

THE LOTUS SUTRA

Lecture #53 (December 7, 2011)
Lecture #54 (December 14, 2011)

Chapter 26 Dharanis

SUMMARY

Dharani is a Sanskrit word which means holding on to the good, thus preventing evil. It is the mystic syllables which keep up the religious life of a person who recites it. Very often a *dharani* is regarded as the quintessence of a sutra or a deity, and is similar to a *mantra* in Hinduism. Recently Dr. Keisho Tsukamoto explains that *dharani* are originally the names of gods, goddesses who control productivity of agriculture in his book, Social Development of Sutras.

This chapter reveals the *dharanis* or spells (the mystic syllables which keep up a chanter's religious life) for preventing evils 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 (Deity Kishimo or Deity Hariti) and her children. It is very hard for us to expound the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in this defiled society in the Declining Latter Age of Dharma; therefore, two Bodhisattvas, two heavenly-kings, and Deity Hariti together with female former devils gave us *dharani*-spells to expounders of the Lotus Sutra.

It may be very hard for non-Buddhists to understand that the evils become good deities. According to Buddhism, every person has both characters of good and bad. Whether he or she becomes very good or very bad depends on his or her “e-n, 縁,” contributory causes like parents, siblings, friends, education, discipline, environments, and many other factors. Therefore, even devils are able to become deities once he or she repents wrong conduct and live in Buddhist doctrines.

In Chapter Ten, the Buddha said to Medicine-King Bodhisattva, **“This Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand. This sutra is the store of the hidden core of all the Buddhas. Do not give it carelessly!”** (P.175, LL.26~30) In Chapter 26, the same Bodhisattva asks Sakyamuni Buddha the merits of practicing it and gives the spell to protect us in the Latter Age of the Dharma.

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, LL.4~6)

Medicine-King Bodhisattva (*Yaku-o Bosatsu* in Japanese) asked the Buddha how many merits will be given to those who keep, read, recite, understand and 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.

Whenever we read the sutra, it is important to hold the sutra book in our hands or place it on a table in front of us and read each word respectfully; we consider each character as a manifestation of the Buddha. Even if you have memorized a chapter, we are still recommended to read the words. It is not really necessary to memorize or be able to read it fast. However, from a practical point of view, it is helpful to be able to recite portions by heart. Since we are Bodhisattvas, we are teachers, and we memorize the words in order to teach others correctly. The power of *dharanis* will help us to practice the sutra more firmly.

“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, LL.14~16)

The Buddha answered Medicine-King Bodhisattva. There are more merits than the number of grains of sand 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, LL.17~19)

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 the Buddhas. Then he gave to expounders of the Lotus Sutra in order to protect them these dharani-spells: “Ani, mani, mane, mamane, shirei . . .” Since any sutras are considered as Buddha’s spoken words, when we read it, we are the same with a Buddha; therefore, if anyone threatens us, they create the same sin against the Buddhas.

“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, LL.22~24)

Brave-In-Giving Bodhisattva (*Yuze Bosatsu* in Japanese) vowed 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, LL.13~16)

Vaisravana Heavenly-King (*Bishamon Tenno* in Japanese) vowed his protection and uttered the spells: “*Ari, nari, tonari, anaro, nabi, kunabi.*” He also protects the person who keeps this sutra so that he may have no trouble within a hundred *yojanas*’ distance from here.

Vaisravana is also known by the name of Much-Hearing because he often likes to hear the Dharma. He is one of the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings, the guardians of the four directions of the world. He protects people living in the northern part of the world.

The Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings are the kings of the four heavenly realms around Mount Sumeru (*Shumisen* in Japanese). They protect Buddhism and its believers while serving God Indra (*Taishaku-ten* in Japanese). Indra is the Lord God of the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings. He was originally a Hindu god but in Buddhism he is considered to be a god who protects Buddhism and its followers.

Nichiren Shonin respects and adores the Four-Quarter Heavenly Kings, so their names are written on the four corners of the Mandala Gohonzon of Ten Realms.

“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, LL.24~29)

World-Holding Heavenly-King (*Jikoku Tenno* in Japanese) 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 ...*”

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| “Thereupon raksasis called -- | | |
| | 1. Lamba, | 6. Many-Hairs, |
| | 2. Vilamba, | 7. Insatiable, |
| | 3. Crooked-Teeth, | 8. Necklace-Holding, |
| | 4. Flower-Teeth, | 9. Kunti, |
| | 5. Black-Teeth, | 10. Plunderer-Of-All-Beings. |
| These ten raksasis and their attendants came to the Buddha, together with Mother-Of-Devils and her children and attendants.” (P.328, LL.7~11) | | |

Ten *raksasis* (female devils, Jurasetsunyo in Japanese) and Mother-Of-Devils also vowed to protect a person who practices the Lotus Sutra so that they may have no trouble. They uttered the spells: “*Idebi, ideibin, ideibi, adeibi, ideibi ...*”

Mother-Of-Devils is well known as *Kishimo* in Japanese or *Hariti* in Sanskrit. It is said that she has 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 easy delivery and the health of children and also mothers.

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 become 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, LL.17~19)

Sakyamuni Buddha 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 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 to the sutra. These are our daily practices at our temples and at our homes. The phrase, “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,” is to verify to us that even only chanting the Odaimoku has immeasurable merits.

These five deities and their *dharani*-spells are very important for Nichiren Shu priests who perform the *kito* blessing. When Nichiren Shonin wrote informal *gohonzons* and amulets, he often wrote these bodhisattvas’ names and the two Heavenly-Kings’ names on both sides of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo and gave them to his followers for protection.

We must not miss-use these *dharani*-spells, the five deities protect us BECAUSE we

expound the Lotus Sutra and because to protect the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

“When the Buddha expounded this Chapter of Dharanis, sixty-eight thousand people obtained the truth of birthlessness.” (P.329, last lines):

Senchu Murano translated birthlessness here; however, Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation is 不退轉(fu-taiten) literally means not to return or firmness or indomitable. The last five chapters of the Lotus Sutra emphasize us to be Bodhisattvas who expound the Lotus Sutra and save all sentient beings, that is, to be born again and again on the Saha-world and save them all.

Therefore, the translation should be “When the Buddha expounded this Chapter of Dharanis, sixty-eight thousand people obtained firm belief on the Lotus Sutra.”

Kishimo-jin Story:

Hariti (Devil Mother) lived in the mountains of ancient India. She had hundreds of children that she took very good care of. She held each one and loved all of them very much.

Every evening she would go into the village and snatch a human child to feed her children. The parents of the village locked all their doors and closed the windows so that Hariti could not steal their children.

Each house suffered the loss of a child. Finally, they all wondered how they could stop this. They all decided to go to the wisest person in the world, the Buddha.

Seeing the Buddha, they all cried and told them their stories. The Buddha sat and thought and through his great wisdom, had an idea. He called one of his disciples to his side.

Sakyamuni Buddha said, go to the Hariti’s home while she is gone at midnight and her children are asleep. Without disturbing them take one child and bring him back to me. That evening they entered Hariti’s cave.

When Hariti returned with food for her children she noticed one was missing. She began to cry and wailed loudly, unable to overcome her sadness she decided to ask Sakyamuni Buddha for his guidance.

Upon seeing Sakyamuni Buddha, she wept and cried. She said, “One of my precious children is missing. Someone must have stolen him in the night while I was not home.” Sakyamuni said, “You have hundreds of children only one is missing, so why do you cry?” Hariti replied, “To a mother even one child among hundreds is special and if one is missing the parent’s heart cannot be completely happy.” Smiling the Buddha said, “Human beings have very few children, but you go every evening and terrorize the village stealing a child from every family. Do you not think these parents also cry when their child is missing?”

At that moment something changed in Hariti’s heart. She began to cry again. The Buddha then asked, “Now why do you cry?” She replied, “When I think of the sadness of the other mothers and families whose children I stole, I feel their sadness. I vow to be the protector of all children from now on. Let no sufferings such as sickness, disease, or death touch the children I protect.” The Buddha then smiled and said, “You have now learned compassion.” He presented her with a pomegranate. “In the place of human flesh please eat this from now on.” She smiled and tasted it, it was delicious, and her heart grew warm and kind. At this moment the devil became a god.

Kishimo-jin (Devil-god) has a statue with the *Koyasu* (Child Bearing Kishimo-jin). She is the deity of protection for children and women. Although she looks scary on the outside inside her heart is warm and

protective. This shows that what matters most is on the inside of a person and that we should not merely judge from the outside appearance of things matters.