

## Chapter 11

### BEHOLDING THE STUPA OF TREASURES

#### 見宝塔品

Lecture #23 (December 1, 2010)

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#### Summary

In the preceding chapter, the Buddha taught how valuable it is for us to keep, read, recite, explain, and copy this sutra. He also taught those who expounded the sutra must strive in being compassionate, patient, and non-discriminatory.

A stupa of the seven treasures sprung up from the underground and hung in the sky before the Buddha and the congregation. A loud voice of praise was heard from within the stupa, “Excellent, excellent, what you, Sakyamuni Buddha, have expounded is all true.” Seeing these supernatural phenomena, the congregation was extremely surprised and wondered why these things occurred. The Buddha explained that Many-Treasures Buddha 多宝如来 was in the stupa and that this Buddha always appeared when the Lotus Sutra was expounded as he validated the truth of the teachings.

Answering the wish of the congregation to see this Buddha in the stupa, Sakyamuni emitted a ray of light from the white curls between his eyebrows. The illumination summoned the Buddhas of the worlds of the ten directions to Sakyamuni and Many-Treasures Buddha. At that moment, Sakyamuni purified the place. He repeated this three times.

Then Sakyamuni Buddha ascended into the air to open the door of the stupa. Many-Treasures Buddha offered him half of his seat. Since the seat of the two Buddhas was too high for the congregation to see, Sakyamuni raised them up into the sky by his supernatural powers.

Then he said to them, “I shall soon enter into Nirvana. Is there anyone who is willing to expound the Lotus Sutra in this world after my extinction? I wish to hand it on to someone so that it can be perpetuated.”

#### Explanations

Many supernatural phenomena are revealed in this chapter. We should not think they are merely superstitions, because all supernatural phenomena in the Lotus Sutra have some meaning. Sakyamuni Buddha tries to expound in this chapter that Truth transcends time and space.

We intend to judge things through what we have already learned, but Buddha wisdom is too difficult for us to understand with our knowledge only. We must transcend our knowledge in order to understand Buddha wisdom. This is the main reason why people are raised to the sky and stay there. In other words you will understand the Lotus Sutra through faith. The chapters from 11 through 22 are revealed in the sky.

**“Thereupon a stupa of the seven treasures sprang up from underground and hung in the sky before the Buddha.”** (P.181, LL.1~2)

When a Buddha appears, his stupa or palace also moves as he moves as we learned in Chapter Seven (P.138). You may wonder how a house can move together with a person. However when we move to some other place, we naturally need a place to live. The place could be a rented apartment room, a house, a mansion or an estate. It depends on one's karma, ability, and status. Therefore the stupa of Many-Treasures Buddha shows his virtue. Since the stupa is decorated with the seven treasures (gold, silver, lapis lazuli, shell, agate, pearl and ruby), he has tremendous virtue and goodness.

The seven treasures were just some of the valuable goods handled by the Silk Road traders; therefore, the Lotus Sutra might be influenced by the merchants who practiced the teachings and not by the professional monks. What was important and valuable to the lay people were not the same for monks. In many chapters, the Lotus Sutra relies on the value of goods to show how important the teachings of the Buddha are and how we must treasure it.

Moreover the stupa can also mean one's Buddha nature. The stupa symbolizes a person who follows the Six Perfections (giving, keeping precepts, being patient, hardworking, settling your mind and having Buddha wisdom). The ground means the society in which we live. The springing up of the stupa means that salvation in Buddhism is not given from heaven, but rather by one's effort from this ground.

**“Excellent, excellent, You, Sakyamuni have expounded to this great multitude the Lotus Sutra, the teaching of Equality, the Great Wisdom, the Dharma for Bodhisattvas, the Dharma Upheld by the Buddhas. So it is, so it is. What you, Sakyamuni, the World Honored One, have expounded is all true.”**: (P.181, Last Paragraph)

You may be familiar with this sentence. This is “The Appearance of a Stupa” in “*Yokuryo Shu*” in our service books. We often read this paragraph in our daily services. In our society, there are many differences like the rich and poor, the wise and fool, black and white, male and female; however, Buddha sees no differences because everyone has Buddha nature, so everyone can also become a Buddha. This is one of the reasons why the Lotus Sutra is the most excellent.

There are two meanings in the teaching of equality; 1) Buddha Dharma is always the same in the past, present and future; whoever teaches and wherever it is taught, 2) all living beings are able to attain Buddhahood by realizing the “*Reality of All Things*” revealed in Chapter Two, that is to see things from three different points of view: “All existence is non-

substantial and void or *ku-tai*,” “All existence is non-substantial, but it nevertheless has a provisional reality or *ke-tai*,” and “All existence is neither void nor provisionally-real, but there is a truth which transcends this dichotomy, which is middle way or *chu-tai*.”

**“Why did this stupa of treasures spring up from the underground? Why was that voice heard from within the stupa?”** (P.182, LL.9~11)

Great-Eloquence Bodhisattva raises these questions. He represents the congregation when asking questions and making requests in this chapter. Please note that different Bodhisattvas raise questions, or the Buddha talks to different Bodhisattvas in each chapter. Great-Eloquence has three questions: 1) why did the stupa appear, 2) why did it appear from the underground and 3) why did Many-Treasures Buddha say, “Excellent, excellent!”?

## **The Reason for the Appearance of the Stupa** 宝塔涌現の因縁

**“Many-Treasures Tathagata caused his stupa to spring up from underground in order to hear the Lotus Sutra direct from me. Now he praised me, saying ‘Excellent, excellent!’”**  
(P.182, Last paragraph)

Sakyamuni Buddha answers the Bodhisattva and says that in his previous life, Many-Treasures Buddha once lived in a world named Pure-Treasure, located at a great distance to the East. When he was still a Bodhisattva, he made a vow, “If anyone expounds the Lotus Sutra after I become a Buddha and after I pass away, I will cause my stupa to spring up before him, wherever he may be, so that I may be able to prove the authenticity of the sutra.” That was the reason Many-Treasures Buddha sprung up from underground and why he praised Sakyamuni Buddha.

All Buddhas have their own vows. For example, Sakyamuni Buddha vowed to save all living beings on this earth while Amitabha Buddha made 48 vows to lead the people who have trust in him to the Pure Land in the West after their death.

## **Assembly of All Manifestation-Buddhas** 分身仏の来集

**“World Honored One! We wish to see that Buddha.”** (P.183, L.3)

Responding to Great-Eloquence Bodhisattva's request, Sakyamuni explains another vow made by Many-Treasures Buddha that Sakyamuni must call on all Buddhas of his replicas who are expounding the Lotus Sutra in the ten quarters. Then he emitted a ray of light from his white curls between his eyebrows. The ray of light illumined all ten directions of the worlds. Those Buddhas in the ten directions, illuminated by the light, came pouring in to Mt. Sacred Eagle with their Bodhisattvas.

These Buddhas are the Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha's replicas. Sakyamuni Buddha can produce Buddhas in his likeness by his supernatural powers and dispatch them to the worlds of the ten quarters for propagation. The idea of clones might come out of this chapter. Now they have come to hear this sutra directly from Sakyamuni. This idea of the replicas is first introduced in this chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

## **Triple Purification of the World 三變土田**

**“At that instance the *Saha*-World was purified.”** (P.184, L.9)

**“The gods and men were removed to other worlds except those who were in the congregation.”**(P.184, LL.15~17)

**“Sakyamuni Buddha purified two hundred billion nayuta worlds of each of the eight quarters neighboring the *Saha*-World to receive all the Buddhas of his replicas. The hells, the regions of hungry spirits, the regions of animals, and the regions of asuras were eliminated; and the gods and men were removed to other worlds.”**(P.184, LL.28~34)

**“Sakyamuni Buddha again purified two hundred billion nayuta more worlds of each of the eight quarters to seat all the Buddhas of his replicas.”** (P.185, Second Paragraph)

Sakyamuni Buddha purified the land three times, which symbolizes his limitless power.

The idea that “The *Saha*-World is identical with the Pure Land of Tranquil Light” originated from this chapter. (娑婆即寂光)

The land was purified not only because all replicas of the Buddha came but because it was the place where the important teaching of the Lotus Sutra was about to be revealed. What was the important teaching of the sutra? The existence of the Eternal Buddha, which will be explained in Chapter 16.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “This place is pure because the teaching is supreme. The person is honored because he expounds the supreme teachings.” Thus, when all the people on earth believe in the Lotus Sutra, peace and security will prevail. That is his constant wish.

According to the Great Master T'ien T'ai, the purification of the world three times is done because of the steadfast faith towards the Lotus Sutra. Faith towards the sutra means that we believe in that all phenomena in the universe are created and destroyed by the True Nature of the Dharma with infinite possibilities of harmony and evolution. To believe in this concept is faith in the Lotus Sutra.

**Other Buddhas Also Wish to Open the Doors of the Stupa 宝塔を開かんと他仏も欲する**

**“Good man! Go to Sakyamuni Buddha who is now living on Mt. Grdhrakuta! Ask him on my behalf, ‘Are you in good health? Are you peaceful? Are the Bodhisattvas and Sravakas peaceful or not?’ Strew these jeweled flowers to him, offer them to him, and say, ‘That Buddha sent me to tell you that he wishes to see the stupa of the treasures opened.’”** (P.186, Third Paragraph)

Those Buddhas who are not able to attend this significant occasion sent their messengers to request Sakyamuni Buddha to open the doors of the stupa of Many-Treasures.

**“Now he opened the door of the stupa of the seven treasures with his fingers of his right hand.”** (P.186, L.27)

This is very ceremonial. The door cannot be opened until all the Buddhas of his replicas and messengers of the other Buddhas had arrived and sat on their seats and all of the attendees wished to see the stupa opened. Everyone was waiting with their hands together in *Gassho*. The sound made of opening the door was as loud as the removal of a bolt and lock on a gate of a great city. Finally the door opened.

**“Thereupon Many-Treasures Buddha in the stupa of treasures offered a half of his seat to Sakyamuni Buddha, saying, ‘Please sit here!’”** (P.187, Third Paragraph)

There are many different statues of Sakyamuni Buddha. When you see a statue of two Buddhas sitting side by side in a stupa, this symbolizes Chapter Eleven of the Lotus Sutra. This shows that Sakyamuni Buddha is preaching the Lotus Sutra with Many-Treasures Buddha authenticating the truth. In Nichiren Shu, this style of statue is often enshrined as part of the *gohonzon*.

Many-Treasures Buddha is a past Buddha while Sakyamuni Buddha is the present Buddha; therefore, both Buddhas sitting together means the transcendence of time and space. Sakyamuni Buddha reveals the truth that is more spiritual while Many-Treasures Buddha appears with the materialistic seven treasures; that is to say, the teaching of the truth can be proved physically. For example, we can see the existence of gravity by dropping an object. Furthermore, this means that the Lotus Sutra reveals the oneness of spirituality and reality, the mental world and the physical world, and spirit and matter.

**“The seat of the Buddhas is too high. Raise us up by your supernatural powers so that we may be able to be with you in the sky.”**(P.187, LL. 15~17)

Answering the request of the great multitude, the Buddha raised them up to the sky with his supernatural powers. The aim is not for them to walk or stay in the sky physically but to be ambitious and to improve themselves. It is sometimes important to get out of our fixed ways and see things from different points of view. When we go up to the top of a mountain, everything looks so small. We feel free from the sufferings down below.

**"Who will expound the Sutra of the Lotus Sutra in this *Saha* -World? Now is the time to do this. I shall enter into Nirvana before long." (P.187, LL.21~23):**

Sakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra for eight years before his death. His body was also mortal. He realized his death was approaching; therefore, he asked someone to take his place. But he also warned that it would not be an easy task to expound the Lotus Sutra.

It is very interesting to note that the candidates for expounding the Lotus Sutra in Chapter 13 wish to do so in other worlds not in this *Saha*-World and that another group of candidates who are Bodhisattvas from the other worlds wish to expound the teachings in this *Saha*-World in Chapter 15. In both cases, Sakyamuni Buddha declines their offers because there are already other Bodhisattvas ready to handle this task in Buddha's mind. We will learn about this matter in detail in later chapters.

## **The Six Hard and Nine Easy Tasks 六難九易**

After the Buddha asked candidates for propagation of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, he explains how difficult it will be to expound the Lotus Sutra after his extinction. He lists nine examples of unimaginable difficulty, such as expounding the countless other sutras numbering as many as there are sands in the River Ganges, picking up Mt. Sumeru and hurling it at a great distance and moving one billion sumeru-worlds with a flick of your toe. Then stresses in six articles that those hardships are nothing compared to the demanding mission of his followers.

The six hard tasks are as follows:

1. **"It is difficult to expound this sutra in the evil world."** (P.191, 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph)
2. **"It is difficult to copy and keep this sutra or cause others to copy."** (P.191, 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph)
3. **"It is difficult to read this sutra even for awhile in the evil world."** (P.191, Last paragraph)
4. **"It is difficult to keep this sutra and expound it to even one person."** (P.192, 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph)
5. **"It is difficult to hear and receive this sutra and ask the meanings of it."** (P.192, 4<sup>th</sup> Paragraph)
6. **"It is difficult to keep this sutra."** (P.192, Last Paragraph)

After revealing these hard tasks, the Buddha praises those who expound, copy, read, keep, receive and hear the sutra and equates them to "the eyes of the world and honored by gods and men."

**"It is difficult to keep this sutra. I shall be glad to see anyone keeping it even for a moment. So will all the other Buddhas. He will be praised by all the Buddha. He will be a man of valor, a man of endeavor. He should be considered to have already observed the precepts, and practiced the \*dhuta. He will quickly attain the unsurpassed enlightenment of the Buddha. Anyone who reads and recites this sutra in the future is a true son of mine. He shall be considered to live on the stage of purity and good."** (P.193, LL.4<sup>th</sup> to the end of the page)

\*dhuta ..... Discipline to release from ties to clothing, food, and dwelling.

The Last sentence of the above quotation by Senchu Murano is not accurate to the Chinese Version of Kumarajiva's version. I prefer Gene Reeves' translation as **“In that frightening age, one who can teach this sutra even for a moment should receive offerings from all human and heavenly beings.”** Thus, Nichiren Daishonin was protected by his disciples, followers and most of all by many deities as he faced many persecutions. So as you and I will be protected.

In Lecture #2 of this series, we discussed the three different ways of dividing the 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra by the Great Master T'ien Tai of China. They are:

- ① The Preaching at Mount Sacred Eagle 前靈鷲山会 (Chapter 1 through 10)
- ② In the Sky 虚空会 (Chapter 11 to 22)
- ③ Returning to the Mountain 後靈鷲山会 (Chapter 22 to 28).

- ① The Preaching at Mount Sacred Eagle: is like the obligatory education received from kindergarten to high school.
- ② In the Sky: is like undergraduate and graduate education with the focus being more specific and technical. The education at this level is hard to understand for ordinary people, thus it is similar to monastic life.
- ③ Returning to the Mountain: is the place where we practice what we have learned for the sake of other people.

Furthermore, the three different ways can be looked as follows:

- ① is more like ordinary lives while;
- ② is more like seclusion and intense study and;
- ③ is the person who completed higher education and purified his or her mind, who returns to ordinary life and lives together with everyone in order to spread peaceful and secure living.

A devout follower, Abutsu-bo, asked Nichiren, “What is the Many-Treasures Stupa and who is the Many-Treasures Buddha?” Nichiren answered as follows:  
“In the *Mappo* Era, there are no *stupas* except the men and women who practice the Lotus Sutra. There is no difference between the rich and poor, and superior and inferior when chanting ‘Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo.’ All devotees are the *stupas* and they are all Many-Treasures Buddha. There is no treasure *stupa* except the Lotus Sutra. The sacred title of the sutra is the treasure stupa. The stupa itself is ‘Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo.’ The body of you, Abutsu-bo, represents the five elements of soil, water, fire, wind, and void. These five elements are the five characters of the Myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo. Therefore, Abutsu-bo, you yourself is the treasure stupa, and the stupa is you, Abutsu-bo.”

My personal translation of the above phrase is that Many-Treasures Buddha appeared to prove the righteousness of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Since we chant the sacred title of the sutra, we are just like Many-Treasures Buddha proving the truth of the teachings of the sutra by being happy, peaceful and harmonious with all other beings.