

# CHAPTER 5

## THE SIMILE OF HERBS

### 藥草喻品

Lecture #11 (Dec. 17, 2008)

In the previous chapter, we learned that faith helps understanding of the sutra with the parable spoken by Kasyapa and the other three disciples. So the Buddha praised them and said, "Excellent, excellent! You spoke of my true merits very well. My true merits are just as you said. In reality; however, I have more merits." So he explains them in this chapter.

Since *sravakas*' understanding was improved, Buddha Sakyamuni tries to increase their knowledge further. Faith and understanding will invite action. In this chapter, He reveals faith becomes the way to keep the precepts. When one's faith and precepts is firm, one will be able to attain the Buddha's wisdom. He relates a story of the same rain and different plants.

### The PARABLE of MEDICINAL HERBS

There are various trees and grasses including herbs growing in the thickets, forests, mountains, ravines and valleys. All these plants are different in size, name and form. They are covered with a dark cloud. Rain starts to fall. The small, middle and large roots, stems, branches, leaves of the trees and grasses are watered. So were tall and short trees, whether they are big, medium or small in size. All the plants and trees receive more or less enough water for them to survive from the rain of the same cloud and grow differently according to their species. They produce different flowers and fruits although they grow on the same ground and receive water from the same rain.

### EXPLANATION

The Buddha is like the cloud. The Buddha appeared in this world just as the large cloud rose in the sky. Although he equally expounded the Dharma to gods, people and all other living beings, they all understand the Buddha's teachings in a different manner depending on their own individual abilities, characters and specialties.

In this world, there are many different races, cultures, customs and levels of education. The Buddha accepts the differences and applies different teachings to each individual in order to maximize their understanding. To some, this may sound like discrimination, but in reality, it is true equality and compassion.

### "Roots, stems, branches and leaves of the trees and grasses."

- 1) Roots symbolize faith

- 2) Stems - precept
- 3) Branches - firm practice
- 4) Leaves - Buddha Wisdom

The roots of trees and grasses produce stems, branches and leaves, so as faith produces precepts. Our firm belief and precepts will help us reach toward Buddha Wisdom. When one has faith, he or she naturally keeps the precepts like reciting the sutra and chanting the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.” When one does not believe in a certain rule set forth by the community, observing the rule can make one feel uncomfortable. But once he or she believes in salvation through faith, one can follow the precept easily like chanting Odaimoku everyday or holding daily morning and/or evening chanting.

It is like stems coming from the roots. When stems grow little by little, branches appear here and there. Branches symbolize one's firm belief and practice. When your belief becomes strong and your practice steady and continuous; then you will receive the Buddha Wisdom - just as branches produce leaves.

**"The small, middle and large roots, stems, branches and leaves of the trees and grasses including herbs growing in the thickets and forests were watered. So were tall and short trees, whether they were superior or middle or inferior.”** (P.105, LL.23~26)

In your garden, there are many different flower plants, shrubs and trees in various sizes. With these different plants, sizes and colors, your garden keeps in shape and retains beauty. It is the same with human beings. There are millions and billions of people with different talents and abilities. These differences keep society strong and developing.

### **Crossing the River to the Other Shore 至往彼岸 :**

- 1) **“I will cause all living beings to cross the ocean of birth and death if they have not yet done so,**
- 2) **“I will cause them to emancipate themselves from suffering if they have not yet done so,**
- 3) **“I will cause them to have peace of mind if they have not yet so,**
- 4) **“I will cause them to attain Nirvana if they have not yet done so.”**  
(P.106, LL.12~17)

During the Spring and Autumn *Hi-Gan* Memorial Services, the officiant of the service reads these phrases as prayers, so that the souls of ancestors read by the priest will cross to the other shore of Nirvana.

**"Having heard these teachings, they became peaceful in their present lives. In the future lives, they will have rebirths in good places, enjoy pleasures by practicing the Way and hear these teachings again.”**現世安穩後生善處 (P.106, LL.27~30) :

Amitabha Buddha vows anyone who invokes the name of Amida Buddha – *nembutsu* – with a sincere heart will achieve rebirth in his Pure Land 極樂淨土. Buddha Sakyamuni promises not only rebirth in the Pure Land but also peace in this present life.

The later chapters of the Lotus Sutra reveal many different ways of gaining material satisfaction. However, it does not mean that if you practice the sutra, you will not have any mishaps or misfortune. "Peaceful" means the matter of mind or spirit; it does not mean the circumstances or environment. Nichiren Dai-Shonin was exiled to Sado Island. He was placed at Tsukahara Sammaido surrounded by tombstones covered with snow. He barely had enough food to eat. Although he was surrounded by such miserable circumstance, he proudly exclaimed, "I am the richest man in Japan." Buddhism is not meant to be a tool to search for material gain only, but to seek the truth and peaceful mind whatever the situation or circumstance is.

**“And hear these teachings again.”**

Thus, at the end of *Kaikyo-ge* or Verse for Opening the Sutra, we recite, “May we meet and receive it, birth after birth, world after world” 生生世世値遇し頂戴せん。

**I see all living beings equally.**

**I have no partiality for them.**

**There is not ‘this one’ or ‘that one’ to me.**

**I transcend love and hatred.** (P.111, LL.4~7)

...

**I expound the Dharma to all living beings**

**Just as the rain waters all the earth.** (P.111, LL.18/19)

**I have no partiality for them,**

**Whether they are noble or mean,**

**Whether they observe or violate the precepts,**

**Whether they live a monastic life or not,**

**Whether they have right or wrong views,**

**Whether they are clever or dull.** (P.111, LL.22~27)

Buddhists are not supposed to distinguish if someone is a good person or a bad person. Buddha Sakyamuni expounded the Dharma to all living beings equally just as the rain showers the entire earth. However, those who hear the Dharma will accept it differently according to their own individual capacities. Therefore, the Buddha revealed many different teachings for different levels of understanding, but the Buddha's real Dharma is for all people to attain Buddha Wisdom.

**"Study and practice it continuously, and you will become Buddhas."** (P.114, Last 2 lines)

This phrase is the last sentence of Chapter Five. The Lotus Sutra always advises us to strive for our goals continuously and not for instant gain of material substances. Nichiren

Dai-Shonin says in *Shoho Jisso Sho*, “Learn and practice to strengthen your faith. Without leaning and practicing there is no Buddhism. Follow this yourself and influence others to do the same. To learn and to practice are a part of faith. Even if only a word or a phrase, spread it to others.”

To practice spreading Buddha Dharma especially “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” is the way of the Bodhisattva. It is the way to attain Buddhahood for others and for oneself.

*For Additional Explanations on Chapter 5*

### **Compassionate Rain**

(LOTUS #59, June/July, 2004)

There is almost no rain in Southern California over a six month period from April to November. Mountain fires burn many acres every year. Once the fire starts, it is hard to control because of the dry plants and strong winds. It continues to burn thousands of acres for several weeks.

Because of the shortage of rain, it is currently dusty and dirty all over Southern California. The beautiful blue roof tiles of our temple are dirty with dust and smog these days. We need rain!

I would like to talk about the Compassionate Rain, a story in Chapter Five of the Lotus Sutra as follows:

There are countless number of plants such as trees, shrubs, flowers and weeds in the mountains, forests, woods, deserts, villages, towns and cities on this earth. They all differ in their shapes, sizes, colors and fragrances. Some plants can be used as medicine for human beings while others are poisonous.

Suppose a big black cloud appears in the sky and covers the entire planet. Rain starts to fall and all the plants are watered. Rain falls without any difference as to whether the plant is tall, medium or short, has beautiful or ugly flowers, or is a herb or poisonous. Each one of these plants receives just enough water depending on their need.

The cloud and rain are the same as the Buddha. Buddha Sakyamuni has appeared on this earth like the large cloud. He expounded the Dharma to gods and men just as the large cloud covered all the trees, shrubs, grasses and weeds. The Buddha taught us his teachings with no difference to him or her, the rich or the poor, the Buddhists or the non-Buddhists.

In Chapter Four of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha leads us to the highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra, step by step, according to the level of our understanding just like in the story of the Penniless Man Becoming a Millionaire in twenty years. In Chapter Five, the Buddha reveals that people vary in their education, race, culture and moral behaviors, but his teachings were equally given to all people without any discrimination.

The parables in these two chapters mean that the Buddha is always trying to lead all living beings equally to Buddhahood although they may need different step by step guidance.

Some people understand his teachings a lot, while others a little. Even though we understand his teachings differently, the Buddha gives us his compassionate teachings equally without discrimination just as the cloud gives rain without discrimination. Let us not discriminate others.



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