

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING BY FAITH

信解品

Lecture #10 (Dec. 10, 2008)

Although it is difficult to understand the profound and immeasurable Buddha Dharma, faith will help you to understand. It is the theme of this chapter, but be careful it is not blind belief. It is important for us to realize there is something great beyond our comprehension. In Nichiren Buddhism we call “MYO-HO” or wonderful dharma for the something great. Although we cannot understand, belief or faith will help you to understand the Lotus Sutra. That is what the teaching in this chapter.

The Four Great *Shomons* or *Sravakas* were overjoyed to hear the Dharma that they had never heard before and to see that Sariputra, one of their fellow *shomons*, was assured of his own future Buddhahood in the preceding chapter. So they commented that it was just as if they had obtained innumerable treasures without seeking them. However, they do not practice the way of the Bodhisattvas because they are too old, too tired, and do not wish to progress. They are satisfied as they are now. They are almost same with us, because we often excuse ourselves from studying and practicing Buddhism with various reasons. Thus Sravakas says as follows:

“We elders of the Sangha were already old and decrepit when we heard of Anuttra-samyak-sanmbodhi. We did not seek Anuttra-samyak-sanmbodhi because we thought that we had already attained Nirvana, and also because we thought we were too old and decrepit to do so. You have been expounding the Dharma for a long time. We have been in your congregation all the while. We were already tired. Therefore, we just cherished the truth that nothing is substantial, the truth that nothing is different from any other thing, and the truth that nothing more is to be sought. We did not wish to perform the Bodhisattva practices.”

At the view point of the Lotus Sutra, those who are in Theravada Buddhism do not try to practice Bodhisattva Way; therefore, they think that they are not able to become Buddhas.

Buddhism started with Gautama Siddhartha’s salvation from his own sufferings of birth, old age, disease and death. It is called Nirvana. Theravada Buddhists emphasize for attaining Nirvana; therefore, they are more fundamentalists. Mahayana Buddhists emphasize more for salvation from sufferings in daily life, especially so in the Lotus Sutra. Salvation from sufferings in our daily lives is specially revealed in Chapters 25 and 26 in the Lotus Sutra

Obtaining Innumerable Treasures although We Did Not Seek Them無量 珍宝不求自得

“But now we are very glad to hear that you have assured a Sravaka of his future attainment of Anuttra-samyak-sanmbodhi. We have the greatest joy that we have ever had. We have never expected to hear such a rare teachings all of a sudden. How glad we are! We have obtained great benefits. We have obtained innumerable treasures although we did not seek them.”

Nichiren Shu priests who completed the *Aragyo* for three times are certified to enshrine Deity Daikoku for him and for his followers. Daikoku looks like a Santa Clause who gives all kinds of toys from his bag to children during Christmas time. Daikoku is for adults who need special blessing especially in their business. His blessing is throughout year. The deity Daikoku is enshrined in a rice measure box called *masu*, because Daikoku brings rice for us. Rice was essential food for most Oriental people. The priests always write: 無量 珍宝不求自得 in the *masu* box of Deity Daikoku.

This does not mean that we just sit and wait for treasures to appear. As you will see in the following parable how the son improved his mental attitude in stages covering a span of 20 years, we must struggle for improvement in daily life. Enlightenment is to be achieved within the turmoil of our daily life, not in silent seclusion. Let us always try to improve ourselves, inspire our children, grandchildren, and society step by step.

The parables of “The Rich Man and His Poor Son”

A poor little boy ran away from his father when he was very young. He lived in another country for many years. He wandered about in all directions, seeking food and clothing. Many years later while wandering here and there, he happened to walk towards his home country.

At that time his father stayed in a city in the countryside. He had been vainly looking for his son ever since first ran away. The father was now very rich. He had innumerable treasures. His storehouses were filled with gold, silver, coral, and crystal. He had many servants, carts, cows, and sheep. He dealt with many merchants and customers.

The poor son happened to come to the city where his father was living. The father had been thinking of his son ever since he had first lost him. He thought, "I am old and decrepit. I have many treasures. But I have no son other than the missing one. When I die, my treasures will be scattered and lost. Therefore, I am always yearning for my son."

At that time the poor son happened to stand by the gate of the wealthy man's house. Seeing the rich man, the poor son was frightened and thought, "Is he a king or someone like a

king? This is not the place where I can get some work to get food and clothing easily. If I stay here any longer, I shall be forced to work." He tried to run away.

(1) The rich man recognized him at first sight as his son. He was delighted. He immediately dispatched a man standing beside him to quickly bring back the poor son. The messenger ran up to the poor son and caught him. The poor son was frightened and cried, "I have done nothing wrong. Why did you stop me?" The messenger pulled him by force. The poor son thought, "I have been arrested though I am not guilty. I shall be killed." Becoming more and more frightened, the poor son fainted and fell to the ground.

(2) Seeing all this in the distance, the father said to the messenger, "I do not want him anymore. Do not bring him forcibly! Pour cold water on his face to awaken him!" The father said this because he had realized that his son was too base and mean to meet a noble man. He knew that the man was his son but expediently refrained from telling others that this was his son.

Waking up, the poor son stood up and went to a village of the poor to get food and clothing. The wealthy man dispatched messengers in secret. He said to two men looking worn-out, powerless and virtue less, "Go and gently tell the poor man that he will be employed here for a double day's pay. If he agrees, bring him here and have him work together with you to clear dirt." The poor son drew his pay in advance and cleared dirt.

(3) Seeing him, the father felt great compassion towards him and took off his necklace, his garment, and other ornaments. He put on tattered and dirty clothing. He approached the workers and said, "Work hard! Do not be lazy!"

Seeing this poor man working hard, the father told him, "Do not hesitate to take the trays, rice, flour, salt and vinegar - as much as you need! Make yourself comfortable."

Years later, the rich man gave the poor man a name and called him son. The son was glad to be treated kindly, but still thought that he was an humble employee.

Still more years passed. After that the father and the son trusted each other. Now the son felt no hesitation in entering the house of his father, but he still lodged in his old place.

(4) One day the rich man became ill. After a while the father noticed that his son had become more at ease and peaceful, that he wanted to improve himself, and he felt ashamed of the thought that he was base and mean.

(5) As the moment of death for the father drew near, he told his son to call in his relatives, the king, ministers and members of his household. When they were all assembled, he said to them, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is my son, my real son. I am his real father. He ran away from me when I lived in a certain city, and wandered with hardships for more than fifty years. His name is so-and-so. All my treasures are his now."

At that time the poor son was very glad to hear these words of his father. He had the greatest joy that he had ever had. He thought, "I never dreamed of having this store of treasures myself. It has come to me unexpectedly.

The above parable was expounded not by the Buddha but by his four disciples (Subhiti須菩提, Katyayana迦旃延, Kasyapa迦葉 and Maudgalyana目連). Telling the story to the Buddha, they said as follows”

“World-Honored One! The great rich man is you. We are like your sons because you always tell us that we are your sons.”

The numbers marked at the head of each passage above show how the son improved his mental attitude by stages. As Great Master Chih-I put it, the parable illustrates how Sakyamuni Buddha presented the truth in stages, giving us (1) the Sutra in Kegon Period, where the Buddha’s enlightenment is seen as too dazzling for most people to understand. (2) The Agon sutras of Lesser Vehicle, wherein we enter the path of labor and discipline. (3) The Hoto sutras were expounded according to people’s capacities. (4) The Hannya sutras were taught for Buddha wisdom. (5) The Lotus Sutra and Nirvana Sutra which make us heirs of the Buddha.

Afterthought of the Parable

1. As the poor son took a step by step progress, we need effort and endeavor in our school, work, home, and others. It takes many years to accomplish.

2. This story might not be welcomed among Hindu Society that keep strict cast classification. Or the poor son needed for twenty years to be recognized as the son of the wealthy man among the cast society. Or the idea might come from foreign country.

3. The multibillionaire must be involved in a Silk Road trading. Alexander the Great of Macedon conquered the Iranian empire and colonized the area in about 330 B.C., superimposing the culture of the Greeks. The Greek language was brought to the area, and Greek mythology was introduced. The aesthetics of Greek sculpture were merged with the ideas developed from the Indian kingdoms, and a separate local school of art emerged. By the third century B.C., the area had already become a crossroads of Asia, where Persian, Indian and Greek ideas met.

4. This story of the homeless who becomes a billionaire is revealed in Chapter Four. It says, “We have obtained unsurpassed treasures although we did not seek them.” The Buddha and deities are always trying to save us from misery; however, we do not understand their intentions.

5. You may think that the poor son inherits his father’s treasures because he is the real son of the rich man. The Buddha says, “All living beings are my children” in Chapter Three. We are all able to inherit the Buddha’s treasures (Buddhahood) when we trust in the sacred title of the sutra, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.” Thus, we will realize the reality of all things without notice and have a peaceful mind. Please chant the Odaimoku as many as possible wherever you are and whatever you are doing.



Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Las Vegas
3920 Spencer Street
Las Vegas, Nevada 89119-5201
phone/fax (702) 396-6276
email revkanai@gmail.com

All Graphics and content on these pages are the copyrighted property of “Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Las Vegas”. Unless otherwise stated all content and graphics belong to “Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Las Vegas” and its affiliates. Permission for use or reposting is granted under certain specific instances. Please contact Kanai Shonin (*email above*) for further information.