enter nirvana, and also employ different expedient means to preach the subtle and wonderful Law, thus causing living beings to awaken joyful minds.¹⁴⁷

"Good men, the Thus Come One observes how among living beings there are those who delight in a little Law, meager in virtue and heavy with defilement. For such persons I describe how in my youth I left my household and attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. But in truth the time since I attained Buddhahood is extremely long, as I have told you. It is simply that I use this expedient means to teach and convert living beings and cause them to enter the Buddha way. That is why I speak in this manner.

"Good men, the scriptures expounded by the Thus Come One are all for the purpose of saving and emancipating living beings.¹⁴⁸ Sometimes I speak of myself, sometimes of others:

¹⁴⁵ The Buddha is alive and teaching Dharma to us always. The physical Buddha who was born in India (Present Nepal) passed away, so we cannot see him or hear from him; however, the Original Buddha exists in Dharma. Human beings, animals, plants, wind, air and everything in the universe is the manifestation of the Dharma.

¹⁴⁶ For instance, he named himself the Burning-Light Buddha, Amida Buddha, Dainin Buddha, Never-Despising Bodhisattva, and many others.

¹⁴⁷ A lie and an expedient are very different. Lie is to deceive others and cause them harm while an expedient is a white lie to lead others to a better situation or salvation. Nichiren Shu has many expedients such as amulets, ofuda, Kito blessing, and rei-dan. These are for people to rejoice. Rejoicing is one of the ways for people to approach the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Sakyamuni Buddha expounds his teachings so skillfully and with such a gentle voice that living beings are delighted. It is very important to rejoice or delight in whatever you are doing. Rejoicing and delighting make you and others feel better and full of vitality.

¹⁴⁸ All teachings of the Buddha even expedients are for the purpose of saving all living beings.

All teachings explained before revealing the Original Buddha in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra are called "Shaku-mon" or Provisional teachings. The "Hom-mon" is the latter half of the sutra that reveals the eternal nature of the Buddha. Some Nichiren sects concentrate only the section of the Hom-mon. Nichiren Shu places equal value on the Shaku-mon and the Hom-mon because even though Shaku-mon is expedient, it is still for the purpose of saving all living beings. It is teaching to help all to understand the Hom-mon, as education in elementary and middle schools is a step to understanding higher education. Therefore, the Eternal Buddha manifests as Sakyamuni, Amida, Dainichi, Yakushi Buddhas or other bodhisattvas. The Eternal Buddha might manifest as Jesus Christ, Moses, Allah, or Confucius, depending of the level of understanding of the people. If we understand all religions and cultures, we do not need to fight each other because of differences.

sometimes I present myself, sometimes others; sometimes I show my own actions, sometimes those of others. All that I preach is true and not false.

Why do I do this? The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction. It is neither substantial nor empty, neither consistent nor diverse. Nor is it what those who dwell in the threefold world perceive it to be.¹⁴⁹ All such things the Thus Come One sees clearly and without error.

"Because living beings have different natures, different desires, different actions, and different ways of thinking and making distinctions, and because I want to enable them to put down good roots, I employ a variety of causes and conditions, similes, parables, and phrases and preach different doctrines. This, the Buddha's work, I have never for a moment neglected.

"Thus, since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of asamkhya kalpas, and during that time I have constantly abided here without ever entering extinction.¹⁵⁰ Good men, originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed. Now, however, although in fact I do not actually enter extinction, I announce that I am going to adopt the course of extinction. This is an expedient means which the Thus Come One uses to teach and convert living beings.

"Why do I do this? Because if the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, those persons with shallow virtue will fail to plant good roots but, living in poverty and lowliness, will become attached to the five desires and be caught in the net of deluded thoughts and imaginings. If they see that the Thus Come One is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will grow arrogant and selfish, or become discouraged and neglectful. They will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind.

"Therefore as an expedient means the Thus Come One says: 'Monks, you should know that it is a rare thing to live at a time when one of the Buddhas appears in the world.' Why

¹⁴⁹ The triple world is the world of unenlightened beings. It is divided into three:

The world of desire, whose inhabitants have appetite and sexual desire, like human beings and animals.

The world of form, whose inhabitants have neither appetite nor sexual desire, like plants and metals.

The formless world, whose inhabitants have no physical forms like air, electric waves, spiritual beings.

The Buddhas see the essence of all things while we see things in differences: black or white, good or bad, wise or fool, beneficial or harmful, or winning or losing.

Christians see differences like good or evil, God or Satan, heaven or hell, while Buddhists are supposed to see things in totality and individually as they are. We should not attach to a thing or a matter. See things in difference among equality and equality among difference.

¹⁵⁰ The Eternal Buddha is never born nor passes away. Although the historical Buddha passed away many centuries ago in India, the Original Buddha is always with us

does he do this? Because persons of shallow virtue may pass immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas with some of them chancing to see a Buddha and others never seeing one at all. For this reason I say to them: 'Monks, the Thus Come One is hard to get to see.' When living beings hear these words, they are certain to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha. In their minds they will harbor a longing and will thirst to gaze upon the Buddha, and then they will work to plant good roots. Therefore the Thus Come One, though in truth he does not enter extinction, speaks of passing into extinction.

"Good men, the Buddhas and Thus Come Ones all preach a Law such as this. They act in order to save all living beings, so what they do is true and not false.

"Suppose, for example, that there is a skilled physician who is wise and understanding and knows how to compound medicines to effectively cure all kinds of diseases. He has many sons, perhaps ten, twenty, or even a hundred. He goes off to some other land far away to see about a certain affair. After he has gone, the children drink some kind of poison that make them distraught with pain and they fall writhing to the ground.

"At that time the father returns to his home and finds that his children have drunk poison. Some are completely out of their minds, while others are not. Seeing their father from far off, all are overjoyed and kneel down and entreat him, saying: 'How fine that you have returned safely. We were stupid and by mistake drank some poison. We beg you to cure us and let us live out our lives!'

"The father, seeing his children suffering like this, follows various prescriptions. Gathering fine medicinal herbs that meet all the requirements of color, fragrance and flavor, he grinds, sifts and mixes them together. Giving a dose of these to his children, he tells them: 'This is a highly effective medicine, meeting all the requirements of color, fragrance and flavor. Take it and you will quickly be relieved of your sufferings and will be free of all illness.'

"Those children who have not lost their senses can see that this is good medicine, outstanding in both color and fragrance, so they take it immediately and are completely cured of their sickness. Those who are out of their minds are equally delighted to see their father return and beg him to cure their sickness, but when they are given the medicine, they refuse to take it. Why? Because the poison has penetrated deeply and their minds no longer function as before. So although the medicine is of excellent color and fragrance, they do not perceive it as good.

"The father thinks to himself: My poor children! Because of the poison in them, their minds are completely befuddled. Although they are happy to see me and ask me to cure them, they refuse to take this excellent medicine. I must now resort to some expedient means

to induce them to take the medicine. So he says to them: 'You should know that I am now old and worn out, and the time of my death has come. I will leave this good medicine here. You should take it and not worry that it will not cure you.' Having given these instructions, he then goes off to another land where he sends a messenger home to announce, 'Your father is dead.'

"At that time the children, hearing that their father has deserted them and died, are filled with great grief and consternation and think to themselves: If our father were alive he would have pity on us and see that we are protected. But now he has abandoned us and died in some other country far away. We are shelter-less orphans with no one to rely on!

"Constantly harboring such feelings of grief, they at last come to their senses and realize that the medicine is in fact excellent in color and fragrance and flavor, and so they take it and are healed of all the effects of the poison. The father, hearing that his children are all cured, immediately returns home and appears to them all once more.¹⁵¹

"Good men, what is your opinion? Can anyone say that this skilled physician is guilty of lying?"

"No, World-Honored One."

The Buddha said: "It is the same with me. It has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayuta and asamkhyā kalpas since I attained Buddhahood. But for the sake of living beings I employ the power of expedient means and say that I am about to pass into extinction. In view of the circumstances, however, no one can say that I have been guilty of lies or falsehoods."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Since I attained Buddhahood the number of kalpas that have passed is an
immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions, trillions,
asamkhyas.

Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting countless millions of living
beings, causing them to enter the Buddha way, all this for immeasurable
kalpas.

¹⁵¹ The Buddha is like the father. It is many hundreds of thousands of billions of kalpas since he became the Buddha. In order to save the perverted people in the world after the Buddha's death, he says expediently, "I shall pass away." Although Sakyamuni Buddha has been gone for almost 2500 years, his teachings exist even today and will exist forever. Just as the physical body of the doctor could not cure the sickness but rather it was the remedy that cured the poor children, the Buddha's teachings, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, is continuing to cure the people in the declining latter age of the law.

In order to save living beings, as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana but in truth I do not pass into extinction.

I am always here preaching the Law.

I am always here, but through my transcendental powers I make it so that living beings in their befuddlement do not see me even when close by.

When the multitude see that I have passed into extinction, far and wide they offer alms to my relics.

All harbor thoughts of yearning and in their minds thirst to gaze at me.

When living beings have become truly faithful, honest and upright, gentle in intent, single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha not hesitating even if it costs them their lives, then I and the assembly of monks appear together on Holy Eagle Peak.

At that time I tell the living beings that I am always here, never entering extinction, but that because of the power of an expedient means at times I appear to be extinct, at other times not, and that if there are living beings in other lands who are reverent and sincere in their wish to believe, then among them too I will preach the unsurpassed Law.

But you have not heard of this, so you suppose that I enter extinction.

When I look at living beings I see them drowned in a sea of suffering; therefore I do not show myself, causing them to thirst for me.

Then when their minds are filled with yearning, at last I appear and preach the Law for them.

Such are my transcendental powers.

For asamkhya kalpas constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak and in various other places.

When living beings witness the end of a kalpa and all is consumed in a great fire, this, my land, remains safe and tranquil, constantly filled with heavenly and human beings.

The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves are adorned with various kinds of gems.

Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit where living beings enjoy themselves at ease.

The gods strike heavenly drums, constantly making many kinds of music.

Mandarava blossoms rain down, scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly.

My pure land is not destroyed, yet the multitude see it as consumed in fire, with anxiety, fear and other sufferings filling it everywhere.

These living beings with their various offenses, through causes arising from their evil actions, spend asamkhya kalpas without hearing the name of the Three Treasures.

But those who practice meritorious ways, who are gentle, peaceful, honest and upright, all of them will see me here in person, preaching the Law.
At times for this multitude I describe the Buddha's life span as immeasurable, and to those who see the Buddha only after a long time I explain how difficult it is to meet the Buddha.
Such is the power of my wisdom that its sagacious beams shine without measure. This life span of countless kalpas I gained as the result of lengthy practice. You who are possessed of wisdom, entertain no doubts on this point! Cast them off, end them forever, for the Buddha's words are true, not false. He is like a skilled physician who uses an expedient means to cure his deranged sons. Though in fact alive, he gives out word he is dead, yet no one can say he speaks falsely. I am the father of this world, saving those who suffer and are afflicted. Because of the befuddlement of ordinary people, though I live, I give out word I have entered extinction.
For if they see me constantly, arrogance and selfishness arise in their minds. Abandoning restraint, they give themselves up to the five desires and fall into the evil paths of existence.
Always I am aware of which living beings practice the way, and which do not, and in response to their needs for salvation I preach various doctrines for them. At all times I think to myself: How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?

Chapter Seventeen: Distinction of Benefits

SUMMARY

In the preceding chapter, the Original Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni was revealed for the first time, not having previously been revealed in other sutras. In the next three chapters, the Buddha explains, in detail, merits coming to those who believe in the Eternal Buddha and practice the teaching of the Eternal Buddha.

In order to receive the full merits there are four stages while the Buddha exists and five stages after his death. The four stages while the Buddha exists are:

Understanding by faith a single moment's thought when one hears that the Buddha's life is eternal,
Understanding the meaning,
Disseminating it to others, and
Entering into deep faith.

In addition, in order to receive the full merits one must follow the five stages after the Buddha's death that are:

Rejoicing,
Reading and reciting,
Expounding it to others,
Practicing the Six Paramitas, and
Mastering the Six Paramitas.

By practicing these stages, one receives various merits.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time, when the great assembly heard the Buddha describe how his life span lasted such a very long number of kalpas, immeasurable, boundless asamkhyas of living beings gained a great many rich benefits.¹⁵²

At that time the World-Honored One said to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Maitreya: "Ajita, when I described how the life span of the Thus Come One lasts for such an exceedingly long time, living beings numerous as the sands of six hundred and eighty ten thousands, millions, nayutas of Ganges attained the truth of birthlessness.¹⁵³ And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas a thousand times more in number gained the dharani teaching

¹⁵²Great benefit is to realize that we are also eternal like the Buddha. This chapter explains the variety of merits we can obtain.

¹⁵³Birthlessness means here that one's mind is in the state where he or she will not see the two sides of things such as birth or death, winning or losing, beneficial or not, prosperity or decline, and so forth.

that allows them to retain all that they hear.¹⁵⁴ And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of entire world gained the eloquence that allows them to speak pleasingly and without hindrance.¹⁵⁵ And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of entire world gained dharanis that allow them to retain hundreds, thousands, then thousands, millions, immeasurable repetitions of the teachings. And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of a thousand-millionfold world were able to turn the un-regressing wheel of a Law.¹⁵⁶ And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as dust particles of two thousand middle sized lands were able to turn the pure wheel of a Law.¹⁵⁷ And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of a thousand small lands gained assurance that they would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi after eight rebirths.¹⁵⁸ And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as a dust particles of four four-continent worlds gained assurance that they would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi after four rebirths. And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of three four-continent worlds gained assurance that they would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi after two rebirths. And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of two four-continent worlds gained assurance that they will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi after two rebirths. And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas numerous as the dust particles of one four-continent world gained assurance that they would attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi after one rebirth. And living beings numerous as the dust particles of eight worlds were all moved to set their minds upon anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

When the Buddha announced that these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas had gained the great benefits of the Law, from the midst of the air mandarava flowers and great mandarava flowers rained down, scattering over the immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas who were seated on lion seats under jeweled trees, and also scattering over Shakyamuni Buddha, and over Many Treasures Thus Come One who long ago entered extinction, both of whom were seated on lion seats in the tower of seven treasures. They also scattered over all the great bodhisattvas and the four kinds of believers. In addition, finely powdered sandalwood and aloes rained down, and in the midst of the air heavenly

¹⁵⁴ Dharanis are the mystic syllables that have power to stop evils and keep goodness. The power is that one can memorize and remember many hundreds of thousands of repetitions of teachings.

¹⁵⁵ The one who has heard that the duration of the life of the Buddha is eternal will be able to preach gracefully and fluently even though he is attacked or persecuted. In fact he enjoys preaching to others.

¹⁵⁶ Turning the wheel of the dharma means that a Buddha preaches his teaching. The teaching is spread one, to another, to others just like a wheel turns and is able to go anywhere. In this way, the Dharma will be spread throughout the world. When we try to teach righteousness, we may face many obstacles. However, one who has heard that the duration of the life of the Buddha is eternal will be able to endure the hardship.

¹⁵⁷ He is able to preach the Lotus Sutra with a pure heart (not expecting any rewards).

¹⁵⁸ Anyone who has heard that the duration of the life of the Buddha is eternal is able to attain Buddhahood after eight rebirths, after four rebirths, after three rebirths, after two rebirths, or immediately after this life. To attain Enlightenment depends on one's faith and practice. It is as if we acquired tickets to attain Enlightenment. For example, if several people received railroad tickets to go to New York from Los Angeles. If they do not get on a train, they will never reach New York. One may go straight to New York while others may stop along the way. To reach New York sooner or later depends on one's conduct. The Lotus Sutra teaches that we must have strong faith and practice the teaching of the Eternal Buddha to attain Enlightenment.

drums sounded of their own accord, wonderful notes deep and far-reaching. And a thousand varieties of heavenly robes rained down, draped with various necklaces, pearl necklaces, mani jewel necklaces, necklaces of wish-granting jewels, spreading everywhere in nine directions. In jewel-encrusted censers priceless incenses burned, their fragrance of their own accord permeating everywhere as an offering to the great assembly. Above each one of the Buddhas there appeared bodhisattvas holding banners and canopies, in rows reaching up to the Brahma heaven. These bodhisattvas employed their wonderful voices in singing immeasurable hymns of praise to the Buddhas.

At that time the bodhisattva Maitreya rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder and, pressing his palms together and facing the Buddha, spoke in verse form, saying:

*The Buddha preaches a rarely encountered Law, one never heard from past times.
The World-Honored One possesses great powers and his life span cannot be measured.*

The countless sons of the Buddha, hearing the World-Honored One make distinctions and describe the benefits of the Law they will gain, find their whole bodies filled with joy.

Some abide in this stage of no regression, some have acquired dharanis, some can speak pleasingly and without hindrance or retain ten thousand, a million repetitions of the teachings.

Some bodhisattvas numerous as the dust particles of a thousand major worlds are all able to turn the un-regressing wheel of the Law.

Some Bodhisattvas numerous as the dust particles of a thousand intermediate worlds are all able to turn the pure wheel of the Law.

And some bodhisattvas numerous as the dust particles of a thousand minor worlds are assured that after eight more rebirths they will be able to complete the Buddha way.

Some bodhisattvas numerous as the dust particle of four, three, two times the four continents after a corresponding number of rebirths will become Buddhas; some bodhisattvas numerous as the dust particles of one set of the four continents after one more rebirth will attain comprehensive wisdom.

Thus when living beings hear of the great length of the Buddha's life, they gain pure fruits and rewards that are immeasurable and free of outflows.

Again living beings numerous as the dust particles of eight worlds, hearing the Buddha describe his life span, all set their minds on the unsurpassed way.

The World-Honored One preaches a Law that is immeasurable and cannot be fathomed, and those who benefit from it are many, as boundless as the open air.

Heavenly mandarava flowers and great mandarava flowers rain down; Shakyas and Brahmas like Ganges sands arrive from countless Buddha lands.

Sandalwood and aloes in the jumble of fine powder rain down; like birds flying down from the sky they scatter as an offering over the Buddhas.

In the midst of the air heavenly drums of their own accord emit wonderful sounds; heavenly robes by the thousand, ten thousand, million come whirling and fluttering down; wonderful jewel-encrusted censers burn priceless incense which of his own accord permeates everywhere, an offering to all the World-Honored Ones.

The multitude of great bodhisattvas hold banners and canopies adorned with the seven treasures, ten thousand, a million in kind, lofty, wonderful, in rows reaching up to the Brahma heaven.

Before each one of the Buddhas hang jeweled streamers and superlative banners, while in thousands, ten thousands of verses the praises of the Thus Come One are sung.

All these many things have never been known in the past.

Hearing that the Buddha's life is immeasurable, all beings are filled with joy.

The Buddha's name is heard in ten directions, widely benefiting living beings, and all are endowed with good roots to help them set their minds on the unsurpassed way.

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattva in mahasattva Maitreya: "Ajita, if there are living beings who, on hearing that the life span of the Buddha is of such long duration, are able to believe and understand it even for a moment, the benefits they gain thereby will be without limit or measure.¹⁵⁹ Suppose there are good men or good women who, for the sake of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, over a period of eight hundred thousand million nayutas of kalpas practice the five paramitas - the paramitas of dana (almsgiving), shila (keeping of the precepts), kshanti (forbearance), virya (assiduousness) and dhyana (meditation), the paramita of prajna being omitted - the benefits they obtain will now measure up to even a hundred part, the thousandth part, a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, millionth part of the benefits mentioned previously. Indeed, it is beyond the power of calculation, simile or parable to convey the comparison. For good men who have gained such benefits as those [mentioned previously] to fall back without reaching the goal of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi is utterly unimaginable."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

¹⁵⁹ It is very important to rejoice at hearing the Buddha's teaching. To rejoice is the first step to keep one's firm faith. Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933) who wrote Night of Galaxy Railroad rejoiced when he read the Lotus Sutra. Kenji was 18 years old when he first found the book of the sutra on his father's bookshelf. It is said while he was reading it, he could not stop his body from shaking from the emotions that were stirred up inside. From that time on, the rest of his life was based on the sutra. He was always praying for others' happiness. His poem says that he is "Not defeated by rain, not defeated by wind, not defeated by snow or the heat of summer... All things in my daily life are shared, without taking account of myself."

If someone seeking the Buddha wisdom for a period of eight hundred thousand million nayutas of kalpas should practice the five paramitas, during all those kalpas distributing alms to the Buddhas and to the pratyekabuddhas and disciples and the multitude of bodhisattvas, rare delicacies of food and drink, fine garments and articles of bedding, or building religious retreats of sandalwood adorned with gardens and groves.

If he should distribute alms of many varieties, all refined and wonderful, and do this for the entire number of kalpas to express his devotion to the Buddha away; and if moreover he should keep the precepts, in purity and without omission or outflow, seeking the unsurpassed way, praised by the Buddhas; and if he should practice forbearance, remaining in a posture of submission and gentleness, even when various evils are visited on him, not allowing his mind to be roused or swayed; when others, convinced they have gained the Law, harbor thoughts of overbearing arrogance and he is treated with contempt and vexed by them, if he can still endure it with patience; and if he is diligent and assiduous, ever firm in intent and thought, for immeasurable millions of kalpas single-minded, and never lax or neglectful, for countless kalpas dwelling in a deserted and quiet place; and if he practices sitting and walking exercises, banishing drowsiness, constantly regulating his mind, and as a result of such actions is able to produce states of meditation, for eighty million ten thousand kalpas remaining calm, his mind never deranged; and if he holds to the blessings of this single-mindedness and with it seeks the unsurpassed way, saying, "I will gain comprehensive wisdom and exhaust all the states of meditation!"

If this person for a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million kalpas should carry out these meritorious practices as I have described above, still those good men and women who hear me describe my life span and believe it for even a moment win blessings that surpass those of such a person.

If a person is completely free of all doubt and regret, if in the depths of this mind he believes for one instant, his blessings will be such as this.

These bodhisattvas who have practiced the way for immeasurable kalpas when they hear me describe my life span are able to believe and accept what I say.

These persons will gratefully accept this sutra, saying, "Our wish is that in future ages we may use our long lives to save living beings.

Just as today the World-Honored One, king of the Shakyas, roars like a lion in the place of practice, preaching the Law without fear, so may we too in ages to come, honored and revered by all, when we sit in the place of practice describe our life span in the same manner."

If there are those profound in mind, pure, honest and upright, who, hearing much, can retain it all, who follow principle in understanding the Buddha's words, then persons such as this will have no doubts [about my lives span].

"Furthermore, Ajita, if there is someone who, hearing of the long duration of the Buddha's life span, can understand the import of such words, the benefits that such a person acquires will be without limit or measure, able to awaken in him unsurpassed wisdom of the Thus Come One. How much more so, then, if far and wide a person listens to this sutra or cause others to listen to it, embraces it himself or causes others to embrace it, copies it himself or cause others to copy it, or presents flowers, incense, necklaces, streamers, banners, silken canopies, fragrant oil or lamps of butter oil as offerings to the sutra rolls. The benefits of such a person will be immeasurable, boundless, able to inspire in him to wisdom that embraces all species.

"Ajita, if good men and good women, hearing me describe the great length of my life span, in the depths of their mind believe and understand, then they will see the Buddha constantly abiding on Mount Gridhrakuta, with the great bodhisattvas and multitude of voice-hearers surrounding him, preaching the Law. They will also see this saha world, its ground of lapis lazuli level and well ordered, the Jambunada gold bordering its eight highways, the rows of Jeweled trees, the terraces, towers and observatories all made of jewels, and all the multitude of bodhisattvas who live in their midst. If there are those who are able to see such things, you should know that it is a mark of their deep faith and understanding.

"Again, if after the Thus Come One has entered extinction there are those who hear this sutra and do not slander or speak ill of it but have already shown deep faith and understanding. How much more in the case of persons who read, recite and embrace this sutra! Such persons are in effect receiving the Thus Come One on the crown of their heads.

"Ajita, these good men and good women need not for my sake erect towers and temples or build monks quarters or make the four kinds of offerings to the community of monks. Why? Because these good men and good women, in receiving, embracing, reading and reciting this sutra, have already erected towers, constructed monks quarters, and given alms to the community of monks. It should be considered that they have erected towers adorned with the seven treasures for the relics of the Buddha, broad at the base and tapering at the top, reaching to the Brahma heaven, hung with banners, canopies, and a multitude of jeweled bells, with flowers, incense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, many kinds of drums, musical instruments, pipes, harps, and various types of dances and diversions, and with wonderful voices that sing and intone hymns of praise. It is as though they have already offered alms for immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas.

"Ajita, if after I have entered extinction there are those who hear this sutra and can accept and uphold it, copy it themselves or cause others to copy it, then it may be considered that they have already erected monks quarters, or used red sandalwood to construct thirty-

two halls, as tall as eight tala trees, lofty, spacious and beautifully adorned to accommodate hundreds and thousands of monks.¹⁶⁰ Gardens, groves, pools, lakes, exercise grounds, caves for meditation, clothing, food, drink, beds, matting, medicines, and all kinds of utensils for comfort fill them, and these monks quarters and halls number in the hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions, and indeed are immeasurable in number. All these are presented before me as alms for me in the community of monks.

"So I say, if after the Thus Come One enters extinction there are those who accept, uphold, read and recite the sutra or preach it to others, who copy it themselves or cause others to copy it, or who offer alms to the sutra rolls, then they need not erect towers or temples or build monks quarters or offer alms to the community of monks. And how much more is this true for those who are able to embrace this sutra and at the same time dispense alms, keep the precepts, practice forbearance, and display diligence, single-mindedness and wisdom! Their virtue will be uppermost, immeasurable and boundless, as the open sky, east, west, north and south, in the four intermediate directions and up and down, is immeasurable and boundless. The blessings of such persons will be as immeasurable and boundless as this, and such persons will quickly attain the wisdom embraces all species.

"If a person reads, recites, accepts and upholds this sutra or preaches it to others; if he copies it himself or causes others to copy it; and if he can erect towers, build monks quarters, offer alms and praise to the community of voice-hearers; if he can employ hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of modes of praise to praise the merits of the bodhisattvas; and if for the sake of others he employs various causes and conditions and accords with principle in explaining and preaching this Lotus Sutra; and if he can observe the precepts with purity, keep company with those who are gentle and peaceful, be forbearing and without anger, firm in intent and thoughts, constantly prizing the practice of sitting and meditation, attaining various states of profound meditation, diligent and courageous, mastering all the good doctrines, keen in faculties and wisdom, good at answering difficult questions - Ajita, if after I have entered extinction there are good men and good women who accept, uphold, read and recite this sutra and have good merits such as these, you should know that they have already proceeded to the place of practice and are drawing near to anuttara-samyak-sambodhi as they sit beneath the tree of the way. Ajita, wherever these good men and good women sit or stand or circle in exercise, there one should erect a tower, and all heavenly and human beings should offer alms to it as they would to the tower of the Buddha."

¹⁶⁰ The above two sentences seem to be contradictory; however, it is a Buddha's viewpoint. He says it is not necessary to build a temple for him. He was very humble. He advises instead to build a temple for those who keep, read, and recite the Lotus Sutra. In our view, we must erect a stupa for the Buddha for respect, honor and appreciation. For example, if someone saved a child from drowning, they might say, "I just did what I was supposed to do. It was not something special. You do not need to appreciate me." But the child's parents feel an obligation to show their gratitude. So, it is the same with us to build a stupa for the Buddha.

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If after I have entered extinction a person who can honor and uphold this sutra, his blessings will be immeasurable, as I have described above.

It is as though he had supplied all manner of alms, erecting a tower for the Buddha's relics adorned with the seven treasures and with a central pole very tall and wide that tapers gradually as it reaches the Brahma heaven.

Jeweled bells by the thousands, ten thousand, million, move in the wind, emitting a wonderful sound.

And for immeasurable kalpas he offers alms to this tower, flowers, incense, various kinds of necklaces, heavenly robes and assorted musical instruments, and burns fragrant oil and lamps of butter oil that constantly light up the area around.

In the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law if there is someone who can uphold this sutra, it will be as though he supplied all alms ascribed above.

If someone can uphold this sutra, it will be as though in the presence of the Buddha he should use ox-head sandalwood to build monks quarters as an offering, or thirty-two halls as high as eight tala trees, or supply all kinds of superior foods and wonderful clothes and bedding, residences for assemblies of hundreds, thousands, gardens, groves, pools and lakes, exercise grounds and caves for meditation, all with various kinds of fine adornments.

If someone with a believing and understanding mind accepts, upholds, reads, recites and copies this sutra or causes others to copy it or offers alms to the sutra rolls, scattering flowers, and incense and powdered incense or constantly burning fragrant oil extracted from sumana, champaka or atimuktaka flowers, if he offers alms such as these he will gain immeasurable merits, boundless as the open air, and his blessings will also be like this.

How much more so if one upholds this sutra and at the same time dispense alms, keeps the precepts, is forbearing, delights in meditation, and never gives way to anger or evil speaking.

If one displays reverence toward memorial towers, humbles himself before monks, gives a wide berth to an arrogant mind, constantly ponders upon wisdom and is never angry when asked difficult questions but responds compliantly with an explanation ~ if one can carry out such practices, his merits will be beyond measure.

If you see a teacher of the Law who has cultivated virtues such as these, you should scatter heavenly flowers over him, clothe his body in heavenly robes, bow your head before his feet in salutation, and in your mind imagine you see the Buddha.

You should also think to yourself: before long he will proceed to the place of practice and attain a state of no outflows and no action, bringing wide benefits to heavenly and human beings!

In the place where such a person resides, where he walks, sits or lies down, or recites even one verse of scripture, there you should erect a tower adorned in a fitting and wonderful manner and offer alms of various kinds to it.

When a son of the Buddha dwells in such places the Buddha will accept and utilize them, and constantly in their midst will walk, sit or lie down.

Chapter Eighteen: The Benefits of Joyful Acceptance

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the Buddha revealed that the merits of a person who rejoices at hearing the teaching of the Lotus Sutra are unlimited. In the previous chapter, we learned that there were five stages of practices for devotees of the Lotus Sutra. The first stage is the rejoicing that one experiences upon grasping the significance of the sutra for the first time. The disciples who heard the Dharma directly from Buddha Sakyamuni might rejoice by dancing around. Their rejoicing developed into a strong belief in Buddha's teaching that was spread by word of mouth from one person to another. The merits of the fiftieth person who hears the sutra and rejoices to accept the sutra are much greater than the merits of a rich man giving his wealth to all beings and whatever else they wished for eighty years. The moment of joy is decisive for one's faith. It has an immeasurable impact on all of one's future activities. This is the main point of this chapter.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the bodhisattva and mahasattva Maitreya said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, if there are good men or good women who, hearing this Lotus Sutra, respond with joy, what amount of blessings do they acquire?"*¹⁶¹

Then he spoke in verse, saying:

After the World-Honored One has passed into extinction, if those who hear this sutra are able to respond with joy, what a mount of blessings will they acquire?

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattva Maitreya: "Ajita, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, suppose there are monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, or other persons of wisdom, whether old or young, who, hearing the sutra, respond with joy and, leaving the Dharma assembly, go to some other place, perhaps a monks quarters, a spot that is deserted and quiet, a city, a community, the settlement or a village, and there in accordance with what they have heard they put forth effort and preaching in expounding for the sake of

¹⁶¹ Ordinary people always ask themselves how many benefits they will get by doing this or that. Maitreya Bodhisattva wondered how many merits would be given to anyone who rejoiced at hearing the Lotus Sutra. He was a very compassionate person, so he asked the Buddha for others. Rejoicing here refers to the appreciation for the Buddha revealing the truth. Without rejoicing and appreciation, one is not a Buddhist even if he or she reads and memorizes hundreds of Buddhist scriptures or lectures. Some people criticize people who seek merits, but the Lotus Sutra accepts these people. It is all right for Buddhists to seek merit by practicing Buddhism.

their parents and relatives, their good friends and acquaintances. These persons, after hearing, respond with joy and they too set about spreading the teachings. One person, having heard, responds with joy and spreads the teachings, and the teachings in this way continue to be handed along from one to another until they reach a fiftieth person.

"Ajita, the benefits received by this fiftieth good man or good woman who responds with joy I will now describe to you – he must listen carefully.¹⁶² Imagine all the beings in the six paths of existence of four hundred ten thousand million asamkhya worlds, all the four kinds of living beings, those born from the egg, those born from the womb, those born from dampness, and those born by transformation, those with form, those without form, those with thought, those without thought, those who are not with thought, those who are not without thought, those without legs, those with two legs, four legs or many legs. And imagine that, among all of this vast number of living beings, a person should come who is seeking blessings and, responding to their various desires, dispenses objects of amazement and playthings to all these living beings. Each one of these living beings is given gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, coral, amber, and other wonderful and precious gems, as well as elephants, horses, carriages, and palaces and towers made of the seven treasures, enough to fill a whole Jambudvīpa. This great dispenser of charity, having handed out gifts in this manner for a full eighty years, then thinks to himself: I have already doled out objects of amusement and playthings to these living beings, responding to various desires. But these living beings are now old and decrepit, their years over eighty, their hair white, their faces wrinkled, before long they will die. I now should employ the law of the Buddha to instruct and guide them.

"Immediately he gathers all the living beings together and propagates the Law among them, teaching, benefiting and delighting them. In one moment all are able to attain the way of the srota-āpanna, the way of the śakṛidāgamin, the way of the anāgamin, and the way of arhat, to exhaust all outflows and enter deeply into meditation. All attain freedom and become endowed with eight emancipations. Now what is your opinion? Are the benefits gained by this great dispenser of charity many or not?"

Maitreya said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, this man's benefits are very many indeed, immeasurable and boundless. Even if this dispenser of charity had merely given all those playthings to living beings, his benefits would still be immeasurable. And how much more so when he has enabled them to attain the fruits of arhatship!"*

¹⁶² In the military, a listener must repeat an official message by mouth in order to avoid misunderstanding. Buddha Dharma was transmitted orally for hundreds of years. It might be great joy for one who heard the Dharma directly from the Buddha, but the Buddha's message may be changed when transmitted from one person to another. When the fiftieth person hears the Dharma, it may be different from the original spoken messages, however, the Buddha revealed the merits of the fiftieth person who heard the Lotus Sutra in any manner however changed by transmission.

The Buddha said to Maitreya: "I will now state the matter clearly for you. This man gave all these objects of amusement to living beings in the six paths of existence of four hundred ten thousand million asamkhya worlds and also made it possible for them to attain the fruits of arhatship. But the benefits that he gains do not match the benefits of the fiftieth person who hears just one verse of the Lotus Sutra and responds with joy. They are not equal to one hundredth, one thousandth, one part in a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, a million. Indeed it is beyond the power of calculation, simile or parable to express the comparison.¹⁶³

"Ajita, the benefits gained by even the fiftieth person who hears the Lotus Sutra as it is handed along to him responds with joy. His blessings are greater by an immeasurable, boundless asamkhya number, and are in fact incomparable.

"Moreover, Ajita, suppose a person for the sake of this sutra visits a monks quarters and, sitting or standing, even for a moment listens to it and accepts it. As a result of the benefits so obtained, when he is reborn in his next existence he will enjoy the finest, most superior and wonderful elephants, horses and carriages, and palanquins decked with rare treasures, and will mount up to the heavenly palaces.¹⁶⁴ Or suppose there is a person who is sitting in the place where the Law is expounded, and when another person appears, the first person urges them to sit down and listen, or offers to share his seat and so persuades him to sit down. The benefits gained by this person will be such that when he is reborn he will be in a place where lord Shakra is seated, where the heavenly king Brahma is seated, or were a wheel-turning sage king is seated.¹⁶⁵

"Ajita, suppose there is a person who speaks to another person, saying, 'There is a sutra called the Lotus. Let us go together and listen to it.' And suppose, having been urged, the other person goes and even for an instant listens to the sutra. The benefits of the first person will be such that when he is reborn he will be born in the same place as dharani bodhisattvas. He will have keen faculties and wisdom. For a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand ages he will

¹⁶³ The Buddha compares the merits of the fiftieth person and a rich man. Suppose a great, wealthy man, who was seeking merits, gave all those pleasing things such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, shell, coral, elephants, horses, palaces and stately buildings to other living beings in accordance with their wishes. Having continued giving those alms to them for eighty years, this great giver thought, "I gave those pleasing things to them according to their wishes. They will die before long. I will lead them by the teachings of the lesser vehicle." He caused them to attain enlightenment momentarily. His merits are immeasurable and limitless. However, the Buddha says that his merits are much less than the fiftieth person who rejoices at hearing the Lotus Sutra. It is because the material wealth has a limit while the Dharma does not. You can give the teachings of the Buddha to an unlimited number of people during unlimited period of time. The propagation of the teaching of the Buddha starts with rejoicing at hearing the Dharma.

¹⁶⁴ Isn't it nice that all of you here at the temple will be able to go up to the palace of heaven or the Buddha land? If you share your seat with your friend or someone at this temple and hear the chanting of the sutra, you will be a king or a ruler of a country in your next life according to this sutra.

¹⁶⁵ Rejoicing at hearing the chanting of the Lotus Sutra is not the end. We have received immeasurable merits, now we must cause others to hear it, to let others have the same merits. If you do that, your breath will not foul. You will not have diseases of the tongue or the mouth. Your teeth will not be defiled. Your nose will not be flat or awry. Your lips, tongue and teeth will be well shaped. You will have all the good features of a person. Mind and body are one. When your mind is calm and positive, your body looks good and respectful to others. All Buddhas have 32 major marks and 80 good mini-marks.

never be struck dumb. His mouth will not emit a foul odor. His tongue will never be afflicted, nor will his mouth be afflicted. His teeth will not be stained or black, nor will they be yellow or widely spaced, nor will they be missing or fall out or be at an angle or crooked. His lips will not droop down or curl back or be rough or chapped or afflicted with sores or misshapen or twisted or too thick or too big or black or discolored or unsightly in any way. His nose will not be too broad or flat or crooked or too highly arched. His face will not be swarthy, nor will it be long and narrow, or sunken and distorted. He will not have a single unsightly feature. His lips, tongue and teeth will all be handsomely proportioned. His nose will be long and high, his face round and full, his eyebrows long and set high, his forehead broad, smooth, and well shaped, and he will be endowed with all the features proper to a human being. In each existence he is born into, he will see the Buddha, hear his Law, and have faith in his teachings.

"Ajita, just observe! The benefits gained merely by encouraging one person to go and listen to the Law are such as this! How much more, then, if one single-mindedly hears, preaches, reads, and recites the sutra and before the great assembly makes distinctions of the sake of people and practices it as the sutra instructs!"¹⁶⁶

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If someone in the Dharma assembly is able to hear this sutra, even just one verse, and responding with joy, preaches it to others, and in this way the teachings are handed along till they reach the fiftieth person, the blessings gained by this last person are such as I will now define.

Suppose there is a great dispenser of charity who bestows goods on immeasurable multitudes, doing this for a full eighty years, responding to each person's desires.

Seeing the signs of decrepitude and old age, the white hair and wrinkled face, the missing teeth, the withered form, he thinks, "Their death is not far off; I must now teach them so they can gain the fruits of the way!"

Immediately for their sake he employs an expedient means, preaching the true Law of nirvana:

"Nothing in this world is lasting or firm but all are like bubbles, foam, heat shimmer. Therefore all of you must quickly learn to hate it and be gone!"

¹⁶⁶ "Act According to Its Teaching." The Lotus Sutra is a religion of practice. If you practice as the sutra reveals, one will receive unlimited merits. A major practice of the sutra is to tell others even a word or a phrase of it. Nichiren Dai-Shonin says in Shoho Jisso Sho:

"Without learning and practicing there is no Buddhism. To learn and to practice is a part of faith. Follow these yourself and influence others to do the same. Even if it is only a word or a phrase, spread it to others."

If you spread it to others, you are already a teacher. The merit of a teacher of the Dharma is the topic of the next chapter.

When the people here this Law, all are able to become arhats endowed with the six transcendental powers, the three understandings and eight emancipations. But the fiftieth person who hears one verse [of the Lotus sutra] and responds with joy gains blessings that are far greater, beyond description by simile or parable. And if one who has had the teachings passed along to him receives blessings that are immeasurable, how much more so one who in the Dharma assembly first hears the sutra and responds with joy.

Suppose someone encourages another person, urging him to go and listen to the Lotus, saying, "This sutra is profound and wonderful, hard to encounter in a thousand, ten thousand kalpas!"

And suppose, as urged, the person goes to listen, even though he listens for just a moment.

The blessings that the first person gets in reward I will now describe in detail: Age after age, no afflictions of the mouth, no teeth missing, yellow or blackened, lips that are not thick, curled or defective, no fateful features, a tongue not dry, black or too short; nose high, long and straight, forehead broad, smooth and well shaped, face and eyes ball properly aligned and impressive, the kind people delight to look at, breath free of foul odor, a fragrance of utpala flowers constantly emitted by the mouth.

Suppose one goes to the monks quarters expressly to listen the Lotus Sutra and listens with joy for just a moment - I will now describe his blessings.

In existences to come among heavenly and human beings he will acquire wonderful elephants, horses, carriages, palanquins adorned with rare jewels, and will mount to the palaces of heaven.

If in the place where the law is expounded one encourages someone to sit and hear the sutra, the blessings he acquires will enable him to gain the seat of Shakra, Brahma and the wheel-turner.

How much more so if one listens single-mindedly, explains and expounds the meaning, and practices the sutra as the sutra instructs - that person's blessings know no bounds!

Chapter Nineteen: The Benefits of the Teacher of the Law

SUMMARY

The teacher of the Dharma is not only a priest or a monk but also a layman who keeps, reads, recites, expounds or copies the Lotus Sutra. All of you who listen to these lectures are also teachers of the Dharma if you practice the teachings of the sutra. This chapter reveals that the teacher will have their five organs and mind purified. They will gain the eight hundred to twelve hundred merits of the body and mind.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Constant Exertion: If good men or good women accept and uphold this Lotus Sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, such persons will obtain eight hundred eye benefits, twelve hundred ear benefits, eight hundred nose benefits, twelve hundred tongue benefits, eight hundred body benefits, and twelve hundred mind benefits. With these benefits they will be able to adorn their six sense organs, making all of them pure.¹⁶⁷

"These good men and good women, with the pure physical eyes they received from their parents at birth, will view all that exists in the inner and our parts of thousand-million-fold world, its mountains, forests, rivers and seas, down as far as the Avichi hell and up to this Summit of Being. And in the midst they will see all the living beings, and also see and understand all the causes and conditions created by their deeds and the births that await them as result and recompense for those deeds."¹⁶⁸

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

¹⁶⁷ The conditions needed for you to purify your senses are to keep, read, recite, expound or copy the Lotus Sutra. They are called the Five Kinds of Practices for the Dharma teacher.

It is very easy to copy the sutra these days. You just use a copy machine or a scanner. However, before the printing machine was invented, all scriptures had to be written by hand, character-by-character. Centuries ago, those written texts were traded with other valuable merchandise and spread to other countries through the Silk Road and other routes of trading for hundreds of years. It is very important to copy the sutra even today. If you would like to copy the Lotus Sutra with a pen or fude, please let Rev. Kanai know. He will advise you on how to go about copying the sutra.

The number of merits, either eight hundred or twelve hundred, is very symbolic. Hindu people often use numbers like 4, 8, and 9 as representing perfect numbers. "Four" represents front, back, left and right or the four directions (N. E. W. S.); "Eight" means the preceding four plus the other four intermediary corners (NE. NW. SE. SW.); and "nine" symbolizes the preceding eight plus the center. 800 and 1200 are multiples of 4 and 8.

Priests chant the above phrases while they perform kito blessing.

It is important to realize the reasons why we purify our senses and why we practice the five codes of keeping, reading, reciting, expounding, and copying the sutra. It is for the peace and happiness for all of us. It is the way of the Bodhisattva.

¹⁶⁸ We can see the bottom of hell to the highest heaven with our eyes given by our parents. There is one condition for this; it is to expound the Lotus Sutra fearlessly. It means that we must preach without discrimination, prejudice or preconception. Then our minds naturally will be purified.

If in the midst of the great assembly someone with a fearless mind preaches this Lotus Sutra, listen to the benefits he will receive!
Such a person gains eight hundred benefits of superior eyes.
As a result of these adornments his eyes become extremely pure.
With the eyes received that birth from his parents he will view all the three thousand worlds, their inner and outer parts, their Mount Meru, their Sumeru, the Iron Encircling Mountains and all the other mountains and forests, the waters of their great seas, rivers and streams, down as far as the Avichi hell, up to the Summit of Being heaven.
And he will see all the living beings in their midst.
Though he has not yet gained heavenly eyes, the power of his physical eyes will be such as this.

"Moreover, Constant Exertion, if good men or good women accept and uphold this sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, they will gain twelve hundred ear benefits with which to purify their ears so they can hear all the different varieties of words and sounds in the thousand-millionfold world, down as far as the Avichi hell, up to the Summit of Being, have been in its inner and our parts.¹⁶⁹ Elephant sounds, horse sounds, ox sounds, carriage sounds, weeping sounds, lamenting sounds, conch sounds, drum sounds, bell sounds, chime sounds, sounds of laughter, sounds of speaking, men's voices, women's voices, boys' voices, girls' voices, the voice that is not the Law, bitter voices, merry voices, voices of common mortals, voices of sages, happy voices, unhappy voices, voices of heavenly beings, dragon voices, yaksha voices, gandharva voices, asura voices, garuda voices, kinnara voices, mahoraga voices, the sound of fire, the sound of water, the sound of wind, voices of hell dwellers, voices of beasts, voices of hungry spirits, monks' voices, nuns' voices, voices of voice hearers, voices of pratyekabuddhas, voices of bodhisattvas and voices of Buddhas.¹⁷⁰ In a word, although the person has not yet gained heavenly ears, with the pure and ordinary ears that he received at birth from his parents he will be able to hear and understand all the voices that exist in the inner and outer parts of thousand-millionfold world. And though in this manner he can distinguish all the various kinds of sounds and voices, this will not impair his hearing faculty."

¹⁶⁹ The conditions to obtain twelve hundred merits of the ear are to keep, read, recite, expound or copy the Lotus Sutra. Prince Shotoku, who established the constitution of Japan for the first time in 604 AD, was able to listen to ten different testimonies at the same time, and gave each of them a correct response. He was one of the very first practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in Japan.

¹⁷⁰ The natural ears means that we hear or listen regardless of the time or the condition of our bodies and minds. Our feelings differ from time to time, depending on the environment. When we are hungry, we may not give our attention to others, but while we are eating, we tend to listen to others easier; therefore, business meetings often taken place while eating. The natural ears also means not to form attachment to a good voice or bad voice, or harsh voice or gentle voice. Do not be attached to one type of voice but rather, listen to all voices.

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

With the ears received at birth from one's parents, pure and without stain or defilement, with these ordinary ears one can hear the sounds of the three thousand worlds, elephant, horse, carriage, ox sounds, bell, chime, conch, drum sounds, lute and harp sounds, pipe and flute sounds; the sound of pure and beautiful singing one can hear without becoming attached to it.

The countless varieties of human voices – one can hear and understand all these. Again one can hear the voices of heavenly beings, subtle and wonderful song sounds, and one can hear men and women's voices, the voices of young boys and young girls.

In the midst of hills, rivers and steep valleys the voice of the kalavinka, the jivakajivaka and other birds – all these sounds he will hear.

From the tormented multitudes of hell the sounds of various kinds of suffering and distress, sounds of hungry spirits driven by famine and thirst as they search for food and drink, of the asuras who live on the shores of the great sea when they talk among themselves or emit loud cries.

Thus he who preaches the Law can dwell safely among all these, hearing these many voices from afar without ever impairing his faculties of hearing.

In the worlds of the ten directions when beasts and birds call to another this person who preaches the Law hears them all from where he is.

In the Brahma heaven and above, the Light Sound Heaven, All Pure heaven, and up to the Summit of Being heaven, the sounds of the voices talking there – the teacher of the Law, dwelling here, can hear them all.

All the multitude of monks and all the nuns, whether they are reading or reciting the scriptures or preaching them for the sake of others – the teacher of the Law dwells here, can hear them all.

And when there are bodhisattvas who read and recite the sutra teachings or preach them for the sake of others or select passage and explain their meaning, the sounds of their voices – he can hear them all.

When the Buddhas, great sages and venerable ones, teach and convert living beings, in the midst of the great assembly expounding and preaching the subtle and wonderful Law, one who upholds the Lotus Sutra can hear them all.

All the sounds in the inner and outer parts of the thousand-million-fold world, down to the Avichi hell, up to the Summit of Being heaven – he can hear all these sounds and never impair his faculties of hearing.

Because the faculties of his ears are so keen he can distinguish and understand all the sounds.

One who upholds the Lotus Sutra, though he has not yet gained heavenly ears, can do this simply through the ears he was born with – such are the benefits he gains.

"Moreover, Constant Exertion, if good men or good women accept and uphold this sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, they will succeed in gaining eight hundred nose benefits with which to purify their faculty of smell so they can detect all the different fragrances from top to bottom and in the inner and our parts of a thousand-million-fold world, the fragrance of sumana flowers, jatika flowers, mallika flowers, champaka flowers, patala flowers, red lotus flowers, blue lotus flowers, white lotus flowers, the fragrance of flowering trees, fruit trees, sandalwood, aloes, tamalapatra and tagara, as well as incense blended from thousand, ten thousand ingredients, powdered incense, pellet incense or paste incense.¹⁷¹ One who upholds this sutra while dwelling here, will be able to distinguish all these.

"Moreover he will be able to distinguish and identify the odors of living beings, of elephants, horses, oxen, sheep and so forth, the odor of a man, a woman, a boy child, a girl child, and odors of plants, trees, thickets and forests. Whether they are near or far off, he will be able to detect all these odors and distinguish one from the other without error.

"One who upholds this sutra, though he dwells right here, will also be able to detect orders of the various heavens in the sky above.¹⁷² The scent of a parijataka and kovidara trees, of mandarava flowers, great mandarava flowers, great manjushaka flowers, sandalwood, aloes, various kinds of powdered incense, and incense made of an assortment of flowers - of heavenly scents from which they are derived or blended, there are non that he cannot detect and identify.

"He will also be able to detect the scent of the bodies of heavenly beings. The scent when Shakra Devanam Indra is in his superb palace amusing himself and satisfying the five desires, or the scent when he is in the Hall of the Wonderful Law preaching the Law for the heavenly beings of Trayastrimsha, or the scent when he is wondering at leisure in his gardens, as well as the scent of the bodies of the other male and female heavenly beings - all these he will be able to detect from a far.

"He will thus be able to extend his awareness up to the Brahma heaven and even higher to the Summit of Being heaven, detecting the scent of all bodies of the heavenly beings, who also detect the incense burned by the heavenly beings. Moreover the scent of the

¹⁷¹ With developments of technology and science, we can see and listen to the other side of the world through the radio, TV, and the Internet at home. A computer that even detects different odors may be soon developed. According to the Lotus Sutra, one can detect not only the smell of elephants and lions, but also underground reserves of gold, silver, and copper.

¹⁷² After Buddha Sakyamuni's death, our practice begins with our joy to hear that the duration of the Buddha is eternal. Then we keep the Lotus Sutra, read it, recite it, copy it and explain it to others. Furthermore we, bodhisattvas, practice the Six Paramitas (the six kinds of practice by which bodhisattvas are able to attain enlightenment). The Six Paramitas are donation, keeping precepts, perseverance, endurance, meditation and wisdom.

voice-hearer's, of pratyekabuddhas, of bodhisattvas and of the bodies of the Buddhas ~ all these he will detect from afar and will know where these beings are. And although he can detect all these scents, his faculty of smell will not be impaired or disordered. If he should wish to distinguish one scent from another and describe it for someone else, he will be able to recall it without error."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The purity of such person's nose will be such that throughout this world he will be able to detect and identify all manner of odors, fragrant or foul, sumana and jatika flowers, tamalapatra and sandalwood, the scent of aloes and cassia, the scent of various flowers and fruits.

And he will know the scent of living beings, the scent of men and women.

Though this preacher of the Law dwells far off, he will detect the scents and know where the persons are.

Wheel-turning kings of great authority, lesser wheel turners and their sons, their ministers and palace attendants ~ he will detect their scent and know where they are.

Precious treasures adorning the body, treasure storehouses in the earth, jewel ladies of wheel-turning kings ~ he will detect their scent where they are.

Ornaments to adorn the bodies of persons, clothing and necklaces, all kinds of paste incense ~ by detecting these he will know who the wearers are.

When heavenly beings walk or sit, amuse themselves or carry out magical transformations," the upholder of the Lotus by detecting their scent can know all this.

Blossoms and fruits of various trees, and aroma of butter oil ~ the upholder of the sutra, dwelling here, knows where all these are.

Deep in the mountains, in steep places where blossoms of the sandalwood tree unfold, living beings are in their midst ~ by detecting the scent he can know all this.

Living beings in the Iron Encircling Mountains, in the great seas or in the ground ~ the upholder of this sutra detects their scent and knows where all of them are.

When male and female asuras and their retinues of followers fight with one another or amuse themselves, he detects the scent and knows all this.

On the broad plains, in narrow places, lions, elephants, tigers, wolves, buffaloes and water buffaloes ~ by detecting their scent he knows where they are.

When a woman is pregnant and no one can determine if the child is male or female, if it will lack normal faculties or be inhuman, by detecting the scent he can know all this.

And through this power to detect scents he knows when a woman will be successful or not, if the pregnancy will be successful or not, if she will be delivered safely of a healthy child.

Through his power of detect scents he knows the thoughts of men and women, if their minds are stained by desire, stupidity or anger, and he knows if they are practicing good.

Hoard of goods that are stored in the earth, gold, silver and precious treasures, things heaped in bronze vessels - by detecting the scent he can tell where they all are.

Various kinds of necklaces whose value cannot be appraised - by the scent he knows if they are precious or worthless, where they came from and where they are now.

Flowers in the heavens above, mandaravas, manjushakas, parijataka trees - detecting their scent, he knows all these.

The palaces in the heavens above in their separate grades of upper, intermediate, and lower, adorned with numerous jeweled flowers - detecting their scent, he knows them all.

The heavenly gardens and groves, the superb mansions, the observatories, the Hall of the Wonderful Law, and those taking pleasure in their midst - detecting their scent, he knows them all.

When heavenly beings listen to the Law or indulge the five desires, coming and going, walking, sitting, lying down - detecting their scent, he knows them all.

The robes worn by heavenly women when, adorned with lovely flowers and perfumes, they whirl and circle in enjoyment - detecting their scent, he knows them all.

Thus extending his awareness upward to the Brahma heaven, by detecting their scent, he knows all those who enter meditation or emerge from meditation.

In the Light Sound and All Pure heavens and up to the Summit of Being, those born for the first time, those who have departed - detecting their scent, he knows them all.

The multitude of monks diligent at all times with regard to the Law, whether sitting or walking around or reading a reciting the sutra teachings, sometimes under the forest trees concentrating their energies, sitting in meditation - the upholder of the sutra detects their scent and knows were all of them are.

Bodhisattvas firm and unbending in will, sitting in meditation or reading the sutras or preaching the Law for others - by detecting their scent he knows them all.

The World-Honored Ones, present in all quarters, revered and respected by all, pitying the multitude, preaching the Law - by detecting their scent he knows them all.

Living beings who in the Buddhas presence hear the sutra and all rejoice, who practice as the Law prescribes - by detecting their scent he knows them all.

Though he has not yet acquired the nose possessed by a bodhisattva of the Law of no outflows, the upholder of the sutra before then will acquire a nose with the marks described here.

"Moreover, Constant Exertion, if good men or good women except and uphold this sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, they will gain twelve hundred tongue benefits.¹⁷³ Whether something is good tasting or vile, whether it is flavorful or not, and even things that are bitter or astringent, when encountered by the faculties of this person's tongue will be a changed into superb flavors as fine as the sweet dew of heaven, and there will be none that are not pleasing.

"If with these faculties of the tongue he undertakes to expound and preaching in the midst of the great assembly, he will produce a deep and wonderful voice capable of penetrating the mind and causing all who hear it to rejoice and delight.¹⁷⁴ When the men and women of heaven, Shakra, Brahma and other heavenly beings, hear the sound of this deep and wonderful voice expounding and preaching, advancing and argument point by point, they will all gather to listen. Dragons and dragon daughters, yakshas and yaksha daughters, gandharvas and gandharva daughters, asuras and asura daughters, garudas and garuda daughters, kinnaras and kinnara daughters, mahoragas and mahoraga daughters will all gather close around its possessor in order to listen the Law, and will revere him and offer alms. Monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, monarchs, princes, ministers and their retinues, petty wheel-turning kings and great wheel-turning kings with their seven treasures and thousand sons and inner and outer retinues will ascend their palaces and all come to listen to the Law.

"Because this bodhisattva is so skilled of preaching the Law, the Brahmins, householders and people throughout the country will for the remainder of their lives follow and wait on him and offer him alms. Voice-hearers, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhas will constantly delight to see him. Wherever this person is, the Buddhas will all face in that direction when they preach the Law, and he will be able to accept and uphold all the doctrines of the Buddha. And in addition he will be able to emit the deep and wonderful sound of the Law."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

¹⁷³ The sense of taste is different depending on our body and mind. When we are happy, food tastes good, when unhappy, food tastes bad even though we may be eating the same thing. The digestive process is also different depending on the conditions of our body and mind.

St. Nichiren was exiled to Sado Island in the Japan Sea at the age of 50, in 1272. He was placed in a shelter with a broken roof and walls at the snow-covered Tsukahara Cemetery in November. The Kamakura Government wished him to die there, so food was not given to him. However, Abutsubo, who tried to kill Nichiren but was later converted, brought food for him at midnight with his wife. A practitioner of the Sutra will not starve to death.

¹⁷⁴ The merits of the tongue mean not only taste but also voices and speeches like those blessed with a silver tongue. A Dharma teacher will have beautiful voices and please others that listen to their messages. People who have heard the rumor of the beautiful voice will also come to listen to the teachings.

The faculties of this person's tongue will be so pure that he will never experience any bad tastes, but all that he eats will become like sweet dew.

With his deep, pure and wonderful voice he will preach the Law in the great assembly, employing causes, conditions and similes to lead and guide the minds of living beings.

All who hear him will rejoice and offer him their finest alms.

Heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, as well as asuras and others will all approach him with reverent minds and together come to hear the Law.

If this preacher of the Law wishes to use his wonderful voice to fill the three thousand worlds he can do so at will.

Wheel-turning kings great and small and their thousand sons and retinues will press their palms together with reverent minds and constantly come to hear and accept the Law.

Heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, rakshasas and pishachas likewise with rejoicing minds will constantly delight in coming to bring alms.

The heavenly king Brahma, the devil king, the deities Freedom and Great Freedom, all the multitude of heavenly beings will constantly come to where he is.

The Buddhas and their disciples, hearing the sound of him teaching the Law, will keep him constantly in their thoughts and guard him and at times show themselves for his sake.

"Moreover, Constant Exertion, if good men or good women except and uphold this sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, they will gain eight hundred body benefits.¹⁷⁵ They will acquire pure bodies, like pure lapis lazuli, such as living beings delight to see. Because of the purity of their bodies, when the living beings of the thousand-millionfold world are born or die, when they are born in upper or lower regions, in fair or ugly circumstances, in good places or bad, they will all be reflected [in these bodies]. The mountain kings of Iron Encircling Mountains, the Great Iron Encircling Mountains, Mount Meru and Mahameru, as well as living beings in their midst, will all be reflected therein. Down to the Avichi hell, upward to the Summit of Being, all the regions and their living beings will be reflected therein. Voice-hearers, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, Buddhas preaching the Law ~ the forms and shapes of these will be reflected in their bodies."

¹⁷⁵ The sutra explains that the teacher's body will be able to have his body purified like lapis lazuli just as a reflection is seen in a clear mirror. The mirror has no self. Because the mirror has no self, it clearly reflects things just as they are. When a person faces the teacher who practices the Five Codes, their wrong conducts are reflected in his mind and he will thus repent his wrong conducts. There are a few stories of a person or an animal who faced the Buddha Sakyamuni repented their wrong conducts, like the drunken elephant that tried to smash and kill the Buddha, or Hariti/Kishimo who sucked children's blood.

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

If one upholds the Lotus Sutra his body will be very pure, like pure lapis lazuli – living beings will all delight to see it.

And it will be like a pure bright mirror in which forms and shapes are all reflected.

The bodhisattva in his pure body will see all that is in the world; he alone will see brightly what is not visible to others.

Within the three thousand worlds all the mass of burgeoning creatures, heavenly and human beings, asuras, hell dwellers, spirits, beasts – their forms and shapes in this way will all be reflected in his body.

The palaces of the various heavens upward to the Summit of Being, the Iron Encircling Mountains, the mountains Meru and Mahameru, the great seas and other waters – all will be reflected in his body.

The Buddhas and voice-hearers, Buddha sons and bodhisattvas, whether alone or in the assembly preaching the Law – all will be reflected.

Though this person has not yet acquired the wonderful body of Dharma nature, free of outflows, because the purity of his ordinary body all things were reflected in it.

"Moreover, Constant Exertion, if good men or good women except and uphold this sutra after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, they will acquire twelve hundred mind benefits.¹⁷⁶ Because of purity of their mental faculties, when they hear no more than one verse or one phrase [of the sutra], they will master immeasurable and boundless numbers of principles. And once having understood these principles, they will be able to expound and preach on the single phrase or a single verse for a month, for four months, or for a whole year, and the doctrines that they preach during that time will conform to the gist of the principles and will never be contrary to true reality.

"If they should expound some text of the secular world or speak on matters of government or those relating to wealth and livelihood, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law. With regard to the living beings in the six realms of existence of a thousand-

¹⁷⁶ We inherited the five organs from our parents. We cannot change the shapes of the organs without surgery. Animals also have the five senses but many are much more keenly developed than human beings. However, human beings have a much more developed brain and we are able to control our minds. When we control our minds, our faces can change to be gentle. The five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching are the five characters of "Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo." Nichiren Shonin said that when the rays of the five characters in "Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo" shine in the body of a person, they would become an honorable one. It is called the Gohonzon. When our bodies are purified, we receive the 800 or the 1200 merits of the organs. All human beings originally possess the honorable merits. We must rediscover the Gohonzon that we have originally possessed.

million-fold world, they will understand how the minds of those living beings work, how they move, what idle theories they entertain.¹⁷⁷

"Thus although they have not yet acquired the wisdom of no outflows, the purity of their minds will be such that the thought of these persons, their calculations and surmises and the words they speak, will in all cases represent the Law of the Buddha, never departing from the truth, and also conform with what was preached in the sutras of former Buddhas."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The minds of these persons will be pure, bright, keen, without stain or defilement.
And with these wonderful mental faculties they will understand the superior, intermediate and inferior Law.
Hearing no more than one verse, they will master immeasurable principles and able to preach them step by step in accordance with the Law for a month, four months, or a year.
All the living beings in the inner and outer parts of this world, heavenly beings, Dragons, humans, yakshas, spirits, those in the six realms of existence and all the various thoughts they have - upholders of Lotus Sutra as their reward will know all these in an instant!
The countless Buddhas of the ten directions, adorned with the marks of a hundred blessings, for the sake of living beings preach the Law, and such persons, hearing it, will be able to accept and uphold it.
They will ponder immeasurable principles, preach the Law in an immeasurable number of ways, yet from start to finish never forget or make a mistake, because they are upholders of the Lotus Sutra.
They will understand the characteristics of all phenomena, accord with principles, recognizing their proper order, be masters of names and words, and expound and preach things as they understand them.
What these persons preach is in all cases the Law of former Buddhas, and because they expound this Law they have no fear before the assembly.

¹⁷⁷ The teacher of the Dharma, when their body and mind is purified, is able to talk about any worldly matter according to the right teachings of the Buddha. They can also talk about the constitution, economy, business, farming, or industry according to the Buddha's teachings.

The teacher of the Dharma is able to read the mind and to know what is important and what is not for any particular person. Therefore, the teacher can lead us correctly in a short amount of time.

When Shijo Kingo, one of Nichiren's disciples, asked Nichiren that he wanted to become a priest, Nichiren Shonin advised him to serve his master, Lord Echi, obediently as a samurai warrior. St. Nichiren said, "To serve your master (in your work) is to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra says that worldly politics and economy are not against its ultimate reality."

So, let us practice Buddhism in our daily lives.

Such as a purity of the mental faculties of these upholders of the Lotus Sutra. Though they have not yet obtained freedom from outflows before that they will manifest the marks described here.

While these persons uphold this sutra they will dwell safely on rare ground, by all living beings delighted in, loved and respected, able to employ a thousand, ten thousand varieties of apt and skillful words to make distinctions, expound and preach ~ because they uphold the Lotus Sutra.

Chapter Twenty: Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

SUMMARY

The previous chapter revealed that those who keep, read, recite, expound, or copy the Lotus Sutra will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the eye, nose, and body and twelve hundred merits of the ear, tongue, and mind. Thus, we encourage doing the five practices (of keeping, reading, reciting, expounding, and copying the Lotus Sutra) for teachers of the Dharma. On the other hand, this chapter reveals the practice of bowing to others without performing the above five practices. Never-Despising Bodhisattva kept the practice of only bowing to the four kinds of devotees and praising them, saying, "I respect you deeply. I do not despise you because you will be able to practice the Way of Bodhisattvas and become Buddhas." In actuality, Never-Despising Bodhisattva was Sakyamuni Buddha himself in his previous existence.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Gainer of Great Authority: *You should understand this. When monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen uphold the Lotus Sutra, if anyone should speak ill of them, curse or slander them, he will suffer severe recompense for his crime, as I have explained earlier.¹⁷⁸ And I have also explained earlier the benefits gained by those who uphold the sutra, namely, purification of their eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind.*

"Gainer of Great Authority, long ago, an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable number of asamkhyā kalpas in the past, there was a Buddha named Awesome Sound King Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. His kalpa was called Exempt from Decay and his land was called Great Achievement.

"This Buddha Awesome Sound King during the age when he lived preached the Law for heavenly and human beings and asuras. For those who were seeking to become voice-hearers he responded by preaching the Law of the four noble truths so that they could transcend birth, old age, sickness and death and eventually attain nirvana. For those seeking to become pratyekabuddhas he responded by preaching the Law of the twelve-linked chain of causation. For the bodhisattvas, as a means to lead them to anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, he

¹⁷⁸ Bhiksus are male priests and monks. Bhikusunis are nuns. Upasakas are laymen while upasikas are laywomen.

responded by preaching the Law of the six paramitas so they could eventually gain the Buddha wisdom.

"Gainer of Great Authority, this Buddha Awesome Sound King had a life span of kalpas equal to four-hundred thousand million nayutas of Ganges sands. His correct Law endured in the world for as many kalpas as there are dust particles in one Jambudvipa. His counterfeit Law endured in the world for as many kalpas as there are dust particles in the four continents. After this Buddha had finished bringing great benefits to living beings, he passed into extinction.

"After his Correct Law and Counterfeit Law had come to an end, another Buddha appeared in the same land. He too was named Awesome Sound King Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. This process continue until twenty-thousand million Buddhas had appeared one after another, all bearing the same name.

"After the original Awesome sound King Thus Come One had passed into extinction, and after his Correct Law had also passed away, in the period of his Counterfeit Law, monks of overbearing arrogance exercised great authority and power. At this time there was a bodhisattva monk named Never Disparaging. Now, Gainer of Great Authority, for what reason was he named Never Disparaging? This monk, whatever persons he happened to meet, whether monks, nuns, Laymen or laywomen, would bow in obeisance to all of them and speak words of praise, saying, 'I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparaging and arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood.'¹⁷⁹

"This monk did not devote his time to reading or reciting the scriptures, but simply want about bowing to people. And if he happened to see any of the four kinds of believers far off in the distance, he would purposely go to where they were, bow to them and speak words of praise, saying, 'I would never dare disparage you, because you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!'

"Among the four kinds of believers there were the those who gave way to anger, their minds lacking in purity, and they spoke ill of him and cursed him, saying, 'This ignorant monk ~ were does he come from, presuming to declare that he does not disparage us and bestowing

¹⁷⁹ It is not easy to bow at people and praise them by saying, 'I respect you deeply. I do not despise you. It is because you will be able to practice the way of Bodhisattvas and become Buddhas.' Why could he do that? Never-Despising Bodhisattva probably bowed at one's Buddha nature. When we face the Gohonzon and bow, the Gohonzon bows to us, too, because the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, deities, disciples and other people are written on both sides of the Odaimoku, just as we put our right and left palms together.

on us a prediction that we will attain Buddhahood? We have no use for such vain and irresponsible predictions!

"Many years passed in this way, during which this monk was constantly subjected to curses and abuse. He did not give way to anger, however, but each time spoke the same words, 'You are certain to attain Buddhahood.' When he spoke in this manner, some among the group would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him. But even as he ran away and took up his stance at a distance, he continued to call out in a loud voice, 'I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!'¹⁸⁰ And because he always spoke these words, the overbearing arrogant monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen gave him the name Never Disparaging.

"When this monk was on the point of death, he heard up in the sky fully twenty thousand, ten thousand, a million verses of the Lotus Sutra that had been previously preached by the Buddha Awesome Sound King, and he was able to accept and uphold them all.¹⁸¹ Immediately he gained the kind of purity of vision and purity of the faculties of the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind that have been described above. Having gained this purity of the six faculties, his life span was increased by two hundred ten million nayutas of years, and he went about widely preaching the Lotus Sutra for people.¹⁸²

"At that time, when the four kinds of believers who were overbearingly arrogant, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who had looked with contempt on this monk and given him the name Never Disparaging ~ when they saw that he had gained great transcendental powers, the power to preach pleasingly and eloquently, the power of great goodness and tranquility, and when they heard his preaching, they all took faith in him and willingly became his followers.

"This bodhisattva converted a multitude of a thousand, ten thousand, a million, causing them to abide in the state of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. After his life came to an end, he was able to encounter two thousand million Buddhas, all bearing the name Sun Moon Bright,

¹⁸⁰ Why did the bodhisattva bow as he did even though others tried to harm him with a stick, a tile, or a piece of stone? It was because he wished them to make "en" or be in a relationship with the Buddha's teachings. It was the cultivation of Buddha Seeds within themselves. Even though others speak ill of, abuse, or slander the Dharma-Practitioner at least, they make contact with him, a practitioner of the sutra. In the prelude to Nichiren Shu service, we always read "Kaikyō-ge," Verses for Opening the Sutra, which contains the following sentence: "All beings, believing or even slandering the teaching, shall attain their Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra."

¹⁸¹ "A voice in the sky" means a voice from the spiritual realm that transcends place and time. It is a voice from the eternal world, a voice from the universe. It is important for a dying person to hear the voice of our chanting of the sutra and the Odaimoku. Reverend Shokai Kanai always explains to members of his temple to chant the Odaimoku at someone's deathbed. Even after someone has passed away, he tells the family of the deceased to have a pillow service at the side of the deceased as soon as possible. Then the six senses of the deceased will be purified.

¹⁸² Even though all human beings are in the cycle of birth and death countless times, one whose six sense organs are purified is able to live long in the spiritual realm without the sufferings of worldly matters. He stays in the spiritual realm for a LONG time.

and in the midst of their Law he preached this Lotus Sutra. Through the causes and conditions created thereby, he was also able to encounter two thousand million Buddhas, all with the identical name Cloud Freedom Lamp King. In the midst of the Law of these Buddhas, he excepted, upheld, read, recited and preached this sutra for the four kinds of believers. For that reason he was able to gain perfection of his ordinary eyes, and the faculties of his ears, nose, tongue, body and mind were likewise purified. Among the four kinds of believers he preached Law with no fear in his mind.

"Gainer of Great Authority, this bodhisattva and mahasattvas Never Disparaging in this manner offered alms to a vast number of Buddhas, treating them with reverence and honor and praising them. Having planted these good roots, he was later able to encounter a thousand, ten thousand, a million Buddhas, and in the midst of the Law of these Buddhas, he preached this sutra, gaining benefits about him to attain Buddhahood.

"Gainer of Great Authority, what do you think? The bodhisattva Never Disparaging who lived at that time ~ could he be unknown to you? In fact he was none other than I myself! If in my previous existences I had not accepted, upheld, read and recited this sutra and preached it for others, I would never have been able to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi so quickly.¹⁸³ Because in the presence of those earlier Buddhas I accepted, upheld, read and recited this sutra and preached it for others, I was able quickly to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

"Gainer of Great Authority, at that time before the four kinds of believers, the monks, nuns, laymen and many women, because anger arose in their minds and they threatened me with disparagement and contempt, were for two hundred million kalpas never able to encounter a Buddha, to hear the Law, or to see the community of monks. For a thousand kalpas they underwent great suffering and Avichi hell. After they had finished paying for their offenses, they once more encountered the bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who instructed them in anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

"Gainer of Great Authority, what do you think? The four kinds of believers who at that time constantly disparaged this bodhisattva ~ could they be unknown to you? They are in this assembly now, Bhadravala and his group, Five Hundred bodhisattvas; Lion Moon and her group, Five Hundred laymen, all having reached the state where they will never regress in their search for anuttara-samyak-sambodhi!¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ The Never-Despising Bodhisattva was a previous existence of Gautama Siddhartha who became a Buddha. Chapter 19 explains to us to exercise the five practices after the Buddha's extinction while Chapter 20 reveals the bodhisattva who never exercises the five practices. However, the above quotation explains to us that without the practices in his previous lives, the Never-Despising Bodhisattva would not have been able to attain Buddhahood so quickly. Therefore, we must still keep, read, recite, expound, and copy the Lotus Sutra for quicker attainment of Buddhahood.

¹⁸⁴ The four kinds of devotees (500 of them) in the congregation were former abusers and slanderers against the Never-Despising Bodhisattva. Although they were in hell, they had made "en" or a contact with the Lotus Sutra and they were able to listen to the

"Gainer of Great Authority, you should understand that this Lotus Sutra richly benefits the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, for it can cause them to obtain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. For this reason, after the Thus Come One has passed into extinction, the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas should at all times accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach and transcribe this sutra."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

In the past there was a Buddha named Awesome Sound King, of immeasurable supernatural powers and wisdom, leading and guiding one and all. Heavenly and human beings, dragons, spirits joined in offering him alms. After this Buddha had entered extinction, when his Law was about to expire, there was a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging. The four kinds of believers at that time scrutinized and adhered to the Law. The bodhisattva Never Disparaging would go to where they were and speak to them, saying, "I would never disparage you, for you are practicing the way and all of you will become Buddhas!" When the people heard this, they gibed at him, cursed and reviled him, but the bodhisattva Never Disparaging bore all this with patience. When his offenses had been wiped out and his life was drawing to a close, he was able to hear this sutra and his six faculties were purified. Because of his transcendental powers his life span was extended, and for the sake of others he preached this sutra far and wide. The many persons who adhered to the Law all received teaching and conversion from this bodhisattva, who caused them to dwell in the Buddha way. When Never Disparaging's life ended, he encountered numerous Buddhas, and because he preached this sutra he gained measurable blessings. Bit by bit he acquired benefits and quickly completed the Buddha way. Never Disparaging who lived at that time was none other than myself. And the four kinds of believers who adhered to the Law then, who heard Never Disparaging say, "You will become Buddhas!" and through the causes thus created encounter numerous Buddhas ~ they are here in this assembly, a group

Buddha Sakyamuni preaching the Lotus Sutra. It was their karma. Whether they believed or slandered, they shall attain Buddhahood through this sutra. We might also have been slanders before, but we are fortunately now able to attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra.

In your daily lives, there may be some conflict among members of your family or at your work. At that time, you may not be able to bow to your parents, spouse, a child, or a co-worker by putting your palms together in gassho. Try to do so when they are not facing you, then you can do it. Try to put your palms together and bow at them. Because of your changed attitude of respecting, they will change their attitude, too. Respect each other. It is the teaching of the Never Despising Bodhisattva.

of Five Hundred bodhisattvas, and the four kinds of believers, men and women of pure faith who now in my presence listen to the Law.

In previous existences I encouraged these persons to listen to and accept this sutra, the foremost in the Law, unfolding it, teaching people, and causing them to dwell in nirvana.

So in age after age they accepted and upheld scriptures of this kind.

A million million ten thousand kalpas, an inconceivable time will pass before at least one can hear this Lotus Sutra.

A million million ten thousand kalpas, an inconceivable time will pass before the Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, preach this sutra.

Therefore its practitioners after the Buddha has entered extinction, when they hear a sutra like this should entertain no doubts or perplexities but should with a single mind preach this sutra far and wide, age after age encountering Buddhas and quickly completing the Buddha way.

Chapter Twenty-one: The Mystic Powers of the Tathagata

SUMMARY

This chapter is one of the three major chapters in the Lotus Sutra. The other two major chapters are Chapter 2 (Expedients) and Chapter 16 (The Life of the Tathagata). Nichiren Shu priests read these three chapters very often.

The twenty-eight chapters of the sutra are divided in half; the first half is called shakumon, which reveals the historical Sakyamuni Buddha, while the last half is called honmon, which reveals the eternal nature of the Sakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, the disciples that appeared in the first half are called "the disciples in shakumon" while the disciples revealed in the last half are called "the disciples in honmon." In this chapter, Sakyamuni transmits this sutra and assigns the disciples in honmon the missionary works after his death.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who had emerged from the earth, numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, all in the presence of the Buddha single-mindedly pressed their palms together, gazed up in reverence at the face of the Honored One, and said to the Buddha: *World-Honored One, after the Buddha has entered extinction, in the lands where the emanations of the World-Honored One are present, and in the place where the Buddha has passed into extinction, we will preach this sutra far and wide.*¹⁸⁵ *Why? Because we ourselves wish to gain this great Law, true and pure, to accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach, transcribe and offer alms to it.*¹⁸⁶

At that time the World-Honored One, in the presence of Manjushri and the other immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who from of old had dwelled in the saha world, as well as the monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimvaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings—before all these he displayed his great supernatural powers.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ In Chapter 15, the "Appearance of Bodhisattvas from Underground," the earth split open before Sakyamuni, and countless Bodhisattvas welled forth. In this chapter, these innumerable great Bodhisattvas vowed to expound the teaching of the Lotus Sutra on this earth after the Buddha's death.

¹⁸⁶ These five practices that we perform must not only be for the sake of self, but must also for others. To make offerings to the sutra means to show appreciation to the sutra and to the Buddha.

¹⁸⁷ The Buddha displayed the following Ten Great Supernatural Powers:

1. Stretching out his tongue – Buddha's words are true.
2. Emitting rays from his body – Buddha's virtues inspire others.
3. Coughing at the same time – The way of all Buddhas is one.
4. Snapping fingers – Buddhas are rejoicing.
5. Ground shaking in the six ways – People are impressed.

He extended his long broad tongue upward till it reached the Brahma heaven, and from all his pores he emitted immeasurable, countless beams of light that illuminated all the worlds in the ten directions.

The other Buddhas, seated on lion thrones underneath the numerous jeweled trees, did likewise, extending their long broad tongues and emitting immeasurable beams of light. When Shakyamuni Buddha and other Buddhas beneath the jeweled trees thus displayed their supernatural powers, they did so for fully a hundred thousand years. After that they drew in their long tongues again, coughed in unison, and altogether snapped her fingers. The sounds made by these two actions filled all the Buddha worlds in the ten directions, and the earth in all of them quaked and trembled in six different ways.

The living beings in their midst, the heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, thanks to the Buddha's supernatural powers, all saw in this saha world immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas seated on lion seats under the numerous jeweled trees, and also saw Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Thus Come One seated together on a lion seat in the treasure tower. Moreover, they saw immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas and the four kinds of believers who reverently surrounded Shakyamuni Buddha.

When they had seen these things, they were all filled with great joy, having gained what they had never had before. At the time the heavenly beings in the midst of the sky cried out with loud voices, saying: *"Beyond these immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhyā worlds there is a land named saha, and in it a Buddha named Shakyamuni. Now for the sake of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas he is preaching in his sutra of the Great Vehicle called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. You must respond with joy from the depths of your heart, and also offer obeisance and alms to Shakyamuni Buddha!"*

When the various living beings heard the voices in the sky, they pressed their palms together, faced the saha world, and spoke these words: *"Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha! Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha!"*

6. Seeing the billions of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in this world – People in other worlds also attain Buddhahood with the Lotus Sutra.

7. Hearing other Buddhas' voices from the skies – Universal laws are the same with this world and other worlds.

8. Saying, "Namah Sakyamuni Buddha" – All people are devoted to the Buddha.

9. Strewing various objects – All people appreciate the Buddha Sakyamuni.

10. A single Buddha-world – The peaceful and happy utopia is the Buddha Land.

Then they took different kinds of flowers, incense, necklaces, banners and canopies, as well as the ornaments, rare jewels and other wonderful articles that adorned their persons, and all together scattered them far off in the direction of the saha world. The objects thus scattered poured in from the ten directions like clouds gathering together. Then they changed into a jeweled curtain that completely covered the area where the Buddhas were. At that time the worlds in the ten directions were opened up so that there was unobstructed passage from one to the other and they were like a single Buddha land.

At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices and the others in the great assembly of bodhisattvas, saying: "The supernatural powers of the Buddhas, as you have seen, are immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable. If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were to employ these supernatural powers for a measurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One ~ all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra."¹⁸⁸

"For this reason, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, you must single-mindedly accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach and transcribe it, and practice it as directed. In any of the various lands, wherever there are those who accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach, transcribe, or practice it as directed, or wherever the sutra rolls are preserved, whether in a garden, a forest, beneath a tree, in monks quarters, in the lodgings of white-robed laymen, in palaces, or in mountain valleys or the wide wilderness, in all these places one should erect towers and offer alms. Why? Because you should understand that such spots are places of religious practice. In such places have the Buddhas gained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, in such places have the Buddhas turn the wheel of the Law, in such places have the Buddhas entered parinirvana."¹⁸⁹

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

¹⁸⁸ 1. All the teachings of the Tathagata are universal laws and unchangeable.

2. All the unhindered, supernatural powers of the Tathagata can save all beings in any place and any occasion.

3. All the treasury of the hidden core of the Tathagata contains the most appropriate teachings to each situation.

4. All the profound achievements of the Tathagata are hard to understand for us, but benefit us without noticing them.

Therefore, we must keep, read, recite, expound, and copy this sutra and act according to the teachings of the sutra with all our hearts wherever we are.

¹⁸⁹ For practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, a temple or monastery is everywhere: it could be at home, work, on the street, and so forth. A Buddha is not at a particular place, like heaven, in the west, or the universe, but rather, he is at any place where we practice the Dharma.

The Buddhas, saviors of the world, abide in their great transcendental powers, and in order to please living being they display immeasurable supernatural powers.¹⁹⁰

Their tongues reach to the Brahma heaven, their bodies emit countless beams of light. For the sake of those who seek the Buddha way they manifest these things that are rarely seen.

The sound of the Buddhas coughing, the sound of them snapping their fingers, is heard throughout the lands in the ten directions and the earth in all those lands moves in six ways.

Because after the Buddha has passed into extinction there will be those who can uphold this sutra, the Buddhas are delighted and manifest immeasurable supernatural powers.

Because they wish to entrust this sutra, they praise and extol the person who accepts and upholds it, and though they should do so for immeasurable kalpas they could never exhaust their praises.

The benefits gained by such a person are boundless and inexhaustible, like the vast sky in the ten directions that no one can set a limit to.

One who can uphold this sutra has in effect already seen me, and likewise has seen Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas that are emanations of my body.

And he also sees me today as I teach and convert the bodhisattvas.

One who can uphold this sutra causes me and my emanations, and Many Treasures Buddha who has already entered extension, all to be filled with joy.

The Buddhas who are present in the ten directions and those of past and future ages - he will see them too, offer alms to them and cause them to be filled with joy.

The secret essentials of the Law gained by the Buddhas who sat in the place of practice - one who can uphold this sutra will gain them too before long.

One who can uphold this sutra will delight in endlessly expounding the principles of the various doctrines and their names and phrases like a wind in the open sky moving everywhere without hindrance or block.

After the Thus Come One has passed into extinction, this person will know the sutras preached by the Buddha, their causes and conditions and their proper sequence, and will preach them truthfully in accordance with principle.

As the light of the sun and moon can vanish all obscurity and gloom, so this person as he passes through the world can wipe out the darkness of living beings, causing immeasurable numbers of bodhisattvas in the end to dwell in the single vehicle.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ The Buddha is the savior. He revealed the ten great supernatural powers mentioned above in order to cause all living being to rejoice. Some Buddhist sects prohibit their priests and followers from practicing supernatural powers, but the Lotus Sutra encourages the showing of the powers in order to cause all living beings to rejoice. Therefore, Nichiren Shu issues amulets and ofuda and we perform kito. However, we must know that supernatural powers are only expedients to cause people to rejoice. The final aim is to attain Buddhahood, the salvation from all sufferings.

¹⁹¹ The name of Nichiren (Sun and Lotus) comes from this quotation; "the light of the sun eliminates all darkness." Nichiren Shonin wished to be someone who would eliminate all darkness of all living beings by chanting the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo."

Therefore a person of wisdom, hearing how keen are the benefits to be gained, after I
have passed into extinction should accept and uphold this sutra.
Such a person assuredly and without doubt will attain the Buddha way.

Sakyamuni Buddha selected Bodhisattvas that were headed by Jogyo or Superb-Action from underground. It is to them that the Buddha transmits the Lotus Sutra after his death.

Nichiren DaiShonin compared his position to that of Superb-Action Bodhisattva. After Nichiren was exiled on the island of Sado after the execution at Tatsu-no-Kuchi, he believed that he was the rebirth of Superb-Action Bodhisattva. He discusses this in his essay, Shoho Jisso Sho:

"I, Nichiren, a man born in the Age of Degeneration, have nearly achieved the task of pioneering the propagation of the Wonderful Law, the task assigned to the Bodhisattva Superb-Action. . . . I, Nichiren, am the one who takes the lead of the Bodhisattvas from Underground. Then may I not be one of them? And if I am one of them, why may not all my disciple and followers be their kinsmen? . . . If you are one in faith with Nichiren, you too are one of the Bodhisattvas from Underground."

Chapter Twenty-two: Entrustment

SUMMARY

The twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra are divided in half; the first half is called shakumon, which reveals the historical Sakyamuni Buddha, while the last half is called hon-mon, which reveals the eternal nature of the Sakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, the disciples that appeared in the first half are called "the disciples in shaku-mon" while the disciples revealed in the last half are called "the disciples in hon-mon."

In the previous chapter, Sakyamuni Buddha transmits the Lotus Sutra and assigns the disciples in hon-mon the missionary works after his death. In this chapter, the Buddha also transmits the sutra and assigns to the disciples in shaku-mon the missionary works after the Buddha's death.

Nichiren Shonin had not realized that he was the rebirth of Bodhisattva Jogyo, a disciple in hon-mon, until the Sado Exile. After the Tatsu-no-kuchi Execution and the exile to Sado, he firmly believed that Sakyamuni Buddha transmitted the Lotus Sutra to him. He says that those who chant Odaimoku are also the disciples in hon-mon, so we must propagate the Odaimoku.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha rose from his Dharma seat and, manifesting his great supernatural powers, with his right hand patted the heads of the immeasurable bodhisattvas and mahasattvas and spoke these words: "For immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhyā kalpas I have practiced this hard-to-attain Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I entrust it to you. You must single-mindedly propagate this Law abroad, causing its benefits to spread far and wide."¹⁹²

Three times he patted the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas on the head and spoke these words: "For immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhyā kalpas I have practiced this hard-to-attain Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I entrust it to you. You must accept, uphold, recite, and broadly propagate this Law, causing all living beings everywhere to hear and understand it."¹⁹³ Why? Because the Thus Come One has great pity and compassion. He is in no way stingy or begrudging, nor has he any fear. He is

¹⁹² According to Hindu custom, to put one's hand on someone's head is to entrust him or her. Sakyamuni Buddha entrusted all Bodhisattvas who gathered to listen to the Dharma at the Sacred Eagle Mountain. He put his hand on the heads of all Bodhisattvas to transmit the Lotus Sutra and requested them to propagate it. He did it three times.

Abhiseka or kancho is a similar ceremony in India. When a king is installed on his throne, his head is wetted with ocean water. Rev. Shokai Kanai also performs a similar ceremony when a person is ready to convert to become a Nichiren Shu member or when blessing a newborn baby.

¹⁹³ The Buddha is warning that one must keep, read and recite the sutra before he or she can expound the sutra. One must keep up with these practices; otherwise people will not follow him or her.

able to bestow on living beings the wisdom of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Thus Come One, the wisdom that comes of itself. The Thus Come One is a great giver of gifts to all living beings. You for your part should respond by studying this Law of the Thus Come One. You must not be stingy or begrudging.

"In future ages if there are good men and good women who have faith in the wisdom of the Thus Come One, you should preach and expound the Lotus Sutra for them, so that others may hear and understand it. For in this way you can cause them to gain the Buddha wisdom. If there are living beings who do not believe or accept it, you should use some of the other profound doctrines of the Thus Come One to teach, benefit and bring joy to them.¹⁹⁴ If you do all this, then you will have repaid the debt of gratitude that you owe to the Buddha."

When the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas heard the Buddhas speak these words, they all experienced a great joy that filled their bodies. With even greater reverence than before, they bent their bodies, bowed their heads, pressed their palms together and, facing the Buddha, raised their voices in unison, saying: *"We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded. We beg the World-Honored One to have no concern on this account!"*¹⁹⁵

The multitude of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas repeated these words three times, raising their voices in unison and saying: *"We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded. Therefore we beg the World-Honored One to have no concern on this account!"*

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha caused the Buddhas who were emanations of his body and had come from the ten directions to return each one to his original land, saying: *"Each of these Buddhas may proceed at his own pleasure. The tower of Many Treasures Buddha may also return to its former position."*¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ There are many people who do not listen to the profound teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha advises us to educate them by some other teachings of the Dharma, like the Laws of the Three Seals, Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Paths. One must lead others with these step-by-step methods:

"To Show Him" means that if you show how to do it, he may wish to learn.

"To Teach Him" means that you explain, in detail, the meaning of the Dharma one by one.

"To Benefit Him" means that one will practice Dharma to show that it benefits him.

"To Cause Him to Rejoice" means to show that continuing to do the practice will bring joyfulness.

¹⁹⁵ The shaku-mon Bodhisattvas respectfully and joyfully said these words three times simultaneously. Because the Buddha repeated his transmission of the Dharma to the Bodhisattvas three times, the Bodhisattvas also said these words three times. Three is an indivisible, sacred number. When you have a serious prayer, it may be better to repeat prayer three times.

¹⁹⁶ Since Shakyamuni Buddha has finished his lecture on the Lotus Sutra at this time, he requests all Buddhas to return to their own home worlds in the ten quarters. He also requests to close the doors of the pagoda of Many-Treasures Buddha who came to prove that this sutra is excellent and all true. Also, this is the end of the assembly in the sky.

Similarly, Nichiren Shu priests quote part of the above sentence, "Wishing to send back to their home worlds," at the end of prayers of ceremonies such as Burning Religious Items and Closing-Eye of Gohonzon or family shrine. In a sense they are "sending back the items to their home worlds"; to wish the souls in those religious items to return to their original lands and/or return to nature.

When he spoke these words, the immeasurable emanation Buddhas from the ten directions who were seated on lion seats under the jeweled trees, as well as Many Treasures Buddha, Superior Practices, and the others of the greater multitude of boundless asamkhyā of bodhisattvas, Śāriputra and the other voice-hearers and four kinds of believers, and the heavenly and human beings, asuras and others in all the worlds, hearing what the Buddha had said, were all filled with great joy.¹⁹⁷

This chapter ends the logical explanations of the Lotus Sutra. We understand the sutra logically, but it is hard for us to practice it in our daily lives. Therefore, the Buddha prepared another six chapters for us to practice the Dharma through the examples of previous lives of Bodhisattvas and explanations of protection of deities.

¹⁹⁷ It is quite joyful when we know that this world becomes the Buddha's pure land when the minds of each one of us are the same with the Buddha's.

Chapter Twenty-three: The Former Deeds of Bodhisattva Medicine King

SUMMARY

In the previous chapter, we came to the end of the second stage of the Lotus Sutra. Chapters 23 through 28 are the final stage. In these chapters, Buddha Sakyamuni tries to stimulate us with stories of the previous lives of bodhisattvas and how they devoted their lives for the sake of the Lotus Sutra. This chapter reveals the previous life of Medicine-King Bodhisattva. It is very interesting that another previous life of his under a different Buddha is also revealed in Chapter 27.

Once upon a time, there lived a Buddha called Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue. Gladly-Seen-By-All-Beings Bodhisattva (Medicine-King Bodhisattva in a previous life) willingly practiced austerities under this Buddha. Because of his hard practice, the bodhisattva attained the samadhi by which he could transform himself into any other living being. He willingly showed his appreciation to the Buddha by burning his body by pouring perfume oil on his skin and setting it on fire. The light of the flame illuminated the worlds for many thousands of millions of years.

After the death of the bodhisattva, he was born again as a son of a king named Pure-Virtue under the same Buddha. Since the Buddha knew about the previous life of the son, He said to him, "I will enter Nirvana tonight. I transmit all my teachings, treasures, and relics to you. Erect stupas to enshrine them and make offerings to them!"

The bodhisattva followed the last words of the Buddha and erected many thousands of stupas. Finally, he sat in front of a stupa and burned his elbows as an offering to the Buddha. When people saw the Bodhisattva lose his elbows, they felt sorry for him. But the Bodhisattva made a vow and said, "Since I made an offering of my elbows, I will become a Buddha with a golden body if my words are true. Then my two elbows will be restored." As he made the vow, his elbows were restored.

Buddha Sakyamuni explains, "Anyone who wants to attain enlightenment can do so by burning just one finger or toe, and making an offering just like Medicine-King did in his former life. This kind of offering is more valuable than the offerings of lands, palaces, and treasures."

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time bodhisattva Constellation King Flower spoke to the Buddha, saying: *"World-Honored One, how does the bodhisattva Medicine King come and go in the saha world? World-Honored One, this bodhisattva Medicine King has carried out some hundreds,*

*thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of difficult practices, arduous practices.*¹⁹⁸ *Very well, World-Honored One, could I ask you to explain a little? The heavenly beings, dragons, gods, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, and the bodhisattvas who have come from other lands and the multitude of voice-hearers, will all be delighted to hear you."*

At that time the Buddha addressed the bodhisattva Constellation King Flower, saying: "Many kalpas in the past, immeasurable as Ganges sands, there was a Buddha named Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, trainer of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. This Buddha had eighty million great bodhisattvas and mahasattvas and a multitude of great voice-hearers equal to the sands of seventy-two Ganges. This Buddha's life span was forty-two thousand kalpas, and the life span of the bodhisattva's was the same. In his land there were no women, hell dwellers, hungry spirits, beasts or asuras, and no kind of tribulation. The ground was as level as the palm of a hand, made of lapis lazuli and adorned with jeweled trees. Jeweled curtains covered it over, banners of jeweled flowers hung down, and jeweled urns and incense burners filled the land everywhere. There were daises made of the seven treasures, with a tree by each dais, the tree situated an arrow-shot length from the dais. These jeweled trees all had bodhisattvas and voice-hearers sitting under them, and each of the jeweled daises had hundreds of millions of heavenly beings playing on heavenly instruments and singing the praises of the Buddha as an offering.

"At the time, for the sake of the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings and the other numerous bodhisattvas and multitude of voice-hearers, the Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra. This bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings delighted in carrying out arduous practices. In the midst of the Law preached by the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue he applied himself diligently and traveled about here and there, single-mindedly seeking Buddhahood for a period of fully twelve thousand years. After that he was able to gain the samadhi in which one can manifest all physical forms.¹⁹⁹ Having gained this

¹⁹⁸ Although Senchu Murano translated from Kumarajiva's Chinese version, "This Medicine-King Bodhisattva will have to practice hundreds of thousand of billions of nayutas of austerities in this world," I believe it should be past tense. The same sentence from the Kumarajiva's version is translated differently by Kubo Tsugunari and Yuyama Akira as follows: "This Bodhisattva Bhaisajayaraja has performed hundred of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of difficult and arduous practices." Leon Hurvitz also translates the same sentence as, "This bodhisattva Medicine King has to his credit several hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of nayutas of difficult deeds, of painful deeds." The congregation of the Lotus Sutra knew that the bodhisattva had engaged in painful practices for so many kalpas, but they did not know what kind of practices he performed. To answer this question is the main subject of this chapter. Medicine-King Bodhisattva appears in six different chapters in the Lotus Sutra: Chapters 1, 10, 15, 23, 26, and 27.

¹⁹⁹ Not only Sakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra but also other Buddhas such as Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra. At the time of Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue Buddha, Gladly-Seen-By-All-Beings Bodhisattva had performed painful practices for many years and finally attained samadhi. In order to lead others, one must have endured hard practices in order to be a leader. Samadhi means concentration of the mind on a single object. This bodhisattva is able to transform himself into any other living being for the salvation of a person or persons.

samadhi, his heart was filled with great joy and he thought to himself: My gaining the samadhi in which I can manifest all physical forms is due entirely to the fact that I heard the Lotus Sutra. I must now make an offering to the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue and to the Lotus Sutra!

"Immediately he entered the samadhi and in the midst of the sky rained down mandarava flowers, great mandarava flowers, and finely ground, hard black particles of sandalwood; they filled the whole sky like clouds as they came raining down. He also rained down the incense of the sandalwood that grows by the southern seashore. Six taels of this incense is worth as much as the saha world. All these he used as an offering to the Buddha.

"When he had finished making this offering, he rose from this samadhi and thought to himself: Though I have employed my supernatural powers to make this offering to the Buddha, it is not as good as making an offering of my own body.

"Thereupon he swallowed various perfumes, sandalwood, kunduruka, turushka, prikka, aloes, and liquidambar gum, and he also drank the fragrant oil of champaka and other kinds of flowers, doing this for a period of fully twelve hundred years. Anointing his body with the fragrant oil, he appeared before the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue, wrapped his body in heavenly jeweled robes, poured fragrant oil over his head and, calling on his transcendental powers, set fire to his body.²⁰⁰ The glow shown forth, illuminating worlds equal in number to the sands of eighty million Ganges. The Buddhas in these worlds simultaneously spoke out in praise, saying: 'Excellent, excellent, good man! This is true diligence. This is what is called a true Dharma offering to the Thus Come One. Though one may use flowers, incense, necklaces, incense for burning, powdered incense, paste incense, heavenly silken banners and canopies, along with the incense of the sandalwood that grows by the southern seashore, presenting offerings of all such things as these, he can never match this! Though one may make donations of his realm and cities, his wife and children, he is no match for this! Good men, this is called the foremost donation of all. Among all donations, this is most highly prized, for one is offering the Dharma to the Thus Come One'

"After they had spoken these words, they each fell silent. The body of the bodhisattva burned for twelve hundred years, and when that period of time had passed, it at last burned itself out.

²⁰⁰ Gladly-Seen-By-All-Beings Bodhisattva experienced great joy in attaining the samadhi and showed his appreciation to the Buddha and the Lotus Sutra by offering incense and flowers, but he felt that they were not enough. He then offered his own body by burning himself. The light of the flame illuminated the worlds for countless years. The light symbolizes the Buddha's teachings. The merit of burning his body continues for countless years. So it means Buddha's teachings expound for countless years. Please do not misunderstand with the suicide burning.

Can you think of things that burn themselves to illuminate their surroundings? They are matches, candles, incenses, gases, and so forth. They offer their body by burning themselves. They should be able to attain Nirvana, shouldn't they?

"After the bodhisattva Gladly Seen By All Living Beings had made this Dharma offering and his life had come to an end, he was reborn in the land of the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue, in the household of the King Pure Virtue.²⁰¹ Sitting in cross-legged position, he was suddenly born by transformation, and at once for the benefit of his father he spoke in verse form, saying:

Great king, you should now understand this.
Having walked about in a certain place, I immediately gained the samadhi
that allows me to manifest all physical forms.
I have carried out my endeavors with great diligence and cast aside the body
that I loved.

"When he had recited this verse, he said to his father: 'The Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue is still present at this time. Previously I made an offering to this Buddha and gained a dharani that allows me to understand the words of all living beings. Moreover I have heard this Lotus Sutra with its eight hundred, thousand, ten thousand, millions of nayutas, kankaras, vivaras, akshobhyas of verses. Great king, I must now once more make an offering to this Buddha.

"Having said this, he seated himself on a dais made of the seven treasures, rose up into the air to the height of seven tala trees and, proceeding to the place where the Buddha was, bowed his head to the ground in observance to the Buddha's feet, put the nails of his ten fingers together and spoken this verse in praise of the Buddha:

The countenance so rare and wonderful, its bright beams illuminating the ten
directions!
At a previous time I made an offering.
And now once more I draw near.

"At the time, after the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings had spoken this verse, he said to the Buddha: 'World-Honored One, is the World-Honored One still present in the world?'

"At that time the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue said to the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings: 'Good man, the time has come for my nirvana. The time has come for extinction. You may provide me with a comfortable couch, for tonight will be my parinirvana.'

²⁰¹ Gladly-Seen-By-All-Beings Bodhisattva was reborn as a son of King Pure-Virtue at the same time of the Buddha called Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue Buddha. The son tried to lead his father to the Buddha Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue who was still alive at that time. It is interesting to know that in Chapter 27, Pure-Virtue was the mother's name (not the father's) of another previous life of Medicine-King Bodhisattva.

"He also commanded the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings, saying: 'Good man, I take this Law of the Buddha and entrust it to you. In addition, the bodhisattvas and great disciples, along with the Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and the thousand-millionfold seven-jeweled world, with its jeweled trees and jeweled daises and heavenly beings who wait on and attend them - all these I hand over to you. I also entrust you the relics of my body that remain after I have passed into extinction. You must distribute them abroad and arrange for offerings to them far and wide. You should erect many thousands of towers [to house them].'²⁰²

"The Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue, having given these commands to the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by Living Beings, that night, in the last watch of the night, entered Nirvana.

"At that time the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings, seeing the Buddha pass into extinction, was deeply grieved and distressed. Out of his great love and longing for the Buddha he at once prepared a pyre made of sandalwood from the seashore, and with this as an offering to the Buddha's body, he cremated the body. After the fire had burned out, he gathered up the relics, fashioned eighty-four thousand jeweled urns, and built eighty-four thousand towers, high as the three worlds, adorned with central poles, draped with banners and canopies and hung with a multitude of jeweled bells.²⁰³

"At that time the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings once more thought to himself: 'Though I have made these offerings, my mind is not yet satisfied. I must make some further offering to the relics.'

"Then he spoke to the other bodhisattvas and great disciples, and to the heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, and all the members of the great assembly, saying, 'You must give your undivided attention. I will now make an offering to the relics of the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue.'

"Having spoken these words, immediately in the presence of the eighty-four thousand towers he burned his arms, which were adorned with a hundred blessings, for a period of

²⁰² When the bodhisattva went to see the Buddha, Sun-Moon-Pure-Virtue Buddha was glad to see the bodhisattva and so he transmitted the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and asked him to cremate his body, distribute his ashes far and wide, erect stupas, and make offerings to them. The Buddha did not say to erect the stupas for his own sake, but rather he meant that the stupas would let people in a latter era know about the teachings of the Buddha.

²⁰³ 84,000 stupas for the Buddha's urns were erected. Many jeweled bells were hung from the eaves of the stupas. Most temple buildings and five-story pagodas have bells hanging at the corners of the eaves. The sound of bells is supposed to remind one of the Buddha's teachings. When you go to a temple, please look up and find the bells hanging from the buildings and the five-story pagodas.

seventy-two thousand years as his offering.²⁰⁴ This caused the numberless multitudes who were seeking to become voice-hearers, along with an immeasurable asamkhya of persons, to conceive the desire for anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and all of them were able to dwell in the samadhi where one can manifest all physical forms.

"At that time the bodhisattvas, heavenly and human beings, asuras and others, seeing that the bodhisattva had destroyed his arms, were alarmed and saddened and they said: 'This bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings is our teacher, instructing and converting us. Now he has burned his arms and his body is no longer whole!'

"At that time, in the midst of the great assembly, the bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings made this vow, saying: 'I have cast away both my arms. I'm certain to attain the golden body of a Buddha. If this is true and not false, then may my two arms become as they were before!'

"When he had finished pronouncing this vow, his arms reappeared of themselves as they had been before. This came about because the merits and wisdom of this bodhisattva were many-fold and profound. At that time the thousand-million-fold world shook and trembled in six different ways, heaven rained down jeweled flowers, and all the heavenly and human beings gained what they had never had before."

"The Buddha said to the bodhisattva Constellation King Flower: "What do you think? Is this bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings someone unknown to you? He is in fact none other than the present bodhisattva Medicine King!²⁰⁵ He cast aside his body as an offering in this fashion immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of times.

"Constellation King Flower, if there are those have made up their minds and wish to gain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, they would do well to burn a finger or one toe of their foot as an offering to the Buddha towers. It is better than offering one's realm and cities, wife and

²⁰⁴ Gladly-Seen-By-All-Being Bodhisattva was not satisfied even though he had erected 84,000 stupas. It was at this time that he burned his elbows in front of the stupas. Those who saw him burning his elbows as an offering to the Buddha and the sutra were amazed and requested him to expound the teachings of the Buddha to them.

Outsiders may feel sorry for him; "It must be hot and painful! He might suffer from the burn!" However, the bodhisattva was grateful. The same can also be said about St. Nichiren, who was ambushed, exiled, beaten, and almost be-headed. His followers felt very sorry for him. In spite of their worries, Nichiren was glad to be persecuted many times because all of these perils meant that what the sutra says is true. Therefore, millions of people follow after him and have practiced the Lotus Sutra in the past, practice in the present and will practice in the future.

²⁰⁵ At the beginning of this chapter, Star-King Bodhisattva asks, "World-Honored One! Why does Medicine-King Bodhisattva walk about this Saha-World?" Now we know that the previous life of Medicine-King Bodhisattva was actually Gladly-Seen-By-All-Bodhisattva himself. Buddha Sakyamuni also said, "Anyone who aspires for, and wishes to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, should offer a light to the stupas of the Buddha by burning a finger or toe."

We must have preparedness if we really wish to expound the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. "At the cost of one's life" in Chapter 16 is the spirit of a true preacher's mind.

children, or the mountains, forests, Rivers, and lakes in the lands of thousand-million-fold world, or all their precious treasures. even if a person were to fill the whole thousand-million-fold world with the seven treasures as an offering to the Buddha and the great bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas and arhats, the benefits gained by such a person cannot match those gained by accepting and upholding this Lotus Sutra, even just one four-line verse of it! The latter brings the most numerous blessings of all.

"Constellation King Flower, among all the rivers, streams, and other bodies of water, for example, the ocean is foremost. And this Lotus Sutra is likewise, being the most profound and greatest of the sutras preached by the Thus Come Ones.²⁰⁶ Again just as among the Dirt Mountains, Black Mountains, Small Iron Encircling Mountains, Great Iron Encircling mountains, Ten Treasure Mountains and all the other mountains, Mount Sumeru is foremost, so this Lotus Sutra is likewise. Among all the sutras, it holds the highest place. And just as among all the stars and their like, the moon, a god's son, is foremost, so this Lotus Sutra is likewise. For among all the thousands, ten thousands, millions of types a sutra teachings, it shines the brightest. And just as the sun, a god's son, can banish all darkness, so too this sutra is capable of destroying the darkness of all that is not good.

"As among the petty kings the wheel-turning sage king is foremost, so this sutra is the most honored among all the many sutras. As the lord Shakra is king among the thirty-three heavenly beings, so this sutra likewise is king among all the sutras. And as the heavenly king, great Brahma, is the father of all living beings, so this sutra likewise is father of all sages, worthies, those still learning, those who have completed their learning, and those who set their minds on becoming bodhisattvas. And as among all the ordinary mortals, the srotaapanna, sakridagamin, anagamin, arhats and pratyekabuddhas are foremost, so this sutra likewise is foremost among all the sutra teachings preached by all the Thus Come Ones, preached by all the bodhisattvas, or preached by all the voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas, and in the same way this sutra is foremost among all the sutra teachings. As the Buddha is king of the doctrines, so likewise this sutra is king of the sutras.

²⁰⁶ The Buddha continues to explain that the Lotus Sutra is unsurpassed by any other sutra. He gives ten metaphors of comparison:

Just as the sea is larger than rivers,
Just as Mt. Sumeru is the highest of mountains,
Just as the moon is brighter than the other planets,
Just as the sun dispels all darkness,
Just as the wheel-turning-holy-king is superior to ordinary monarchs,
Just as King Sakra is the king of the thirty-three gods,
Just as the Great-Brahman-Heavenly-King is the father of all living beings,
Just as saints are superior to unenlightened mortals,
Just as Bodhisattvas are superior to Sravakas or Pratyekabuddhas,
Just as the Buddha is King of the Dharma,
So the Lotus Sutra is king of all sutras.

"Constellation King Flower, this sutra can save all living beings. The sutra can cause all living beings to free themselves from suffering and anguish. The sutra can bring great benefits to living beings and fulfill their desires, as a clear pond can satisfy all those who are thirsty.²⁰⁷ It is like a fire to one who is cold, a robe to one who is naked, like a band of merchants finding a leader, the child finding its mother, someone finding a ship in which to cross the water, a sick man finding a doctor, someone in darkness finding a lamp, the poor finding riches, the people finding a ruler, a traveling merchant finding his way to the sea. It is like a torch that banishes darkness, Such is this Lotus Sutra. It can cause living beings to cast off all distress, all sickness and pain. It can unloose all the bonds of birth and death.

"If a person is able to hear this Lotus Sutra, if he copies it himself or causes others to copy it, the benefits he gains thereby will be such that even the Buddha wisdom could never finish calculating their extent. If one copies these sutra scrolls and uses flowers, incense, necklaces, incense for burning, powdered incense, paste incense, banners, canopies, robes, various kinds of lamps such as lamps of butter oil, oil lamps, lamps with various fragrant oils, lamps of champaka oil, or lamps of navamalika oil to make offerings to them, the benefits that he acquires will likewise be immeasurable.

"Constellation King Flower, if there is a person who hears this chapter on the Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King, he too will gain immeasurable and boundless benefits. If there is a woman hears this chapter of the Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King and is able to accept and hold it, that will be her last appearance in a woman's body and she will never be born in that form again.

"If in the last Five Hundred year period after the Thus Come One has entered extinction there a woman who hears this sutra and carries out its practices as this sutra directs, when her life here on earth comes to an end she will immediately go to the world of Peace and Delight where the Buddha Amitayus dwells surrounded by the assembly of great bodhisattvas and there will be born seated on a jeweled seat in the center of a lotus blossom. He will no longer know the torments of greed, desire, anger, rage, stupidity or ignorance, or

²⁰⁷ What is more, the Lotus Sutra has the power to save all living beings from suffering and give them great joy:
Just like a man who reaches a stream of fresh water when he is thirsty,
Just like a man who finds a fire when he is cold,
Just like a man who is given a garment when he is naked,
Just like a party of merchants who find a ship when they want to cross a river,
Just like a sick person who finds a skilled physician,
Just like a man who is given light when he is in darkness,
Just like a poor man who finds a treasure,
Just like the people of a nation who enthrone a new king,
Just like a trader who reaches the seacoast,
Just like a torch which dispels darkness,
So this sutra saves all living beings from sufferings, from diseases, and from the bonds of life and death (from any change).

the torments brought about by arrogance, envy or other defilements. He will gain the bodhisattva's transcendental powers and the truth of the birthlessness of all phenomena. Having gained this truth, his faculty of sight will be clear and pure, and with this clear pure faculty of sight he will see Buddhas and Thus Come Ones equal in number to the sands of Āven hundred twelve thousand million nayutas of Ganges.

"At that time Buddhas will join him praising them from afar, saying: Excellent, excellent, good man! In the midst of the Law of Shakyamuni Buddha you have been able to accept, uphold, read, recite and ponder this sutra and to preach it for others. The good fortune you gain thereby is immeasurable and boundless. It cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water. Your benefits are such that a thousand Buddhas speaking altogether could never finish describing them. Now you have been able to destroy all devils and thieves, to annihilate the army of birth and death, and all others who bore you enmity or malice have likewise been wiped out.

"Good man, a hundred, a thousand Buddhas will employ their transcendental powers to join in guarding and protecting you. Among the heavenly and human beings of all the worlds, there will be no one like you. With the sole exception of the Thus Come One, there will be none among the voice-hearer, pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas whose wisdom and ability in meditation can equal yours!"

"Constellation King Flower, such will be the benefits and the power of wisdom successfully acquired by this bodhisattva.

" If there is a person who, hearing this chapter on the Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King, is able to welcome it with joy and praise its excellence, then in this present existence this person's mouth will constantly emit the fragrance of the blue lotus flower, and the pores of his body will constantly emit the fragrance of ox-head sandalwood. His benefits will be such as have been described above.

"For this reason, Constellation King Flower, I entrust this chapter on the Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King to you. After I pass into extinction, in the last Five Hundred period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allowed to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devils' people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas or kumbhanda demons to seize the advantage!

"Constellation King Flower, you must use your transcendental powers to guard and protect this sutra. Why? Because this sutra provides good medicine for the ills of the people of Jambudvīpa. If a person who has an illness is able to hear this sutra, then his illness will be wiped out and he will know neither old age or death.

"Constellation King Flower, if you see someone who accepts and upholds this sutra, you must take blue lotus blossoms, heap them with powdered incense, and scatter them over him as an offering. And when you have scattered them, you should think to yourself: Before long this person will pick grasses, spread them as a seat in the place of practice, and conquer the armies of the devil. Then he will sound the conch of the Law, beat the drum of the great Law, and free all living beings from the sea of old age, sickness and death!

"For this reason when those who seek the Buddha way see someone who accepts and upholds this sutra, they should approach him with this kind of respect and reference."

When [the Buddha] preached this chapter on the Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King, eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas gained the dharani that allows them to understand the words of all living beings. Many Treasures Thus Come One in the midst of his treasure tower praised the bodhisattva Constellation King Flower, saying: *Excellent, excellent, Constellation King Flower. You succeeded in acquiring inconceivable benefits and thus were able to question Shakyamuni Buddha about this matter, profiting immeasurable numbers of living beings.*"

How can we get the merits? The same chapter says, "You kept, read and recited this sutra, thought it over, and expounded it to others under Sakymauni Buddha. Now you have obtained innumerable merits and virtues, which cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water."

"Now you have defeated the army of Mara, beaten the forces of birth and death, and annihilated all your enemies."

"It is because this sutra is a good medicine for the diseases of the people of the Jambudvīpa. The patient who hears this sutra will be cured of his disease at once. He will not grow old or die."

Jambu-dvīpa (Embu-dai) is the name of a great island to the south of Mt. Sumeru (Shumi-sen) and is, according to the traditional cosmological view, the world in which we are living.

St. Nichiren often wrote the above quotations on an amulet Gohonzon and gave it to his followers. The army of Mara, for examples of growing old, birth and death, are all processes of our lives. Our enemies are sufferings caused by changes (birth and death.) The army of Mara lives within our bodies. One of Buddha's basic teachings is "Everything is changing; to realize these changes is a way to attain Buddhahood." Through hardship in our lives, we must realize the reality of life. To become free from sufferings is Nirvana and happiness.

We shall keep, recite, memorize, copy and expound the Lotus Sutra. Then we will get innumerable merits and virtues.

Chapter Twenty-four: Bodhisattva Myozon

SUMMARY

In the previous chapter, we learned that Medicine King Bodhisattva attained samadhi and could transform himself into any other living being because of his hard practice in his previous lives. In this chapter, Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva can change his body into 34 different forms while in the next chapter; World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva can change his body into 33 different forms. It is very interesting that Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva lives in a pure land in the east while World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva lives in the pure land in the west. They came to this world of ours to save us.

Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva came to greet Sakyamuni Buddha at Mount Sacred Eagle from the Bodhisattva's pure land in the east. How did he come by? He just meditated without moving, and then his body appeared in front of the Buddha in the Saha World in a matter of moments. How did he gain such a supernatural power? In his previous life, he offered one hundred thousand various kinds of music to Cloud-Thunder-Sound-King Buddha for 12,000 years.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha emitted a beam of bright light from the knob of flesh [on top of his head], one of the features of a great man, and also emitted a beam of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, illuminating the Buddha worlds in the eastern direction equal in number to the sands of one hundred eighty thousand million nayutas of Ganges.²⁰⁸ Beyond these numerous worlds was a world called Adorned with Pure Light. In this realm there was a Buddha named Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. An immeasurably and boundlessly great multitude of bodhisattvas surrounded him and paid reverence, and for these he preached the Law. The beam of bright light from the white tuft of Shakyamuni Buddha illuminated the whole land.

²⁰⁸ This chapter begins with Sakyamuni Buddha emitting a ray of light from the tuft on his head and from the hair between his eyebrows, and illuminating countless worlds in the east. The Buddha also emits the light from his head in Chapter 1 and Chapter 11 in the Lotus Sutra. In Chapter One, He illuminated eighteen thousand worlds in the east down to the Avici Hell and up to the Akanistha Heaven of each world. In Chapter Eleven, He emitted a ray of light Five Hundred billion nayutas worlds, that is, as many worlds as there are sands in the River Ganges, in the east. He also illuminated the worlds of the south, west, north, the four intermediate quarters, zenith, and nadir, with rays of light. In Chapter Twenty-four, His light illuminated one hundred and eight billion nayutas Buddha worlds, that is, as many worlds in the east as there are sands in the River Ganges.

At that time in the land Adorned with Pure Light there was a bodhisattva named Wonderful Sound, who long ago had planted numerous roots of virtue, offering alms to and waiting upon immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas.²⁰⁹ He had succeeded in acquiring all kinds of profound wisdom, gaining the samadhi of the wonderful banner mark, the Dharma flower samadhi, the pure virtue samadhi, the samadhi of the Constellation King's sport, the condition-less samadhi, the seal of wisdom samadhi, the samadhi that allows one to understand the words of all living beings, the samadhi that gathers together all benefits, the pure samadhi, with the samadhi of the sport of transcendental powers, the wisdom torch samadhi, the adorned king samadhi, the pure light glow samadhi, the pure storehouse samadhi, the unshared samadhi, and the samadhi of the suns revolving. He has gained all these great samadhis equal in number to the sands of a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million Ganges.

When the light emitted by Shakyamuni Buddha illuminated his body, he immediately spoke to the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom, saying: *"World-Honored One, I must journey to the saha world to do obeisance, wait on, and offer alms to Shakyamuni Buddha, and to see Bodhisattva Manjushri, Prince of the Dharma, Bodhisattva Medicine King, Bodhisattva Brave donor, Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower, Bodhisattva Superior Practices Intent, Bodhisattva Adorned King, and Bodhisattva Medicine Superior."*²¹⁰

At that time the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom said to Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound: *"You must not look with contempt on the land or come to think of it as a means and inferior."*²¹¹ *Good man, that saha world is uneven, high in places, low in others, and full of dirt, stones, mountains, foulness, and impurity. The Buddha is puny in stature and the numerous bodhisattvas are likewise small in form, whereas your body is forty-two thousand yojanas in height and mine is six million eight hundred thousand yojanas. Your body is foremost in shapeliness, with hundreds, thousands, ten thousands of blessings and a radiance that is particularly wonderful. Therefore when you journey there, you must not look with*

²⁰⁹ At the end of the light's reach, there was a world called All-Pure-Light-Adornment where a Buddha called Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom lived. There also lived a Bodhisattva called Wonderful-Voice who was lit up with the light of Sakyamuni Buddha. This great Bodhisattva had accumulated many merits, served numerous Buddhas, and attained various samadhi, concentration of the mind on various things, such as samadhi for the Lotus Sutra, samadhi for pure virtue, samadhi for freedom from causality, samadhi for transforming himself to others, and so forth.

²¹⁰ Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva asked his Buddha, Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom, that he wished to visit Sakyamuni Buddha who is expounding the Lotus Sutra in the Saha-World. The world where the Bodhisattva and his Buddha are living is one of pure-land; therefore, no negative thing exists there. The Buddha warned Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva never to despise the people in the Saha-World.

²¹¹ Judging from that statement, the world, the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas in the east, are superior to Sakyamuni Buddha and Bodhisattvas in this Saha-World. However, the Buddha of the east told his Bodhisattva, Wonderful-Voice, "You may be tempted to feel superior to those people who live in the Saha-World; however, be careful not to denigrate them or the world in which they live." All Buddhists must stand on the Dharma, that is, there is no difference among the superior or the inferior because all of us have the seeds to attain Buddhahood.

contempt on that land or come to think of the Buddha and bodhisattvas or the land itself as mean and inferior!"

Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, my journey now to the saha world is in all respects due to the power of the Thus Come One, a sport carried out by the Thus Come One's transcendental powers, an adornment to the Thus Come One's blessings and wisdom."*

Thereupon the Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, without raising from his seat or swaying his body, entered into the samadhi, and through the power of the samadhi, in a place not far removed from the Dharma seat on Mount Gridhrakuta, created a jeweled mass of eighty-four thousand lotus blossoms.²¹² Their stems were made of Jambunada gold, their leaves were of silver, their stamens of diamond, and their calyxes of kimshuka jewels.

At that time the Dharma Prince Manjushri, spying the lotus flowers, spoke to the Buddha, saying: *"World-Honored One, what causes have brought about the appearance of this auspicious sign? Here are many ten thousands of lotus blossoms, their stems made of Jambunada gold, their stamens of diamond and their calyxes of kimshuka jewels!"*²¹³

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha said to Manjushri: *"This bodhisattva and mahasattva Wonderful Sound wishes to leave the land of the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom and, surrounded by eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas, to come to this saha world to offer alms, wait on, and pay obeisance to me. He also wishes to offer alms to and hear the Lotus Sutra."*

Manjushri said to the Buddha: *"World-Honored One, what good roots has this bodhisattva planted, what benefits has he cultivated, that he can exercise such great transcendental powers as this? What samadhi does he carry out? I beg you to explain for us the name of this samadhi, for we too would look like to apply ourselves diligently to its practice. If we carry out this samadhi, then we will be able to observe the aspect and size of this bodhisattva and his bearing and conduct. We beg the World-Honored One to employ his transcendental powers to bring this bodhisattva here and enable us to see him!"*

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha said to Manjushri, *"Many Treasures Thus Come One, who entered extinction so long ago, will manifest his form for you."*

²¹² As we see Buddhist statues, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas sit or stand on lotus flowers most of the time. Before Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva moved to the place where Sakyamuni Buddha was expounding the Lotus Sutra at Mt. Sacred Eagle, he must prepare the seats for himself and his 84,000 attendants. Then he can transfer his body and attendants with his power of samadhi, just like in the Star Trek movies, when you go into a special chamber and transfer yourself to another place.

²¹³ It was really surprising for Manjusri and other attendees at the mountain to see the lotus flowers appear suddenly. Then he asked Sakyamuni Buddha to explain that phenomena. "It is a sign that Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva is coming from the World of Pure-light-Adornment in the east and make offerings to me and the Lotus Sutra," answered the Buddha.

Then the Buddha Many Treasures said to the bodhisattva [Wonderful Sound], *"Come, good man. The Dharma Prince Manjushri wishes to see your body."*

With that, Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound vanished from his own land and, accompanied by eight-four thousand bodhisattvas, appeared here [in this saha world]. The lands that he passed through on his way quaked and trembled in six different ways, and in all of them seven jeweled lotus flowers rained down and instruments of hundreds and thousands of the musicians sounded of themselves without having been struck.

This bodhisattva's eyes were as big and broad as the leaves of the blue Lotus, and a hundred, thousand, ten thousand moons put together could not surpass the perfection of this face. His body was pure gold in color, adorned with immeasurable hundreds and thousands of blessings. His dignity and virtue were splendid, his light shone brightly, he was endowed with many special marks and as stalwart in body as Narayana.

Taking his place on the dais made of seven treasures, he had risen up into the air until he was raised above the earth the height of seven tala trees. Then with a host of bodhisattvas surrounding him and paying reverence, he had journeyed to Mount Gridhrakuta in this saha world. When he arrived there he descended from the dais of seven of seven pressures. Bearing a necklace worth hundreds and thousands, he proceeded to the place where Shakyamuni Buddha was, bowed his head to the ground, made obeisance to the Buddha's feet, and presented the necklace, addressing the Buddha in these words: *"World-Honored One, the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom wishes to inquire about the World-Honored One. Are your illnesses few, are your worries few? Can you come and go easily and conveniently, can you move about in comfort?²¹⁴ Are the four elements properly harmonized in you? Can you endure the world's affairs? Are the living beings easy to the rescue? Are they not excessive in their greed, anger, stupidity, jealousy, stinginess, and arrogance? Are they not lacking in filial conduct toward their parents? Are they not disrespectful toward shramanas and given to heterodox views and other evil? Do they not fail to control their five emotions? World-Honored One, are the living beings able to conquer and overcome the enmity of the devils? Has Many Treasures Thus Come One, who entered extinction so long ago, come in his tower of seven treasures to listen to the Law? The Buddha also wishes to inquire about Many Treasures Thus Come One, whether he is tranquil and at ease, with few worries, patient and long abiding. World-Honored One, I would like to see the body of the Buddha Many Treasures. I beg the World-Honored One to allow me to see him!"*

²¹⁴ Eighty-four thousand attendants accompanied Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva. They appeared in front of Buddha Sakyamuni. The Bodhisattva gave a precious necklace to the Buddha. In the next chapter World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva also gave his necklace of many gems and offered it to the Buddha Sakyamuni. Bodhisattvas are laypersons, so they carry a lot of gems and jewels. After offering the necklace, Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva asked Sakyamuni Buddha's health and spirit, the worldly affairs, and how the living beings in the Saha-World were doing.

At the time Shakyamuni Buddha said to Many Treasures Buddha, "This bodhisattva Wonderful Sound wishes to see you."

Then Many Treasures Buddha addressed Wonderful Sound, saying, "Excellent, excellent! You have come here in order to be able to offer alms to a Shakyamuni Buddha and to listen to the Lotus Sutra and see Manjushri and the others."

At that time the Bodhisattva Flower Virtue said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, this bodhisattva Wonderful Sound - what good roots has he planted, what benefits has he cultivated, that he possesses these supernatural powers?"²¹⁵

The Buddha replied to Bodhisattva flower Virtual: "In ages past there was a Buddha named cloud Thunder Sound King, tathagata, arhats, samyak-sambuddha. His land was called Manifesting All Worlds and his kalpa was called Gladly Seen. For twelve thousand years the Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound employed a hundred thousand types of musical instruments to provide an offering to the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound King, and he also presented to him eighty-four thousand alms bowls made of the seven treasures. In recompense for these actions he has now been born in the land of the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom and possesses these supernatural powers.

"Flower Virtue, what is your opinion? The bodhisattva Wonderful Sound who at that time made musical offerings to the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound King and presented him with jeweled vessels - was he someone unknown to you? In fact is none other than the bodhisattva and mahasattva Wonderful Sound who is here now!

"Flower Virtue, this bodhisattva Wonderful Sound has already made offerings to and waited on an immeasurable number of Buddhas. Long ago he planted the roots of virtue and encountered hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of Buddhist equal in number to the sands of the Ganges.

"Flower Virtue, you see only the body of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound which is here. But this bodhisattva manifests himself in various different bodies and preaches this sutra for the sake of living beings in various different places. At times he appears as King Brahma, at

²¹⁵ Then a Bodhisattva named Flower-Virtue approached the Buddha and asked, "What kind of practice in his previous lives did Wonderful-Voice do to obtain such a supernatural power?" Sakyamuni replied, "Long ago, there was a Buddha called Cloud-Thunder-Pearl-King Tathagata. Wonderful-Voice made many offerings of beautiful music to this Buddha. Because of his great deeds, he was born in the world of Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom Tathagata, and there he acquired supernatural power. This is the Bodhisattva whom you see here now. He continued practicing and accumulating virtues until he was able to transform himself into thirty-four kinds of living beings, such as a king, a god, a man or woman, a priest or a nun, a boy or a girl, a human being or nonhuman being, and so on. He takes these various shapes according to the capacities of those who are to be saved.

times as Lord Shakra, at times as the heavenly Being Freedom, at times as a great general of heaven, at times as the heavenly King Vaishravana, at times as a wheel-turning sage king, at times as one of the petty kings, at times as rich man, at times as a householder, to times the chief minister, at times as a Brahman, at times as a monk, a nun, a layman believer, or laywomen believer, at times as the wife of a rich man or a householder, at times as a wife of a chief minister, a times as a wife of a Brahman, at times as a young boy or a young girl, at times as a heavenly being, a dragon, a yaksha, a gandharva, an asura, a garuda, a kinnara, a mahoraga, a human or a nonhuman being, so preaches this sutra. The hell dwellers, hungry spirits, beasts, and the numerous others who are in difficult circumstances thus are able to be saved. And for the sake of those who are in women's quarters of the royal palace, he changes himself into a woman's form and preaches this sutra.

"Flower Virtue, this bodhisattva Wonderful Sound can save and protect the various living beings of the saha world. This bodhisattva Wonderful Sound performs various transformations, manifesting himself in different forms in this saha land and preaches this sutra for the sake of living beings, and yet his transcendental powers, his transformations, and his Wisdom suffer no injury or diminution thereby.²¹⁶ This bodhisattva employs various types of wisdom to illuminate the saha world, causing each one among all the living beings to acquire the appropriate understanding, and does the same in all the other worlds of the ten directions which are numerous as Ganges sands.

"If the form of a voice-hearer is what is needed to bring salvation, he manifests himself in the form of a voice-hearer and proceeds to preach the Law. If the form of a pratyekabuddha will bring salvation, he manifests himself in the form of a pratyekabuddha and preaches the Law. If the form of a bodhisattva will bring salvation, he manifests a bodhisattva form and preaches the Law. If the form of a Buddha will bring salvation, he immediately manifests a Buddha form and preaches the Law. Thus he manifests himself in various different forms, depending upon what is appropriate for salvation. And if it is appropriate to enter extinction in order to bring salvation, he manifests himself as entering extinction.

"Flower virtue, the bodhisattva mahasattvas Wonderful Sound has acquired great transcendental powers and the power of wisdom that enable him to do all this!"

At that time the bodhisattva Flower Virtue said to the Buddha, *"World-Honored One, this bodhisattva Wonderful Sound as planted the roots of goodness very deeply. World-Honored One, samadhi does this bodhisattva dwell in, that he is able to carry out all these transformations and manifestations to save living beings?"*

²¹⁶ Although Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva lives in a world of one hundred and eight billion nayuta Buddha-worlds away, he illuminates this Saha-World where we live with the many rays of light of his wisdom and saves all living beings. Some of you who devote yourself to expounding the Lotus Sutra may be the manifestation of Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva's samadhi.

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Flower Virtue, "Good man, this samadhi is called Manifesting All Kinds of bodies. The bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, dwelling in this samadhi, is able in this manner to enrich and benefit immeasurable living beings."²¹⁷

When [the Buddha] preached this chapter on Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, the eighty-four thousand persons who had come with bodhisattva Wonderful Sound all acquired the samadhi enabling them to manifest all kinds of bodies, and the immeasurable bodhisattvas in this saha world also acquired this samadhi and dharani.

At that time the bodhisattva and mahasattva Wonderful Sound, having finished offering alms to Shakyamuni Buddha and to the tower of Many Treasures Buddha, returned to his original land.²¹⁸ The lands that he passed through on his way quaked and trembled in six different ways, jeweled lotus flowers rained down, and hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of different kinds of music played.

After he had arrived in his original land and was surrounded by his eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas, he proceeded to the place of the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom and addressed the Buddha saying, "*World-Honored One, I have visited the saha world, enriched and benefited the living beings, saw Shakyamuni Buddha and the tower of Many Treasures Buddha, and offered obeisance and alms to them. I also saw bodhisattva Manjushri, prince of the Dharma, as well as Bodhisattva Medicine King, Bodhisattva Gaining Diligent Exertion Power, Bodhisattva Brave Donor, and others. And I made it possible for these eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas to gain the samadhi enabling them to manifest all kinds of bodies.*"

When [the Buddha] preached this chapter on the comings and goings of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, forty-two thousand sons of gods gained the truth of the birthlessness of all phenomena, and Bodhisattva Flower Virtue gained the Dharma flower samadhi.

²¹⁷ Medicine King Bodhisattva in the previous chapter attained the same samadhi as Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva did; the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva in the next chapter also attained the same samadhi. The samadhi by which one can transform into other living beings is a power of concentration acquired by practice. Such a miraculous phenomenon may sound impossible. However, when we sincerely devote ourselves to the service and welfare of others, we can reach a stage of non-self and become one with them.

In appearance, we may even look like one of them. For example, an adult playing happily with children may look like a child himself. He may feel like a child, too. The children may even consider him to be one of them. Such transformations are far from impossible, but they do require a special state of mind. The samadhi by which one can transform himself into other living things is an expression of the Bodhisattva-spirit of devoting one's self to others.

²¹⁸ Although Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva left this Saha-World where we live, he still illuminates us and tries to save us all with his samadhi.

Chapter Twenty-five: The Universal Gate of Bodhisattva Kanzeon

SUMMARY

Chapter 25, which deals with the Kannon Bodhisattva, the Universal Gate of World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva or Avalokitesvara, is a part of the Lotus Sutra of course; however, there are countless number of faithful men and women who take this chapter as an independent sutra regardless of whether they believe in the Lotus Sutra or not. We can see a lot of statues of Kannon in Japan, China, Thailand and other Asian countries. They are enshrined not only inside the temples but also outside.

Why is the Kannon so popular? I think that it is because the Buddhas are too superior for ordinary people and too difficult for them to understand. For instance, in a household the children talk more easily to their mother than their father.

It is the same with faith. The Buddhas are too superior and difficult to approach, but the Bodhisattvas are closer to ordinary people and may listen to our complaints and desires. It is the Kannon Bodhisattva who perceives our sufferings, listens to our desires with his compassion, and saves us.

However, there is one condition: the sutra says, "Call his name with all their hearts." In Nichiren-shu, it is not necessary to call the Bodhisattva's name, because the Odaimoku contains his and other Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' names in it.

At that time the bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent immediately rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, pressed his palms together and, facing the Buddha, spoke these words: *"World Honored One, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds-- why is he called Perceiver of the World's Sounds?"*

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent: "Good man, suppose there are immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of living beings who are undergoing various trials and suffering. If they hear of this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and single-mindedly call his name, then at once he will perceive the sound of their voices and they will all gain deliverance from their trials."²¹⁹

²¹⁹ It says to call his name with all their hearts. It is not enough to utter the name or the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra with your mouth only. It requires calling his name or chanting the Odaimoku with your mouth, mind and body (i.e., three actions). Buddhism talks about the relationship of mind and matter. When you chant the name of Kannon with your mouth, you may imagine his compassionate face and his power in your mind, and then you will feel better, just as when you look at a mirror and laugh, you will feel happy. When you become happy, your suffering will disappear. Why is Kannon able to perceive your suffering immediately? It is because you are a Kannon Bodhisattva. To chant his name or to chant the Odaimoku is to attain oneness with Kannon or the Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni. This realization could not be attained without one's heart.

“If someone, holding fast to the name of bodhisattva perceiver of the world's sounds, should enter a great fire, the fire could not burn him. This would come about because of this bodhisattva's authority and supernatural power. If one were washed away by a great flood and call upon his name, one would immediately find himself in a shallow place.

“Suppose there were a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million living beings who, seeking for gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, coral, amber, pearls, and other treasures, set out on the great sea. and suppose a fierce wind should blow their ship off course and it drifted to the land of raksasas demons. If among those people there is even just one who calls the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's sounds, then all those people will be delivered from their troubles with the raksasas. This is why he is called Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

“If a person who faces imminent threat of attack should call the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's sounds, then the swords and staves wielded by his attackers would instantly shatter into so many pieces and he would be delivered.”

“Though enough yakshas and raksasas to fill all the thousand-million-fold world should try to come and torment a person, if they hear him calling the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, then these evil demons will not even be able to look at him with their evil eyes, much less do him harm.

“Suppose, in a place filled with all the evil-hearted bandits of the thousand-million-fold world, there is a merchant leader who is guiding a band of merchants carrying valuable treasures over a steep and dangerous road, and that one man shouts out these words: 'Good men, do not be afraid! You must single-mindedly call on the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds. This bodhisattva can grant fearlessness to living beings. If you call his name, you will be delivered from these evil-hearted bandits!'”²²⁰ When the band of merchants hear this, they all together raise their voices, saying, 'Hail to the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the

²²⁰ These are the seven calamities that the Bodhisattva can save us from.

They are calamities of:

fire,

water,

human-eating demons (bacteria?)

swords and clubs,

demons,

the calamity of chains and shackles, and

the calamity of bandits.

If someone calls the name of this Bodhisattva, he or she will be able to avoid these seven calamities. Such benefits, by which one can avoid calamities and obtain happiness, are material gain. He gives us spiritual gain, too.

To obtain the above-mentioned benefits we must have pure hearts. The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas grant such benefits only to those people who practice sincerely. The purpose of calling the name of Kannon is to show our sincerity to him. So the sutra emphasizes here again to have sincerity.

World's Sounds! And because they call his name, they are at once able to gain deliverance. Inexhaustible Intent, the authority and supernatural power of the Bodhisattva and mahasattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds are as mighty as this!

"If there should be living beings beset by numerous lusts and cravings, let them think with constant reverence of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and then they can shed their desires. If they have great wrath and ire, let them think with constant reverence of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and then they can shed their ire. If they have great ignorance and stupidity, let them think with constant reverence of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and they can rid themselves of stupidity.²²¹

"Inexhaustible Intent, the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds possesses great authority and supernatural powers, as I have described, and can confer many benefits. For this reason, living beings should constantly keep the thought of him in mind.

"If a woman wishes to give birth to a male child, she should offer obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and then she will bear a son blessed with merit, virtue, and wisdom. And if she wishes to bear a daughter, she will bear one with all the marks of comeliness, one who in the past planted the roots of virtue and is loved and respected by many persons.²²²

"Inexhaustible Intent, the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds has power to do all this. If there are living beings who pay respect and obeisance to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, their good fortune will not be fleeting or vain. Therefore living beings should all accept and uphold the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

"Inexhaustible Intent, suppose there is a person who accepts and upholds the names of as many bodhisattvas as there are sands in sixty-two million Ganges, and for as long as his present body lasts, he offers them alms in the form of food and drink, clothing, bedding and medicines. What is your opinion? Would this good man or good woman gain many benefits or would he not?"

Inexhaustible Intent replied, *"They would be very many, World-Honored One."*

²²¹Lust, anger and stupidity (ignorance to the Buddha's teachings) are called the "Three Poisons" in Buddhism. The seven calamities listed above are material and physical sufferings of human nature, and the three poisons are mental sufferings. Material sufferings come upon us because the mental sufferings exist already as their basis. If our suffering minds are healed of the three poisons, we can expect material calamities to disappear, too. Therefore it is important to control your mind.

²²²I give these quotations to a lady who wishes to have a baby or to a mother to be and tell her to recite these quotations everyday together with the Odaimoku, so that she may have a good baby. One's life is not only once, but there were many previous lives; therefore, it is important to have a boy endowed with merits and virtues and wisdom to carry into this world, or a girl who has the roots of virtues planted in her previous existences. It is a similar concept when a mother tries to educate her baby before birth by means of listening to music and keeping a relaxed and gentle mind.

The Buddha said: "Suppose also that there is a person who accepts and upholds the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and even just once offers him obeisance and alms. The good fortune gained by these two persons would be exactly equal and without difference. For a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million kalpas it would never be exhausted or run out. Inexhaustible Intent, if one accepts and upholds the name of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, he will gain the benefit of merit and virtue that is as immeasurable and boundless as this!"

Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent said to the Buddha, "*World-Honored One, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds-- how does he come and go in this saha world? How does he preach the Law for the sake of living beings? How does the power of expedient means apply in this case?*"²²⁵

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent: "Good man, if there are living beings in the land who need someone in the body of a Buddha in order to be saved, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds immediately manifests himself in a Buddha body and preaches the Law for them. If they need someone in a pratyekabuddha's body in order to be saved, immediately he manifests a pratyekabuddha's body and preaches the Law to them. If they need a voice-hearer to be saved, immediately he becomes a voice-hearer and preaches the Law for them. If they need King Brahma to be saved, immediately he becomes King Brahma and preaches the Law for them. If they need the lord Shakra to be saved, immediately he becomes the lord Shakra and preaches the Law for them. If they need the heavenly being Freedom to be saved, immediately he becomes the heavenly being Freedom and preaches the Law for them. If they need a great general of heaven to be saved,

²²⁵ Truth is one, but there are many different ways to explain the truth. A good teacher at a school knows how to teach smart kids, slow-learning kids, and lazy kids in his class. He must use different method to teach them. The World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva expounds the Dharma, but he uses his different approaches for different levels of understanding; they are expedients. The Bodhisattva takes 33 different shapes for ordinary people to make it easy for them to approach him and makes their wishes become reality; then he expounds the Dharma. He takes the shapes of a Buddha, a king, a god, a great general, a rich man, a householder, a prime minister, a wife, a dragon, a man of pure faith, a boy, a girl, a nonhuman being, and so on.

We have different colors of skin, different cultures, different levels of education, different beliefs, different social status, different occupations, and so forth, but we are all the same human beings. A leader must understand people's feelings and desires. That is why this Bodhisattva transforms himself into other shape of living beings.

Kannon Bodhisattva is not only the statues standing at temples, but in reality he appears as shapes of many different people as mentioned above. It is because when we pray hard or call his name with all our heart, energy (Chi or Ki) develops. That energy harmonizes with someone else who has the same energy or extra energy. Then he or she appears to save you as an embodiment of Kannon.

There are many different statues of Kannon Bodhisattva, having one face, three faces, eleven faces, two arms, six arms, one thousand arms etc. Each face is different, and each arm holds different symbolic objects because each person has different desires to be fulfilled.

Many people stay at the level of fulfillment of their desires, but the Bodhisattva's real intention is to expound Dharma. Nichiren Shu has many expedients such as kito blessing, ofudas and omamori amulets, and also enshrines many different deities. They are all expedients to lead people to be saved. But we must not forget to learn and to practice a higher level of Buddhism to attain Buddhahood.

immediately he becomes a great general of heaven and preaches the Law for them. If they need Vaishravana to be saved, immediately he becomes Vaishravana and preaches the Law for them. If they need a petty king to be saved, immediately he becomes a petty king and preaches the law for them.

“If they need a rich man to be saved, immediately he becomes a rich man and preaches the Law for them. If they need a householder to be saved, immediately he becomes a householder and preaches the Law for them. If they need a chief minister to be saved, immediately he becomes a chief minister and preaches the Law for them. If they need a Brahman to be saved, immediately he becomes a Brahman and preaches the Law for them. If they need a monk, a nun, a layman believer, or a laywoman believer and preaches the Law for them. If they need the wife of a rich man, of a householder, a chief minister, or a Brahman to be saved, immediately he becomes those wives and preaches the Law for them. If they need a young boy or a young girl and preaches the Law for them. If they need a heavenly being, a dragon, a yaksha, a gandharva, an asura, a garuda, a kinnara, a mahoraga, a human or a nonhuman being to be saved, immediately he becomes all of these and preaches the Law for them. If they need a vajra-bearing god and preaches the Law for them.

“Inexhaustible Intent, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds has succeeded in acquiring benefits such as these and. Taking on a variety of different forms, goes about among the lands saving living beings. For this reason you and the others should single-mindedly offer alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds can bestow fearlessness on those who are in fearful, pressing or difficult circumstances. That is why in this saha world everyone calls him Bestower of Fearlessness.”

Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent said to the Buddha, *“World-Honored One, now I must offer alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds.”*²²⁴

²²⁴The Endless-Intent Bodhisattva was so impressed by what he heard about the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva that he wanted to make him an offering. He took a necklace of many gems from his neck and tried to give it to the Kannon Bodhisattva, who would not accept it. Thereupon Buddha Sakyamuni told him to receive it out of his compassion toward the Endless-Intent Bodhisattva. Although Kannon received it, he divided the necklace into two parts and offered one part of it to Sakyamuni Buddha and the other to the stupa of Many-Treasures Buddha. The reason he did not accept the offering was that he was very humble and that he thought he was not worthy to receive an offering from others. He believed all his power of saving others came from the Buddhas; therefore, he divided the necklace into two and gave one part of it to Sakyamuni Buddha and offered the other half to the stupa of Many Treasures Buddha. Remember, the door of the stupa of the Many-Treasures Buddha was closed at the end of chapter 22 of the Lotus Sutra.

The logical explanations of the Lotus Sutra end at Chapter 22; however, it is difficult for us to practice it in our daily lives. Therefore, the Buddha prepared another six chapters for us to practice the Dharma through the examples of previous lives of Bodhisattvas and explanations of protection by deities. The next chapter also contains explanations by protections of other deities.

Then he took from his neck a necklace adorned with numerous precious gems, worth a hundred or a thousand taels of gold, and presented it to [the bodhisattva], saying, *"Sir, please accept this necklace of precious gems as a gift in the Dharma."*

At that time Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds was unwilling to accept the gift.

Inexhaustible Intent spoke once more to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, saying, *"Sir, out of compassion for us, please accept this necklace."*

Then the Buddha said to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, *"Out of compassion for this Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent and for the four kinds of believers, the heavenly kings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings, you should accept this necklace."*

Thereupon Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, having compassion for the four kinds of believers and the heavenly beings, dragons, human and nonhuman beings and the others, accepted the necklace and, dividing it into two parts, presented one part to Shakyamuni Buddha and presented the other to the tower of the Buddha Many Treasures.

[The Buddha said,] *"Inexhaustible Intent, these are the kinds of freely exercised supernatural powers that Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds displays in his comings and goings in the saha world."*

At that time Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent posed this question in verse form:

*World-Honored One replete with wonderful features, I now ask you once again for
what reason that Buddha's son is named Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's
Sounds?*

*The honored One endowed with wonderful features replied to Inexhaustible Intent in
verse: Listen to the actions of the Perceiver of Sounds, how aptly he responds in
various quarters.*

*His vast oath is deep as the ocean; kalpas pass but it remains unfathomable.
He has attended many thousands and millions of Buddhas, setting forth his great pure
vow.*

*I will describe him in outline for you~ listen to his name, observe his body, bear him in
mind, not passing the time vainly, for he can wipe out the pains of existence.
Suppose someone should conceive a wish to harm you, should push you into a great pit
of fire.*

*Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and the pit of fire will change into a
pond!*

If you should be cast adrift on the vast ocean, menaced by dragons, fish and various demons, think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and the billows and waves cannot drown you!

Suppose you are on the peak of Mount Sumeru and someone pushes you off. Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and you will hang in midair like the sun!

Suppose you are pursued by evil men who wish to throw you down from a diamond mountain.

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and they cannot harm a hair of you! Suppose you are surrounded by evil-hearted bandits, each brandishing a knife to wound you.

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and at once all will be swayed by compassion!

Suppose you encounter trouble with the king's law, face punishment, about to forfeit your life.

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and the executioner's sword will be broken to bits!

Suppose you are imprisoned in cangue and lock, hands and feet bound by fetters and chains.

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and they will fall off, leaving you free! Suppose with curses and various poisonous herbs someone should try to injure you. Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and the injury will rebound upon the originator.

Suppose you encounter evil raksasas, poison dragons and various demons.

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and then none of them will dare to harm you.

If evil beasts should encircle you, their sharp fangs and claws inspiring terror, think on the power of that Perceiver of sounds and they will scamper away in boundless retreat.

If lizards, snakes, vipers, scorpions threaten you with poison breath that sears like flame, think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and, hearing your voice, they will flee of themselves.

If clouds should bring thunder, and lightning strike, if hail pelts or drenching rain comes down, think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and at that moment they will vanish away.

If living beings encounter weariness or peril, immeasurable suffering pressing them down, the power of the Perceiver of Sounds' wonderful wisdom can save them from the sufferings of the world.

He is endowed with transcendental powers and widely practices the expedient means of wisdom.

Throughout the lands in the ten directions there is no region where he does not manifest himself.

In many different kinds of evil circumstances, in the realms of hell, hungry spirits or beasts, the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death-- all these he bit by bit wipes out.

He of the true gaze, the pure gaze, the gaze of great and encompassing wisdom, the gaze of pity, the gaze of compassion-- constantly we implore him, constantly look up in reverence.

His pure light, free of blemish, is a sun of wisdom dispelling all darkness's.

He can quell the wind and fire of misfortune and everywhere bring light to the world.

The precepts from his compassionate body shake us like thunder, the wonder of his pitying mind is like a great cloud.

He sends down the sweet dew, the Dharma rain, to quench the flames of earthly desires.

When law suits bring you before the officials, when terrified in the midst of an army, think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and hatred in all its forms will be dispelled.

Wonderful sound, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Brahma's sound, the sea tide sound-- they surpass those sounds of the world; therefore you should constantly think on them from thought to thought never entertaining doubt!

Perceiver of the World's Sounds, pure sage-- to those in suffering, in danger of death, he can offer aid and support.

Endowed with all benefits, he views living beings with compassionate eyes.

The sea of his accumulated blessings is immeasurable; therefore you should bow your head to him!

At that time the Bodhisattva Earth Holder immediately rose from his seat, advanced, and said to the Buddha, *"World-Honored One, if there are living beings who hear this chapter on Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, on the freedom of his actions, his manifestation of a universal gateway, and his transcendental powers, it should be known that the benefits these persons gain are not few!"*

When the Buddha preached this chapter on the Universal Gateway, a multitude of eighty-four thousand persons in the assembly all conceived a determination to attain the unparalleled state of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Chapter Twenty-six: Dharani

SUMMARY

This chapter reveals the dharanis (the mystic syllables which sustain a chanter's religious life) of many deities. The deities are Medicine-King Bodhisattva, Brave-In-Giving Bodhisattva, Vaisravana Heavenly-King, World-Holding Heavenly-King and ten female devils together with Mother-Of-Devils and her children. The dharani-spells are uttered to protect the practitioners, teachers and expounders of the Lotus Sutra.

TRANSLATION TEXT

At that time the Bodhisattva Medicine king rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, pressed his palms together and, facing the Buddha, spoke to him, saying, "*World-Honored One, if there are good men or good women who can accept and uphold the Lotus Sutra, if they read and recite it, penetrate its meaning, or copy the sutra scrolls, how much merit will they gain?*"²²⁵

The Buddha said to Medicine King, "If there are good men or good women who offer alms to Buddhas equal in number to the sands of eight hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges, what is your opinion? The merit they gain will surely be great, will it not?"

"Very great, World-Honored One."

The Buddha said, "If there are good men or good women who, with regard to this sutra, can accept and uphold even one four-line verse, if they read and recite it, understand the principle and practice it as the sutra directs, the benefits will be very many."²²⁶

At that time Bodhisattva Medicine King said to the Buddha, "*World-Honored One, I will now give to those who preach the Law dharani spells, which will guard and protect them.*"²²⁷ Then he pronounced these spells:

²²⁵ Medicine-King Bodhisattva (Yaku-o Bosatsu) asked the Buddha how many merits will be given to those who keep, read, recite, understand or copy the Lotus Sutra. Keeping, reading, reciting, understanding and copying are the five practices in the Lotus Sutra. We have studied these practices in Chapter Ten in which the Buddha told Medicine-King Bodhisattva and eighty thousand great men what the teachers of the Dharma must practice and what the teachers must keep in their mind. Then, in this chapter the Bodhisattva asked how many merits the teachers of the Dharma would receive.

²²⁶ The Buddha answered Medicine-King Bodhisattva. There are more merits than the number of sand grains in the River Ganges. You do not have to read the entire sutra or one chapter of the sutra but to keep, read, recite, understand or copy a single phrase or sentence. We intend to follow our own way of practice; however, the sutra warns us to practice according to the sutra. "Myoho Renge Kyo" is the name of the Lotus Sutra. "Namu" means to devote, to respect, to honor, to adore and to admire. So when you keep, read, chant, explain or copy only "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," you are still practicing according to the Lotus Sutra.

*anye manye mane mamane chitte harite shame shamitavi
shante mukte muktatame same avashame sama same kshaye
akshaye akshine shante shame dharani alokabhashe-
pratyavekshani nivshite abhyantaranivishite atyantaparishuddhi
ukkule mukkule arade parade shukakashi asamasame
buddhivilokite dharmaparikshite sanghanirghoshani
bhayabhayashodhani mantre mantrakshayate rute
rutakaushalye akshaye akshayavanataya abalo amanyanataya.*

"World-Honored One, these dharanis, these supernatural spells, are pronounced by Buddhas equal in number to the sands of sixty-two million Ganges. If anyone should assault or injure these teachers of the Law, then he will have assaulted and injured these Buddhas!"

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha praised Bodhisattva Medicine King, saying, "Excellent, excellent, Medicine King! You keep these teachers of the Law in your compassionate thoughts, shield and guard them, and for that reason you pronounce these dharanis. They will bring great benefit to living beings."

At that time Bodhisattva Brave Donor said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I too will pronounce dharanis to shield and guard those who read, recite, accept, and uphold the Lotus Sutra. If a teacher of the Law acquires these dharanis, then although yakshas, rakshasas, putanas, krityas, kumbhandas or hungry spirits should spy out his shortcomings and try to take advantage of them, they will be unable to do so."²²⁸ Then in the presence of the Buddha he pronounced these spells:

*jvale mahajvale ukke mukke ade adavati nritye nrityavati ittini
vittini chittini nrityani nrityakati*

"World-Honored One, these dharanis, these supernatural spells, are pronounced by Buddhas equal in number to the sands of the Ganges, and all of them respond with joy. If anyone should assault or injure these teachers of the Law, then he will have assaulted and injured these Buddhas!"

²²⁷ Medicine-King Bodhisattva vowed that if there are people who attack or abuse a teacher who reads and recites the sutra, they should be considered to have attacked and abused all Buddhas. Then he uttered these dharani-spells: "Ani, mani, mane, mamane, shirei ..."

²²⁸ Brave-In-Giving Bodhisattva (Yuze Bosatsu) vows his protection toward a teacher of the Lotus Sutra. He promised that the teacher will not have his weak points taken advantage of by anyone and uttered the spells: "Zarei, makazare, ukki, mokki, arei ..."

At that time the heavenly king Vaishravana, protector of the world, said to the Buddha, *"World-Honored One, I too think compassionately of living beings and shield and guard these teachers of the Law, and therefore I pronounce these dharanis."*²²⁹ Then he pronounced these spells:

atte natte nunatte anada nade kunadi

"World-Honored One, with these supernatural spells I shield and guard the teachers of the Law. And I will also shield and guard those who uphold this sutra, making certain that they suffer no decline or harm within the area of a hundred yojanas."

At that time heavenly king Upholder of the Nation, who was in the assembly along with a host of thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of gandharvas who surrounded him and paid him reverence, advanced to the place where the Buddha was, pressed his palms together and said to the Buddha, *"World-Honored One, I too will employ dharanis, supernatural spells, to shield and guard those who uphold the Lotus Sutra."*²³⁰ Then he pronounced these spells:

*agane gane gauri gandhari chandali matangi janguly vrusani
agashti*

"World-Honored One, these dharanis, these supernatural spells, are pronounced by forty-two million Buddhas. If anyone should assault or injure these teachers of the Law, then he will have assaulted and injured these Buddhas!"

At that time there were daughters of rakshasa demons, the first named Lamba, the second named Vilamba, the third named Crooked Teeth, the fourth named Flowery Teeth, the fifth named Black Teeth, the sixth named Much Hair, the seventh named Insatiable, the eighth named Necklace Bearer, the ninth named Kunti, and the tenth named Stealer of the

²²⁹ Vaisravana Heavenly-King (Bishamon Tenno) vowed his protection and uttered the spells: "Ari, nari, tonari, anaro, nabi, kunabi." He also protects the person who keeps this sutra so that he may have no trouble within a hundred yojanas' distance from here.

Vaisravana is also known by the name of Much-Hearing because he often likes to hear the Dharma. He is one of the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings, the guardians of the four directions of the world. He protects people living in the northern part of the world. The Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings are the kings of the four heavenly realms around Mount Sumeru (Shumisen in Japanese). They protect Buddhism and its believers while serving God Indra (Taishaku-ten in Japanese). Indra is the lord god of the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings. He was originally a Hindu god but in Buddhism he is considered to be a god who protects Buddhism and its followers.

Nichiren Shonin respects and adores the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings, so their names are written on the four corners of the Mandala Gohonzon.

²³⁰ World-Holding Heavenly-King (Jikoku Tenno) is also one of the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings. He protects people living in the eastern part of the world. He uttered the spells: "Akjane, kyane, kuri, kendari, sendari ..."

Vital Spirit of All Living Beings. These ten rakshasa daughters, along with the Mother of Devil Children, her offspring, and her attendants, all proceeded to the place where the Buddha was and spoke to the Buddha in unison, saying, *"World-Honored One, we too wish to shield and guard those who read, recite, accept, and uphold the Lotus Sutra and spare them from decline or harm. If anyone should spy out the shortcomings of these teachers of the Law and try to take advantage of them, we will make it impossible for him to do so."* Then in the presence of the Buddha they pronounce these spells:

*itime itime itime atime itime nime nime nime nime nime ruhe
ruhe ruhe ruhe stahе stahе stahе stuhe shuhe*

"Though they climb upon our very heads, they will never trouble the teachers of the Law! Whether it be a yaksha, or a pakshasa, or a hungry spirit, or a putana, or a kritya, or a vetada, or a skanda, or an umaraka, or an apasmaraka, or a yaksha kritya, or a human kritya, or a fever, a one day, a two day, a three day, or a four day, or up to a seven day or a constant fever, whether it be in a man's form, in a woman's form, in young boy's form, in young girl's form, though it be only in a dream, it will never trouble them!"

Then in the presence of the Buddha they spoke in verse form, saying:

*If there are those who fail to heed our spells and trouble and disrupt the
preachers of the Law, their heads will split into seven pieces like the
branches of the arjaka tree.*

*Their crime will be like that of one who kills father and mother, or one who
presses out oil, or cheats others with measures and scales, or, like
Devadatta, disrupts the Order of monks.*

*Anyone who commits a crime against these teachers of the Law will bring on
himself guilt such as this!"*

After the rakshasa daughters had spoken these verses, they said to the Buddha, *"World-Honored One, we will use our own bodies to shield and guard those who accept, uphold, read, recite, and practice this sutra.²⁵¹ We will see that they gain peace and tranquility, freeing them from decline and harm and nulling the effect of all poison herbs."*

²⁵¹ Ten raksasis (female devils, Jurasetsunyo) and Mother-Of-Devils also vowed to protect a person who practices the Lotus Sutra so that he may have no trouble. They uttered the spells: "Idebi, ideibin, ideibi, adeibi, ideibi ..."

Mother-Of-Devils is well known as Kishimo in Japanese or Heriti in Sanskrit. It is said that she had Five Hundred children. She fed them the blood of the babies of others. When she heard the Dharma from the Buddha, she repented her sins and vowed to protect Buddhism. She is invoked for an easy delivery, and the health of children.

Note: In Buddhism, once devils turn their minds to goodness and practice righteousness, they are considered to be deities because it is said that those who are very bad could be very good when they repent their wrong doings.

The Buddha said to the rakshasa daughters, "Excellent, excellent! If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be immeasurable.²³² How much more so if you shield and guard those who accept and uphold it in its entirety, who offer alms to the sutra scrolls, flowers, incense, necklaces, powdered incense, paste incense, incense for burning, banners, canopies, music, who burn various kinds of lamps, lamps of butter oil, oil lamps, lamps of various fragrant oils, lamps of sumana flower oil, and lamps of utpala flower oil, and who in this manner offer hundreds and thousands of varieties of alms? Kunti, you and your attendants should shield and guard the teachers of the Law such as these!"

When [the Buddha] preached this Dharani chapter, sixty-eight thousand persons gained the truth of birthlessness.

²³² Buddha Sakyamuni praised these deities who uttered the dharani-spells. He said that the number of their merits will be beyond expression, and also that those who practice the Lotus Sutra will receive numerous merits. Needless to say, so will be our merits when we protect a person who keeps the sutra, makes a copy of this sutra and makes offerings such as music, flowers, incense and candles. These are our daily practices at the temple and at our homes.

These five deities and their dharani-spells are very important for Nichiren Shu priests who perform the kito blessing. When Saint Nichiren wrote informal gohonzons and amulets, he often wrote these deities' names on both sides of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo and gave them to his followers for protection.

Chapter Twenty-seven: The Former Deeds of King Wondrous Splendor

SUMMARY

This chapter reveals the story of two sons who converted their father and mother to the Buddha Dharma and the Lotus Sutra. It is very difficult to convert our spouses and immediate family members because they know everything about us, inside and out. Therefore, words may not be effective for them but our actions would be. The two children showed their magic (something others cannot do) to draw their father's attention.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time the Buddha addressed the great assembly, saying: "In an age long ago, an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable number of asamkhyā kalpas in the past, there was a Buddha named Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom, tathagata, arhat, samyak-sambuddha. His land was named Light Bright Adornment and his kalpa was named Gladly Seen. In the midst of this Buddha's Law there was a king named Wonderful Adornment. This king's consort was named Pure Virtue, and he had two sons, one named Pure Storehouse and the other named Pure Eye.²³³ These two sons possessed great supernatural powers, merit, virtue, wisdom, and for a long time they had been practicing the way appropriate to a bodhisattva, carrying out the dana-paramita, shīla-paramita, kṣanti-paramita, virya-paramita, dhyaṇa-paramita, prajñā-paramita, the paramita of expedient means, pity, compassion, joy and indifference, as well as the thirty-seven aids to the way. All of these they had thoroughly understood and mastered. In addition, they had gained the samādhis of the bodhisattva, namely, the pure samādhi; sun, star, and constellation samādhi; pure light samādhi; pure color samādhi; pure illumination samādhi; long adornment samādhi; and great dignity and virtue storehouse samādhi, and had thoroughly mastered all these samādhis.

"At that time that Buddha, wishing to attract and guide King Wonderful Adornment, and because he thought with compassion of living beings, preached the Lotus Sutra. The king's two sons, Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye, went to where their mother was, pressed their

²³³ The two sons persuaded their mother to go listen to the Buddha who preached the Lotus Sutra. She said, "Yes, I will. But your father deeply believes in Brahmanism. Go tell him to join us." It is very hard to alter the belief of a family member if they believe in another faith.

Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933) was a poet and wrote a lot of poems and fairy tales based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. On his deathbed, when he was 36 years old, he left a will to his parents who were very devoted to the Pure Land faith. "I am very sorry to die before you, and I could not repay my gratitude to you, but I wish to repay your favor in my next life and my lives after that. Please call on me by chanting the Odaimoku, "Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō" after my death. Thus, he asked his parents to chant the Odaimoku to communicate with him in the spiritual realm. He also requested his parents to publish 100 copies of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese and give them to his relatives and friends to make a relationship, or "en" in Japanese, with the sutra.

palms and the nails of their ten fingers together, and said to her, 'We beg our mother to go and visit the place where the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom is. We too will attend him, drawing near to the Buddha and offering alms and obeisance. Why? Because this Buddha is preaching the Lotus Sutra in the midst of all the multitude of heavenly and human beings and it is right that we should listen and accept it.'

"The mother announced to her sons, 'Your father puts his faith in non-Buddhist doctrines and is deeply attached to the Brahmanical Law. You should go to your father, tell him about this, and persuade him to go with you.'

"Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye pressed their palms and ten fingernails together and said to their mother, 'We are sons of the Dharma King, and yet we have been born into this family of heretical views!'

"The mother said to her sons, 'You are right to think with concern about your father. You should manifest some supernatural wonder for him. When he sees that, his mind will surely be cleansed and purified and he will permit us to go to where the Buddha is.'

"The two sons, being concerned about their father, leaped up into the air to the height of seven tala trees and there performed various types of supernatural wonders, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down in midair; making water come out of the upper part of their bodies; making fire come out of the lower part of their bodies, making water come out of the lower part of their bodies; making fire come at of the upper part of their bodies;²³⁴ manifesting huge bodies that filled the sky and then making themselves small again; after becoming small, making themselves big again; disappearing in the midst of the sky and then suddenly appearing on the ground; sinking into the ground as though it were water; walking on the water as though it were land. They manifested these various types of supernatural wonders in order to cause the mind of their royal father to become pure and to make him believe and understand.

"At that time when the father saw his sons displaying supernatural powers of this kind, his mind was filled with great delight, as he had never known before, and he pressed his palms together, faced his sons and said, 'Who is your teacher? Whose disciples are you?'

²³⁴ They showed these wonders to their father because the mother said to do so, so that he may change his mind and allow them to go to the Buddha.

To attain this kind of magic is not an aim of Buddhism, although some yogi may be able to perform some. These wonders by the two children represent only a symbol that suggests that we do something different to capture the attention of others. For example, if you continue to recite a chapter of the sutra and chant the Odaimoku everyday without fail, your character naturally changes and you improve yourself in daily life. This change makes others wonder.

"The two sons replied, "Great king, the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom is at present sitting in the Dharma seat under the seven-jeweled bodhi tree and, amid the multitudes of heavenly and human beings of all the world, is broadly expounding the Lotus Sutra. This is our teacher and we are his disciples.'

"The father said to his sons, 'I would like to go now and see your teacher, You can go with me.'²³⁵

"With this the two sons descended from the air, proceeded to where their mother was, pressed their palms together and said to their mother, 'Our royal father has now come to believe and understand, he is fully capable of conceiving a desire for anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. We have finished doing the Buddha's work for the sake of our father. We beg that our mother will permit us to go to the place where the Buddha is, to leave the household life and to practice the way.'

"At that time the two sons, wishing to state their meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying to their mother:

We beg our mother to permit us to leave the household and become shramanas.
The Buddhas are very hard to encounter; we will follow this Buddha and learn
from him.

Rare as is the udumbara flower, rarer is it to encounter a Buddha, and escaping
from difficulties is also difficult-- we beg you to allow us to leave the
household.

"Their mother then said to them, 'I will permit you to leave the household life. Why? Because the Buddha is difficult to encounter.'

"The two sons then addressed their father and mother, saying: Excellent, father and mother! And we beg you in due time to go to the place where the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom is, attend him in person and offer alms. Why? Because encountering the Buddha is as difficult as encountering the udumbara flower. Or as difficult as it is for a one-eyed turtle to encounter a floating log with a hole in it.²³⁶ We have

²³⁵ The two sons practiced the Samadhi (concentration of the mind on a single matter) only for themselves, so this was their first time to practice samadhi for others. They influenced their father to be interested in a different faith, Buddha Dharma. So he said to them, "I also wish to see your teacher. I will go with you."

²³⁶ Udumbara is the name of a legendary tree which is thought to blossom once in three thousand years. It often stands in Buddhist writings for what is exceptionally rare. It is also very rare for a one-eyed tortoise to find a hole in a piece of wood floating on the ocean surface in a moving wave. Thus, it is very rare to meet a Buddha. The physical real Buddha existed almost 2,500 years ago on this earth. It is said that the next Buddha after Sakyamuni, Maitreya, will appear in this world five billion six hundred and seventy million years after the death of Sakyamuni. So we had better be born again that many years later to meet the Buddha physically.

been blessed with great good fortune from past existences and so have been born in an age where we can encounter the Buddha's Law. For this reason our father and mother should permit us to leave household life. Why? Because the Buddhas are difficult to encounter, and the proper time is also hard to come upon.'

"At that time the eighty-four thousand persons in the women's quarters of King Wonderful Adornment were all capable of accepting and upholding the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Pure Eye had long ago mastered the Dharma flower samadhi, and Bodhisattva Pure Storehouse had already, some hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas in the past, mastered the samadhi of the escape from the evil realms of existence. This was because he wished to make it possible for all living beings to escape the evil realms. The king's consort had gained the samadhi of the Buddhas' assembly and was capable of understanding the secret storehouse of the Buddhas. Her two sons, as already described, had employed the power of expedient means to improve and transform their father so that he could acquire a mind of faith and understanding and love and delight in the Buddha's Law.

"Thereupon King Wonderful Adornment, accompanied by his ranks of ministers and his attendants; his queen Pure Virtue and all the ladies-in-waiting and attendants of the women's quarters; and the king's two sons and their forty-two thousand attendants, all at the same time went to where the Buddha was.²³⁷ Arriving there, they bowed their heads to the ground in obeisance to his feet, circled around the Buddha three times, and then withdrew and stood to one side.

"At that time that Buddha preached the Law for the sake of the king, instructing him and bringing him benefit and joy. The king was exceedingly delighted.

"At that time King Wonderful Adornment and his queen removed from their necks necklaces of pearls worth hundreds and thousands and scattered them over the Buddha. In midair the necklaces changed into a jeweled dais with four pillars. On the dais was a large jeweled couch spread with hundreds, thousands, ten thousands of heavenly robes. Seated cross-legged on them was a Buddha who emitted a brilliant light.

"At that time King Wonderful Adornment thought to himself: The Buddha's body is rare indeed, extraordinary in dignity and adornment, constituting a form of utmost subtlety and wonder! Then the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom spoke to the four kinds of believers, saying, 'Do you see this King Wonderful Adornment who stands before me with his palms pressed together? In the midst of my Law this king will become a monk, diligently practicing the Law that aids the Buddha way. He will be able to

²³⁷ The king, queen and princes with their ministers and attendants all came to that Buddha. Then the Buddha expounded the Dharma of the Lotus Sutra to them and showed them the way, taught them, benefited them and caused them to rejoice. The king and queen took off their necklaces of pearls worth hundreds of thousands, and gave the necklaces to the Buddha in appreciation.

become a Buddha. His name will be Sal Tree King, his land will be called Great Light, and his kalpa will be called Great Lofty King.²³⁸ This Buddha Sal Tree King will have an immeasurable multitude of bodhisattvas, as well as immeasurable voice-hearers. His land will be level and smooth. Such will be his benefits.'

"The king immediately turned his kingdom to his younger brother and he himself, along with his queen, his two sons, and all their attendants, in the midst of the Buddha's Law renounced the household life to practice the way.

"After the king had left the household life, for the space of eighty-four thousand years he constantly applied himself with diligence, practicing the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law. When his period had passed, he gained the samadhi of the adornment of all pure benefits. Rising into the air to the height of seven tala trees, he addressed the Buddha saying: 'World-Honored One, these two sons of mine have carried out the Buddha's work, employing transcendental powers and transformations to turn my mind away from heresies, enabling me to abide safely in the Buddha's Law, and permitting me to see the World-Honored One.'²³⁹ These two sons have been good friends to me. They wished to awaken the good roots from my past existences and to enrich and benefit me, and for that reason they were born into my household.'

"At that time the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom said to King Wonderful Adornment, 'Just so, just so. It is as you have said. If good men and good women have planted good roots, and as a result in existence after existence have been able to gain good friends, then these good friends can do the Buddha's work, teaching, benefiting, delighting, and enabling them to enter anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Great king, you should understand that a good friend is the great cause and condition by which one is guided and led, and which enables one to see the Buddha and to conceive the desire for anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Great king, do you see these two sons? These two sons have

²³⁸ Cloud-Thunderpeal-Star-King-Flower-Wisdom Buddha said to the congregation that King Wonderful-Adornment will become a Buddha after strenuous study and practice and will be called Sala-Tree-King Buddha.

We must know why the Cloud-Thunderpeal-Star-King-Flower-Wisdom Buddha gives assurances to the king that he will become a Buddha before his sons and wife who have practiced Buddhism much longer than the king. I think it is because when a leader becomes a Buddhist, his followers are influenced by the leader and easily become Buddhists. Therefore, Nichiren Shonin tried to convert authorities of the Kamakura Government in Kamakura, and his grand-disciple, Nichizo, tried to convert Royal families in Kyoto. It is very important for a leader of any group to practice righteousness; otherwise, others will copy their leader's wrong doing.

²³⁹ This king is great because it is hard for adults to say their children are their teacher. We often tend to say, "I did it," when something good happens, while we tend to blame others when something wrong happens. However, this king realized that his sons caused him to dwell in Buddha Dharma and they were born in his family in order to lead him to Buddha's teachings. "These two sons of mine are my teachers." The original term for the teacher in this case uses "zenchishiki" in the Chinese version. Zenchishiki literally means good knowledge. It is a person who helps in conversion or religious progress. Nichiren Shonin used the term for those who gave him persecutions, especially the Shogunate of the Kamakura Government. Sakyamuni Buddha used the term for Devadatta who tried to kill the Buddha in this life; however, in their previous lives, Devadatta caused the Buddha to have loving-kindness, compassion, joy and impartiality, so Devadatta was Buddha's zenchishiki.

already offered alms to Buddhas equal in number to the sands of sixty-Five Hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million nayutas of Ganges, have drawn near to them with reverence, and in the presence of those Buddhas have accepted and upheld the Lotus Sutra, thinking with compassion of living beings who embrace heretical views and causing them to abide in correct views.'

"King Wonderful Adornment then descended from midair and said to the Buddha, 'World-Honored One, the Thus Come One is a very rare being! Because of his benefits and wisdom, the knob of flesh on the top of his head illuminates all with bright light. His eyes are long, broad, and dark blue in color. The tuft of hair in between his eyebrows, one of his features, is white as a crystal moon. His teeth are white, even, closely spaced, and constantly have a bright gleam. His lips are red and beautiful as the bimba fruit.'

"At that time King Wonderful Adornment, having praised the Buddha's immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of benefits in this manner, in the presence of the Thus Come One single-mindedly pressed his palms together and addressed the Buddha once more, saying 'World-Honored One, such a thing as this has never been known before! The law of the Thus Come One is fully endowed with inconceivably subtle and wonderful benefits. Where his teachings and precepts are observed there will be tranquility and good feeling. From this day on I will give way to heretical views or to arrogance, anger, or other evil states of mind.'

"When he had spoken these words, he bowed to the Buddha and departed."

The Buddha said to the great assembly: "What is your opinion? Is this King Wonderful Adornment someone unknown to you? In fact he is none other than the present Bodhisattva Flower Virtue. And his queen Pure Virtue is Bodhisattva Light Shining Adornment Marks who is now in the Buddha's presence. Out of pity and compassion for King Wonderful Adornment and his attendants, he was born in their midst. The king's sons are the present bodhisattvas Medicine King and Medicine Superior.²⁴⁰

"These bodhisattvas Medicine King and Medicine Superior have already succeeded in acquiring great benefits such as these, and in the presence of immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas have planted numerous roots of virtue and acquired inconceivably good benefits. If there are persons who are acquainted with the names of these two bodhisattvas, the heavenly and human beings of all the world will surely do obeisance to them."

²⁴⁰ The Lotus Sutra is the teachings of the past, present and future. In previous lives we might have had a relationship or "en" with the Lotus Sutra, and we are practicing it together now, and then we will attain Buddhahood in the future. All of us here today might have the "en" with the Lotus Sutra now and in our previous lives, and we may attain Buddhahood together in the future.

When the Buddha preached this chapter on the Former Affairs of King Wonderful Adornment, eighty-four thousand persons removed themselves from dust and defilement and with respect to the various phenomena attained the pure Dharma eye.

Chapter Twenty-eight: The Encouragement of Bodhisattva Universally Worthy

SUMMARY

Universal-Sage Bodhisattva had been watching and listening to the Buddha Sakyamuni preaching the Lotus Sutra at Mount Sacred Eagle. He wanted to talk to the Buddha directly, so he came from his remote world in the east with his hundreds and thousands of bodhisattvas and asked the Buddha how to obtain the teachings of the Lotus Sutra after his death. The Buddha told him that people need to do four things in order to obtain the sutra in the latter eras. This chapter is like a review and conclusion of the Lotus Sutra.

TEXT TRANSLATION

At that time Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, famed for his freely exercised transcendental powers, dignity and virtue, in company with great bodhisattvas in immeasurable, boundless, indescribable numbers, arrived from the east.²⁴¹ The lands that he passed through one and all quaked and trembled, jeweled lotus flowers rained down, and immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of different kinds of music played. In addition, numberless heavenly beings, dragons yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings surrounded him in a great assembly, each displaying his dignity, virtue, and transcendental powers.

When [Bodhisattva Universal Worthy] arrived in the midst of Mount Gridhrakuta in the saha world, he bowed his head to the ground in obeisance to Shakyamuni Buddha, circled around him to the right seven times, and said to the Buddha: *World-Honored One, when I was in the land of the Buddha King Above Jeweled Dignity and Virtue, from far away I heard the Lotus Sutra being preached in this saha world. In company with this multitude of immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas I have come to listen to and accept it. I beg that the World-Honored One will preach it for us. And good men and good women in the time after the Thus Come One has entered extinction--how will they be able to acquire this Lotus Sutra?*²⁴²

²⁴¹ Universal-Sage Bodhisattva came to this Saha World to hear and receive the Lotus Sutra. He has never appeared in the previous chapters; however, this bodhisattva and Manjusri Bodhisattva are two bystanders Sakyamuni Buddha. Manjusri has been at Sacred Eagle Mountain from the very beginning to listen to the Buddha reveal the Lotus Sutra. Universal-Sage is good at theory while Manjusri is good at wisdom. Universal-Sage sits on Buddha's right hand side and Manjusri on his left side. Facing the Mandala Gohonzon, the name of Universal-Sage appears on the left side of the "Ho" of "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," and Manjusri on the right.

Why did Universal-Sage Bodhisattva come from a remote, distant world to listen to the Lotus Sutra? It signifies that the sutra is not only for the people on earth but also for all living beings in all universes.

²⁴² Universal-Sage Bodhisattva asked the Buddha, "How can the people after Buddha's death hear and understand the spirit of the Lotus Sutra?"

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Universal Worthy: "If good men and good women will fulfill four conditions in the time after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, then they will be able to acquire this Lotus Sutra."²⁴³ First, they must be protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas. Second, they must plant the roots of virtue. Third, they must enter the stage where they are sure of reaching enlightenment. Fourth, they must conceive a determination to save all living beings. If good men and good women fulfill these four conditions, then after the Thus Come One has entered extinction they will be certain to acquire this sutra."

At that time Bodhisattva Universal Worthy said to the Buddha: "*World-Honored One, in the evil and corrupt age of the last five-hundred-year period, if there is someone who accepts and upholds this sutra, I will guard and protect him, free him from decline and harm, see that he attains peace and tranquility, and make certain that no one can spy out and take advantage of his shortcomings, no devil, devil's son, devil's daughter, devil's minion, or one possessed by the devil, no yaksha, raksasa, kumbhanda, pishacha, kritiya, putana, vetada, or other being that torments humans will be able to take advantage of him.*"²⁴⁴

"Whether that person is walking or standing, if he reads and recites this sutra, then at that time I will mount my six-tusked kingly white elephant and with my multitude of great bodhisattvas will proceed to where he is. I will manifest myself, offer alms, guard and protect

²⁴³ Buddha Sakyamuni's answer to Universal-Sage Bodhisattva is that there are four things to do, as follows:

We must believe that the Buddhas and deities are always protecting us. This is because of Buddha's compassion.

We must practice virtuous behavior and do good deeds by stealth. This means we must do good deeds even though nobody watches or recognizes us. Buddhas are always watching us.

We must have strong faith. If we have strong faith, we will not waver in our minds even if someone threatens our lives like Nichiren Daishonin was threatened.

We must try to save all living beings in righteousness including all animals, plants and environments.

If we keep up these four practices, we will be able to attain Buddhahood after the death of Sakyamuni Buddha. When we can trust ourselves that "we can be Buddhas," we will be able to obtain the Lotus Sutra. The Eternal Buddha always protects us wherever we are, so we can do good even though nobody is watching. Because we believe that, we will have steady faith and try to help others and save all living beings.

²⁴⁴ Universal-Sage Bodhisattva promised the Buddha that he would protect people who practiced the Lotus Sutra especially in the Mappo Era. There are three different eras after the death of Sakyamuni Buddha. They are Shobo, Zobo and Mappo Eras. The Shobo era is divided into two: the first Five Hundred years and the second Five Hundred years after the Buddha's death. It is the period of the righteous law when Buddhist doctrines, practices, and enlightenment all exist. Zobo is also divided into two: the third Five Hundred years and the fourth Five Hundred years after the Buddha's death. Zobo is the period of the imitative law when both doctrine and practices still exist, but there is no longer any enlightenment. That is why it is called imitation law. Mappo is always regarded as lasting ten thousand years after the first two periods have ended. It is the period when doctrine alone is alive, but there is neither practice nor enlightenment. Therefore "the later Five Hundred years after your extinction" means in the era of Mappo, which we live in now.

Until recently when archaeologists excavated many Buddhist monuments, Buddhists thought that the Mappo era started in 1052; therefore, in the years just before and those after 1052, people wished to be born in the Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land in the west because it was said that there was no salvation on the earth, so that the Nembutsu Sects flourished rapidly.

On the contrary, the books of the Lotus Sutra and images of Sakyamuni Buddha were destroyed throughout Japan.

When St. Nichiren was exiled to Izu Peninsula, he received a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha from Lord Izu in appreciation to Nichiren who cured his illness. The statue was given to the lord from a fisherman who caught it in his fish net together with fish from the ocean.

Because of this kind of era, Universal-Sage Bodhisattva promised to protect those who keep the Lotus Sutra.

him, and bring comfort to his mind. I will do this because I too want to offer alms to the Lotus Sutra. If when that person is seated he ponders this sutra, at that time too I will mount my kingly white elephant and manifest myself in his presence. If that person should forget a single phrase or verse of the Lotus Sutra, I will prompt him and join him in reading and reciting so that he will gain understanding. At that time the person who accepts, upholds, reads and recites the Lotus Sutra will be able to see my body, will be filled with great joy, and will apply himself with greater diligence than ever. Because he has seen me, he will immediately acquire samadhis and dharanis. These are called the repetition dharani, the hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million repetition dharani, and the Dharma sound expedient dharani. He will acquire dharanis such as these.

*"World-Honored One, in that later time, in the evil and corrupt age of the last five-hundred-year period, if monks, nuns, laymen believers or laywomen believers who seek out, accept, uphold, read, recite, and transcribe this Lotus Sutra should wish to practice it, they should do so diligently and with a single mind for a period of twenty-one days. When the twenty-one days have been fulfilled, I will mount my six-tusked white elephant and, with immeasurable numbers of bodhisattvas surrounding me and with this body that all living beings delight to see, I will manifest myself in the presence of the person and preach the Law for him, bringing him instruction, benefit, and joy. I will also give him dharani spells. And because he has acquired these spells, no nonhuman being will be able to injure him and he cannot be confused or lead astray by women. I too will personally guard him at all times. Therefore, World-Honored One, I hope you will permit me to pronounce these dharanis." Then in the presence of the Buddha he pronounced these spells:*²⁴⁵

*adande dandapati dandavarte dandakushale dandasudhare
sudhare sudharapati buddhapashyane sarvadharaṇi-avartani
sarvadharaṇyavartani su-avartani saṃghaparikṣhani
saṃghanarḡhatani asaṃge saṃgapaḡate tri-adhvasaṃgātulya-
arate-prapty savasaṃgasamatikrante sarvadharmasuparikṣhite
sarvasattvarutakaushalyaṇugate simhavikridite*

"World-Honored One, if any bodhisattva is able to hear these dharanis, he should understand that it is due to the transcendental powers of Universal Worthy. If when the Lotus Sutra is propagated throughout Jambudvīpa there are those who accept and uphold it, they should think to themselves: This is all due to the authority and supernatural power of Universal Worthy! If there are those who accept this sutra, memorize it correctly, understand its principles, and practice it as the sutra prescribes, these persons should know that they are carrying out the practices of Universal Worthy himself. In the presence of immeasurable,

²⁴⁵ The Bodhisattva gave 20 spells for the sake of those who practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra: "Atandai, tanda-hatai, tanda-kusharei, tanda-shudarei, shudarei, shudara-hachi, botsuda-hasennei, ..."

boundless members of Buddhas they will have planted good roots deep in the ground, and the hands of the Thus Come Ones will pat them on the head.

"If they do no more than copy the sutra, when their lives come to an end they will be reborn in the Trayastrimsha heaven. At that time eighty-four thousand heavenly women, performing all kinds of music, will come to greet them. Such persons will put on crowns made of seven treasures amidst the ladies-in-waiting will amuse and enjoy themselves. How much more so, then, if they accept, uphold, read and recite the sutra, memorize it correctly, understand its principles, when the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousand Buddhas, who will free them from all fear and keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence. Immediately they will proceed to the Tushita heaven, to the place of Bodhisattva Maitreya. Bodhisattva Maitreya possesses the thirty-two features and is surrounded by a multitude of great bodhisattvas. He has hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of heavenly women attendants, and these persons will be reborn in their midst. Such will be the benefits and advantages they enjoy.

"Therefore persons of wisdom should single-mindedly copy the sutra themselves, or cause others to copy it, should accept, uphold, read, and recite it, memorize it correctly and practice it as the sutra prescribes. "World-Honored One, I now therefore employ my transcendental powers to guard and protect this sutra. And after the Thus Come One had entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end."

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha spoke these words of praise: "Excellent, excellent, Universal Worthy! You are able to guard and assist this sutra and cause many living beings to gain peace and happiness and advantages. You have already acquired inconceivable benefits and profound great pity and compassion. Since long ages in the past you have shown a desire for anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and have taken a vow to use your transcendental powers to guard and protect this sutra. And I will employ my transcendental powers to guard and protect those who can accept and uphold the name of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

"Universal Worthy, if there are those who accept, uphold, read and recite this Lotus Sutra, memorize it correctly, practice and transcribe it, you should know that such persons have seen Shakyamuni Buddha. It is as though they heard his sutra from the Buddha's mouth. You should know that such persons have offered alms to Shakyamuni Buddha. You should know that such persons have been patted on the head by Shakyamuni Buddha. You should know that such persons have been covered in the robes of Shakyamuni Buddha.

"They will no longer be greedy for or attached to worldly pleasures, they will have no taste for the scriptures or jottings of the non-Buddhists. They will take no pleasure in associating with such people, or with those engaged in evil occupations such as butchers,

raisers of pigs sheep, chickens or dogs, hunters, or those who offer women's charms for sale. These persons will be honest and upright in mind and intent, correct in memory, and will possess the power of merit and virtue. They will not be troubled by the three poisons, nor will they be troubled by jealousy, self-importance, ill-founded conceit, or arrogance. These persons will have few desires, will be easily satisfied, and will know how to carry out the practices of Universal Worthy.

"Universal Worthy, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period, if you see someone who accepts, upholds reads, and recites the Lotus Sutra, you should think to yourself: Before long this person will proceed to the place of practice, conquer the devil hosts, and attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. He will turn the wheel of the Dharma, beat the Dharma drum, and sound the Dharma conch, and rain down the Dharma rain. He is worthy to sit in the lion seat of the Dharma, amid the great assembly of heavenly and human beings.

"Universal Worthy, in later ages if there are those who accept, uphold, read, and recite this sutra, such persons will no longer be greedy for or attached to clothing, bedding, food and drink, or other necessities of daily life. Their wishes will not be in vain, and in this present existence they will gain the reward of good fortune. If there is anyone who disparages or makes light of them, saying, 'You are mere idiots! It is useless to carry out these practices--in the end they will gain you nothing!', then as punishment for his offense that person will be born eyeless in existence after existence. But if there is anyone who offers alms to them and praises them, then in this present existence he will have manifest reward for it.

"If anyone sees a person who accepts and upholds this sutra and tries to expose the faults or evils of that person, whether what he speaks is true or not, he will in his present existence be afflicted with white leprosy. If anyone disparages or laughs at that person, then in existence after existence he will have teeth that are missing or spaced far apart, ugly lips, a flat nose, hands and feet that are gnarled or deformed, and eyes that are squinty. His body will have a foul odor, with evil sores that run pus and blood, and he will suffer from water in the belly, shortness of breath, and other severe and malignant illnesses. Therefore, Universal Worthy, 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." ²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ It is our belief that we who chant the Odaimoku, will die peacefully and a thousand Buddhas will come to us, hold our hands and lead us to the Tusita Heaven where Maitreya Bodhisattva is waiting to be the next Buddha on this earth. We will be born again together with that Buddha.

Nichiren Daishonin also promised that there is nothing to be afraid of in dying. He gave a reply letter to Lord Matsuno as follows: "So continue your chanting of 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo' until your death. It is interesting to climb the mountain of the Wonderful Enlightenment and look around. There, the sky and earth is the Land of Tranquil Light. The earth is layered with rubies, and streets are marked with golden ropes. Four kinds of flowers, such as Mandara and Manjushage, fall from heaven, beautiful music is heard in the air, and the wind of the Four Virtue Paramitas- Eternity, Bliss, Self-reliance, and Purity - are blowing gently. There, all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are living joyful lives. We will soon join their company and enjoy heavenly lives. It is impossible to go to such a great place with weak faith.

When this chapter on the Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy was preached, bodhisattvas immeasurable and boundless as Ganges sands acquired dharanis allowing them to memorize a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million repetitions of the teachings, and bodhisattvas equal to the dust particles of the thousand-million-fold world perfected the way of Universal Worthy.

When the Buddha preached this sutra, Universal Worthy and the other bodhisattvas, Sâriputra and the other voice-hearers, along with the heavenly beings, dragons, humans and nonhuman beings--the entire membership of the great assembly were all filled with great joy. Accepting and upholding the words of the Buddha, they bowed in obeisance and departed.

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