

CHAPTER 1

INTORODUCTORY

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Lecture #3 (Sep. 24, 2008)
Lecture #4 (Oct. 1, 2008)

Meaning of Lotus Flowers

The Lotus Sutra is originally The *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* in Sanskrit, The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law in English, and Myo-ho Renge Kyo 妙法蓮華經 in Japanese. *Saddharma* means wonderful laws while *Pundarika* means white lotus flowers.

The lotus flower symbolizes beauty, purity, cause/condition, and eternity. The flower is beautiful. The flower is never defiled with dirty water even though it grows out of dirty water, because the surface of the flowers, leaves, and stems are oily. Even if you pour dirty water on the lotus, the dirty water forms into beads and whisks away.

So this symbolizes purity and teaches us that we should not be influenced by bad friends and bad environment.

It also symbolizes the law of cause and effect. Usually a flower blooms, bears fruit and seeds in the fruit. The flower blooming is the cause and fruits and seeds the effect. However, the lotus seeds are already inside the flower when it blooms. So instead of the waiting for the cycle from bloom to fruit to seed, the lotus flower accomplishes all three feats at the same time.

It also symbolizes eternity because the shell of the olive shaped seed is very hard; therefore, it can keep dormant for a long time – centuries long. Dr. Oga, an excavator, discovered three seeds along the Kemi River in Chiba, Japan. The seeds were estimated to be around 2,000 years old. Two of them bloomed and were named Oga Lotus.

Faith Helps Understanding

Chapter Two of the Lotus Sutra says, “**The Dharma attained by the Buddhas is the highest Truth, rare to hear, and difficult to understand.**” If you imagine the historical Buddha Sakyamuni only, you will not understand the Lotus Sutra because this sutra is not only taught by the historical Buddha but also the spiritual Eternal Buddha. The sutra reveals the existence of the Eternal Buddha; the three generations (the past, present and future) of people, and also countless worlds beyond our solar system. Science has not proven the

existence of other habitable worlds; however, it will be proved in the near future. Until then we must believe the Lotus Sutra, we must put faith in the sutra. Chapter Four of the sutra emphasizes the importance of faith, that is to say, if you have faith in the sutra, you will understand the Lotus Sutra.

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings says that Buddha Sakyamuni has yet to reveal the truth in over forty years, that all of his preceding teachings were expedients, and that it is now the time to reveal the Real Aspect of Things. What is the Reality of All Things? How can we attain the truth? Who are the people to become Buddhas? It is for the Lotus Sutra to answer these questions.

After the announcement in *The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*, some of the audience members withdrew; however, most of them remained at Mt. Sacred Eagle to hear more. While Buddha Sakyamuni entered into deep meditation, tens of thousand of people, non-human beings and deities came to listen to the most profound teachings of the Buddha.

The audience assembled into four groups as follows:

1. **His disciples and followers** all have attained *arhatship* 阿羅漢, those who have already broken the cycle of birth and death. They are all in the realm of *sravaka* or *shomon* 声聞, salvation only for themselves but not for others. They are ordained monks, nuns, lay men and women. Among them are Ajnata-Kauninya 阿若憍陳如 who is one of the five original companions, Kasyapa 迦葉, Sariputra 舍利弗, Maudgalyayana 目連, Nanda 阿難, Rauhula 羅睺羅 who is Siddhartha's son, Yasodhara 耶輸陀羅 who was Siddhartha's wife, and Maha-Prajapati 摩訶波闍沙提 who was Siddhartha's step-mother. They formed the sangha. There are twelve thousand of them.
2. **Bodhisattvas** 菩薩 could be ordained or lay priests who already have committed themselves in helping others attain Buddhahood, while *arahats* 阿羅漢 are only ordained people who renounced their ordinary lives. *Arahats* practice only in the Theravada teachings while bodhisattvas practice the Mahayana doctrines. Bodhisattvas never faltered in seeking Buddhahood, obtained *dharanis* 陀羅尼, turned the irrevocable wheel of the Dharma, and made offerings to many hundreds of thousand of Buddhas. They have already saved many hundreds of thousands of living beings. They included Manjusri 文殊, World-Voice-Perceiver 觀世音, Great-Power-Obtain 得大勢, Medicine King 藥王, and Maitreya 弥勒. There are eighty thousand of them gathered waiting for the Buddha to reveal the truth. Note, some Bodhisattvas do teach only Theravada doctrines for the sake of the listeners' level of understanding.
3. **Spiritual Beings** are twenty-thousand gods 天王, eight dragon-kings 龍王, four kimnara-kings 緊那羅王, four gandharva-kings 乾闥婆王, four asura-kings 阿修羅王, and four garuda-kings 迦樓羅王. Some of the spiritual beings are the moon, stars, and guardians of the North, East, West, and South. These supreme beings also gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle to listen to the Dharma which has yet to be revealed in

over forty years. Many of them are not physical beings; but some appeared in the form of human beings or human-animals similar to many Greek Mythological Gods.

4. Lastly **King Ajatasatru** 阿闍世王 who tried to harm Buddha Sakyamuni with Devadatta 提婆達多. He repented his wrong doing and came to hear the teaching together with hundreds of thousands of attendants.

When all four groups of people and spiritual beings sat, the six phenomena occurred to signify something great was about to happen. They are (1)the gods rained mandarava-flowers, (2)the world of the Buddha quaked in the six ways, (3)all people gathered there was astonished looking at the phenomena, (4)rejoiced, (5)joined their hands together toward the Buddha, and (6)looked up at Buddha Sakyamuni with one mind.

“Thereupon the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows, and illumined all the corners of eighteen thousand worlds in the east, down to the Avici Hell of each world, and up to the Akanistha Heaven of each world.”

After preaching the Sutra of the Innumerable Meaning, Buddha Sakyamuni still continued deep meditation while the audience was gathering. Suddenly he emitted a ray of light from his forehead. The congregations at Mt. Sacred Eagle were able to see all people in the six realms 六道 including heaven and hell in the worlds beyond earth, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of those worlds, and the stupas of the seven treasures. The audience have never seen such things and wondered why the Buddha emitted the ray of light. Representing them, Maitreya Bodhisattva asked Manjusri Bodhisattva, “Why is our teacher emitting a great ray of light?” He answers as follow:

“I think that the Buddha wishes to expound a great teaching, to send the rain of a great teaching, to blow the conch-shell horn of a great teaching, to beat the drum of a great teaching, and to explain the meaning of a great teaching.”

Then, Manjusri told his experience in his previous life as follows:

“I met many Buddhas in my previous existence. At that time I saw the same good omens as this. Those Buddhas emitted the same ray of light as this, and then expounded a great teaching. Therefore I think this Buddha also is emitting this ray of light, and showing this good omen, wishing to cause all living beings to hear and understand the most difficult teaching in the world to believe.”

The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is always the same with what Buddhas in the past taught, what Buddhas in present teach, and what Buddhas will teach in the future. Manjusri keeps talking:

“His expounding of the right teachings was good at the beginning, good in the middle, and good at the end. The meanings of those teachings were profound. ... Those who were seeking Sravakahood 声聞, he expounded the teaching of the Four Truths 四諦 a teaching suitable for them, saved them from birth, old age, disease, and death, and

caused them to attain Nirvana. To those who were seeking Pratyekabuddhahood緣覺, he expounded the teaching of the Twelve Causes十二因緣, a teaching suitable for them. To Bodhisattvas菩薩, he expounded the teaching of the Six Paramitas六波羅蜜, a teaching suitable for them, and caused them to attain Anuttra-samyak-sanmbodhi, that is, to obtain the knowledge of the equality and differences of all things.

The Four Truths四諦

1. All Existence is suffering 苦諦
2. The Cause of Suffering is illusion and desire集諦
3. Nirvana is the realm free from sufferings 滅諦
4. The Way for the attainment of Nirvana 道諦 is to practice the Eight Fold Paths八正道. They are Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation.
(More detail will be discussed in Chapter 3.)

The Twelve Causes十二因緣

1. Ignorance 無明
2. Action 行
3. Consciousness 識
4. Mental Functions and Matter名色
5. The Six Senses 六入
6. Contact 觸
7. Perception 受
8. Desire 愛
9. Attachment 取
10. Existence 有
11. Birth 生
12. Old Age and Death 老死
(More detail will be explained in Chapter 7.)

The Six Paramitas六波羅蜜

1. Contribution 布施
2. Keeping Precepts 持戒
3. Perseverance 忍
4. Endeavor 精進
5. Meditation 禪定
6. Wisdom 知惠
(More detail will be explained in Chapter 12.)

The above teachings were taught by all Buddhas during Manjusri Bodhisattva's previous existence. In order for the congregation to understand better, Manjusri Bodhisattva further explained that a long time ago in his previous life, there was a Buddha called Sun-Moon-Light. The Buddha emitted a ray of light after revealing *the Innumerable Meaning Sutra* and expounded the teaching of *the Lotus Sutra*. At that time there was a Bodhisattva called Wonderful-Light and one of the Buddha's disciple who was attached to gain. He read and recited many sutras, but he did not understand them. He forgot many parts of those sutras. Therefore, he was called Fame-Seeking.

“Maitreya, know this! Wonderful-Light Bodhisattva at that time was no one but myself; and Fame-Seeking Bodhisattva, no one but you.”

Discussion: What do you think about this sentence?

Have you ever thought about your previous lives?

Manjusri Bodhisattva made Maitreya Bodhisattva recall his past existence. This made the congregation think about trying to recall their own previous lives and also remind us that there were previous lives for all of us. Maitreya Bodhisattva is in Tusita Heaven now waiting to become a Buddha in his next birth. You and I may be Fame-Seeking Bodhisattva now but also could be like Maitreya Bodhisattva in our next life.

Let us try to be better than yesterday and try that tomorrow is better than today!

This ends of the Chapter 1. Buddha Sakyamuni was still in deep meditation.



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