

THE LOTUS SUTRA

Lecture #46(August 31, 2011)
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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 are Chapter 2 (Expedients) and Chapter 16 (The Life of the Tathagata). Nichiren Shu priests read these three chapters often during their morning and evening services.

Hearing the Bodhisattvas' vow from Underground to expound the teachings of the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's Pari-Nirvana, the Buddha entrusts them to propagate the Lotus Sutra especially to those in the Latter Age of the Dharma. Then he delightedly reveals ten kinds of supernatural powers. The congregations are very surprised to see these phenomena for the first time.

EXPLANATIONS

“World-Honored One! After your extinction, we will expound this sutra in the worlds of the Buddhas of your replicas and also in the place from which you will pass away.” (P.292, LL.5~7)

Let us review the transmission of the Lotus Sutra after Sakyamuni Buddha's death. In Chapter 11, the Buddha told the congregation that his Pari-Nirvana is near and asked someone to expound the Lotus Sutra after his death. (P.187)

In Chapter 13 Medicine-King Bodhisattva and twenty thousand other Bodhisattvas spoke up that they would transmit the Lotus Sutra, but in some other world because the people of this world have many evils. (P. 203) Buddha did not respond to them.

In Chapter 15 there were eighty billion nayuta of Bodhisattvas (who had come from the other worlds) who made up their minds to expound the sutra in this world, requested permission to protect, to keep, to read, to recite, to copy and to make offerings to the sutra on this earth. However, the Buddha refused them, because there are countless numbers of Bodhisattvas who will do the task after Buddha's extinction. Then, suddenly the earth split open before Sakyamuni, and countless Bodhisattvas sprung up. (P.228)

In Chapter 21, these innumerable great Bodhisattvas from Underground vowed to expound the teaching of the Lotus Sutra on this earth after the Buddha's death. Sakyamuni assigns them to transmit the Lotus Sutra in the future. This transmission to these Great Bodhisattvas is called the “Special Transmission” as distinct from the “General Transmission,” which will come in Chapter 22.

“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.292, LL.7~10)

These five practices that we perform must not only be for the sake of ourselves, but must also be for others. To make offerings to the sutra means to show appreciation to the sutra and to the Buddha. Nichiren Daishonin in Mt. Minobu always offered to the Buddha food, clothes and other items given to him. Thus, Rev. Kanai always offers donations and food brought to the temple and to him on the altar.

The Ten Great Supernatural Powers如来の十神力：

“Thereupon the World-Honored One displayed his ten great supernatural powers in the presence of the multitude.” (P.292, L.11~12)

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. To see the billions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in this world – People in other worlds also attain Buddhahood with the Lotus Sutra.
7. To hear 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. It is the same to say, “Namu Sakyamuni Buddha” in Japanese.
9. Strewing various objects – All people appreciate the Sakyamuni Buddha.
10. A single Buddha-world – The peaceful and happy utopia is the Buddha Land.

The universe is the body of the Eternal Buddha. All phenomena in the universe are the Eternal Buddha’s powers and the eternal process of evolution. Thus, we are a part of the eternal process of evolution physically and spiritually.

When Rev. Kanai recite this chapter, he often stretches his tongue, snaps his fingers, coughs, shakes his body and imagine rays of light coming out of his body with the lights going to the people.

The Four Phrases of the Primary Mystery如来の四句の要法：

“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, LL.14~18)

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 treasures of the hidden core of the Tathagata contain 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.

These phrases mean that the Lotus Sutra contains all of the above; 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; then we receive the merits of the Eternal Buddha just as the children inherit genes from their parents.

"Here the Buddhas attained Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Here the Buddhas turned the wheel of the Dharma. Here the Buddhas entered into Pari-nirvana." (P.294, LL.27~29)

This means that a place where the Lotus Sutra is practiced is itself the place of enlightenment. For practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, a temple or monastery is everywhere: it could be at your home, work, on the street and so forth. The Eternal 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, LL.32~34)

The Buddha is the savior. He revealed the ten great supernatural powers mentioned above in order to cause all living beings to rejoice. Some Buddhist sects prohibit their priests and followers from practicing supernatural powers, but the Lotus Sutra encourages it. Therefore, Nichiren Shu issues amulets and *ofuda* and some priests perform *kito* blessing. However, we must understand that supernatural powers are only expedients to cause people to rejoice and to have a connection with the sutra. The final aim is for everyone 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, LL.18~23)

The name of Nichi-ren (Sun and Lotus) comes from this quotation; "the light of the sun eliminates all darkness." Nichiren wished to be the person who would eliminate all darkness of all living beings through the chanting of the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo."

Buddha Sakyamuni chose the Bodhisattvas from Underground that was headed by Jogyo or Superior-Practice. It is to them that the Buddha transmits the Lotus Sutra after his death. Nichiren Daishonin compared his position to that of Superior-Practice Bodhisattva. When he was exiled to Sado Island after nearly missing his execution at Tatsu-no-Kuchi, he believed that he was the rebirth of Superior-Practice Bodhisattva. He discussed 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 (*Myo-ho*), the task assigned to the Bodhisattva Superior-Practice. . . . 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 disciples and followers be their kinsmen? . . . If you are one in faith with Nichiren, you too are one of the Bodhisattvas from Underground.”