

Chapter 15

THE APPEARANCE OF BODHISATTVA FROM UNDERGROUND

從地涌出品

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Shakumon 迹門 and Honmon 本門:

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma or the Lotus Sutra has 28 chapters. Chapter 1 to 14 is called Shaku-mon which reveals the historical Buddha Sakyamuni as a being bound by limitations of time and space and of birth and death just like us. In the Shakumon, Buddha Sakyamuni is one of the Buddhas located in the ten directions of the universe of the past, present and future. The last fourteen chapters of the Lotus Sutra reveal the Original Buddha and the Buddha's eternal nature. Sakyamuni is the only Original Buddha, while all the other Buddhas are his manifestations. Thus Sakyamuni who attained Buddhahood under the bodhi tree in Buddhagaya, India was indeed the original Buddha's manifestation. Chapter 16 explains the relationship between the Original Buddha and the manifestation Buddha.

This concept of the Original Buddha is revealed only in the Lotus Sutra. Many people including the founders of many Buddhist schools did not understand or could not believe the concept of the Original Buddha, so they said that the Lotus Sutra is too difficult to understand and that the teachings are not for us, the ordinary people.

Without understanding or faith in the concept of the Original Buddha, no one can digest the truth revealed in the sutra. However we must be very careful that the Original Buddha is only able to be revealed after the historical Buddha is revealed just as the teaching of Honmon is revealed only after Shakumon. Through expedients, the Original Buddha manifests in many forms in order to educate us so that one day we will be able to comprehend the concept of the Eternal Buddha.

Summary

At the end of Chapter 13 the Buddha says, "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 off to someone so that it can be perpetuated." In chapter 14, there were eighty billion

nayuta of Bodhisattvas who made up their minds to expound the sutra and vowed to endure any hardship or persecutions on this earth. However Buddha Sakyamuni did not responded to them.

As chapter 15 begins, countless numbers of Bodhisattvas from the other worlds said that they would expound the sutra in this Saha-world. They wished the Buddha will give them permission to do so. Then, Buddha Sakyamuni surprised them by saying; "No. You do not need to do so, because there are already countless Bodhisattvas in this world. They are the ones who will expound this sutra in this Saha-world." As soon as he said this, the ground quaked and cracked and countless Bodhisattvas appeared from Underground. Among them, there were four leaders: Superior-Practice, Limitless-Practice, Pure-Practice and Steadily-Established-Practice Bodhisattvas.

Explanations

“Thereupon the Bodhisattva-mahasattvas ... who had come from the other worlds, ... said: ‘If you permit us to protect, keep, read, recite and copy this sutra, and make offerings to it strenuously in this Saha-World after your extinction, we will do so, and expound it in this world.’” (P.228, 1st and 2nd Paragraph)

Buddha Sakyamuni did not respond to the proposals from the Bodhisattvas from the other worlds in the previous chapters, but this time he answered by refusing their proposal saying as follows:

“No, good men! I do not want you to protect or keep this sutra because there are Bodhisattvas-mahasattvas sixty thousand times as many as the sands of the River Ganges in this Saha-World.” (P.228, LL.13~15)

He refused assistance from the other worlds. This means that the problems of this world must be solved by the people of this earth. “Do not rely on others.” “Do not run away from suffering of this earth. We must solve our problems by ourselves.” The Lotus Sutra teaches self-esteem and self-support. The Buddha always encourages us to do things by ourselves as he trusts us.

We do not know how many sand-particles there are in the River Ganges for it must be too numerous to count. Countless many Buddhists existed in the past and will continue to exist in the future. The total number may be higher than the sixty thousand times as many as there are sands in the River Ganges because the sutra talks about countless years in the past and countless years in the future. Therefore it is not surprising to hear that "There are Bodhisattvas-mahasattvas sixty thousand times as many as the sands of the River Ganges in this world" who will spread the teachings of the dharma. This number is actually quite small.

“...the ground of the Saha-world, which was composed of one thousands million Sumeru-worlds, quaked and cracked, and many thousands of billions of Bodhisattva-mahasattvas sprang up from Underground simultaneously.” (P.228, LL.19~22)

It is important to say that they sprang up from Underground. For instance, the seeds of grasses and plants are kept underground during winter. When the weather turns warmer and spring has come, the seeds simultaneously sprout up from the ground. The buds are very soft and

easily broken, but the buds are strong enough to break and crack the hard ground. Some buds are strong enough to crack even asphalt or concrete. This event is wonderful and contains mystic properties. This is the concept of “MYO-HO.” We must strive hard to be just like the buds. We look fragile outside but very strong in our minds. We must have strong determination and inner power to live strong lives and carry forth the teaching of the dharma, to break through the grounds of ignorance and into the light of wisdom.

The number of Bodhisattvas who sprang up from Underground is countless. For instance, even the number of their attendants is as many as sixty thousand times the number of the sands of the River Ganges. The Bodhisattvas from Underground are the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra* today. Nichiren Daishonin says: “If you are not a Bodhisattva from Underground, you cannot chant the Odaimoku.” So you and I are the Bodhisattvas from Underground.

“They had lived in the sky below this Saha-World.”(P.228, Last two lines)

Isn't it wonderful that there is sky not only above us but also underground? But you should not take these words literally. The sky is “*ku*” in Japanese and Chinese. This means void, nothingness, non-attachment, and equality. The Bodhisattvas from Underground have lived in the stage of non-attachment. The Master T'ien T'ai of China says that the sky below this earth refers to subconscious creativity. When we are deep in meditation or concentration or when we chant the Odaimoku, we may be able to channelize this subconscious creativity.

The Bodhisattvas from Underground were educated under the guidance of the Eternal and Original Buddha in the remote past. Although they had already reached non-attachment, upon hearing the voice of the Buddha's request to expound the Lotus Sutra on this earth, they returned to live with us in a world filled with sufferings. We must realize that we are the Bodhisattvas from Underground ready to expound the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in this evil world.

***The Four Great Bodhisattvas* 四菩薩**

“Those Bodhisattvas had four leaders: 1) Superior-Practice, 2) Limitless-Practice, 3) Pure-Practice, and 4) Steadily-Established-Practice. These four great Bodhisattvas were the highest leaders of those Bodhisattvas.” (P.230, Second Paragraph)

It is said that these four great Bodhisattvas are the leaders in the *Degeneration Era of the Dharma* 末法. The names of the four Bodhisattvas appear next to Sakyamuni Buddha and Taho Buddha on Nichiren's *Mandala Gohonzon*. They are located at either side near the top center.

Nichiren Shonin applied these four Great Bodhisattvas with the four elements of the universe such as soil, water, heat and air: 1) Superior-Practice for the virtue of fire, 2) Limitless-Practice for the virtue of wind, 3) Pure-Practice for virtue of water, and 4) Steadily-Established-Practice for the virtue of earth.

It is also said that Nichiren is the rebirth of Superior-Practice Bodhisattva who is the great leader of the four Bodhisattvas.

“World-Honored One! Are you in good health? Are you peaceful or not? Are the living beings, whom you are to save, ready to receive your teachings or not? Do they not fatigue you?” (P.230, 3rd Paragraph)

Thus, the four Bodhisattvas from Underground asked how the Buddha was doing. Responding to their questions, he replied as follows:

“I am peaceful. I am in good health. The living beings are ready to be saved. They do not fatigue me because I already taught them in their consecutive previous existence, and also because they have already honored the past Buddhas respectfully and **planted the roots of good.**” (P.230, LL.23~27)

When we do something unwanted or unfavorable, we get tired easily. When we enjoy our work, we will not tire easily and will not feel stress. Sakyamuni Buddha really enjoyed

expounding his teachings because he knows our past, present and future. He knows that we will become Buddhas. So when we have a dream for the future and work hard to achieve this aim, we are able to enjoy what we are doing.

Those who practice the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* today had encountered this teaching in the past. This sutra is extremely difficult to learn; however, we must have accepted the teachings and practiced it before. With the relationships of *cause and effect*, since we experienced this sutra before, we are able to practice the teachings again today, thus eventually leading us to attain Buddhahood in the future. The sutra states we are all assured of our future attainment of Buddhahood.

To plant the roots or seeds of good, is very important for Buddhists and also for everyone to do something good every day. Think of the conduct of bringing pleasure to others as if you are adding savings into a bank. Accumulation of pennies will become millions of dollars, so your good deeds will lead to attaining Enlightenment.

“We have never seen these many thousands of billions of Bodhisattvas. Tell me, Most Honorable Biped! Where did they come from? Why did they come?” (P.231, Last 6 lines from the bottom)

Maitreya Bodhisattvas asked the above questions as a representative for the entire congregation who had gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle. They are the Buddha's disciples, relatives, Bodhisattvas from other worlds, gods, spiritual beings and others. They have never seen these

Bodhisattvas from Underground before. They wondered where they came from, why they were here, who was their teacher, and which sutra did they practice and what teaching of Buddha did they study?

“Good Man! Wait for a while! Here is a Bodhisattva-mahasattva called Maitreya in this congregation. Sakyamuni Buddha assured Maitreya Bodhisattva of his future attainment of Buddhahood, saying, ‘You will become a Buddha immediately after me.’” (P.234, LL.22~25)

Before answering Maitreya's questions, the Buddha addressed the assurance of his attaining Buddhahood in front of the congregation. It is Maitreya Bodhisattva who will be a Buddha immediately after Sakyamuni. He is believed to be living in the *Tusita* Heaven, waiting for the time when he will come down to this world and succeed Sakyamuni Buddha. It is said that he will appear in this world five billion six hundred and seventy million years after the parinirvana of Sakyamuni. Maitreya Buddha could be you!

“My words are true. Believe me with all your hearts! I have been teaching them since the remotest past.” (P.237, LL.7~10)

The Buddha finally answered Maitreya's questions. He says: "It is true that you have never seen any of these countless Bodhisattvas who have sprung up from beneath the earth. But I, Sakyamuni, have been teaching them in the World of Endurance ever since I attained Buddhahood. ... It may appear to you as if, after I attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi tree near the city of Gaya some 40 and odd years ago, I then taught them for the first time, and let them enter the way to Buddhahood. But TO TELL THE TRUTH, I HAVE BEEN EXPOUNDING THE LAW TO THEM SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL." This phrase is the introduction to the next chapter, "Duration of the Life of the Tathagata (Buddha)." The concept of the Eternal Buddha has never been revealed before. Therefore the people do not understand what the Buddha said and the congregation elicited a new question as follows:

"It is difficult for anyone in the world to believe this. It is as difficult to believe a handsome, black-haired man twenty-five years old who points to men a hundred years old and says, 'They are my sons,' or to believe men a hundred years old who point to a young man and say, 'This is our father. He brought us up.' You (Buddha Sakyamuni) are like the young man. It is not long since you attained enlightenment." (P.237, Last Paragraph~Next Page)

How is Sakyamuni Buddha able to teach these countless Bodhisattvas in less than 40 years after his enlightenment? Just as it is impossible for a young man to say this old man is his son, there is no possibility of such action occurring, but Sakyamuni is the young man. There are thousands and millions and countless numbers of Bodhisattvas to have been taught in such a short time. Maitreya Bodhisattva and the entire congregation never heard such an issue like this before. These Bodhisattvas have supernatural powers, which are not obtained quickly. They are pure and:

“They are not defiled by worldliness just as the lotus-flower is not defiled by water.” (P.239, LL.2~4)

This phrase is one of the most important phrases in the sutra. A lotus flower is often used to symbolize Buddhism. A pair of flower vases is always placed at the altar in almost all Buddhist temples. The images of Buddhist statues are sitting or standing on the lotus flowers. As you know our Buddhist scripture is called the Lotus Sutra. During special services, priests sometimes scatter lotus flower petals to purifying the altar and welcome the many Buddhas, deities and our ancestors. Our founder Nichiren Daishonin took a part of his name, “Ren,” from this phrase. Lotus is “*ren*” or “*hasu*” in Japanese.

Why is the lotus so much important in Buddhism? It symbolizes purity, long life and the teaching of Buddhism: Cause and Effect. Most plants follow the life pattern of flowers blooming, and when they have withered, the fruits appear and bear seeds. For the lotus however, by the time the flower blooms, the plant is already bearing fruits. This phenomenon is directly connected with the principle of Cause and Effect which Buddha Sakyamuni expounded.

The roots of the lotus grow in muddy waters and the flowers with its beauty and fragrance are never influenced by the dirty water. So we all should not live influenced by bad environments or bad friends. The water where the roots and stems grow is a symbol of our present world and the surface where the leaves and flowers grow is a symbol of the land of Buddha nature. Without the roots and stems in the muddy water, there can be no beautiful flowers and unblemished leaves. The lotus never grows in clear water. It must be rooted in dirty mud then it will bloom beautiful flowers. Keeping these symbols of the lotus flowers, Nichiren's follower should at least try not to be defiled by worldliness just as the lotus-flower is not defiled by the dirty water. Even if you pour the dirty water over the leaves, the water slides right off and does not soil the flower, because the plant is just like wax. Wax and water do not mix.

About 50 years ago, Professor Ohga found three lotus seeds when he excavated River Kemigawa near Tokyo. The seeds were estimated to be around 2,000 years old. When Ohaga planted the seeds in muddy water, one of them sprouted and bloomed light pink flowers. So the lower is named Ohga-Hasu. The seed of the lotus is shape like an olive but its shell is very hard like a rock. Because of the hard shell, the life of the lotus seed could sustain 2,000 years of dormancy. Just like the long life of the lotus seed, our Buddha nature last forever even after our physical body is decayed. This phenomenon was strange to the congregation. The Bodhisattvas from Underground already obtained this knowledge somehow. Everyone wondered:

“How did you teach these innumerable Bodhisattvas in such a short time, and cause them to aspire for enlightenment and not falter in seeking enlightenment?” (P.240, Last Gatha)

This phrase ends this chapter. The historical Buddha Sakyamuni had a physical body which brought forth limitations similar to the entire congregation gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle. Without the concept of the Original Eternal Buddha, Buddha's compassion is also limited.

We are just about ready to understand the concept of the Eternal Buddha starting from the next chapter.