

THE LOTUS SUTRA

Lecture #42 (July 6)

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

SUMMARY

From this chapter to the last chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Sakyamuni Buddha talks about the merits in our daily lives by practicing the sutra.

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 Sakyamuni Buddha rejoiced by dancing around. Their rejoicing developed into a strong belief in the 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 at accepting the sutra are much greater than the merits of a rich man giving his wealth to all beings and whatever else they wished for, for eighty years. The moment of joy is decisive for one's faith. It has the 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 of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma” (P.263, LL.6~8)

Ordinary people always ask themselves how much benefit they will receive 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 on behalf of everyone. Rejoicing here refers to the appreciation towards the Buddha for 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 like some scholars. 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 the way of the Dharma.

“Now I will tell you the merits of the fiftieth good man or woman who rejoices at hearing this sutra.” (P.264, LL.2~3)

In the military, a listener must repeat an official order verbatim in order to avoid any misunderstanding. Buddha Dharma was transmitted orally for hundreds of years. It might have been great joy to those who heard the Dharma directly from the Buddha, but the Buddha's message may change when transmitted from one person to another. When the fiftieth person

hears the Dharma, it may be different from the original spoken message; however, the Buddha revealed the merits of the fiftieth person who heard the Lotus Sutra in any manner however changed by the long train of transmission.

“The merits of the former person (a rich man) are less than a hundredth or a thousandth of the merits of the latter person (who rejoices at hearing even a gatha of this sutra.)” (P. 265, LL.5~6)

The Buddha compares the merits of the fiftieth person and a rich man. Suppose a great, wealthy man, who was seeking merits, gave away all the pleasurable 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 these alms to them for eighty years, this great giver thought, “I gave those pleasurable 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.

A friend of mine who went to one of the countries in Africa as NGO told me, “It is better to teach how to fish than give away fish.” It is very similar to the merits comparing the fiftieth person’s and a rich man’s gifts.

“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, LL.16~19)

“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, LL.20~25)

Isn’t it nice that all of you here at the temple will be able to go up to the palace of heaven or to 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.

King Sâkra 帝釈天 is one of the two tutelary gods of Buddhism. He lives in the Palace of Correct View at the top of Mt. Sumeru in the Tusita Heaven. He hears about the moral condition of the people of the world, according to the report given by the Four-Quarter Kings and others, who inspect this world. **Brahman Heavenly-King 梵天** is the highest god according to some Hindus and the creator of the universe.

“Anyone who says to another person, ‘Let us 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, LL.26~31)

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 be 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 the 32 major marks and the 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, LL.8~12)

“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 Daishonin says in *Shoho Jisso Sho*:

Without learning and practicing there is no Buddhism. To learn and to practice is a part of faith. Follow this 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.