

## CHAPTER 3

### A PARABLE

### 比喻品

Lecture #8 (Nov. 12, 2008)

Lecture #9 (Nov. 19, 2008)

As I mentioned before the Lotus Sutra is a compilation of dialogues between Buddha Sakyamuni and his disciples; therefore, it was originally not divided into 28 chapters. For convenience of understanding, the editors a few centuries later divided the dialogues into different chapters. Consequently, Chapter Three is still a continuation of Chapter Two.

In the previous chapter, we learned that Buddha Sakyamuni appeared in this world and caused us to become exactly as he was. We also learned that when we remove our doubts and that when we have great joy to hear Buddha Dharma, we will become Buddhas. When the congregation heard these messages, they were so delighted. Especially Sariputra, so Chapter Three starts with his emotional expressions as follows:

**“Thereupon Sariputra, who felt like dancing with joy, stood up, joined his hands together, looked up at the honorable face.”**

#### **Sariputra’s Doubts Cleared** 舍利弗の疑問の消滅

Why did Sariputra rejoice so much? There were a few reasons for this: 1) the Buddha assured Bodhisattvas’ future Buddhahood in the sutras preceding the Lotus Sutra but not for the *Sravakas* and *Pratyekabuddhas*; 2) therefore, the disciples in the two vehicles (*Sravakas* and *Pratyekabuddhas*) were not able to attain Buddhahood. 3) However, Sariputra realized that it was his misunderstanding. Everyone including the disciples in the two vehicles will also be able to become Buddhas in the Lotus Sutra. Thus he was able to remove his doubt and said to the Buddha as follows:

**“We heard this Dharma before. At that time we saw that the Bodhisattvas were assured of their Buddhahood, but not that we were. We deeply regretted that we were not given the immeasurable insight of the Tathagata.**

**“We entered the same world of the Dharma. Why does the Tathagata save us only by the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle?”**

**“Now I understand that the fault was on our side, not on yours, because if we had waited for your expounding of the Way to Anuttra-samyak-sanmbodhi (Perfect**

Enlightenment), we would have been saved by the Great Vehicle (Lotus Sutra). When we heard your first teaching, we did not know that that teaching was an expedient one expounding according to our capacities. Therefore, we believed and received that teaching at once, though it over, and attained the enlightenment.

**“World-Honored One! I reproached myself day and night after I saw that the Bodhisattvas were assured of their future Buddhahood. Now I have heard from you the Dharma that I had never heard before. I have removed all my doubts. I am calm and peaceful in body and mind. Today I have realized that I am your son, that I was born from your mouth, that I was born in the world of the Dharma, and that I have obtained the Dharma of the Buddha.”**

“The assurance of their future Buddhahood” means a certificate to become a Buddha, not a diploma. If you accomplish such and such conditions, then you will become a Buddha. What are these conditions? They are the ways of Bodhisattva - seeking truth and leading others to the truth. A Bodhisattva is a seeker for the universal truth and a compassionate person toward others in order to enlighten. In other words, we should be helpful to others, should contribute to your society and do something good for others so that we bring pleasure to all. In Chapter Two, *Hoben Pon*, we recite, “Gon Ji Nyu Nan Ekka Shu Shin.” This means, “with such gentle voices that living beings are delighted” which is Right Speech of the Eight Fold Path.

“I am your son. I was born from your mouth.” All Buddhists are Buddha Sakyamuni’s children and the followers of the Buddha Dharma. In other words, we are reborn through Buddha’s teachings. The Buddha is our father. We are his children; therefore, we inherit all his virtue and transmit the Buddha Dharma generation to generation.

## **Lives in the Past, Present and Future三世の命**

In response, Buddha Sakyamuni told previous lives of him and Sariputra. The relationship of the master and the disciple is not only of this life but also in the past. So as us, our relationship is a teacher and students in this life, but we might have studied together under a different master, or you could be my teacher in another life. Buddha Sakyamuni continues to talk and assures Sariputra’s Buddhahood and gives him a Buddhist Name as follows:

**“Under two billion Buddhas in the past, I always taught you in order to cause you to attain unsurpassed enlightenment. You studied under me in the long night. I led you with expedients. Therefore, you have your present life under me.**

**“Sariputra! I cause you to aspire for the enlightenment of the Buddha in your previous existence. You forgot all this, and thought that you had already attained extinction. In order to cause you to remember the Way you practiced under your **original vow**, I now expound to the Sravaka this sutra of the Great Vehicle called the “Lotus Flower of the**

## Wonderful Dharma, the Dharma for Bodhisattvas, and the Dharma Upheld by the Buddhas.

**“Sariputra! After a 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 practice, and to become a Buddha called Flower-Light, the Tathagata.”**

The above underlined sentences indicate Sariputra’s life in the past, present and future. Gautama Siddhartha was born in India (present day Nepal) and became a Buddha of the Sakya Clan. He preached expedient teachings for over 40 years. Sariputra was one of his disciples from a past life and vowed to attain Buddhahood at that time (his original vow). 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 Bodhisattvas, he will become a Buddha called Flower-Light Tathagata 華光如来. This story is applicable not only to Sariputra but for all of us. We may have heard the Buddha’s preaching or Nichiren Shonin chanting Odaimoku during our past lives. This may be a reason why we are comfortably able to chant “Namu Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo.” Many people cannot chant “Namu Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo,” because it is in Japanese, but also he or she has never experienced chanting it in his or her past life.

## Buddha’s Original Vows 本願

All Buddha’s original vows are the same as Sakyamuni’s, “How shall I cause all living beings to enter into the unsurpassed way and quickly become Buddha?” It is revealed at the end of Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra. Amida Tathagata 阿弥陀如来 made Forty-eight Vows and he also vowed that he would not become a Buddha until all sentient beings attain Buddhahood. Many-Treasures Tathagata 多宝如来 vows to prove the truth of the Lotus Sutra as we will study in Chapter Eleven.

Besides the Buddha’s original vows, Bodhisattvas have specific vows. In Mahayana Buddhism, all Buddhists consider themselves to be Bodhisattvas. The words slightly differ depending on each Buddhist denomination but essentially the following four great vows are very common:

## The Four Great Vows 四句誓願

1. However innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to save them all,
2. However inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to extinguish them all,
3. However limitless the Dharmas are, I vow to study them all,
4. However infinite the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it.

It is easy to recite these vows day and night and during any services. However, I was very uncomfortable in reciting these vows because it was hard for me to practice them, especially to extinguish all my desires. Therefore, I recently changed to the following four vows:

1. I vow to uphold the teaching of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,
2. I vow to practice the teaching of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,
3. I vow to protect the teaching of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,
4. I vow to spread the teaching of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.

### **Offerings Inconceivable Number of Kalpas** 歷劫修行 :

**“Sariputra! After a countless, inconceivable number of *kalpas* from now, you will be able to **make offerings** to many thousands of billions of Buddha, to keep their right teachings, to practice the Way which Bodhisattvas should practice and to become a Buddha called Flower-Light, the Tathagata.”**

歷劫修行, *Ryako-shugyo* means religious exercises extending over many *kalpas*. This term refers to the practices leading to enlightenment, which are said to span three *asamkhyā-kalpas*. One *kalpa* refers to a period required for a celestial woman to wear away a ten-mile-cubic stone if she touched it with her garments once every three years. So Sariputra’s enlightenment will require countless years before he becomes a Buddha. It is interesting to know that in *shaku-mon* (the first half of the Lotus Sutra, which is a discussion by the historical Buddha Sakyamuni) Buddha’s disciples require these inconceivable numbers of *kalpas* to become Buddhas; however, in *hon-mon* (the last half of the Lotus Sutra, after revealing the existence of the Eternal Buddha) we are able to become Buddhas instantly. More detail will be discussed later chapters.

### **Planted the Roots of Virtue Long Time Ago** 積功德:

**“Those Bodhisattvas have not just begun to aspire for enlightenment. A long time before that they have already planted the roots of virtue, performed the *Brahma* practices under many hundreds of thousands of billions of Buddhas, received the praises of the Buddhas, studied the wisdom of the Buddhas, obtained great supernatural powers and understood all the teachings of the Buddhas.”**

According to this sentence, we have not heard the Lotus Sutra for the first time in this life. We already had some relationship with this sutra in our previous lives. We have planted virtues to meet the sutra and we will also receive the sutra again in our future lives. In Kaikyo-ge, we read, “*Shojo Sese Chigu shi Chodoisen* 生生世世値遇し頂戴せん,” or “May we meet and receive it, birth after birth, world after world.” Thus we must plant good virtue for us and for our children.

Let us go back to the main subject, with Sariputra assured of becoming a Buddha called Flower-Light.

**“When they saw that Sariputra was assured of his future attainment of Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi by the Buddha, they danced with great joy.”**

This means the great multitude included monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, gods, dragons and half-human and half-animal beings who gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle as we see in Chapter One danced with great joy. For all these people thought that they were not able to become Buddhas at first, but when Sariputra, one of their fellow members, was assured, it was a great honor for them, too. Buddha Sakyamuni will give assurances for all of them to become Buddhas in the following chapters.

In the ancient Indian caste system, if one were born as a child of a slave, he or she has to be a slave till the death. If you were born as a child of a sweeper, you must be a sweeper as an adult. In such a society, it was unbelievable for a *sravaka* or *Pratyeka-buddha* to become a Buddha. Therefore they danced with great joy. Just like the 2008 election, where the people of the United States of America elected their first African-American president, Barack Obama. Many people of all races, not just African-Americans, danced with joy at this ground breaking event.

Although the great multitude of the congregation danced with great joy about Buddha’s assurance for Sariputra to become Buddha, they still doubted that they too would become Buddhas, so the compassionate Buddha Sakyamuni explained with a parable as follows:

Suppose there once lived a very rich man. His wealth was vast. He had many warehouses full of merchandise and treasures. He had many workers. His house was very large, but it had only one narrow gate. Many people lived in that house. The rich man had as many as thirty children who also lived there.

One day while their father was out, a fire broke out and quickly spread all over. Everyone, except the children, escaped safely from the burning house through the narrow gate.

Returning home and seeing what was happening, the rich man was shocked to hear that his children were still inside the burning house. He rushed in to save them.

He shouted “Fire! Fire! Get out of the house quickly!” However, they were preoccupied with playing and did not pay any attention to their father. They did not know the meaning of fire. They continued playing. He thought quickly, “my children will be killed in the fire if they do not come out right away. I could carry only two or three out of the house at one time through the narrow gate but not all of them at one time.”

He had a good idea and told them, “There are toys out there that you like. There are sheep-carts, deer-carts, and bullock-carts. You can have whichever one you want if you come out right now!”

Hearing the words “Toys” and “Carts” the children suddenly ran out of the burning house.

The rich man was relieved that he had saved them all. The children saw no toys and carts outside and said to him, “Where are the toys? Where are the carts? Give us the carts you promised us!” Instead of giving those toys and carts, he gave them real “Great White Bullock-carts.”

The great white bullock-carts were not toys but actual carts decorated with all kinds of jewels and pulled by big white bulls.

In this parable, the rich man represents Buddha Sakyamuni, while the children are us, living beings, which are constantly worrying and suffering. The toy carts of sheep, deer, and bull represent the three vehicles of the *Shomon* (*Sravaka-hood*) who practice the Dharma by listening to the Buddha, the *Engaku* (*Pratyekabuddha-hood*) who learn Dharma for themselves through natural phenomena, and the *Bosatsu* (*Bodhisattvas*) who practice the Dharma for themselves and for others.

It is said that there are 84,000 teachings taught by the Buddha. He taught the Three Vehicles at different levels of understanding, such as *Shomon*, *Engaku* and *Bosatsu*. However, he revealed the One Great Vehicle for all living beings to be saved towards the end of his life. We, Nichiren Buddhists, follow the teachings of the Lotus Sutra that reveals that all living beings will be saved equally, which is the One Great Vehicle.

**“The Buddha said to Sariputra:**

**I am like the father.**

**I am the Saint of Saints.**

**I am the father of the world.**

**All living beings are my children.**

**They are deeply attached**

**To the pleasures of the world.**

**They have no wisdom.**

**The triple world is not peaceful.**

**It is like the burning house.**

**It is full of sufferings.**

**It is dreadful.**

**There are always the sufferings**

**Of birth, old age, disease and death.**

**They are like flames**

**Raging endlessly.**

**I have already left  
The burning house of the triple world.  
I am tranquil and peaceful  
In a bower in a forest.”**

**This Triple World  
Is my property.  
All living beings therein  
Are my children.**

**There are many sufferings  
In this world.  
Only I can save  
All living beings.”**

There are many important messages in the above quotations.

## **The Triple World 三界**

1. The world of desire, whose inhabitants have appetite for food, drink, sleep, sex, possession, and honor.
2. The world of non-existence, whose inhabitants have neither appetite nor other desires such as rocks, plants, water, etc.
3. The world of formless, whose inhabitants have no physical forms such as those in the spiritual realm.

The burning house in the parable symbolizes the world we live. The rich man represents Buddha Sakyamuni who is working hard to save all beings livings; therefore, he is our Lord, Teacher and Father.

## **Three Virtues of the Buddha 仏の三徳**

According to Nichiren Shonin, the Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni possesses the three virtues of lord, teacher and parents. No sutras except the Lotus Sutra explains the Three Virtues of the Buddha because the other Buddhas posses their own worlds. Buddha Sakyamuni is the one who is in charge of this earth where we live.

- 1) Buddha Sakyamuni is lord of the earth whom we should obey as indicated, “This triple world is my property.”
- 2) Buddha Sakyamuni is our father whose concern for us is boundless as indicated, “All living beings therein are my children.”

- 3) Buddha Sakyamuni is our teacher whose words we should study to be saved as indicated, “Only I can save all living beings.”

## **Eight Sufferings**八苦

The first Four Sufferings are birth, old age, disease, and death. The second Four Sufferings are 5) separation from the loved ones, 6) being together with those whom one hates, 7) cannot get what one wants, 8) the fact that one is attached to the five elements of which one's body, mind and environments are composed.

Buddhism starts with Siddhartha losing his mother soon after his birth. He wondered why she died. Is there any way not to die, not to suffer from these eight sufferings? For Buddha who is free from all sufferings sees that the triple world where we live is in a great fire, but we do not realize what fire is and enjoy playing around. Thus, Buddha Sakyamuni began his first sermon with the Four Noble Truth for us to realize that life is full of suffering.

## **The Four Noble Truths**四諦

1. **All existence is suffering**苦諦: Our life is full of sufferings such as birth, disease, old age, death, separation from loved ones, being together with hated ones, not receiving what we wish to have, and other sufferings that come from our attachment to various things.
2. **The Cause of suffering is illusion and desire**集諦: We see many obituaries in the newspaper every day, but we do not suffer when we see these announcements. We do feel sad only when we find that it is someone we know who has died, because we have an attachment to that person.
3. **Nirvana is the realm free from suffering**滅諦: When we eradicate suffering, Nirvana is there.
4. **The way to destroy sufferings**道諦: We practice the Eight-Fold Paths of Right Views, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation.





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