

THE LOTUS SUTRA

Lecture #53 (November 16, 2011)

Lecture #54 (November 23, 2011)

Chapter 25

The Universal Gate of World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva

SUMMARY

The title of this chapter starts with “The Universal Gate,” which means the gate has no doors; thus it is open for everyone. This is Buddha’s compassion through World-Voice-Perceiver. World-Voice-Perceiver means not only to hear the voice and sound of suffering people, but also perceive the heart of those suffering people. It is like a medical device that can detect the problem of a sick person, but the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva is also able to understand the real problem of the sick person’s mind. Chapter 25, which deals with the Universal Gate of World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva, *Kannon* in Japanese or *Avalokitesvara* in Sanskrit, is a part of the Lotus Sutra; however, there are countless number of faithful men and women who read this chapter as an independent sutra regardless of whether they believe in the Lotus Sutra or not.

We can see a lot of statues of Kannon in Japan, China, Thailand, other Asian countries and also at a theological school in the Vatican. A famous Japanese artist, Seiou Michida drew *Maria Kannon* and gave it to Pope John Paul II. Here in Las Vegas, the statues of Kannon are enshrined not only inside but also outside of the temples of Chinese, Vietnamese, Thailand and Cambodian Buddhists. The Eleven-mask Kannon of the Kannon Temple of Nevada was engraved by Ryuun Yamataka in Japan. The wood of the statue is Yaku-sugi or Japanese cedar which is over 1,000 years old found only in Yakushima Island in Southern Japan. The statue was donated by Mrs. Tayeko JimyoTakahashi to Rev. Shokai Kanai who opened a small temple in Las Vegas in November 29, 2002.

A sculptor of Kannon once said that it is very difficult to engrave the face because Kannon is neither a man nor a woman but still must appear with a sacred human form. Why is Kannon so popular? Kannon Bodhisattva could be a male or a female. If someone wishes to see a beautiful woman, the Bodhisattva looks like just such a woman to that person. If someone wants to see a great man, the Bodhisattva appears as such a man. Another reason is because the Buddhas are too superior for ordinary people and too difficult for them to understand. For instance, in a household the children talk more easily to their mother than their father since the mother is more peaceful. This is the same with faith. For many people Buddhas are too superior and difficult to approach, but the Bodhisattvas are closer to ordinary people and listen to our complaints and desires. It is Kannon Bodhisattva who perceives our sufferings, listens to our desires with his compassion and saves us.

However, there is one condition: the sutra says, “Call his name with all their hearts.” In

Nichiren Shu, it is not necessary to call the Bodhisattva's name, because the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," contains his and other Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' names in it.

All Buddhists recite the Four Great Vows. One of them is to vow to quench all inexhaustible desires, Kannon Bodhisattva seems to be fulfilling all our desires; however, Sakyamuni Buddha teaches us to realize that Kannon can be each one of us and also the other side of us. We have desires, which have led to technological breakthrough and advancement in cultures, but on the flip side, we have destroyed our environment, contaminated the water and air and created deserts out of once green pastures. Now it is the time for all of us to give up some of our desires; just as Endless-Intent Bodhisattva took off his necklace and gave it to World-Voice Perceiver Bodhisattva who in turn divided the necklace in half and gave one half to Sakyamuni Buddha and the other half to Many-Treasure Buddha. This means that all merits of Kannon Bodhisattva has come from Sakyamuni and Many-Treasure Buddhas. The Mandala Gohonzon includes all the merits of the Eternal Buddha, historical Sakyamuni Buddha and all other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, we'd better pray directly to the Mandala Gohonzon of the Ten Realms.

EXPLANATIONS

"If many hundreds of thousands of thousands of billions of living beings hear the name of World-Voice Perceiver Bodhisattva and call his name with all their hearts when they are under various sufferings, World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva will immediately perceive their voices, and cause them to emancipate themselves from the sufferings." (P.316, LL9~14)

It says to call his name with all their hearts. It is not enough to utter the name or the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra with your mouth only. This requires calling his name or chanting the Odaimoku with your mouth, mind and body (*i.e.*, three actions). Buddhism talks about the relationship of mind and matter. When you chant the name of Kannon with your mouth, you may imagine his compassionate face and his power in your mind, and then you will feel better, just as when you look at a mirror and laugh, you will feel happy. When you become happy, your suffering will disappear. Why is Kannon able to perceive your suffering immediately? It is because you are a Kannon Bodhisattva. To chant his name or to chant the Odaimoku is to attain oneness with Kannon or the Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha. This realization could not be attained without sincere heart. It is important for devoted Buddhists who realize they act according to the wishes of the Eternal Buddha.

"Those who keep the name of this World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva will not be burned when they are put into a conflagration by the supernatural powers of this Bodhisattvas. Those who call his name will be able to take ground when they are washed by an inundation. ... all the crew will be saved from the attacks ... the sword or stick raised against him will suddenly break asunder ... those devils will not be able even to see him ... those things in which he is bound up will break asunder, and he will be saved ... you will be saved from the attacks of these bandits." (P.316, L.14 ~ P.317, L.14)

These are the seven calamities that the Bodhisattva can save us from.

They are calamities of:

1. **Fire:** For example, when I was a little boy, my father told me that a fire was approaching our next door neighbor, so he chanted Odaimoku a lot facing the fire; the wind shifted away from his neighbor's house.
2. **Water:** Another example is during World War II, a Japanese warship was sunk by aerial bombings, a crewmember chanted chapters of the Lotus Sutra while drifting in the ocean for three days. He was rescued.
3. **Human-eating demons:** What are the human-eating demons? They are like viruses, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, etc. Before the bacteria eat your body, you must take care of yourself by chanting Odaimoku, visiting good doctors, exercising and eating good food. When you chant the Odaimoku hard, you will have wisdom and lead you to a right direction or to a good doctor.
4. **Swords and clubs:** Nichiren Shonin was almost beheaded at Tatsunokuchi Excursion Ground at the age of 49 but the executioner's sword broke into a few pieces by a bright light according to a legend.
5. **Demons:** Nichiren Shu priests who hold *kito* blessing chase away demons and evil spirits by their loud chanting voice of the Lotus Sutra and loud sound of *bokken* and sparks by hitting a special metal and a stone.
6. **The calamity of chains and shackles:** During the era of when this Kannon Sutra was compiled, there were evil kings and lords of a land who made unlawful judgments, so many innocent people were chained and shackled. Even today, this may happen to anyone. By chanting "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" which means that "I shall follow righteousness," you may avoid unlawful judgments against you.
7. **The calamity of bandits:** On Halloween night in 2008 a bandit broke into my house by kicking in the front door and ransacked my bedroom, but I was very lucky that I was not at home and nothing was stolen. The bandit overlooked many important and priceless items. He did not touch anything at the altar.

If someone calls the name of this Bodhisattva, he or she will be able to avoid these seven calamities. Such benefits, by which one can avoid calamities and obtain happiness, are material gain but also gives us spiritual gain, too. To obtain the above-mentioned benefits we must have pure hearts. The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas grant such benefits only to those people who practice sincerely. The purpose of calling the name of Kannon is to show our sincerity towards him. So the sutra emphasizes here again to have sincerity. In order to have sincerity, we must practice daily chanting of the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo."

“Those who have much lust will be saved from lust if they constantly think of the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and respect him. Those who have much anger will be saved from anger if they constantly think of the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and respect him. Those who have much stupidity will be saved from stupidity if they constantly think of the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and respect him.” (P.317, LL.20~26)

Lust, anger and stupidity (ignorance to the Buddha's teachings) are called the 'Three Poisons' in Buddhism. The seven calamities listed above are material and physical sufferings of human nature and the three poisons are mental sufferings. Material sufferings come upon us because the mental sufferings already exist as the base. Natural disasters and our thoughts are not separated. Our thinking reflects upon nature. When we have damaged nature, we try to fix it by going Green. When we are able to control lust, anger, stupidity, calamities may disappear.

Therefore it is important to control your mind. Thus, your thinking and surrounding material or environment are related to each other. This is called the theory of *Ichinen Sanzen*, or “Three Thousand Realms are in One Mind.”

“A woman who, wishing to have a boy, bows and makes offerings to the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva, will be able to give birth to a boy endowed with merits, virtues and wisdom. A woman who wishing to have a girl, does the same, will be able to give birth to a beautiful girl who will be loved and respected by many people because of the roots of virtue which the newly-born girl planted in her previous existence.” (P.317, LL.29~35)

I give this quotation to a woman who wishes to have a baby or to a mother to be and tell her to recite these quotations followed by the Odaimoku while rubbing her tummy every day, so that she may have a good baby. One’s life does not only exist once, but consist of many previous lives; therefore, it is important to have a boy endowed with merits and virtues and wisdom to carry into this world, or a girl who has the roots of virtues planted in her previous existences. This is similar in concept when a mother tries to educate her baby before birth by means of playing music over her womb and keeping a relaxed and gentle mind.

“How does he (the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva) expound the Dharma to the living beings? What expedients does he employ? ” (P.318, LL.20~22)

There is only one truth, but there are many different ways to explain the truth. A good teacher at a school knows how to teach smart kids, slow-learning kids, and lazy kids in his or her class. He or she must use different methods to teach them. The World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva expounds the Dharma, but he uses different approaches for different levels of understanding; these are expedients. The Bodhisattva takes 33 different shapes of ordinary people to make it easy for them to approach him and makes their wishes become reality; then he expounds the Dharma. He takes the shapes of a Buddha, a king, a god, a great general, a rich man, a householder, a prime minister, a wife, a dragon, a man of pure faith, a boy, a girl, a non-human being, and so on.

We have different colors of skin, different cultures, different levels of education, different beliefs, different social status, different occupations, and so forth, but we are all the same human beings. A good leader must understand people’s feelings and desires. That is why this Bodhisattva transforms himself into other shape of living beings.

In Chapter Two, “Expedients,” the Buddhas says that although he has only one teaching (the One Vehicle), he divides it into three vehicles according to people’s capacities. In this chapter, World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva employs the same expedient, not by using words, but using his many appearances.

Kannon Bodhisattva is not only the statues standing at temples, but in reality he appears as shapes of many different people as mentioned above. This is because when we pray hard or call his name with all our heart, energy (*Chi* or *Ki*) develops. That energy harmonizes with someone else who has the same energy or extra energy. Then he or she appears to save you as an embodiment of Kannon.

There are many different statues of Kannon Bodhisattva, having one face, three faces,

eleven faces, two arms, six arms, one thousand arms etc. Each face is different, and each hand holds different symbolic objects because each person has different desires to be fulfilled.

Many people stay at the level of fulfillment of their desires, but the Bodhisattva's real intention is to expound the Dharma. Nichiren Shu has many expedients such as *kito* blessing, *ofudas* prayer tablets and *omamori* amulets, and also enshrines many different deities. They are all expedients to lead people to be saved. But we must not forget to learn and to practice at a higher level of Buddhism in order to attain Buddhahood. Start by praying to the Mandala Gohonzon of the Ten Realms.

“The Endless-Intent Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, ‘World Honored One! Now I will make an offering to the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva.’” (P.319, LL.31~33)

Endless-Intent Bodhisattva was so impressed by what he heard about World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva that he wanted to make him an offering. He took a necklace of many gems from his neck and tried to give it to the Kannon Bodhisattva, who would not accept it. Thereupon Sakyamuni Buddha told him to receive it out of his compassion toward the Endless-Intent Bodhisattva. Although Kannon received it, he divided the necklace into two parts and offered one part of it to Sakyamuni Buddha and the other to the stupa of Many-Treasures Buddha. The reason he did not accept the offering at first was that he was very humble and that he thought he was not worthy of receiving an offering from others.

He believed all his power of saving others came from the Buddhas; therefore, he divided the necklace into two, one for Sakyamuni Buddha who revealed the truth and the other to Many-Treasures Buddha who proved the truth. This action caused World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva to receive many merits which is used to save all the suffering people.

Thus, when we pray, we must focus on the Gohonzon, or the Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha instead of the statues of Bodhisattvas or deities.

Explanations of the Gatha:

During the time when Kannon Sutra was compiled, there were no policemen, firemen, coast guard, or lawyers. Therefore, people in that era wished to have a superman or superwoman who could save people from all kinds of sufferings. The following are good examples:

Fireman: “Suppose you are thrown into a large pit of fire by someone who has an intention of killing you. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, the pit of fire will change into a pond of water.” (P.321, 3rd Paragraph)

Coast Guard: “Suppose you are in a ship drifting on a great ocean where dragons, fish and devils are rampant. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, the ship will not be sunk by the waves.” (P.321, 4th Paragraph)

Mountain Ranger: “Suppose you are pushed off the top of Mt. Sumeru by someone, if you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, you will be able to stay in the air like the sun.” (P.321, 5th Paragraph)

“Suppose you are chased by an evil man, and pushed off the top of a mountain made of diamond. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, you will not lose even a

hair.” (P.321, 6th Paragraph)

Police: “Suppose bandits are surrounding you, and attempting to kill you with swords. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, the bandits will become compassionate towards you.” (P.321, 7th Paragraph)

“Suppose someone curses you to death, or attempts to kill you by various poisons. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, death will be brought to that person, instead.” (P.322, 3rd Paragraph)

Lawyer or Attorney: “Suppose you are sentenced to death, and the sword is drawn to behead you. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, the sword will suddenly break asunder.” (P.321, 8th Paragraph)

“Suppose you are bound up in pillories, chains, manacles or fetters. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, you will be released from them.” (P.322, 2nd Paragraph)

Animal Controller: “Suppose you are surrounded by wild animals which have sharp, fearful tusks and claws. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, they will flee away to distant places.” (P.322, 5th Paragraph)

Medical Doctor: “Suppose you meet lizards, snakes, vipers or scorpions emitting poisonous vipers like flames. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, They will go away as you call his name.” (P.322, 6th Paragraph)

Meteorologist: “Suppose clouds arise, lightning flashes, thunder peals, hail falls, and a heavy rain comes down. If you think of the power of World-Voice-Perceiver, the thunderstorm will stop at once.” (P.322, 7th Paragraph)

Priest: “Hell, the region of hungry spirits, and the region of animals, that is, the three evil regions will be eliminated. The sufferings of birth, old age, disease and death will gradually be eliminated.” (P.323, 3rd Paragraph)

“All darkness is dispelled by the light of his wisdom as spotless and as pure as the light of the sun. The light destroys the dangers of wind and fire, and illumines the whole world brightly.” (P.323, 5th Paragraph)

We are living in the society of inter-dependence; each individual has his or her task to contribute to the communities while others have other tasks that balance supply and demand. The Lotus Sutra emphasizes these points – to help others while the other helps you.

“When the Buddha expounded this Chapter of the Universal Gate, the eighty-four thousand living beings in the congregation began to aspire for the unparalleled Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.” (P.324, last Paragraph)

The last sentence above is the conclusion of Chapter 25. When we understand the real meaning of the Lotus Sutra, we will be free from all mental and physical sufferings, have wonderful powers like the World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva and aspire to save all living beings.