

# THE LOTUS SUTRA

Lecture #51(October 26, 2011)

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## Chapter 24 Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva

### SUMMARY

In the previous chapter, we learned that Medicine-King Bodhisattva attained *samadhi* and could transform himself into any other living being because of his hard practice of burning his body in his previous lives. By telling a story of the previous life of the Medicine King Bodhisattva, the Buddha encourages us to expound the teachings of the Lotus Sutra even sacrificing of one's life.

In this chapter, Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva can change his body into 34 different forms while in the next chapter; World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva can change his body into 33 different forms. It is very interesting that Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva lives in a Pure Land in the East while World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva lives in the Pure Land in the West. Both of them come to this world of ours to save us while Medicine-King Bodhisattva and other deities reveal special spells for us to be protected as practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in Chapter 26.

Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva came to Sakyamuni Buddha on Mount Sacred Eagle from the Bodhisattva's Pure Land in the East. How did he travel to meet the Buddha? He just meditated without moving, and then his body appeared in front of the Buddha in this Saha-World in a matter of moments. How did he gain such a supernatural power? In his previous life, he offered one hundred thousand various kinds of music to Cloud-Thunder-Sound-King Buddha for 12,000 years.

### EXPLANATION

**“Thereupon Sakyamuni Buddha [faced the East and] emitted rays of light from the fleshy tuft on his head, that is, from one of the marks of a great man, and also from the white curls between his eyebrows. The light illumined one hundred and eight billion nayuta Buddha-worlds, that is, as many worlds in the East as there are sands in the River Ganges.”** (P.308, LL.1~6)

This chapter begins with Sakyamuni Buddha emitting a ray of light from the tuft on his head and from the hair between his eyebrows, and illuminating countless worlds in the East. Sakyamuni Buddha also emits the lights from his forehead in Chapter 1 and Chapter 11 in the Lotus Sutra. In Chapter 1, he illuminated eighteen thousand worlds in the East down to the Avichi Hell and up to the Akanistha Heaven of each world. In Chapter 11, He emitted a ray of light Five Hundred billion nayutas worlds, that is, as many worlds as there are sands in the River Ganges, in the east. He also illuminated the worlds of the south, west, north, the four intermediate quarters, zenith, and nadir, with rays of light. In Chapter 24, his lights illuminated one hundred and eight billion nayuta Buddha worlds, that is, as many worlds as there are sands in the River

Ganges.

What do these illuminations mean to us? The Buddha's illumination of rays of lights is always toward the east. The east denotes beginning of the day, beginning of a new start; however, the new beginning is based on the result of yesterday and the past. There is a saying, "Learn a lesson from the past." If we wish to start something new, you'd better do it now. The time now becomes the past soon after we said it. The past is accumulation of now, now, and now.

It is very interesting to see the difference of the Buddha's illumination of rays of light in Chapter 1, 11, and 24. In Chapter 1 Sakyamuni Buddha showed the worlds in the east, in Chapter 11 the worlds in the east and this earth are the same and becomes one great Buddha Land, furthermore, in Chapter 21, those Bodhisattvas in the other worlds put their palms together and facing the Saha-world, said respectfully, "Namu Sakyamuni Buddha, Namu Sakyamuni Buddha" and in Chapter 23 a Bodhisattva in the east visits our world of this earth where it is worth for them to visit.

**"There was a world called All-Pure-Light-Adornment [in the East] beyond those worlds. In that world was a Buddha called Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom. He expounded the Dharma to a great multitude of innumerable Bodhisattvas who were surrounding him respectfully. The ray of light, which was emitted from the white curls of Sakyamuni Buddha, also illumined that world."** (P.308, LL.8~18)

**"At that time there was a Bodhisattva called Wonderful-Voice in the All-Pure-Light-Adornment World."** (P.308, LL.19~20)

At the end of the light's reach, there was a world called All-Pure-Light-Adornment where a Buddha called Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom lived. There also lived a Bodhisattva called Wonderful-Voice who was lit up with the light of Sakyamuni Buddha. This great Bodhisattva had accumulated many merits, served numerous Buddhas, and attained various *Samadhi*. *Samadhi* means concentration of the mind on various things, such as *samadhi* for the Lotus Sutra, *samadhi* for pure virtue, *samadhi* for freedom from causality, *samadhi* for transforming himself into other people, and so forth. So *Samadhi* is a power of concentration acquired by practice. The *samadhi* for the Lotus Sutra means a state of one's mind whose faith is always on the Lotus Sutra, and not influenced by any other scriptures or religions. This can be attained by overcoming many ordeals.

**"He had already planned roots of virtue a long time ago. He had already made offerings to many hundreds of thousands of billions of Buddhas, and attended on them. He had already obtained profound wisdom. He had already obtained hundreds of thousands of billions of great samadhis"** (P.308, L.20~24)

Virtue means behavior or attitudes that show high moral standards. Plant roots of virtue means to do something good for others. By doing so, you can eliminate bad karma little by little. If you accumulated a lot of virtue, you have personal grace, that is, an attractive quality of personal character in motion, spoken words, and mind. Then, not only people respect you, but deities will always protect him or her.

Then if you accumulate more virtue, you will attain various *samadhi*, concentration of the minds on a single matter or object. It is important to be in this state of mind whatever you do, for instant, concentrating chanting Odaimoku is Daimoku Samadhi. All professional people must be in this stage, such as golf, baseball, tea ceremony, singers, teachers, etc. I may say, “golf Samadhi, or singing Samadhi.”

In this chapter there are 16 *samadhi* that are listed, for instance, *Samadhi* for the Lotus flower of the Wonderful Dharma (L.25) means that one realizes that the Lotus Sutra is most superior among all the other scriptures, not influenced by any other teachings, and to strive to attain real meaning of the sutra by mind, mouth, and action.

**“I wish to visit the Saha-World, bow to Sakyamuni Buddha, attend on him and make offerings to him.”** (P.309, LL.10~11)

Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva asked his Buddha, Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom, that he wished to visit Sakyamuni Buddha who is expounding the Lotus Sutra in the Saha-World. The world where Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom Buddha and the Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva are living is a Pure Land in the east; therefore, no negativity exists. In Buddhism there are many Buddhas in different worlds. One Buddha is in each world. The Buddha in the pure world warned Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva never to despise the people in the Saha-World. Looking from the Pure Land, the Saha-World where we live in is filled with evil and impurity; it is called “Defiled Land.” It is also called the “World of Endurance,” because people in this world must learn to endure many sufferings. Before the Lotus Sutra was taught, it was believed that a Pure Land can exist only somewhere else, far away from this Defiled Land. Only the Lotus Sutra explains that the Pure Land is where the Lotus Sutra is practiced; this concept was already explained in Chapter 16. This is the principle theme of the Lotus Sutra, which always emphasizes practice in this real world in order to establish the Pure Land on this earth. “The security of the nation and peaceful living will be established by everyone when they all practice righteousness” is Nichiren Shonin’s wish in Rissho Ankoku.

**“Do not despise that world! Do not consider it to be inferior to our world! Good Man! The Saha-World is not even. It is full of mud, stones, mountains and impurities.”** (P.309, LL.19~21)

Judging from this statement, the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas in the east are superior to Sakyamuni Buddha and Bodhisattvas in this Saha-World. However, the Buddha of the east told his Bodhisattva, Wonderful-Voice, “You may be tempted to feel superior to those people who live in the Saha-World; however, be careful not to denigrate them or the world in which they live.” All Buddhists must stand on the Dharma, that is, there is no difference among the superior or the inferior because all of us have the seeds to attain Buddhahood. How you look at things depends on each person’s mental attitude or an extension of evolution of his or her mind; for example, those who cannot swim are afraid of water and stay away from the ocean while others who enjoy swimming may jump into the water and have fun. For us this Saha-World is full of evils and we must endure sufferings; however, the Buddha sees this world as the Pure Land.

**“Thereupon Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva entered into a *samadhi*. He did not rise from his seat or make any other movement. By the power of this *samadhi*, he caused eighty-**

**four thousand lotus-flowers of treasures to appear in a place not far from the seat of the Dharma situated on Mt. Grdharkuta.”** (P.310, LL.3~7)

As we see Buddhist statues, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas sit or stand on lotus blossoms. Before Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva moved to the place where Sakyamuni Buddha was expounding the Lotus Sutra at Mt. Sacred Eagle, he must prepare a seat for himself and seats for his 84,000 attendants. Then he can transfer his body and bodies of the attendants with his power of *samadhi*, just like in the Star Trek movies, when you go into the transporter and beam yourself to another place.

**“Thereupon Manjusri, the Son of the King of the Dharma, having seen these lotus-flowers, said to Sakyamuni Buddha: ‘World-Honored One! What does this omen mean?’”** (P.310, LL.10~12)

It was really surprising for Manjusri and other congregation to see the lotus flowers appear suddenly in front of them. Then he asked Sakyamuni Buddha to explain this phenomenon. “It is a sign that Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva is coming from the World of All-Pure-Light-Adornment in the East and make offerings to me and the Lotus Sutra,” answered the Buddha.

**“He came to Sakyamuni Buddha, carrying with him a necklace worth hundreds of thousands. He worshipped the feet of the Buddha with his head, offered the necklace to the Buddha, and said to him: ‘World-Honored One! I bring you a message from Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom Buddha. He wishes to say this; Are you in good health? Are you happy and peaceful or not?’”** (P.311. LL.18~24)

Eighty-four thousand attendants accompanied Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva. They appeared in front of Sakyamuni Buddha. The Bodhisattva gave a precious necklace to the Buddha. In the next chapter World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva also gave his necklace of many gems and offered it to Sakyamuni Buddha. Bodhisattvas are laypersons, so they carry a lot of gems and jewels. After offering the necklace, Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva asks Sakyamuni’s health and spirit, the worldly affairs, and how the living beings in the Saha-World were doing. He answers, “No Problem!”

**“Thereupon Flower-Virtue Bodhisattva said to Sakyamuni Buddha: ‘World-Honored One! What root of good did this Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva plant and what kind of meritorious deeds did he do in order to obtain this supernatural power?’”** (P.312, LL.10~13)

Then a Bodhisattva named Flower-Virtue approached the Buddha and asked, “What kind of practice in his previous lives did Wonderful-Voice do to obtain such a supernatural power?” Sakyamuni replied, “Long time ago, there was a Buddha called Cloud-Thunder-Pearl-King Tathagata. Wonderful-Voice made many offerings of beautiful music to this Buddha. Because of his great deeds, he was born in the world of Pure-Flower-Star-King-Wisdom Tathagata, and there he acquired supernatural power. This is the Bodhisattva whom you see here now. He continued practicing and accumulating virtues until he was able to transform himself into thirty-four kinds of living beings, such as a king, a god, a man or woman, a priest or a nun, a boy or a girl, a human being or nonhuman being, and so on. He takes these various shapes according to

the capacities of those who are to be saved.”

There were many great singers whom we cannot forget around the world. I wonder if they might please the Buddhas, god, deities, and deceased ancestors by offering their vocals in their spiritual realms. If so, we'd better brush up our skill even as we advanced in age.

**“The Buddha said to Flower-Virtue Bodhisattva: ‘Good man! This is called the *samadhi* by which one can transform oneself into any other living being.’ Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva entered into this *samadhi* and benefited innumerable living beings.”** (P.314, LL.3~6)

Medicine King Bodhisattva in the previous chapter attained the same *samadhi* as Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva did; the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva in the next chapter also attained the same *samadhi*. The *samadhi* by which one can transform into other living beings is a power of concentration acquired by practice. Such a miraculous phenomenon may sound impossible. However, when we sincerely devote ourselves to the service and welfare of others, we can reach a stage of non-self and become one with them.

In appearance, we may even look like one of them. For example, an adult playing happily with children may look like a child himself. He may feel like a child, too. The children may even consider him or her to be one of them. Such transformations are not far from impossible, but they do require a special state of mind. The *samadhi* by which one can transform himself into other living things is an expression of the Bodhisattva-spirit of devoting one's self to others. In the next chapter we will learn that instead of requesting guardian angels to appear to help us, we try to be guardian angels.

**“This Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva protects all living beings in this Saha-World. He transforms himself into one or another of these various living beings in this Saha-World and expounds this sutra to all living beings without reducing his super natural powers, transformation, and his wisdom.”** (P.313, LL.14~18)

Although Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva lives in a world of one hundred and eight billion nayuta Buddha-worlds away in the east, he illuminates this Saha-World where we live with the many rays of light of his wisdom and saves all living beings. Some of you who devote yourself to expounding the Lotus Sutra may be the manifestation of Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva's *samadhi*.

Nichiren Shonin explains why these Bodhisattvas are able to save all living beings, transforms himself into various persons. It is because these Bodhisattvas have countless number of births and deaths, and have wisdom and knowledge of various living beings from their past lives.

“The Bodhisattva was to transform himself into thirty-four kinds of human beings” does not mean that he changes his appearances physically, but it means that he had been born into different persons in his previous lives like a man, a woman, being a priest, a nun, a king, etc. He once was a girl and a boy who could save others by the form of a child. We are able to learn many lessons from children, too. In every birth, he led countless people to the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and saved them. So someday in the future, we may be able to obtain this supernatural power like Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva by planting seeds of good.

**“Thereupon Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva-mahasattva made offerings to Sakyamuni Buddha and to the stupa of Many-Treasures Buddha, [benefited the living beings of the Saha-World,] and left for his home world.”** (P.314, LL.15~18)

As we learned that Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakas, Buddha’s disciples and devotees offered various things to the Buddha. Offering is one of the important practices for lay people. Even if you only bring some food to ministers and congregation, it is the same as offering to the Buddha, Gohonzon, deities, and ancestors. Rev. Kanai often places a portion of the food and opens the wrapping to offer good fragrance of food. Of course he offers your contribution at the altar and express appreciation to the Gohonzon and to the donors. Offertory is one of the Six Paramitas and is the action of planting roots of good.

After greeting the Sakyamuni Buddha, Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva left this Saha-World where we live and returned to his Pure-Land in the East, but he still illuminates us and tries to save us all with his *samadhi*. Although we cannot see deities, they can see us and protects us always.

Nichiren Shonin said that Wonderful-Voice Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva that expounds the Lotus Sutra, because he appears in the thirty-four different forms of his body. The different forms symbolize the Ten Realms of one’s mind contained in all living beings. Thus, he appears in the realm of hell, hunger spirit, animal, and various forms; so that he can save all living beings in the ten realms.