

## CHAPTER 8

### THE ASSURANCE OF FUTURE BUDDHAHOOD OF THE FIVE HUNDRED DISCIPLES

### 五百弟子受記品

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#### Summary

Purna, who was one of the ten great disciples of the Buddha, was very pleased to hear the Buddha Sakyamuni's logical and consistent teachings in Chapter 2 and 3, of the stories of the Buddha's and his disciples' previous lives in Chapter 3, parables, and the assurance of future Buddha-hood of these disciples in Chapter 3 and 6. He felt like dancing with joy.

Upon seeing Purna's joyful reaction, the Buddha taught how he had practiced and preached the Lotus Sutra to others in his previous lives. Then the Buddha gave assurance of future Buddha-hood to Purna, Kaundinya Bhiksu and the other Five Hundred *arhats* in the congregation.

Meanwhile, the Five Hundred *arhats* rejoiced at the Buddha's assurance of their future Buddha-hood and expressed their gratitude by telling a parable of "The Gem Fastened inside the Garment."

There are two classifications for Sravakas; one of them is those who have something more to learn. They have renounced their families and do not attach to the material things and learned the Four Noble Truth but still have worldly desires. The other classification is those who have no more attachment to the worldly matter, so they have finished all leaning and attained the ultimate truth. The second group of people was called *arhats* (阿羅漢). Please remember that an *arhat* is not a Bodhisattva.

**“Do you see this Purna, the son of Maitrayani? I always praise him, saying that he is the most excellent expounder of the Dharma. I always praise him for his various merits. He strenuously protects my teachings, and helps me propagate them. He strenuously protects my teachings, and helps me propagate them. He shows the Way to the four kinds of devotees, teaches them, benefits them and causes them to rejoice. He explains my right teachings perfectly, and gives great benefits to those who are performing brahma practices with him. No one except the Tathagata excels him in eloquence.”** (P.153, Last Paragraph)

Purna (富樓那) was the son of a teacher for King Suddhodana of Kapilavastu. His mother's name is Maitrayani. He was the most eloquent of the disciples of the Buddha not only in this world but also in Purna's many previous lives of serving the Buddha.

Here is the first time in the chapters of the Lotus Sutra where the Buddha tells us the ways of the Bodhisattva. They are to protect the Buddha's teachings, to propagate the true teachings to others, to show the benefit to others, and to cause them to rejoice.

Purna looked like a Sravaka who seeks salvation for him, but he went about preaching the law to common people and by doing so with such eloquence, he was able to cause many of his followers to aspire to supreme-perfect-enlightenment. Therefore, in reality he was not a Sravaka at all, but a Bodhisattva (one who devotes his life to helping others with Buddha Dharma). To prove this, we must see a phrase before the above quotation. It says, **“Only the Buddha, only the World-Honored One, knows the wishes we have deep in our minds.”** The wishes mean the Original Vow and Wish (本願) in the Chinese and Japanese version. The original wishes and vows were made by all Bodhisattvas in their previous lives to save all sentient beings. Therefore, Purna was already a Bodhisattva; however, he acted as if he was a Sravaka in order to lead all people in the lesser vehicle to Buddha-hood. When Sravakas attained Buddha-hood, their purpose on this life is complete thus ending the cycle of rebirth; therefore, the actions of trying to save others are only for Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Thus, Bodhisattvas must be a preacher (otherwise he cannot help anyone with Buddha's teachings) and often referred to as a “teacher of the law.” From Chapter Ten on, the Lotus Sutra will clarify the mission of the Bodhisattvas.

Buddha Sakyamuni had the Ten Great Disciples who were outstanding in their own special field. For example, Sariputra (舍利弗) was the wisest; Maha-Kasyapa (摩訶迦葉) was known for his practice; Maha-Maudgalyayana (摩訶目健連) was famed for his supernatural power; Purna (富樓那) was the best preacher, and Anirudha (阿叉樓駄) who was a cousin of Sakyamuni, was famous for his clairvoyance, the alleged power for seeing beyond the natural range of the senses. It is said that during his early days of severed ascetic practices, he went blind. In place of his natural sight, he developed clairvoyance.

**“Purna was the most excellent expander of the Dharma under the seven Buddhas. He is the same under me. He will be the same under the future Buddhas of this Kalpa of Sages. He will protect the teachings of those Buddhas and help them propagate their teachings.”** (P.154, 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph)

When one becomes a Buddha, he can see the lives of all beings throughout the past, present and future. Our existence does not span only this present lifetime. We have had past lives. We will have future lives. Our existence is eternal. Therefore, what we are doing now will affect us in our future lives.

Kalpa is duration of time used in India. This period is measured as the time it takes for a celestial woman to wear away a sixteen-mile-cubic stone if she brushes it with her garments once every three years. There are four kalpas in a world (四劫): 1) The Kalpa of Construction, consisting of twenty small kalpas, in which a world is formed, 2) The Kalpa of Continuance, consisting of twenty small kalpas, in which the world continues to exist peacefully, 3) The Kalpa

of Distractions, consisting of twenty small kalpas, in which the world is destroyed and 4) The Kalpa of Emptiness, consisting of twenty small kalpas, in which nothing exists.

**“He (Purna) will be called Dharma-Brightness, the Tathagata.”**(P.154, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines from the bottom)

In order for Purna to be called the Dharma-Brightness Tathagata (法明如来) there is an attached condition that follows: He will always make an effort to teach all living beings strenuously.

Attaining Buddha-hood is not simple. Even after coming to a Nichiren Buddhist temple for ten or twenty years does not automatically mean that we will attain Buddha-hood. However, as we continue to come to the temple, listen to the teachings of the priest, apply the teachings to our daily lives and keep up with our faith, we certainly are getting closer towards reaching Nirvana - step by step. However, Nichiren Dai’Shonin said, “When we chant the Odaimoku, ‘Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,’ we are Buddhas.” More detail will be explained in later chapters.

**“Gods and men will be able to see each other.”** (P.155, L.9)

If people in the human realm and the deities in the heavenly realm can communicate with each other, this world will always be peaceful and joyful. When we chant the Odaimoku, we can sometimes communicate to the deities in the heavenly realm. This is called *kannno-doko* (感応同交), or communication between the Buddha and human beings. For example, a trained priest uses a method called *REIDAN*, where the chanting of the Odaimoku is tapped to reach the heavenly realm. By the priest being able to make this connection, he or she can often find the answer in solving various questions, such as finding lost items, the source of illness, success in business, the resolution to family affair, etc.

**“There will be no evil region or women.”**(P.155, LL.9~10)

Women are often looked down even today and treated poorly in some parts of the world. Even in the United States of America, women only recently received the right to vote after World War I.

In Mahayana Buddhism, men and women are equal because everyone has the Buddha-seed. We should interpret the above quotation in the Lotus Sutra as illustrating there is no difference between men and women in becoming Buddhas. We are all one.

**“The living beings of that world will be born without any medium.”** (P.155, LL.10~11)

This signifies that they will be reborn not through the medium of a mother or an egg or moisture but by their own karma or spiritual wisdom. When we change our thought, we can be reborn as a different person not physically, but spiritually. We must try to improve ourselves daily.

We know only of this physical world. The above sentence is like being in a fairyland or fantasyland; however, we may find the existence of such worlds after our death in the spiritual realm.

**“They will emit light from their bodies.”** (P.155, L.12)

We emit light from our bodies. This is called an aura. Our mood and thoughts affect what kind of light is emitted. When our feelings are of depression, people see us as dark and gloomy, but when we feel energized and cheerful, everyone in the room sees the brightness and they too can become cheerful.

**“They will fly about at will.”**(P.155, L.13)

This means that when we attain Buddha-hood, we will be free like the wind because there will be no obstruction for us to attach ourselves to. We will not be constricted to just being in a physical body but a formless body that can move in any direction without any restraint.

**“They will feed on two things: the delight in the Dharma, and the delight in dhyana.”** (P.155, LL.15~16)

Although we offer food and drink to the altar, the best offering to all the Buddhas, Nichiren Shonin and our ancestors is to recite the Lotus Sutra and chant "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." The closer to Nirvana we become, the more we are delighted in reciting and chanting the sutra. “Delight in the Dharma” means that we feel joy when we understand the meaning of the Buddha’s teachings or when we hear the wonderful voices of priests chanting the sutra or when we chant the sutra by ourselves. “Delight in Dhayana” means when we are delighted to hear, to understand, or to chant ourselves. Our minds become more settled thus not seek other religions or faiths.

**“Now I will assure these twelve hundred Arhats, who are present before me, of their future attainment of Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi one after another. My great disciple, Kaundinya Bhiksu, who is among them, will make offerings to six billion and two hundred thousand million Buddhas and then become a Buddha called Universal-Brightness Tathagata. ... The others of the five hundred Arhats, including Uravilva-kasyapa, Gaya-**

**Kasyapa, Nadi-Kasyapa, Kalodayin, Udayin, Aniruddha, Revata, Kapphina, Bakkula, Gunda, and Svagata, also will attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, and become Buddhas also called Universal-Brightness.”** (P.159, Second Paragraph)

This is the highlight of Chapter Eight in which Pruna (富樓那) Kaunidnya (橋陣如比丘) and the Five Hundred Arhats (五百阿羅漢) received assurances of their future Buddha-hood. Kaundinya and the five hundred Arhats are all called Universal-Brightness Tathagata (普明如来). However, the more important message throughout this chapter is the phrase that follows the above quotation, **"All the other Sravakas also will become Buddha. Tell this to the Sravakas."** (P. 160, Last two lines) This signifies that not only the Sravakas who attended the assembly at Vulture Peak but also the five thousand Sravakas who have left the Buddha in Chapter Two (P.31) were also able to receive the assurance of their Buddha-hood from Kasyapa. This also included those who live in the Period of the Last Law (末法). This meant that we too were assured of our future attainment of Buddhahood.

There is an interesting story about Gunda (周陀). His real name was Suddhi-panthaka (周利般特), a disciple of the Buddha. He was very dull but attained enlightenment through his boundless energy of humming a phrase while he swept the yard. He could only remember a few phrases of the sutra, so many of his friends teased him. One day his mother asked him to go buy a small amount of vinegar and gave him an empty bottle. His friends asked him, “What are you doing?” He answered, “I am going to buy vinegar.” Then one of them said, “No, you are buying water,” while another said, “No, you are going to buy sauce.” Now utterly confused, he started to cry because he had forgotten what he was to buy. Then the Buddha approached him and asked why he was crying. Gunda answered his master saying that he forgot what he was supposed to buy. The Buddha said to him sniff the bottle! Gunda’s face turned to joyfulness. “Vinegar!” Later, the Buddha told him that he did not need to attend any gathering or chanting; however, only to sweep the yard everyday while humming, “Sweep off dirt and shake off dust.” He continued the task every day for years. One day he rushed to the Buddha, and said, “I finally understand the meaning of the phrase; ‘Sweep off dirt and shake off dust’ means to sweep off the dirt of my mind and shake off dust of my mind.” Buddha Sakyamuni was so glad to hear his words and gave assurance of Buddha-hood to him.

**“World-Honored One! We thought that we had already attained perfect extinction. Now we know that we were like men of no wisdom because we were satisfied with the wisdom of the Lesser Vehicle although we had already been qualified to obtain the wisdom of the Tathagata.”** (P.161, LL.6~10)

Thereupon the Five Hundred Arhats expressed their joyfulness with the following parable:

**THE PARABLE OF THE GEM IN THE JACKET** 衣裏宝珠の譬え話

Suppose a poor man visited his old friend. He was treated well with food and drink and fell asleep.

His friend had to leave for official business, so he fastened a priceless gem inside the garment of the poor friend as a gift to him, and went out. The drunken man did not notice what his friend had given him. After a while he got up and went to another country. He had great difficulty in getting food and clothing. He was satisfied as being a homeless man.

Some time later the good friend happened to see his old friend again. He said, "Alas! Why have you had such difficulty in obtaining food and clothing? I fastened a priceless gem inside your garment the last time you came to my house. The gem is still there. You have not noticed it! What a fool you are! Trade that gem for what you want! You will not be short of anything you want."

### **EXPLANATION:**

This parable was told by the Arhats of the Buddha's disciple who had been assured by the Buddha of their future Buddhahood. Arhats thought that they had attained Nirvana when they attained Arhat-ship. Receiving the assurance of Buddhahood was for them like a treasure given unexpectedly.

The real meaning of this story is spiritual, not financial. All of us possess the Buddha nature or Buddha seed, but we have yet to conceive this concept. Since the Buddha revealed the Lotus Sutra, we must recognize everyone's Buddha nature and realize that we are Bodhisattvas. In the Lotus Sutra, we have been granted proof that we can attain Buddhahood through this realization while striving to do our best through maintaining faith and chanting the Odaimoku, the teaching of equality and harmony.

Nichiren Shonin revealed "*Ichinen Sanzen*" or the Three Thousand Worlds in One Thought (一念三千). One's thought affects others and his environment. Our thoughts are connected to the entire world. In other words, we are the Buddha's children. We inherit all the merits and virtues of the Buddha Sakyamuni. The Eternal Buddha is the universe itself. We can receive limitless merits and virtues from throughout the universe when we sincerely trust the Eternal Buddha and the Odaimoku.