

CHAPTER 10

THE TEACHER OF THE DHARMA

法師品

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Summary

A Teacher of the Dharma is any person who propagates the Buddha's teachings especially the Lotus Sutra. The task of the Teacher is to expound the teachings of the Buddha after his death in order to carry on Buddha's true teachings. This chapter explains who the Teachers of the Dharma are and what the Teachers must do. It also explains how important it is for us to support the Teachers.

Explanations

“There upon the World-Honored One said to Medicine-King Bodhisattva in the presence of the eighty thousand great men.” (P. 171, First line)

In the preceding chapters from Chapter 1 to 9, Sakyamuni Buddha talks to the Voice-Hearers or ‘Sravakas’ like Sariputra and Maudgalyayana. They were assured of becoming Buddhas in their future lives. Therefore the Buddha finishes teaching his disciples while he was still alive. In this chapter the Buddha says that he will die soon and asks anyone to expound the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. From this chapter forward, his talk is aimed toward the people after Buddha's death. He talks to Bodhisattvas who are seeking liberation from sufferings not only for him or her but also for others. Since the physical body of the Buddha will be gone soon, the Teachers of the Dharma are necessary in order to continue spreading Buddha's message. They must practice compassion, gentleness, patience and equality to all living beings.

Rejoices in a Moment's Thought 一念隨喜

“If in my presence any of them rejoices, even on a moment's thought, at hearing even a gatha or a phrase of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, I will assure him of his future Buddhahood.” (P.171, LL.10~13)

While Sakyamuni Buddha is alive so many people were rejoiced to hear the words from him. It is important for a beginner in Buddhism to rejoice to hear a word or a phrase of the Lotus Sutra. This excitement is the first step to becoming a Buddhist, and it will lead one to Buddhahood if he or she continues to practice the way of Bodhisattva. The Buddha also says that

even after his death, to rejoice to hear a word or a phrase of the sutra will assure him or her to attain Buddhahood.

“If after my extinction anyone rejoices, even on a moment's thought, at hearing even a gatha or a phrase of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, I also will assure him of his future attainment of Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi (Buddhahood).” (P.171, LL.16~19)

In the era of the Declining Latter Age of Law (末法), many unbelievable crimes are occurring, but if there are more and more people who rejoice at hearing a phrase of the Lotus Sutra, they will be able to eliminate the darkness of this world. For such people, Buddha assures them of their future Buddhahood.

Please recall when you came to this temple for the first time or when you heard the teaching of Buddhism for the first time, you might recall being delighted in hearing the teachings. To be joyful when hearing Buddha Dharma is excellent. When you rejoice in this study class, you will be assured of your future attainment of Buddhahood. Rejoice in this stage is only for the satisfaction of oneself, that is reaching Buddhahood through the Lesser Vehicle. The Lotus Sutra expands the notion that in order to reach true Buddhahood, we must practice with our thoughts (rejoice), with our mouths (chanting), and with our bodies (expounding to others) then the Buddha assures us that we will attain Buddhahood as Bodhisattvas.

The Five Practices for the Teacher of the Dharma and the Ten Offerings 五種法師と十種供養

“If anyone keeps, reads, recites, expounds and copies even a gatha of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, and respects a copy of this sutra just as he respects me, and offers flowers, incense, necklaces, incense powder, incense applicable to the skin, incense to burn, canopies, banners, streamers, garments, and music to it, or just joins his hands together respectfully toward it, Medicine King, know this, he should be considered to have appeared in the world of men out of his compassion towards all living beings.”
(P.171, L.19~L.172, L.5)

The Five Practices are:

1. To Keep,
2. To Read,
3. To Recite,
4. To Expound,
5. To Copy the Lotus Sutra.

Among the five practices, to keep the sutra is the most important. The other practices are there to support in keeping the sutra.

The Ten Offerings are 1) flowers, 2) incense, 3) jewels, 4) incense powder, 5) incense for skin, 6) incense to burn, 7) canopies, 8) banners or streamers, 9) garments, and 10) music. When you visit the Nichiren Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, you will find many of these ornaments hanging from the ceiling. These ornaments symbolize the Buddha Land.

“He (The Teacher of Dharma) should be considered to have appeared in the world of men out of his compassion towards all living beings, although he already made offerings to ten billion Buddhas and fulfilled his great vow under those Buddhas in his previous existence.”
(P.172, LL.4~7)

The Teachers of Dharma have already fulfilled their practices as Bodhisattvas in their previous existences; however, the Teachers chose to appear in this world again with their compassion to save all living beings. Thus, the Lotus Sutra emphasizes for us to expound the teachings and make liberation from sufferings of human beings our aim, instead of staying in the Buddha Land. The sutra restates in a gatha: **“Anyone who keeps the sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma should be considered to have given up his pure world and come here out of compassion towards all living beings.”** (P.173, Last two lines~P.174, First three lines)

“All the people of the world should make the same offerings to them as they do to me. Know this! These good men or women are great Bodhisattva. They should be considered to have appeared in this world by their vow to expound the Sutra of Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma out of their compassion towards all living beings, although they already attained Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi in their previous existence.” (P. 172. LL.16~23)

Please note that many Bodhisattvas have already attained Buddhahood (Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi) in their previous existences in the Sravaka stage, but they made a vow to be born again as human beings in order to save suffering men and women instead of staying in the Pure Land of the Buddhas.

The Teachers of Dharma, the Bodhisattvas, can be considered as substitutes for the Buddhas; however, they can never become too proud because in Chapter 13 of the sutra warns of Teachers who are arrogant, lazy, and selfish should not teach this sutra.

“Medicine King! An evil man who speaks ill of me in my presence with evil intent for as long as a kalpa is not as sinful as the person who reproaches laymen or monks with even a single word of abuse for their reading and reciting the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma.” (P. 172, Last Paragraph)

Why is an evil man who speaks ill of the Buddha for many years is less sinful than the evil man who speaks ill of a lay Buddhist for the first time? This is because the Buddha has

already attained Enlightenment and is not influenced by any evil word or attack; however, a lay person's mind can easily be changed by criticism; thus, the latter evil man is more sinful than a man speaking ill of the Buddha.

“Medicine-King! Anyone who reads and recites the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, know this, will be adorned just as I am. I will shoulder him.” (P.173, First Paragraph)

Regardless of being either man or woman, lay or ordained people, those who read and recite the Lotus Sutra are all respected as the Buddha because they are the Teachers who will expound the excellent and superior Buddha Dharma.

So far, the Teachers who follow the Five Practices are praised. From here on, the Lotus Sutra is praised.

**“Join your hands together and bow to the person who keeps this sutra in the evil worlds after my extinction, just as you do to me!
Offer delicious food and drink, and various garments to this son of mine, and yearn to hear the Dharma from him even if for only a moment!
Anyone who keeps this sutra in the future should be considered to have been dispatched by me to the world of men in order to do my work.”** (P.174, 4th Paragraph~6th Paragraph)

The Teachers of Dharma are worthy to be honored, respected, given delicious food, drinks, and garments; while the Teachers must have strong determination as messengers of the Buddha to expound the Lotus Sutra.

Sutras in the Past, Present, and Future 已今当の経文

“I have expounded many sutras.” (P.175, L.14)

All sutras before the Lotus Sutra revealed are in this group.

“I am now expounding this sutra.” (P.175, L.14)

This phrase refers to the Lotus Sutra.

“I also will expound many sutras in the future.” (P. 175, L.15)

The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue and the Nirvana Sutra are in this group.

Among all sutras the Sakyamuni Buddha says, “The Lotus Sutra is the most excellent and the store of the hidden core of all the Buddhas.”

“This sutra is the store of the hidden core of all the Buddhas. Do not give it to others carelessly! It is protected by the Buddhas. It has not been expounded explicitly. Many people hate it with jealousy even in my lifetime. Needless to say, more people will do so after my extinction.” (P.175, Last Paragraph~P.176, L.1)

Before chanting the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” at Mt. Kiyosumi, Nichiren Dai’Shonin hesitated to teach it or not because of the sentence, “Do not give it to others carelessly.” The reason was if he preached it, many people tend to be jealous towards him. Some people may not believe and express anger and hatred through jealousy. But he went ahead and preached the Lotus Sutra anyways to spread the True Dharma. The anger and jealousy followed as stated. This is one of the many reasons why Nichiren was persecuted countless times. In this chapter, the Buddha predicts many persecutions coming to the Teachers of Dharma. This will be explained again in Chapter 13.

Stupa and Pagoda 仏舎利塔と法塔

“Medicine-King! Erect a stupa of the seven treasures in any place where this sutra is expounded, read, recited, or copied, or in any place where a copy of this sutra exists! The stupa should be tall, spacious and adorned. You need not enshrine my sariras (ashes - death remnants) in the stupa... because it (the Sutra) will contain my perfect body.” (P.176, LL.8~12)

This does not mean that it is all right for us to neglect the ashes of the Sakyamuni Buddha but that we do not need to be attached to the enshrined ashes. Rather we must consider the words and characters of the Lotus Sutra as the Buddha himself. Therefore in “Kaikyo-ge,” or “Verses for Opening Sutra,” we read, “The letters that compose this sutra are the Buddha’s manifestation.”

A stupa was originally a bell-shaped pile of earth erected with relics that contain remnants of the Sakyamuni Buddha or on spots considered as one of the holy sites. Later stupas were made of various materials, such as clay, elaborately formed brick, carved stone and wood. A pagoda is three- or five-storied building, one of the imposing structures of a temple in China and Japan. This was often the place that contained the sutras.

“This sutra opens the gate of expedients and reveals the seal of the truth.” 開方便門示真実相 (P.177, LL.5~6)

All sutras revealed before the Lotus Sutra are expedients. Now the gate to the truth was opened when the Lotus Sutra was revealed. We are able to understand the truth that everyone has the potential to become a Buddha, and that the Buddha’s life is eternal. Everything exists while it is constantly changing. Everything relies on each others.

During a funeral service in Nichiren Shu, this phrase is always read by an officiant or his assistant to lead the soul of the dead to the spiritual Buddha realm by knocking on the edge of the casket to make sure to awaken them to the truth. Followed by the following words, “Our physical world is a realm of expedients, so please do not form attachments to this material world and instead go to the spiritual realm of the Buddha Land.”

The Three Rules for Teaching the Sutra 室衣座の三規

“They should enter the room of the Tathagata, wear the robe of the Tathagata and sit on the seat of the Tathagata.” (P.177, LL.18~19)

Sakyamuni Buddha advises to the people who expound the Lotus Sutra that they should have great compassion towards all living beings, should be gentle and patient, and to see equality of all things without attachment to things. More detail will be explained in Chapter 14.

The Buddha also encourages the Teachers of the Dharma by saying, “If he is hated and threatened with swords, sticks, tile-pieces or stone, I will manifest men and dispatch them to him in order to protect him.”

Dispatch of Monks and Nuns:

**“I will manifest the four kinds of devotees:
Bhiksus, bhiksunis, and men and women of pure faith,
And dispatch them to him
So that they may make offerings to him,
And that they may led many living beings,
Collecting them to hear the Dharma from him.
If he is hated and threatened
With swords, sticks, tile-pieces or stones,
I will manifest men and dispatch them to him
In order to protect him.” (P. 179. LL.16~25)**

Nichiren Shonin is a good proof of this Buddha's vow. More detail will be explained in Chapter 13.