

THE LOTUS SUTRA

Lecture #56 (January 18, 2012)

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Chapter 28

The Encouragement of Universal-Sage Bodhisattva

SUMMARY

This is the last chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Among 28 chapters of the sutra, the most important is Chapter 16, “The Duration of the Life of the Tathagata,” which talks about the eternal existence of Sakyamuni Buddha. Before Chapter 16, the Buddha explained that everyone is able to attain Buddhahood through many stories of parables and previous existences of his, his disciples and others. He gave assurance of Buddhahood to all of his disciples. So these chapters deal on the historical Buddha in India. Chapters 17, 18 and 21 reveal how this sutra is excellent; and Chapters 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 reveal various Bodhisattvas’ vows and protections, so that we are able to expound courageously the teachings of the sutra to others. That is the way of Buddhahood.

Universal-Sage Bodhisattva in many distant worlds away from our *Saha* World had been just watching and listening to the Sakyamuni Buddha preaching the Lotus Sutra in Chapter 1 to 27. He now wanted to talk to the Buddha directly, so he came from his remote world in the east with his hundreds and thousands of Bodhisattvas. Arriving at Mt. Sacred Eagle, he asked Sakyamuni Buddha how to obtain the teachings of the Lotus Sutra especially in the defiled world in the later five hundred years after the Buddha’s death. The Buddha told him that people need to do four things in order to obtain the sutra in the Latter Era (末法). This chapter is 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, LL.1~4)

Universal-Sage Bodhisattva came to this *Saha* World to hear and receive the Lotus Sutra. He has never appeared in any previous chapters; however, this Bodhisattva and Manjusri Bodhisattva are the two bystanders with Sakyamuni Buddha. Manjusri has been at Mt. Sacred Eagle from the very beginning of the sutra to listen to the Buddha who reveals the Lotus Sutra. Universal-Sage is good at theory while Manjusri is good at wisdom. The statue of Universal-Sage sits on an elephant, while the statue of Manjusri on a lion. 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 on the

Lotus Sutra? This signifies that the sutra is not only for the people on the 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, LL.20~22)

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

To obtain the teachings of the Lotus Sutra does not mean just to get the book of the sutra, but it means to realize the reality of all things revealed in Chapter 2 and to realize the existence of the eternal life of the Buddhas. To realize the reality of all things means that all material beings are constantly changing and that all things rely on others. Our material existence is only temporary; we were from the spiritual realms and will return to the spiritual realms. To obtain the teaching of the Lotus Sutra means to understand that you are originally a higher spiritual being; therefore, you can work for others, so you will be a good friend and a teacher for everyone and you are able to keep a bond with gods and Buddhas in the spiritual realms. Eventually your daily life style will change little by little for the better. Lastly you will realize that you are eternal existence just like the Eternal Buddha. Today’s you is just a part of process of evolution to realize your eternal life. The universe is also in process of evolution in spiritual realms,

“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.26~P.337, L.4)

Sakyamuni Buddha’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 the Eternal Buddha’s 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 as Nichiren Daishonin was threatened.
4. We must try to save all living beings by righteousness including all animals, plants and environments. Ecology is very important for us to protect the nature through our practice.

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” and chant the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra, “Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo,” we will be able to obtain the Lotus Sutra. The Eternal Buddha always protects us wherever we are, so we behave well even though nobody is watching. Because we believe that, we will have steady faith and try to help others.

“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, LL.6~9)

Universal-Sage Bodhisattva promised the Buddha that he would protect people who practice the Lotus Sutra especially in the *Mappo* Era. There are three different eras after the death of Sakyamuni Buddha. They are *Shobo*(正法), *Zo*(像法) and *Mappo*(末法) 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 enlightenment. That is why it is called imitation law. *Mappo* is always regarded as lasting ten thousand years after the first two eras 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 far west because it was said that there was no salvation on this earth, so that the *Nembutsu* Sects flourished rapidly.

Those *Nembutsu* practioners burned the books of the Lotus Sutra and destroyed the images of Sakyamuni Buddha throughout Japan. When Nichiren Daishonin 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 had been given to the lord from a fisherman who had caught it in his net together with fish from the ocean.

In Chapter 23, Sakyamuni Buddha says, “**I will transmit this chapter of the Previous Life of Medicine-King Bodhisattva to you. Propagate this chapter throughout the Jambudvipa (the world we live) in the later five hundred years after my extinction lest it should be lost.**” (P.307, LL.6~9)

The Buddha knew that the righteous teachings of the Buddha would be lost in the later five hundred years or *Mappo* Era after his death. Because of this kind of era, Universal-Sage Bodhisattva promised to protect those who keep the Lotus Sutra.

“Thereupon he uttered *darani* spells before the Buddha: ‘Atandai, tandahatai, tandahatei, tandakusahrei, tandashudarei . . .’” (P.338, LL.9~16)

The Bodhisattva gave 20 spells for the sake of those who practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra: “Atandai, tanda-hatai, tanda-kusharei, tanda-shudarei, shudarei, shudara-hachi, botsuda-hasennei, . . .

Those who practice the Lotus Sutra as the next sentence shows are always protected by Universal-Sage Bodhisattva as well as other Bodhisattvas when we learned in previous chapters, though we cannot see them.

“Anyone who copies this sutra will be reborn in the Heaven of the Trayastrimsa Gods

immediately after his present life. On that occasion, eighty-four thousand goddesses will come and receive him, making many kinds of music.” (P.338, L.28~P.339, L.1)

Rev. Shokai Kanai started *shakyo* () campaign in April, 2010. This is to copy the gatha part of Chapter 25, “World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva.” The Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Nevada is trying to purchase land and buildings for future development and propagation. In order to raise money, he asks all his dharma friends to copy the sutra and offer the copied sutra together with monetary donation. He will give each person who contributed a certificate of the offering and donation by means of a paper lotus pedal. So donors may take these pedals as free tickets to the Buddha Land.

“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. There he will go to Maitreya Bodhisattva.” (P.339, LL.6~ 11)

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:

Continue 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.

“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, LL.28~33)

These are Sakyamuni Buddha’s direct words to us. He praised us, “Excellent, Excellent!” And he approved Universal-Save Bodhisattva’s protections toward us. When we recite the sutra, study it, expound it to other, and copy it and make others copy it, they are all offerings to the Buddhas, deities and our ancestors in the spiritual realms.

“He will want little, know contentment, and practice just as you do.” (P.340, L.11~12)

Recent consensus is “Ecology” and “Green,” so we must not waste but reuse, recycle, and seek natural energies. I see many things in my closets and drawers that I have not used for many years. I should give them to a recycle center or dispose them and be satisfied with what I have.

Most Buddhists vow, “Our defilements are inexhaustible, I vow to quench them all.” Can we really quench all our desires? I cannot find this phrase in the Lotus Sutra. But I found, “He will want little, know contentment, and practice just as you do,” in the last page of the sutra. “Want little” means not to hold on to the worldly matters or objects such as material gain, fame, or higher position. The Buddha has no worldly desire at all; however, he has a huge desire to save all living beings. The last phrase in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra says, “How shall I cause all living beings to enter into the unsurpassed way and quickly become Buddhas.” Chapter 2 of the same sutra says, “I once vowed that I would cause all living beings to become exactly as I am.”

In the fall of 2011, the world population reached 7 billion. How can the Buddha cause 7 billion people to be the same with him? In order to materialize Buddha’s huge dream, the Bodhisattvas from Underground will fulfill the Buddha’s dream as revealed in Chapter 15 of the sutra. The Bodhisattva from Underground is not only Nichiren Shonin but all of us who chant Odaimoku, ‘NAMU MYOHOU RENGE KYO!’

My big dream this year is to have a temple building for Kannon Temple of Nevada in commercial zone and remodel its inside as a temple, so tourists from around the world may stop by here and find spiritual refuge at this temple. All tourists look so happy in Las Vegas. It may be worldly satisfaction but Las Vegas has vitality and a lot of energy. “They will gain spiritual energy at the Kannon Temple of Nevada,” that is my big dream.

What is your big dream at this time of New Year?

“Universal-Sage! If you see anyone who keeps, reads, and recites the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma in the later five hundred years after my extinction, you should think, ‘Before long he will go the place of enlightenment, defeat Mara and his followers, attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, turn the wheel of the Dharma, beat the drum of the Dharma.’” (P.340, LL.13~18)

What wonderful encouragement for us! Before long we will attain enlightenment and be able to become Buddhas! On the contrary, if someone who abuse or speak ill of the practioner of the Lotus Sutra will receive retribution for their sins as follows:

“Those who abuse him, saying, ‘you are perverted. You are doing this for nothing,’ will be reborn blind in their successive lives in retribution for their sins.... Those who, upon seeing the keeper of this sutra, blame him justly or unjustly will suffer from white leprosy in their present life. Those who laugh at him will have few teeth, ugly lips, flat noses, contorted limb, squint eyes, and foul and filthy bodies, and suffer from bloody pus of scabs,

abdominal dropsy, tuberculosis and other serious diseases in their successive lives.” (P.340, LL.26~36)

Sakyamuni Buddha revealed his heartfelt truth in the Lotus Sutra. It is the truth, the supreme teaching, Buddha's essence of enlightenment; therefore, he gives warning to someone who slanders the practitioner of the sutra. Although 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra conclude with just a warning, the Buddha reveals how to repent wrong conducts in the conclusion volume of the Lotus Sutra, "Practicing Buddha Dharma by Universal-Sage Bodhisattva."

“When the Buddha expounded this sutra, the great congregation including the Bodhisattvas headed by Universal-Sage, the Sravakas headed by Sariputra, and the other living beings such as gods, dragons, men and nonhuman beings, had great joy, kept the words of the Buddha, bowed to him and retired.” (P.341, LL.10~14)

I, Rev. Shokai Kanai, deeply appreciate all of you who attend the class or read this series of lectures by e-mail or internet. Because of you, I was able to study and learn many new things through these lectures, and I will continue further studying the Lotus Sutra and expound it to others.