Chapter 1
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.

EXPLANATIONS

* NOTE: Page number and line references are to Senchu Murano's translation of the Lotus Sutra.

THUS have I heard *(P.1, L.1)

All 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.

The Buddha (P.1, L.1)

There 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.

Mt. Gradharkuta (P.1, L.1)

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

City of King-House (P.1, L.2)

Present Rajgir, Behar, India

double thousand great bhiksus (P.1, L.2)

Hindu 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 ...

Arhats (P.1, L.3)

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 awaken from illusions, they do not know how to lead others to the supreme teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Maha-(Kasyapa, Katyayana, Kausthila) (P.1, LL.7 - 9)

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

Nanda (P.1, L.10) = Sakyamuni Buddha's half younger brother

Ananda (P.1, L.11) = Sakyamuni Buddha's cousin

Rahula (P.1, L.11) = Sakyamuni Buddha's son

Maha-Prajapati Bhiksuni (P.1, L.14) = Sakyamuni Buddha's adoptive mother

Yasodhara Bhiksuni (P.1, L.15) = Sakyamuni Buddha's wife

Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi (P.1, L.18) = Buddha's Wisdom

Wheel of Dharma (P.1, L.19)

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.

The Other Shore (P.2, L.5)

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).

The following are the names of the representative groups who gathered to listen the Lotus Sutra:

Bodhisattva (P.2, L.8)

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

gods

gods (P.2, L.17)

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.

dragon-kings (P.2, L.25)

All beings living in the oceans, rivers and water; such as fish.

kimnara-kings (P.2, L.30)

Practitioners of Dharma

gandharva-kings (P.2, L.33)
Musicians who serve the protective gods asura-kings (P.3, L.3). Demons who fly in the sky and harm human beings. Even demons adore the teachings of the Buddha.

**garuda-king** (P.3, L.6)

All beings who fly in sky like birds

**King Ajatasatru** (P.3, L.9)

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

**worshipped the feet of the Buddha** (P.3, L.11)

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.

**the four kind of devotees** (P.3, L.12)

They are bhiksus (priests), bhiksunis (nuns), upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (lay-women)

**the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows...** (P.3, L.30)

"Why is he displaying such a ray of light from his forehead?" thought Maitreya Bodhisattva.

"I think that the Buddha ... wishes to expound a great teaching ... ," Manjusri Bodhisattva answered. (P.13, L.15)

"In my previous existence, I saw the same good omen as this." (P.13, L.20)

"Therefore , I think that Tathagata of today also will expound the sutra of the Great Vehicle called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma." (P.16, L. 28)

**THE TEN EPITHETS OF THE BUDDHA** (P.13, L.L.28-32)

1. **Tathagata**: one who has come from the world of truth.
2. *Deserver of Offerings*: one who deserves oblations.


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

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


7. *Unsurpassed Man*: one who is not unsurpassed by anyone.

8. *Instructor of Men*: one who trains or instructs men.


10. *World-Honed One*: one who is honored by the people of the world.

**THE THREE VEHICLES**

1. **Sravakahood (Sho-mon)** (P.14, L.3): in which one understands Buddhism by listening, or one who understands Buddhism by reasoning.

2. **Pratyekabuddhahood (En-gaku)** (P.14, L.6): in which one understands Buddhism by oneself or one who can apply Buddhism in daily life.

3. **Bodhisattvas (Bo-satsu)** (P.14, L.9): in which one who seeks Enlightenment and tries to help others to attain Buddhahood.

**THE FOUR (NOBLE) TRUTHS** (P.14, L.4):

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**.

(More detail will be explained in Chapter 3.)

**TWELVE CAUSES** (P.14, L.7)

(the Twelve-linked chain of dependent origination):

1. Ignorance (moo-**my**),
2. Action (go),
3. Consciousness (shake),
4. Mental functions and matter (my-shake),
5. the Six senses (rook-nigh),
6. Contact (soak),
7. Perception (dg),
8. Desire (AI),
9. Attachment (Hs),
10. Existence (u),
11. Birth (Hs), and
12. Old age and death (ro-shi).

(More details will be explained in Chapter 7.)

**Six Paramitas** (P.14, L.9):

The six kinds of practice by which Bodhisattvas are able to attain Enlightenment.

1. Donation (fuse)
2. Keeping Precepts (*ji-kai*)
3. Perseverance (*nin-niku*)
4. Endeavor (*Sho-jin*)
5. Meditation (*zen-jo*)
6. Wisdom (*Chi-e*)

- *Namu Myohorengekyo* -
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.

Explanations

samadhi (P.23, L.2):

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.

The wisdom of the Buddhas (P.23, L.3):
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.

**Dharma according to the capacities of all living beings (P.23, L.12):**

The Buddha always expounds teachings according to the capacity of understanding of the listeners.

**Innumerable expedients (P.23, L.18):**

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.

**Paramita (P.23, L.20):**

Refers to crossing this shore of birth and death to the other shore of Nirvana.

**The paramita of insight (P.23, L.20):**

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

**The reality of all things (P.24, L.7):**

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.

**The Ten Suchnesses (P.24, LL.8-12):**

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 reflect 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 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. "Nyoze-riki" means "such a potential power," while Nyoze-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 "Nyoze-in" and environmental causes or "Nyoze-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, "Nyoze-ka" and food will be cooked, that is "Nyoze-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 "Nyoze 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. Please try to apply the teaching of these suchnesses in your daily life.

**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 Tien-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 these 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.

The Ceremony of the "Three Denials and Three Requests":

At the beginning of Chapter two, Sakyamuni Buddha said that He would not talk any more about the highest truth attained by the Buddhas because it is too hard for non-Buddhas to understand. However, Sâriputra, the wisest amongst
Sakyamuni Buddha’s disciples, insisted upon hearing the Dharma and three times requested the Buddha to reveal the Lotus Sutra.

**Sakyamuni’s First Denial:** "No more, Śāriputra, will I say because the Dharma attained by the Buddha is the highest Truth, rare to hear and difficult to understand." (P.24, L.4)

**Śāriputra’s First Request:** "Explain all this! Why do you extol so enthusiastically the Dharma?” (P.28, L.4)

**The Second Denial:** "No, no, I will not. If I do, all the gods and men in the world will be frightened and perplexed.” (P.29, L.17) **The Second Request:** "Explain it, explain it!” (P.29, L.25) **The Third Denial:** "No. If I do, all the gods, men and asuras in the world will be frightened and perplexed and arrogant bhiksus will fall into a great pit.” (P.30, L.4)

**The Third Request:** "World-Honored One! Expound the Dharma, expound the Dharma!” (P.30, L.18)

Thus, Śāriputra convinced the Buddha to expound the highest Truth:

"You asked me three times with enthusiasm. How can I leave the Dharma not expounded?” (P.31, L. 8)

**5,000 Arrogant People Retire**

At that moment, 5,000 arrogant people who thought that they had already understood the highest Truth left the site:

"Five thousand people among the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, and upasikas of this congregation rose from their seats, bowed to the Buddha, and retired because they were so sinful and arrogant that they thought they had already obtained what they had not yet, and that they had already understood what they had not yet.” (P.31, L.11)

Sakyamuni Buddha shows his infinite patience and compassion toward these arrogant people. We should always remain humble when encountering the Buddha’s teachings and we should always seek the higher teachings of the Buddha.

**The Coming of the Buddha (P.32, L. - 11):**

After the ceremony of “The Three Denials and the Three Requests, the Buddha expounded the doctrine of the One Great Purpose of the Buddhas’ Appearance in this World. It is our task to open the gate of the insight of the Buddha, to purify ourselves, to obtain the insight of the Buddha and to enter the way into the insight of the Buddha. There is a unique reason why each and every one of
us was born and live today. Consequently, we all have different roles in this world with special tasks to accomplish. If we realize our own unique purpose in life, every day will become very meaningful.

The Insight of the Buddha (P.32, L.4):

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 for ever. 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 can not exist without food, water, air. We cannot be born without parents. You can not 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!"

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.

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." (P.32, LL. 16-18)

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, Sâriputra! There is not a second vehicle in the worlds of the ten quarters. How can there be a third?” (P.33, LL. 14-18)

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." (P.33, LL. 23-26)

"I expounded the teaching of the Three Vehicles only as an expedient." (P.39, LL.5-6)

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."

EXPLANATIONS:

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." (P.37, LL.24-27)

**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. (See more detail on PP. 40-42 of The Lotus Sutra translated by Senchu Murano.)

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."

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 3
A 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.

Explanations

"Assurance of their future Buddhahood"
(P.51, L.9):

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 other to the truth.

"I am your son. I was born from you mouth."
(P.51, the bottom line):

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.
"Under two billion Buddhas in the past, I always taught you in order to attain unsurpassed enlightenment." (P.55, L.17)

The concept of the Eternal Buddha, which is revealed in Chapter 16, is already shown in this chapter of the Lotus Sutra. More details will be discussed in Chapter 16.

The Three Lives of Sariputra

His Past life: "Under two billion Buddhas in the past, I always taught you in order to attain unsurpassed enlightenment. You studied under me."
(P.55, LL.17-20)

His Present Life: "Therefore, You have your present life under me.... You have forgotten all this.... In order to cause you to remember the way you practiced under your original vow, I now expound to the Sravakas this sutra." (P.55, LL.20-26)

His Future Life: "After countless, inconceivable number of kalpas from now, you will be able to make offerings to many thousands of billions of Buddhas, to keep their right teachings, to practice the way which Bodhisattvas should praise, and to become a Buddha called Flower-Light." (P.55, L.29 - P.56, L.3)

Gotama Siddhartha was born in India and became a Buddha of the Sakya Clan. He preached truth and expedients for over 40 years. However in reality, he had been a Buddha for countless kalpas. Sariputra was one of the disciples of the Buddha in past, and vowed to attain Buddhahood at that time. He was born again during the same era of Buddha Sakyamuni but had forgotten about his own past life. With his continuous practices of the way of Bodhisattva, he will be able to become a Buddha called Flower-Light.

This story is not applicable only to Sariputra, but also for ourselves. We may have heard the Buddha's preaching or Nichiren Shonin's Odaimoku during our past lives.

"The original vow" (P.55, L.25):

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.

"The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma" (P.55, L.27):

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 Myoho Renge Kyo," 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.

"You will be able to make offerings to many thousands of billions of Buddhas" (P.55, L.30):

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.

"Offerings" (P.55, L.30)
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.

(Please read Chapter 2 or PP. 40 - 42 of the *Lotus Sutra* for more detailed information regarding the offerings.)

"Those Bodhisattvas have not just begun to aspire for enlightenment. Long ago they have already planted the roots of virtue...” (P. 56, L.25-L.29)

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.

"The Teaching of the Four Truths" (P.59, L.16)

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.

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.

**THE PARABLE OF THE THREE CARTS AND THE BURNING HOUSE**

(P.61, L.2 - P.63, L.21)

A long time ago, a rich man lived in a village. His wealth was immeasurable. He possessed many paddy fields, houses and servants. His manor was large, but it had only one gate. In that house lived several hundred people. The building was in decay, the fences and walls were falling apart, the bases of the pillars were rotten, and the beams and ridgepoles were tilted and slanted.

All of a sudden, a fire broke out and spread all throughout the manor. In this house lived many children of the rich man. He was very frightened at the great fires and thought, "I am able to get out of the burning house safely, but my children are still inside. They are engrossed in playing. They do not know that the fire is coming towards them. They are not frightened or afraid. They do not realize what fire is."

"This house has only one gate. Worse still, the gate is narrow and small. My children are too young to know this. They are attached to the place where they are playing. They may get burned. I had better tell them of the danger. They must come out quickly, so as not to be burned to death."

"Come out quickly!" He warned them with good words of compassion, but they were too engrossed in playing to hear the words of their father. They did not wish to come out. They ran about happily. They only glanced at their father occasionally. If they and I do not get out at once, we shall be burned. I must save them from this danger with an expedient.

He said to them, "The toys you wish to have are outside the gate. There are sheep-carts, deer-carts and bull-carts. You can play with them. Come out of this burning house at once!"

The children rushed quickly out of the burning house, pushing one another, and as each child strives to be first. The rich man, who saw them had come out safely, was relieved and danced with joy. They said to their father, "Father! Give us the toys! Give us the sheep, deer and bull carts you promised us!"

Then the rich man gave each of them a LARGE WHITE OX-CART of the same size. The cart was tall, wide and deep, adorned with many treasures, and had bells hanging on the four sides. This great man gave one of these carts to each of his children because his wealth was so immeasurable that his various store houses were full of treasures.
The children rode in the large carts, overjoyed as they had never before, experienced riding in carts such as these, and had never expected to receive such a luxurious gift.

EXPLANATIONS:

1. *The burning house*: Signifies that this world is filled with sufferings.


3. *The fire*: Signifies that death comes equally to the rich, poor, wise and fool.

4. *The one narrow gate*: Signifies the salvation is not an easy task.

5. *The children rushed out*: You must do it by yourself. Religion is a realm of personal experience.

6. *The sheep cart*: Denotes the *shomon* vehicle.

   *The deer cart*: Denotes the *engaku* vehicle.

   *The bull cart*: Denotes Bodhisattva vehicle.

7. *The large bull cart*: Denotes the One-Buddha vehicle, the Lotus Sutra.


This parable explains that Buddhism is a teaching for us that allows us to eliminate unhappiness and enjoy happiness. True happiness is joyful to help other and to give happiness to others. This is the practice of the One-Buddha Vehicle.

"The triple world is not peaceful. It is like the burning house. It is full of suffering. It is dreadful." (P.75, L.17)

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.

"There are always the suffering of birth, old age, disease and death. They are like flames raging endlessly." (P.75, L.21-L.24)

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."

The Three Virtues of the Buddha

According to St. Nichiren, the Eternal Buddha Sâkyamuni possesses the three virtues of master, teacher, and parent. In the gatha of "A Parable," they are clearly identified.

"This triple world is my property" (P.75, Last two lines)

The Buddha is the master whom we should obey.

"All living beings therein are my children." (P.76, L.1)

The Buddha is our parent whose concern for us is boundless.

"Only I can save all living beings." (P.76, L.5)
The Buddha is our teacher whose words we should study.

Nichiren Shonin explains the abstract Eternal Buddha closer to us; the Buddha as our master, parent, and teacher. It is necessary for leaders to have these three virtues. Parents must also possesses and maintain these virtues for their children so as priests must, too.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 4
Understanding by Faith

SUMMARIES

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."

Explanations

"Exposed their right shoulders" (P.88, L.9):

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.

"Joined their hands together with all their hearts" (P.88, L.10):

In Nichiren Shu, we put our palms together in gassho and chant the Odaimoku or the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, "Namu Myôhô Renge Kyô." "Namu" means Devotion, Love, Trust and Hope. Therefore when we chant the Odaimoku, we vow to devote ourselves to the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, trust the Eternal Buddha, receive Buddha's love and hope our prayers are answered.

"We have obtained innumerable treasures although we did not seek them." (P.89, L. 7):

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.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND HIS POOR SON (P.89, L.9 - P.92, Last Line):
A poor little boy ran away from his father when he was very young. He lived in another country for many years. He wandered about in all directions, seeking food and clothing. Many years later while wandering here and there, he happened to walk towards his home country.

At that time his father stayed in a city in the countryside. He had been vainly looking for his son ever since first ran away. The father was now very rich. He had innumerable treasures. His storehouses were filled with gold, silver, coral, and crystal. He had many servants, carts, cows, and sheep. He dealt with many merchants and customers.

The poor son happened to come to the city where his father was living. The father had been thinking of his son ever since he had first lost him. He thought, "I am old and decrepit. I have many treasures. But I have no son other than the missing one. When I die, my treasures will be scattered and lost. Therefore, I am always yearning for my son."

At that time the poor son happened to stand by the gate of the wealthy man's house. Seeing the rich man, the poor son was frightened and thought, "Is he a king or someone like a king? This is not the place where I can get some work to get food and clothing easily. If I stay here any longer, I shall be forced to work." He tried to run away.

The rich man recognized him at first sight as his son. He was delighted. He immediately dispatched a man standing beside him to quickly bring back the poor son. The messenger ran up to the poor son and caught him. The poor son was frightened and cried, "I have done nothing wrong. Why do you stopped me?" The messenger pulled him by force. The poor son thought, "I have been arrested though I am not guilty. I shall be killed." Becoming more and more frightened, the poor son fainted and fell to the ground.

Seeing all this in the distance, the father said to the messenger, "I do not want him any more. Do not bring him forcibly! Pour cold water on his face to awaken him!" The father said this because he had realized that his son was too base and mean to meet a noble man. He knew that the man was his son, but expediently refrained from telling others that this was his son.

Waking up, the poor son stood up and went to a village of the poor to get food and clothing. The wealthy man dispatched messengers in secret. He said to two men looking worn-out, powerless and virtuless, "Go and gently tell the poor man that he will be employed here for a double day's pay. If he agrees, bring him here and have him work together with you to clear dirt."

The poor son drew his pay in advance and cleared dirt. Seeing him, the father felt great compassion towards him and took off his necklace, his garment and
other ornaments. He put on tattered and dirty clothing. He approached the workers and said, "Work hard! Do not be lazy!"

Seeing this poor man working hard, the father told him, "Do not hesitate to take the trays, rice, flour, salt and vinegar - as much as you need! Make yourself comfortable."

Years later, the rich man gave the poor man a name and called him son. The son was glad to be treated kindly, but still thought that he was an humble employee.

Still more years passed. After that the father and the son trusted each other. Now the son felt no hesitation in entering the house of his father, but still lodged in his old place.

Now the rich man became ill. After a while the father noticed that his son had become more at ease and peaceful, that he wanted to improve himself, and he felt ashamed of the thought that he was base and mean. As the moment of death for the father drew near, he told his son to call in his relatives, the king, ministers and members of his household. When they were all assembled, he said to them, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is my son, my real son. I am his real father. He ran away from me when I lived in a certain city, and wandered with hardships for more than fifty years. His name is so-and-so. All my treasures are his now."

At that time the poor son was very glad to hear these words of his father. He had the greatest joy that he had ever had. He thought, "I never dreamed of having this store of treasures myself. It has come to me unexpectedly.

EXPLANATIONS:

1. Poor son: Signifies human beings who are poor mentally compared to the Buddha.
2. Home country: Means the great life of the universe.
3. The wealthy man: Denotes the Eternal Buddha, origin of the great life of the universe.
4. He ran away from his father: Signifies our selfish conduct that neglects the great life of the universe.
5. The son happened to come to the house of his father: Means that we unconsciously seek the Eternal Buddha.
6. The poor son was frightened by his powerful father: Denotes that we often afraid to know the truth.
7. A double day's pay: Signifies those who practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra receive more merits than practicing other teachings.
8. He should clear dirt: Means that we must cleanse our dirty minds attached to our own self and materials.
9. **Stay here, work hard, then I will pay you more**: Denotes salvation in a lower stage for salvation in a gradual higher level.

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

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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 5
The Simile of Herbs

SUMMARIES

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.

The PARABLE of MEDICINAL HERBS
(P. 105, 4th Paragraph - P. 106, 2nd Paragraph)

There are various trees and grasses including herbs growing in the thickets, forests, mountains, ravines, and valleys. All these plants are different in size, name and form. They are covered with a dark cloud. Rain starts to fall. The small, middle and large roots, stems, branches, leaves of the trees, and grasses are watered. So were tall and short trees, whether they are big, medium, or small in size. All the plants and trees received more or less the same amount of water from the rain of the same cloud, and grow differently according to their species. They produce different flowers and fruits although they grow on the same ground and receive water from the same rain.

EXPLANATION:

The Buddha is like the cloud. The Buddha appeared in this world just as the large cloud rose in the sky. Although he equally expounded the Dharma to gods, people and all other living beings, they all understand the Buddha's teachings in a different manner, but they are still able to vitalize the teachings depending on their own individual abilities, characters and specialties.

In this world, there are many different races, cultures, customs, and levels of education. The Eternal Buddha accepts the differences and applies different teachings to each individual in order to maximize their understanding. To some, this may sound like discrimination, but in reality, it is true equality and compassion.

"Roots, stems, branches and leaves of the trees and grasses." (P.105, L.23 - L.24)
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. But once you believe in salvation through faith, you can follow the precept easily like chanting Odaimoku everyday in Nichiren Buddhism.

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.

"The small, middle and large..." (P.105, L.23)

In 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.

"(They) were covered with a dark cloud, and then watered by a rainfall at the same time." (P.105, L.21)

"I have no partiality for them, whether they are noble or mean, whether they observe or violate the precepts, whether they live a monastic life or not, whether they have right or wrong views, whether they are cleaver or dull." (P.111, L.22 - L.27)

The 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.

"Having heard these teachings, they became peaceful in their present lives,” (P.106, L.27 - 28)

The 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.
St. Nichiren was exiled to Sado Island. He was placed at Tsukahara Sammaidô surrounded by tombstones covered with snow. He barely had enough food to eat. Although he was surrounded by such miserable circumstance, he proudly exclaimed, "I am the richest man in Japan."

Buddhism is not meant to be a tool to search for material gain, but to seek the truth.

"In their future lives, they will have rebirths in good places." (P.106, L.28 - L.29)

Chapter 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." (P.114, Last two lines)

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

**Message of this chapter:**

We all have different characters and abilities. Let us use our characters and abilities wisely and bloom beautiful flowers individually.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 6
Assurance of Future Buddhahood

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.

Explanations

The Four Assurances:

1. "Maha-Kasyapa will become a Buddha called Light Tathagata." (P.115, LL.5-10)
2. "Subhuti will become a Buddha called Beautiful-Form Tathagata." (P.118, LL.25-29)
3. "Great Katyayana will become a Buddha called Jamabunada Gold Light Tathagata." (P.121, LL.2-13)
4. "Great Maudgalyayana will become a Buddha called Tamalapattracandama Fragrance Tathagata." (P.122, L.26 - P.123, L.4)

What are the conditions to attain Buddhahood?

"They will see thousands and billions of Buddhas, make offerings to them, respect them, honor them, praise them and expound an innumerable number of Buddha’s great teachings in their future lives. (P.115, P.118, P.121, P.122)

Regarding the offerings to thousand and billions of Buddhas, in the later chapters of the Lotus Sutra, practices that are more realistic are revealed.

"Although Mara and his followers also will live there, they will not do any evil but protect the teachings of the Buddha." (P.115, LL.26-28):
These phrases are always quoted when Nichiren-Shu priests do *kito* blessing. 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.

"Suppose a man came from a country suffering from famine. Now he saw the meal of a great king. He did not partake of it in doubts and fears. After he was told to take it by the king, he took it at once." (P.118, LL.3-8)

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.

**Message of this chapter:**

Although the Buddha assures of Buddhahood, we still wish him to call our names individually and to give us the names of the Buddhas. We are quite spoiled children, aren't we?

- Namu Myohoreengekyo -
Chapter 7  
_The Parable of the Magic 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 PARABLE OF THE MAGIC CITY**

(P. 144, 3rd Paragraph - P. 145.)

Once upon a time there was a dangerous, long and bad road. It was so fearful that only one man lived in the vicinity. Now many people wished to pass through this road in order to reach a place of treasures. They were led by a man who was clever, wise, and well informed of the conditions of the dangerous road.
Halfway through their journey, the people got tired of walking and said to the leader, "We are tired out. We are also afraid of the danger on this road. We cannot go a step further. Our destination is still far off. We wish to go back."

The leader, who knew many expedients, thought, "What a pity! They wish to go back without getting great treasures." Having thought this, he expediently made a city appear by magic in the distance. He said to them, "Do not go back! You can stay in that great city, and do anything you like. If you enter that city, you will be peaceful. If you go on afterwards and reach the place of treasures, then you can go home."

Thereupon the worn-out people had great joy. They said, "We have never had such joy as this before. Now we shall be able to get off this bad road and become peaceful." They entered the magic city and felt peaceful.

Seeing that they had already rested and were now relieved from their fatigue, the leader caused the city to disappear and said to them, "Now the place of treasures is near. Let us go further to get the treasures. I made this city by magic in order to enable you to rest."

**EXPLANATION:**

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 travelled 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.

"It is a very long time since. . ." (P.126, L.12.)
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 away before the three thousand dust-atom eons ago. So the Buddha is eternal.

"My power of insight as vividly as if he had passed away today." (P.127, L.4.)

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.

"Before he attained Buddhahood, he sat a the place of enlightenment and defeated the army of Mara. He wished to attain Enlightenment, but he could not." (P.128, L.10.)

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.

"At the end of the period of ten small kalpas, the Dharma of the Buddhas came into the mind of Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha." (P.128, L.31-P.33)

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?

"When the Buddha attained Nirvana, . . .the brilliant rays of light of the sun and the moon by the neighboring worlds were illumined by the great rays of light." (P.131, L.5-L.10)

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.

"My palace has never been illumined so brightly before, Why is that?" (P.131, L.18-P.20.)

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.

"May the merits we have accumulated by this offering, Be distributed among all living beings, And may we and all other living beings, attain the enlightenment of the Buddha!" (P.139, L.24 - L.27)

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."

"Thereupon Tathagata . . . turned the wheel of the teaching of the four truths making twelve proclamations altogether." (P.140, L.9 - L.13.)

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.

For the more detail explanation, please refer back to Chapter 3.
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 word.

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 and 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.

The sixteen princes ... renounced the world and became sramaneras." (P.141, L.11.)

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.

"They had already made offerings to hundreds of thousand of billions of Buddhas, performed brahma practices, and sought Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi in their previous existence." (P.141, L.14.)

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 had practiced the Lotus Sutra in our previous lives, therefore, we are able to meet this sangha again in this present life.

"These sixteen Bodhisattvas willingly expounded the Lotus Sutra. Each of them taught living beings as numerous as there are sands in the River Ganges." (P.142, Last Paragraph.)

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.

Sakyamuni Buddha possesses the three virtues of Sovereign, Teacher and Parent that was revealed in Chapter 3: “This triple world is my property” signifies the Sovereign. ”All living beings therein are my children” signifies the Parent. ”Only I can save all living beings” signifies the Teacher. However, Amida Buddha dwells in the west. He is neither our parent, nor Sovereign. In this Saha world we must take Sakyamuni Buddha as our most honored one because he is our Sovereign, Teacher and Parent.

"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." (P. 152, Last lines.)
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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 8
The Assurance of Future Buddhahood of the Five Hundred Disciples

SUMMARIES

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."

EXPLANATIONS

"Purna was the most excellent expander of the Dharma under the seven Buddhas. He is the same under me. He will be the same under the future Buddhas of this Kalpa of Sages. He will protect the teachings of those Buddhas and help them propagate their teachings." (P.154, LL.20-24)

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.

"He (Purna) will be called Dharma-Brightness, the Tathagata" (P.154, L.32):

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.

"Gods and men will be able to see each other." (P.155, L.9):

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.

"There will be no evil region nor women." (P.155, L.9):

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.

"The living beings of that world will be born without any medium." (P.155, L. 10):

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.

"They will emit light from their bodies." (P.155, L.12):

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.

"They will fly about at will." (P.155, L.13):

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."

"They will feed on two things: the delight in the Dharma, and the delight in dhyana." (P.155, L.15):

The more 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.

"Kaundinya Bhiksu become a Buddha called Universal-Bright Tathagata. ... The Five Hundred arhats become Buddhas also called universal-Brightness." (P. 159, 2nd Paragraph):

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." (P. 160, Last two lines.) 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.

Thereupon the Five Hundred Arhats express their joyfulness with --

►Chapter 8 part II
(Explanation of the Parable in the Jacket)
Chapter 9
The ASSURANCE of FUTURE BUDDHAHOOD of the SRAVAKAS

SUMMARIES

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.

EXPLANATIONS

Ananda is a cousin of Buddha Sakyamuni while Rahula is the son of Buddha Sakyamuni.

King Suddhodana (elder)-------- Siddhartha ------- Rahula

King Kokubon (younger)-------- Devadatta ----- Ananda

"Ananda will become a Buddha called Mountain-Sea-Wisdom-Supernatural-Power-King Tathagata." (P.164, 4th from the bottom-line.):

"Rahula will become a Buddha called Walking-On-Flower-Of-Seven-Treasure Tathagata." (P.167, L.11)

"The two thousand Sravakas will be equally called Treasure-Form Tathagata." (P.168, 5th line from the bottom)

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. **Puruna**, 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


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.

~ Namu Myohorenegyo ~
Chapter 10
The TEACHER of the DHARMA

SUMMARIES

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 Shāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, 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.

EXPLANATIONS

"If after my extinction anyone rejoices, even a moment's thought, at hearing even a gatha or a phrase of the sutra, I also will assure him of his future attainment of Buddhahood." (P.171, L.16 - L.19):

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 assure 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.

"I have expounded many sutras." (P.175, L.24):
All sutras before the **Lotus Sutra** revealed are in this group.

"I am now expounding this sutra." (P.175, L.24):

This phrase refers to the **Lotus Sutra**.

"I also will expound many sutras in the future." (P.175, L.25):

The **Meditation Sutra** and the **Nirvana Sutra** are in this group.

Among all sutras the Buddha Sakyamuni says, "The **Lotus Sutra** is the most excellent and the store of the hidden core of all the Buddhas.

"Many people hate it with jealousy even in my lifetime. Needless to say, more people will do so after my extinction." (P.175, Last line to the next page.):

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.

"You need not enshrine my sariras (ashes - death remnants) in the stupa. Because it (the Sutra) will contain my perfect body." (P.176, L.11.):

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 "Kaikyo-ge," we read, "The letters that compose the sutra are all in all the Buddha in his Manifestation."

"This sutra opens the gate of expedient and reveals the seal of the truth." (P.177, L. 5.):

During a funeral service in Nichiren-Shu, 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.

"They should enter the room of the Tathagata, wear the robe of the Tathagata and sit on the seat of the Tathagata." (P.177, L.18.):

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."
Nichiren Daishonin is a good proof of the Buddha's vow which is revealed in the above sentence.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 11
Beholding the Stupa of Treasures

SUMMARY

There upon 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."

EXPLANATIONS

Many supernatural phenomena are revealed in this chapter. We should not think they are merely superstitions, because all supernatural phenomena in the Lotus Sutra have some meaning. Buddha Sakyamuni tries to expound that the truth transcends time and space.

We intend to judge things through what we have already learned, but Buddha wisdom is too difficult for us to understand with our knowledge only. We must transcend our knowledge and try to understand Buddha wisdom. It is the main reason why people are raised to the sky and stay there. The chapters from 11 through 22 are revealed in the sky.
"Thereupon a stupa of the seven treasures sprang up from underground and hung in the sky." (P.181, L.3):

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.

"Excellent, excellent, You, Sakyamuni have expounded to this great multitude the Lotus Sutra" (P.181, Last Paragraph): You are familiar with this sentence. It is a part of "Yokuryo Shu" in our service books. We often read this paragraph in our daily services. 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.

"Why did this stupa of treasures spring up from underground? Why was that voice heard from within the stupa?" (P.182, L.9):

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 underground in order to hear the Lotus Sutra direct from me. Now he praised me.' (P.182, Last paragraph of the page):

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.
"World Honored One! We wish to see that Buddha." (P.183, L.2.):

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.

"At that instance the Saha World was purified." (P.184, L. 9):

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. Therefore Nichiren Daishonin says, "This place is pure because the teaching is supreme. The person is honored because he expounds the supreme teachings." Thus, when all people on the earth believe in the Lotus Sutra, peace and security will prevail on earth. That is Nichiren Daishonin’s constant wish.

"Now he opened the door of the stupa of the seven treasures with his fingers of his right hand" (P.186, L.28.):

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.

"Thereupon Many-Treasure Buddha in the stupa of treasures offered a half of his seat to Sakyamuni Buddha, saying, 'Please sit here!.'" (P.187, L.5.):

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. In Nichiren Shu, this style of statue is often enshrined as a gohonzon.
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.

"The seat of the Buddhas is too high. Raise us up by your supernatural powers so that we may be able to be with you in the sky." (P.187, L.16.)

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.

"Who will expound the Sutra of the Lotus Sutra in this Saha World? Now is the time to do this. I shall enter into Nirvana before long." (P.187, L.21.)

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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 12
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 his previous existence.

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, braking 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.
EXPLANATIONS

"In my previous existence, I sought the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma." (P.195, L.3.):

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.

"I practiced almsgiving in order to complete the six paramitas." (P.195, L.7.):

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.

"I collected fruits, drew water, gathered firewood, and prepared meals for him. I even allowed my body to be his seat" (P.196, L.2.):

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 practice of Bodhisattvas are useless.

When Kingo Shijo asked advise of his master, Nichiren, about quitting his work and obtaining ordination. Nichiren Shonin told him:

"To serve your master (at work) is the way of Buddhists. Daily lives are nothing but the practice of Buddhism."

"The king at that time was a previous life of myself. The seer at that time was a previous life of Devadatta. Devadatta was my teacher." (P.197, L.10.):
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.

Nichiren Shonin also says that Yoritsuna Hei-no-saemon is my real zen-chishiki. Yoritsuna tried to execute the saint at Tatsu-no-kuchi, Kamakura. Because of the execution, Nichiren realized that he was the rebirth of Jogyo Bodhisattva.

There must be a few people who criticize you bitterly. Can you take the criticism as a good lesson or not? If you can accept the criticizer as good teachers or friends, you can grow spiritually to a higher level. Then they are your zen-chishiki.

"Devadatta will become a Buddha after innumerable kalpas." (P.197, L.23.):

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.

"Repentance is the mysterious medicine which cures illness and the sacred dharma to change one's fate." -- **Prayers of Repentance (sange-mon)**

It is a saying in Japan: "If a person is very bad, he could be very good, too, after repentance." A good example in the Lotus Sutra is Kishimo or Mother of Devil revealed in Chapter 26. I will discuss about her in a later chapter.

In Buddhism there is no absolute bad or good. The doctrine of the One Hundred Stages of One's Mind teaches us that even the Buddha has the mind of hell; therefore, he can understand the people in hell. Even people in hell or a murderer has the stage of mind of a Buddha.

"Good men or women with faithful respect caused by their pure minds, and have no doubts, will not fall into hell. ... They will reborn before the Buddhas of the worlds of the ten quarters. ... When they are reborn before the Buddhas, they will appear in lotus-flowers." (P.198, LL.21-30):

These phrases are often quoted at the end of memorial service prayers.

"Manjusri had sprung up from the palace of Dragon-King Sagara in the great ocean, gone up to the sky and traveled through the sky to Mt. Sacred Eagle." (P.199, L.8.):
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.

"There is a daughter of Dragon-King Sagara among those whom I taught. She is eight years old. She is clever. She knows the karmas of all living beings. She obtained dharanis."

(P.200, L.17.):

Dragon-King Sagara is present together with other dragon-kings in the congregation in Chapter 1. (See P. 2.) 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.

"The body of a woman is too defiled to be a recipient of the teachings of the Buddha. How can she attain unsurpassed Bodhi? … A woman has five impossibilities. She cannot become 1. the Brahman-Heavenly-King, 2. King Sâkra, 3. King Mara, 4. a wheel-turning-holy-king, and 5. a Buddha."

(P.201, L.24.):

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.

"The enlightenment of the Buddha is far off. It can be attained only by those who perform the Bodhisattva practices with strenuous efforts from innumerable kalpas." (P.201, L.26.):

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 Kapilavatthu, 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.

"The Daughter of the dragon-king changed into a man all of a sudden." (P.202, L.12.):

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 brake one of the Hindu custom 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.
Chapter 13
ENCOURAGEMENT for KEEPING this SUTRA

SUMMARIES

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"Gautami! I have already assured all the Sravakas of their future attainment of Buddhahood." (P.204, L.13.):

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.

"The Buddha said to Yasodhara: you will become a Buddha in a good world. The name of that Buddha will be Emitting-Ten-Million-Rays-Of-Light." (P.205, L.6):
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 Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

"You will walk the Way to Buddhahood step by step, and finally become a Buddha" (P.205, L.5):

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.

"World-Honored One! After your extinction, we will go to any place and cause all living beings to copy, keep, read and recite this sutra, to expound the meanings of it, to act according to the Dharma.' (P.206, L.6):

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.

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.'

~ Namu Myohorengekyo ~
Chapter 14
Peaceful Practice

SUMMARIES

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"The Buddha said to Manjusri Bodhisattva, 'A Bodhisattva who wishes to expound this sutra in the evil world after my extinction should practice four sets of things.'" (P.210, L.12):

These four sets are:

- Peaceful practice of the body,
- Peaceful practice of the mouth,
- Peaceful practice of mind, and
- Peaceful practice of vows.
"First, he should perform proper practices, approach proper things, and then expound this sutra." (P.210, L.16.):

There are two practices of the body -- Performing proper practices and Approaching proper people.

Performing proper practices means that the preachers should always practice the virtue of patience, be mild and meek. They should not be rash and timourous. 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.

"The Bodhisattva also should know the following truth. All things are insubstantial. They are as they are. Things are not perverted. They do not move. They do not go. They do not turn. They have nothing substantial just as the sky has not." (P.211, Last Paragraph.):

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.

"Second, Manjusri! A Bodhisattva who wishes to expound this sutra ... should not speak of bad points or the merits or demerits of others." (P. 216, the First Paragraph.)

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."

"Again, Manjusri! A Bodhisattva ... should not nurse jealousy against others or flatter or deceive them." (P.218, L.18.):

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.

"Again, Manjusri! A Bodhisattva ... should have great loving-kindness towards laymen and monks, and great compassion towards those who are not Bodhisattvas." (P.220, L.9.):

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."

"The gods will protect him day and night for the sake of the Dharma so that the hearer may rejoice because this sutra was, is, and will be protected by the supernatural powers of the past, present and future Buddhas." (P.220, L.30.):

"He will not be struck with swords or sticks. He will not be poisoned." (P.224, L.26.):

If we keep the above-mentioned four peaceful practices, gods will protect us day and night. A Nichiren Shu priest who performs Kito blessing always quotes the above sentences after prayers. Nichiren Shonin also wrote this sentence on some of the Mandala Gohonzons.

_Shakubuku-shoju_ are the two opposite attitudes in leading sentient beings: the _aggressive_ and the _persuasive._

_Shakubuku_ is the way to approach opponents for their errors and make them awaken from their illusions.

_Shoju_ is to lead and convince them by respectfully accepting and understanding their viewpoints and situations. But this does not mean compromising truth. Both aspects can be seen harmoniously interrelated depending on the time and the situation of the hearers' level of understanding. The _Lotus Sutra_ reveals both attitudes; Shoju is seen in chapter 14; while Shakubuku, in chapters 13 and 20. Although the two methods seem to be
entirely different, they have the same aim - to save others. In our times, the way of shoju seems more appropriate, but it must be flavored with the spirit of shakubuku, too.

Chapter 14 is the end of the first half of the *Lotus Sutra* that reveals the historical Sakyamuni Buddha as a being bound by limitations of time and space. It is called "Shakumon." The last half of the sutra reveals "Honmon," or the Buddha's eternal nature.

~ Namu Myohorengekyo ~
Chapter 15
The Appearance of Bodhisattvas from Underground

SUMMARIES

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"Thereupon the Bodhisattva-mahasattvas ... who had come from the other worlds, .. said: "If you permit us to protect, keep, read, recite and copy this sutra, and make offerings to it strenuously in this Saha-World after your extinction, we will do so, and expound it in this world.'" (P.228, L.4.):

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 word." (P.228, L.13.):

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."

"The ground of the Saha-world, ... quaked and cracked, and many thousands of billions of Bodhisattva-mahasattvas sprang up from underground simultaneously." (P.228, L.19.):

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. Nichiren Daishonin says: "If you are not a Bodhisattva from underground, you cannot chant the Odaimoku." So you and I are the Bodhisattvas from underground.

"They had lived in the sky below this Saha-World." (P. 228, L.24.):

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.

"Those Bodhisattvas had four leaders: Superior-Practice, Limitless-Practice, Pure-Practice and Steadily-Established-Practice." (P.230, L.3):

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.

"World-Honored One! Are you in good health? Are you peaceful or not? ... Do they not fatigue you?" (P.230, L.9.):
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." (P.230, L.23.):

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 Sakyamuni 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.

"We have never seen these many thousands of billions of Bodhisattvas. Tell me, Most Honorable Biped! Where did they come from? Why did they come?." (P.231, L.24.):

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.

"Wait for a while!" "Sakyamuni Buddha assured Maitreya Bodhisattva of his future attainment of Buddhahood." (P.234, L.22.):

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!

"My words are true. Believe me with all your hearts! I have been teaching them since the remotest past." (P.237, L.7):

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 EXPONDING 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.” (P.237, L.30.):

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.

"They are not defiled by worldliness just as the lotus-flower is not defiled by water.” (P.239, L.2.):

This phrase is one of the most important words in the sutra. Nichiren Shonin took a part of his name, "Ren," from this phrase. Lotus is "ren" or "hasu" in Japanese. Nichiren's follower should at least try to imitate him and not be defiled by worldliness just as the lotus-flower is not defiled by water. The lotus grows from dirty soil under water. The stems, leaves, flowers come out of the dirty water. Even if you pour the dirty water on top of them, the water is pushed away and they are not soiled, because the plant is just like wax. Wax and water do not mix.

"How did you teach these innumerable Bodhisattvas in such a short time, and cause them to aspire for enlightenment and not falter in seeking enlightenment?.” (P.240, Last Paragraph.):

This phrase is the end of this chapter. The historical Buddha Sakyamuni had his body and limitations just as all the congregation gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle.
Without the concept of the Original Eternal Buddha, Buddha's compassion is also limited.

We are just about ready to understand the concept of the Eternal Buddha in the next chapter.

- Namu Myohoreengekyo -
Chapter 16

The Duration of the Life 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.

EXPLANATIONS

"Thereupon the Buddha said to the great multitude including Bodhisattvas and others, 'Good men! Understand my sincere and infallible words by faith!""

(P.241, L.4.):

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.

"Thereupon the World-Honored One, seeing that they repeated their appeal even after they repeated it three times, said to them: 'Listen to me attentively! I will tell you about my hidden core and supernatural power."

(P.241, L.16.):

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." (See PP. 24-31.) 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.

"To tell the truth, it is many hundreds of thousand of billions of nayutas of kalpas since I became the Buddha."

(P.241, L.22.):

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-butsu." On the other hand, "Hom-butsu" is the original and eternal Buddha who became the Buddha many hundreds of thousand of billions of nayutas of kalpas ago.

Shaku-butsu is a manifestation of the Hom-butsu. Hom-butsu 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.

"Suppose someone smashed into dust Five Hundred thousand billion nayuta asamkhya worlds, and sent to the east carrying the dust. When he reached a world at a distance of Five Hundred thousand billion nayuta asamkhya worlds, he put a particle on that world. ... Then he repeated that until the particles of the dust were exhausted." (P. 241, L.22.):

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.

"All this time I have been living in this Saha-World, and teaching by expounding the Dharma to them." (P.242, L.20):

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.

"During this time I gave names to myself differently" (P.241, L.25.):

For instance, he named himself the Burning-Light Buddha, Amida Buddha, Dainin Buddha, Never-Despising Bodhisattva, and many others.

"I expounded the Wonderful Dharma with these various expedients, and caused all living beings to rejoice." (P.243, L.32.):

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.

"All the sutras that I expounded hitherto were for the purpose of saving all living beings." (P.243, L.7.):

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 on 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.

"I see that the triple worlds is the world in which the living beings have neither birth nor death, that is to say, do not appear or disappear, that it is the world in which I do not appear or from which I do not disappear, that it is not real or unreal, and that its is not as it seems or as it does not seem. I do not see the triple world in the same way as the livings beings of the triple world do." (P.243, L.14.):

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 loosing.

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 is. We should not attach to a thing or a matter. See things in difference among equality and equality among difference.


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. The Buddha reveals the following parable for us to easily understand the existence of the Original Buddha:
THE PARABLE OF THE EXCELLENT PHYSICIAN

There was once an excellent and wise physician. He was good at dispensing medicines and curing diseases. He had many children. One day he went to a remote country on business.

After he left home, the children accidentally took some poison. The poison passed in to their bodies, and the sons writhed in agony, rolling on the ground. At that time the father returned home. Some of his children had already lost their senses while others still had not. All of them begged him to cure the poison sickness and said, "We were ignorant. We took poison by mistake. Cure us and give us back our lives!"

Seeing his children suffering so much, he compounded a medicine by pounding and sieving the herbs, and gave it to them, saying, "It has good color, smell and taste. Take it! It will remove the pain at once. You will not suffer any more."

Those who had not lost their right minds took it at once, and were cured completely. But the rest of them, who had already lost their right minds, did not consent to take the remedy given to them, because they were so perverted that they did not believe that this medicine having a good color and smell had a good taste.

The father thought, "These children are pitiful. They are so poisoned that they are perverted. Although they rejoice at seeing me and asked me to cure them, they do not consent to take this good medicine. Now I will have them take it with an expedient."

Then he said the them, "Now I am old and decrepit. I shall die soon. I am leaving this medicine here. Take it. Do not be afraid, you will be cured!" Having advised them, he went to a remote country again. Then he sent home a messenger to tell them, "Your father has just died."

Having heard that their father had passed away leaving them behind, they felt extremely sorry. They thought, "If our father were alive, he would love and protect us. Now he has deserted us and died in a remote country."

They felt lonely and helpless because they thought that they were parentless and shelterless. Their constant sadness finally caused them to remember what the father had said in his last words, "Take this remedy!" Then they took it and completely recovered from the poison.

On hearing that they had recovered their health, the father returned home and showed himself to them.
"What do you think of this? Do you think that anyone can accuse this excellent physician of falsehood?" The answer is "No!"

(EXPLANATIONS):

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.

**Odaimoku AS THE GOOD REMEDY**

St. Nichiren, the founder of Nichiren Buddhism, said the title of the Lotus Sutra, which is the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," is just like the remedy of good color, taste, and fragrance. Nichiren Shonin also said, "Chant the Odaimoku. It is the only way to attain Buddhahood in the latter age of the law."

By chanting "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," you will have the four powers of the Odaimoku at least. They are to cure some physical and spiritual illness, to protect practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, to erase one's bad karma, and to attain the truth or Enlightenment.

**Enjoy Chanting the Odaimoku**

Many people asked; "I am chanting Odaimoku for many hours, many months or many years. Why do I not get benefit of such and such." These people seem to chant and pray hard, but their chanting and prayer is in the stage of the sixth and seventh consciousness. They doubt the power of the Odaimoku and doubt themselves. The doubt is buried deep in their sub-consciousness (the seventh consciousness). They must purify the doubtful sub-consciousness.

How can we purify the sub-consciousness and bad karma? It is positive thinking. One easy way to do is to smile. It is to chant Odaimoku with a smiling face. Look up at the Gohonzon, so your eyes will go up slightly and make your face turn to smiles.

Do not force yourself to chant. If you force yourself to chant, you simply build up negative sub-consciousness because it is hard or painful. Enjoy chanting
Odaimoku. If you do not feel happy chanting, you should change your chanting methods: for instance, sitting, timing, speed, or other factors.

The Original Buddha is always thinking how to cause all living beings to enter into the unsurpassed way and quickly become Buddhas.
Chapter 17
The Variety of Merits

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.

EXPLANATIONS

“Thereupon the innumerable living beings in the great congregation, who had heard that the duration of Buddha’s life was so many kalpas as the previous chapter stated, obtained great benefits.” (P.250, L.3.):
Great benefit is to realize that we are also eternal like the Buddha. This chapter explains the variety of merits we can obtain. They are as follows:

"Obtain the Truth of Birthlessness." (P.250, L.11.):

Birthlessness 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.

"Obtain the Dharanis." (P. 250, L.13.):

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.

"Obtain Eloquence without Hindrance." (P. 250, L.16.):

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.

"Obtain the Faculty of Turning the Irrevocable wheel of the Dharma."(P.250, L.21):

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.

"Obtain the Faculty of Turning the Wheel of the Pure Dharma."(P.250. L.23.):

He is able to preach the Lotus Sutra with a pure heart (not expecting any rewards).

"Obtain the faculty of attaining Anuttarasamyaksambodhi after eight rebirths." (P.250, L.26.):

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.

“The good men or women who do not speak ill of this sutra but rejoice at hearing it after my extinction, should be considered to have already understood my longevity by firm faith.” (P.258, L.11.):

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."

"Anyone who keeps, reads or recites this sutra, expounds it to others, copies it, causes others to copy it, or makes offerings to a copy of it after my extinction who also gives alms, observes the precepts, practices patience, make endeavor, concentrates his mind, and seeks wisdom, will be able to obtain the most excellent and innumerable merits. His merits will be as limitless as the sky.” (P.259, L 9.):

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.

"They need not build a stupa or a monastery in my honor.“(P.258, L.16)

"Ajita, Erect a stupa in the place where he or she sat, stood or walked! All gods and men should make offerings to that stupa of a Buddha.” (P. 259, Bottom line.):

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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 18
The Merits of a Person who Rejoices at Hearing this Sutra

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"How many merits will be given to a good man or woman who rejoices at hearing this Sutra?" (P.263, L.7.):

Ordinary people always asks 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.

"I will tell you the merits of the fiftieth good man or woman who rejoices at hearing this sutra." (P.264, L.2.):

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 merits of the former person (a rich man) are less than a hundredth or a thousandth of the merit of the fiftieth person who rejoices at hearing this sutra." (P. 265, L. 5.):

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.

"Furthermore anyone who goes to a monastery in order to hear this sutra and hears it even for moment while he is sitting or standing, in his next life will be able to go up to the palace of heaven." (P. 265, L. 16.):

"Anyone who, while sitting in the place of the expounding of the Dharma, persuades another person to sit down or shares his seat with him to hear the Dharma when he sees him coming to the place, in his next life by his merits, will be able to obtain the seat of King Sâkra, or the Brahman Heavenly-King or of a wheel-turning-holy-king." (P.265, L. 20):

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.

"Anyone who says to another person, ‘Let’s go and hear the sutra’ and causes him to hear it even for a moment, in his next life by his merits, will be able to live with the Bodhisattvas who obtain Dharanis." (P.265, L.26.):

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.

"The merits of the person who causes even a single man to go and hear the Dharma are so many. It is needless to speak of the merits of the person who hears this sutra with all his heart, reads it, recites it, expounds it to the great multitude, and acts according to its teachings." (P.266, L.8.):

"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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 19
The Merits of the Teacher of the Dharma

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the eye, twelve hundred merits of the ear, eight hundred merits of the nose, twelve hundred merits of the tongue, eight hundred merits of the body, and twelve hundred merits of the mind."

(P.269, L.6.):

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.

"I will tell you of the merits of those who fearlessly expound to the great multitude this sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. They will be able to obtain the excellent eyes adorned with eight hundred merits. Their eyes will be pure because of this adornment. With their eyes given by their parents, they will be able to see Mt. Sumeru, the surrounding iron Mountains, and the other mountains, and the forests, ocean and rivers." (P.269, L.22.):

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.

"The good men and women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra, will be able to obtain twelve hundred merits of the ear. With their pure ears, they will be able to recognize all the various sounds and voices inside and outside the one thousand millions Sumeru-worlds, down to the Avici hell and up to the Highest heaven." (P. 270, L. 15.):

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.

"Their ears given by their parents will be purified, not defiled. With their natural ears, they will be able to recognize the sounds of voices of the one thousand million Sumeru-worlds.” (P. 271, L.5.):

"They will be able to recognize the voices of elephants, horses and cows; the sounds of carts, gongs, bells, conch-shell horns, and of drums, lyres, harps, reed-pipes and flutes. Although they recognize pure and sweet songs, they will not be attached to them.” (P.271, L. 9):

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 hash voice or gentle voice. Do not be attached to one type of voice but rather, listen to all voices.
"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the nose." (P.273, L.14.):

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.

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra will be able to obtain twelve hundred merits of the tongue. Anything which tastes good, bad, delicious, distasteful, bitter or astringent, will become as delicious as the nectar of heaven and not distasteful when it is put on their tongues." (P.278, L.20.):

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.

"When they expound the Dharma to the great multitude with their tongues, they will be able to raise deep and wonderful voices, to cause their voices to reach the hearts of the great multitude so that the great multitude may be joyful and cheerful." (P.278, L.25.):

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 good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra, will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the body. Their bodies will be able to become as pure as lapis lazuli." (P.280, L.26.):

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 conduct are reflected in his mind and he will thus repent his wrong conduct. There are a few stories of a person or an animal who faced the Buddha Sakyamuni repented their wrong conduct, like the drunken elephant that tried to smash and kill the Buddha, or Hariti/Kishimo who sucked children’s blood.
"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra will be able to obtain twelve hundred merits of the mind." (P.282, L.13.):

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.

"When they expound the scriptures of non-Buddhist schools, or give advice to the government, or teach the way to earn a livelihood, they will be able to be in accord with the right teachings of the Buddha. They will be able to know all the thoughts, deeds, and words, however meaningless, of the living beings of the one thousand million Sumeru-worlds each of which is composed of the six regions. (P.282, L.22.):

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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 20
Never-Despising Bodhisattva

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"Anyone who speaks ill of or abuses or slanders the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas or upasikas who keep the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, will incur the retributions previously stated." (P.285, L.5.):

Bhiksus are male priests and monks. Bhiksunis are nuns. Upasakas are laymen while upasikas are laywomen.

In Chapter 3, "A Parable," it says, "In my lifetime or after my extinction, some will slander this sutra and despise the person who reads or recites or copies or keeps this sutra. When their present lives end, they will fall into the Avici Hell. They will live there for a kalpa and will have their rebirth in the same hell. Their rebirth will be repeated for innumerable kalpas." (See P. 81) Avici means no interval. Those who fall into Avici Hell will constantly receive pain and suffering for thousands of years. Therefore, we should not speak ill of our Dharma friends, otherwise we may fall into the Avici Hell after death.

"At that time there lived a Bodhisattva called Never-Despising. He took the form of a bhiksu. Great-Power-Obtainer! Why was this bhiksu called Never-Despising? It was because every time he saw bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas or upasikas, he bowed to them and praised them, saying, 'I respect you deeply. I do not despise you. Why is that? It is because you will be able to practice the Way of Bodhisattvas and become Buddhas.' He did not read or recite sutras." (P.286, L.21)
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 Buddhhas." 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.

"When he said this, people would strike him with a stick, a piece of wood, a piece of tile or a stone. He would run away to a distance, and say in a loud voice from afar, 'I do not despise you. You will become Buddhhas.'" (P. 287, L. 6):

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 "Kaikyo-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."

"When he was about to pass away, he heard a voice in the sky, which was the twenty thousand billion gathas of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, which had been expounded by the Powerful-Voice-King Buddha. Having kept all these gathas, he was able to have his eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind purified as previously stated." (P. 287, L. 11):

"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.

"Having his sense-organs purified, he was able to prolong his life for two hundred billions nayuta more years. (P. 287, L. 16.):

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.

"The Never-Despising Bodhisattva at that time was no one but myself. If I had not kept, read, or recited this sutra or expounded it to others in my previous
existence, I should not have been able to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi so quickly. (P.288, L.7.):

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.

"The four kinds of devotees who always abused that Bodhisattva at that time are now present here in this congregation in the persons of the Five Hundred Bodhisattvas, bhiksunis and upasakas. Now they do not falter in seeking Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi." (P.288, L.22.):

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 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.

~ Namu Myohorengekyo ~
Chapter 21
The Supernatural Power of the Tathagatas

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 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 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.

EXPLANATIONS

"World-Honored One! After your extinction, we will expound this sutra in the worlds of your replicas and also in the place from which you will pass away." (P.292, L.8.):

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.

"It is because we also wish to obtain this true, pure, and great Dharma to keep, read, recite, expound, and copy this sutra, and to make offerings to it." (P.92, L. 10.):

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.

"Thereupon the World-Honored One displayed his great supernatural powers in the presence of the multitude." (P.292, L.14..):

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.

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.

"To sum up, all the teachings of the Tathagata, all the unhindered, supernatural powers of the Tathagata, all the treasury of the hidden core of the Tathagata, and all the profound achievements of the Tathagata are revealed and expounded explicitly in this sutra." (P.294, L.14.):

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.

"Here the Buddhas attained Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Here the Buddhas turned the wheel of the Dharma. Here the Buddhas entered into Parinirvana." (P.294, L.23.):

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, the World-Saviors, have great supernatural powers. They display their immeasurable, supernatural powers in order to cause all living beings to rejoice." (P.294, L.31.):

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 andfollowers 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.

"Anyone who expounds it after my extinction according to its true meaning will be able to eliminate the darkness of the living beings of the world where he walks about just as the light of the sun and the moon eliminates all darkness." (P.296, L.18.):

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."

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 Dai Shonin 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."

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 22
Transmission

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"Sakyamuni Buddha rose from the seat of the Dharma, and by his great supernatural powers, put his right hand on the heads of the innumerable Bodhisattva-mahasattvas, and said; "For many hundreds of thousands of billions of asamkhya of kalpas, I studied and practiced the Dharma difficult to obtain, and finally attained Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I will transmit the Dharma to you. Propagate it with all your heats, and make it known far and wide."

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.
"I will transmit the Dharma to you. Keep, read, recite and expound this sutra in which the Dharma is given and cause all living beings to hear it and know it!" (P.297, L. 14.):

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.

"When you see anyone who does not receive this sutra by faith, you should show him some other profound teachings of mine, teach him, benefit him, and cause him to rejoice." (P.297, L.26.):

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:

1. "To Show Him" means that if you show how to do it, he may wish to learn.
2. "To Teach Him" means that you explain, in detail, the meaning of the Dharma one by one.
3. "To Benefit Him" means that one will practice Dharma to show that it benefits him.
4. "To Cause Him to Rejoice" means to show that continuing to do the practice will bring joyfulness.

"We will do as you command. Certainly, World-Honored One! Do not worry!" (P.298, L.6.):

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.

"Thereupon Sakyamuni Buddha, wishing to send back to their home worlds the Buddhas of his replicas, who had come from the worlds of the ten quarters, said 'May the Buddhas be where they wish to be! May the pagoda of Many-Treasures Buddha be where it was!'" (P.298, L.11.):

Since Sakyamuni 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.

"Having heard these words of the Buddha, not only the innumerable Buddhas of his replicas, . . . the gods, men and asuras of the world, had great joy." (P.298, L. 16.):

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.

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.

~ Namu Myohorengekyo ~
Chapter 23
The Previous Life of Medicine-King Bodhisattva

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."
EXPLANATIONS

"World-Honored One! Why does Medicine-King Bodhisattva walk about this Saha-World? World Honored One! This Medicine-King Bodhisattva will have to practice hundreds of thousand of billions of nayutas of austerities in this world." (P.299, L.3.):

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, 13, 23, 26, and 27.

"Thereupon Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue Buddha expounded the sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma to Gladly-Seen-By-All-Being Bodhisattva. . . . He willingly practiced austerities under the Buddha . . . seeking Buddhahood strenuously with all his heart for twelve thousand years until at last he obtained the samadhi by which he could transform himself into any other living being." (P.300, L. 13.):

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.

"He ate various kinds of incense . . . drank perfumed oil . . . Then he applied perfumed oil to his skin, put on heavenly garment of treasures in presence of Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue Buddha, sprinkled various kinds of perfumed oil on the garment, and set fire to his body." (P.301, L. 3.):

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?

"In his next life, he appeared again in the world of Sun-Moon-Pure-Bright-Virtue Buddha. It was in the house of King Pure-Virtue." (P.301, L.26.):

Gladly-Seen-By-All-Being 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.

"Sun-Moon-Pure-Virtue Buddha said to Gladly-Seen-By-All-Being Bodhisattva, ‘Good man! The time of my Nirvana is near at hand. The time of my extinction is coming. . . . I will transmit all my teachings to you.’” (P.302, L. 21.):

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.

"He made eighty-four thousand urns of treasures and put the sariras therein. He erected eighty-four thousand stupas. Many streamers and canopies were hanging down from the stupas. Many jeweled bells also were fixed on the stupas.” (P. 303, L.10.)

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.

"He burned his arms adorned with the marks of one hundred merits, and offered the light of the flame to the eighty-four thousand stupas for seventy-two thousand years. (P.303, L.23.):

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 beheaded. 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.

“Gladly-Seen-By-All-Being Bodhisattva was no one but Medicine-King Bodhisattva of today.”

(P.304, L.7):

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-Being 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.

"Just as the sea is larger than the rivers, this sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma is more profound than any of the other sutras expounded by the Tathagatas. . . ." (P.304, L.27):

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.
"This sutra saves all living beings. This sutra saves them from all sufferings, and gives them
great benefits. All living beings will be able to fulfill their wishes by this sutra just as a man
who gets fire when he suffers from cold. . . ." (P.305, L.16.):

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).

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." (P.306, L.21.)

"Now you have defeated the army of Mara, beaten the forces of birth and death, and
annihilated all your enemies." (P.306, L.26)

"It is because this sutra is a good medicine for the diseases of the people of the
Jambudvipa. The patient who hears this sutra will be cured of his disease at once. He will
not grow old or die." (P.307. L.14.):

Jumbu-dvipa(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.

- Namu Myohorengekyo -
Chapter 24
Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva

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.

EXPLANATION

"Thereupon Sakyamuni Buddha [faced the east and] emitted rays of light from the fleshy tuft on his head and also from the white curls between his eyebrows. The light illumined one hundred and eight billion nayutas Buddha-worlds, that is, as many worlds in the east as there are sands in the River Ganges." (P.308, L. 3.):

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.
"There was a world called All-Pure-Light-Adornment beyond those worlds. In that world there was a Buddha called Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom. ... At that time there was a Bodhisattva called Wonderful-Voice in the All-Pure-Light-Adornment World." (P. 308, L.10.)

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.

"I wish to visit the Saha-World, bow to Sakyamuni Buddha, attend on him and make offerings to him. (P.309, L.10.):

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.

"Do not despise that world! Do not consider it to be inferior to our world! Good Man! The Saha-World is not even. It is full of mud, stones, mountains and impurities." (P.304, L.7):

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.

"Thereupon Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva entered into a samadhi. He did not rise from his seat or make any other movement. By the power of this samadhi, he caused eighty-four thousand lotus-flowers of treasures to appear in a place not far from the seat of the Dharma situated on Mt. Gardhrkututa." (P.3104, L.3):

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.
"Thereupon Manjusri, the Son of the King of the Dharma, having seen these lotus-flowers, said to Sakyamuni Buddha: ‘World-Honored One! What does this omen mean?’" (P.310, L.10.):

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.

"He came to Sakyamuni Buddha, carrying with him a necklace worth hundreds of thousands. He worshipped the feet of the Buddha with his head, offered the necklace to the Buddha, and said to him: ‘World-Honored One! I bring you a message from Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom Buddha. He wishes to say this; Are you in good health? Are you happy and peaceful or not?’" (P.311. L.18.):

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.

"Thereupon Flower-Virtue Bodhisattva said to Sakyamuni Buddha: ‘World-Honored one! What root of good did this Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva plant and what kind of meritorious deeds did he do in order to obtain this supernatural power?’" (P.312, L.10):

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.

"The Buddha said to Flower-Virtue Bodhisattva: ‘Good man! This is called the samadhi by which one can transform oneself into any other living being. Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva entered into this samadhi and benefited innumerable living beings.’" (P.314, L.3):

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.

"This Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva protects all living beings in this Saha-Word. He transforms himself into one or another of these various living beings in this Saha-World and expounds this sutra to all living beings without reducing his super natural powers, transformation, and his wisdom" (P.313, L.14.):

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*.

"Thereupon Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva-mahasattva made offerings to Sakyamuni Buddha and to the stupa of Many-Treasures Buddha, [benefited the living beings of the Saha-World,] and left for his home world." (P.314, L.15.):

Although Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva left this Saha-World where we live, he still illuminates us and tries to save us all with his *samadhi*.

- Namu Myohorenegkyo -
Chapter 25
The Universal Gate of World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva

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.

EXPLANATIONS

“If many hundreds of thousands of billions of living beings hear the name of World-Voice Perceiver Bodhisattva and call his name with all their hearts when they are under various sufferings, World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva will immediately perceive their voices, and cause them to emancipate themselves from the sufferings.” (P.316, L.9.):

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.

"Those who keep the name of this World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva will not be burned ... will be able to take ground when they are washed by an inundation ... all crew will be saved from the attacks ...the sword or stick raised against him will suddenly break asunder ... those devils will not able even to see him ... those things in which he is bound up will break asunder, and he will be saved ... you will be saved from the attacks of these bandits. (P.316, L.14 - P.317, L.14):

These are the seven calamities that the Bodhisattva can save us from.

They are calamities of

1. fire,
2. water,
3. human-eating demons (bacteria?)
4. swords and clubs,
5. demons,
6. the calamity of chains and shackles, and
7. 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.

"Those who have much lust will be saved from lust if they constantly think of the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and respect him. Those who have much anger will be saved from anger if they constantly think of the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and respect him. Those who have much stupidity will be saved from stupidity if they constantly think of the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and respect him." (P.317, L.20.):

Lust, 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.

"A woman who, wishing to have a boy, bows and makes offerings to the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva, will be able to give birth to a boy endowed with merits, virtues and wisdom. A woman who wishing to have a girl, does the same, will be able to give birth to a beautiful girl who will be loved and respected by many people because of the roots of virtue which the newly-born girl planted in her previous existence" (P.317, L.29.):

I 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.

"How does he (the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva) expound the Dharma to the living beings? What expedients does he employ? " (P.318, L.20.):

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-leaning 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.

"The Endless-Intent Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, ‘World Honored One! Now I will make an offering to the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva.’" (P.319, L. 31.):

The 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.

~ Namu Myohorengekyo ~
Chapter 26
Dharanis

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"How many merits will be given to the good men or women who keep, read, recite, understand or copy the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma?" (P.325, L.6.):

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.

"More merits will be given to the good men or women who keep, read or recite even a single gatha of four lines of this sutra, understand the meanings of it or act according to it. (P.325, L. 16.):

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.
"Thereupon Medicine-King Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One! Now I will give dharani-spells to the expounder of the Dharma in order to protect him.’" (P.325, L.19.):

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 . . . "

"Thereupon Brave-In-Giving Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One! I also will utter dharanis in order to protect the person who reads, recites, and keeps the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma.’” (P.326, L.21.):

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 …"

"Thereupon Vaisravana Heavenly-King, the Protector of the World said to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One! I also will utter dharanis in order to protect this teacher of the Dharma out of my compassion towards all living beings.’” (P.327, L.13.):

Vaisravana Heavenly-King (Bishamon Tenno) vowed his protection and uttered the spells: "Ari, narì, 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.

"Thereupon World-Holding Heavenly-King, accompanied by thousands of billions of nayutas of gandharvas who were surrounding him respectfully, came to the Buddha, joined his hands together, and said to him, ‘World-Honored One! I also will protect the keeper of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma with dharanis, with divine spells.’” (P.327, L.24.):
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: "Akyanei, kyanei, kuri, kendari, sendari ..."

"Thereupon raksasis called --

1. Lamba, 6. Many-Hairs,
2. Vilamba, 7. Insatiable,
3. Crooked-Teeth, 8. Necklace-Holding,
4. Flower-Teeth, 9. Kunti,

These ten raksasis and their attendants came to the Buddha, together with Mother-Of-Devils and her children and attendants." (P.328, L. 6.):

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: "I debi, 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.

"Excellent, excellent! Your merits will be immeasurable even when you protect the person who keeps only the name of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma."

(P.329, L.17.):

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.

- Namu Myohoreengekyo -
Chapter 27
King Wonderful-Adornment

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.

EXPLANATIONS

"Under that Buddha (Cloud-Thunderpeal-Star-King-Flower-Wisdom) lived a king called Wonderful-Adornment. His wife was called Pure-Virtue. They had two sons, Pure-Store and Pure-Eyes by name. The two sons had great supernatural powers, merits, virtues and wisdom." (P.330, L.9.):

Sakyamuni Buddha told the following story:

"Once upon a time, there was a king called Wonderful-Adornment and a queen, Pure-Virtue. They had two children, Pure-Store and Pure-Eyes. They practiced Buddhism for many years. They practiced the Seven Paramitas (Giving, Keeping Precepts, Perseverance, Assiduity, Meditation, Wisdom and Expediency). The sons also had already attained the Four States of Mind (Compassion, Loving-kindness, Joy and Impartiality).

"The two sons, Pure-Store and Pure-Eyes, came to their mother, joined their ten fingers and palms together, and said, ‘Mother! Go to Cloud-Thunderpeal-Star-King-Flower-Wisdom Buddha! We also will go to attend on him, approach him, make offerings to him, and bow to him because he is expounding the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma (P.331, L.1.):

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 Myoho Renge Kyo" 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.

"Thereupon the two sons went up to the sky seven times as high as the tala-tree, and displayed various wonders because they were thinking of their father. They walked, stood, sat, and reclined in the sky. Then they issued water from the upper parts of their bodies, and fire from the lower part." (P.331, L.18.):

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.

"Seeing these wonders displayed by the supernatural powers of his sons, the father had the greatest joy that he had ever had. He joined his hands together towards his sons staying in the sky, and said, ‘Who is your teacher?’" (P.331, L.31.):

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."

"Excellent, Father and Mother! Go to Cloud-Thunderpeal-Star-King-Flower-Wisdom Buddha, see him, and make offerings to him because to see a Buddha is as difficult as to see an udumbara-flower or as for a one-eyed tortoise to find a hole in a floating piece of wood!" (P.332, L.25.):

*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.
"Thereupon King Wonderful-Adornment, Queen Pure-Virtue, and their two sons came to that Buddha. The king was accompanied by his ministers and attendants; the queen, by her ladies and attendants; and their two sons, by forty-two thousand men." (P.333, L.13.):

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.

"This king will become a bhikusu under me, strenuously studying and practicing the various ways to the enlightenment of the Buddha, and then become a Buddha called Sala-Tree-King in a world called Great-Light.." (P.333, L.34.):

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.

"World-Honored One! These two sons of mine did the work of the Buddha. They converted me from wrong views by displaying wonders. They caused me to dwell peacefully in your teachings. They caused me to see you. These two sons of mine are my teachers. They appeared in my family in order to benefit me. They inspired the roots of good which I had planted in my previous existence."(P.334, L11.):

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.
"King Wonderful-Adornment was no one but Flower-Virtue Bodhisattva of today. Queen Pure-Virtue was no one but the Light-Adornment- Appearance Bodhisattva who is now before me. . . . The two sons were Medicine-King Bodhisattva and Medicine-Superior Bodhisattva of today." (P.335. L.16.)

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.

- Namu Myohoreengekyo -
Chapter 28
Encouragement of Universal-Sage Bodhisattva

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.

EXPLANATIONS

“Thereupon Universal-Sage Bodhisattva, who was famous for his virtues and supernatural powers without hindrance, came from a world in the distance of many worlds to the east of this Saha World. He was accompanied by innumerable, uncountable great Bodhisattvas.” (P. 336, L.4.):

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.

“Tell me how the good men or women who live after your extinction will be able to obtain this Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma!” (P.336, L.23.):

Universal-Sage Bodhisattva asked the Buddha, “How can the people after Buddha’s death hear and understand the spirit of the Lotus Sutra?”

“If they do the following four things: 1. Secure the protection of the Buddhas, 2. Plant the roots of virtue, 3. Reach the stage of steadiness and 4. Resolve to save all living beings. The
good men or women will be able to obtain this sutra after my extinction if they do these four things.” (P.336, L.28.):

Buddha Sakyamuni’s answer to Universal-Sage Bodhisattva is that there are four things to do, as follows:

1. We must believe that the Buddhas and deities are always protecting us. This is because of Buddhas’ compassion.
2. We must practice virtuous behavior and do good deeds by stealth. This means we must to do good deeds even though nobody watches or recognizes us. Buddhas are always watching us.
3. 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.
4. 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.

“If anyone keeps this sutra in the defiled world in the later Five Hundred years after your extinction, I will protect him so that he may be free from any trouble, that he may be peaceful, and that no one may take advantage of his weak points.” (P.337, L.6.):

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.

“Thereupon he uttered spells before the Buddha: “Atandai, tandahatai, tandahatei, tandakusahrei, tandashudarei . . .” (P.338, L.9.):


"Anyone who keeps, reads and recites this Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, memorizes it correctly, studies it, practices it, and copies it, should be considered to see me, and hear this sutra from my mouth. He should be considered to be making offerings to me. He should be considered to be praised by me with the word “Excellent!” (P.339, Last paragraph.):

These are Sakyamuni Buddha’s direct words to us. He praised us, “Excellent, Excellent!”

"Anyone who keeps, reads and recites this sutra, and understands the meanings of it, will be given helping hands by one thousand Buddhas immediately after his present life. He will be fearless. He will not fall into any evil region. He will be reborn in the Tusita Heaven.” (P.339, L.6.):

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.”

- Namu Myohorengekyo -