

Chapter 19

The Merits of the Teacher of the Dharma

Lecture #42 (July 13, 2011)

Lecture #43 (July 27, 2011)

SUMMARY

The two preceding chapters (17 and 18) emphasized rejoicing by knowing the existence of the Eternal Buddha as revealed in Chapter 16. Chapter 19 reveals that the five organs of the teacher of the Dharma and his or her mind will be purified. They will gain the 800 to 1,200 merits of the body and mind. The teacher of the Dharma is not only a priest or a monk but also a lay person, who keeps, reads, recites, expounds and copies the Lotus Sutra. All of you who listen to these lectures are also Teachers of the Dharma if you expound the teachings of the sutra to others.

Each of the five sense organs is connected to the other senses and the mind. For example, food that you think is delicious is not only savored through the tongue but also the presentation as seen through the eyes, the smell of all the aromas through nose, the sound of sizzling and crackling through the ears, the touch of the utensils by hands and your mind receiving these messages from all five organs. All of us have six senses, but each person feels differently because of his or her mind is different. Even the same person feels differently depending on their mental state. For example, look at the leaves falling in autumn; a lazy person may say, "Damn leaves, I have to sweep the yard," or a terminal ill person may think that his or her life is coming to end soon, or a poet may write a poem while an artist draws a picture of the scenery, likewise a photographer enjoys taking landscapes pictures and a seeker of truth may realize the law of constant change.

The five organs send messages to the brain only what a person wants to see, to hear, to taste, to smell and to touch; or a negative person sends negative message to his or her brain what he or she does not want to see, to hear, to taste, to smell and to touch. Thus, this chapter teaches how to purify your five organs and mind.

EXPLANATIONS

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the eye, twelve hundred merits of the ear, eight hundred merits of the nose, twelve hundred merits of the tongue, eight hundred merits of the body, and twelve hundred merits of the mind."
(P.269, LL.3~8)

The conditions for us to purify our senses are to keep, read, recite, expound or copy the Lotus Sutra. They are called the *Five Kinds of Practices* for the Dharma Teacher.

It is very easy to copy the sutra these days. You just use a copy machine or a scanner. However, before the printing machine was invented, all scriptures had to be written by hand, character-by-character. Centuries ago, these written texts were traded with other valuable merchandise and spread to other countries along the Silk Road and other routes of trading for many centuries.

It is very important for us to copy the sutra even today. If you would like to copy the Lotus Sutra with a pen or *fude* brush, please let Rev. Kanai know. He will advise you on how to go about copying the sutra.

The number of merits, either 800 or 1,200 is very symbolic. Hindu people often use numbers like 4, 8 and 9 as representing perfect numbers. "Four" represents front, back, left and right or the four directions (N. S. E. W.); "Eight" means the preceding four plus the other four intermediary corners (NE. NW. SE. SW.); and "nine" symbolizes the preceding eight plus the center. Eight hundred and twelve hundred are multiples of 4 and 8.

Nichiren Shu priests chant the above phrases while they perform *kito* blessing.

It is important to realize the reasons why we purify our senses and why we practice the five codes of *keeping, reading, reciting, expounding* and *copying* the sutra. It is for the peace and happiness for all of us. It is the way of the Bodhisattva.

"Listen! I will tell you of the merits of those who fearlessly expound to the great multitude this Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. They will be able to obtain the excellent eyes adorned with eight hundred merits. Their eyes will be pure because of this adornment. With their eyes given by their parents, they will be able to see Mt. Meru, Mt. Sumeru, the surrounding Iron Mountains, and the other mountains, and the forests, ocean and rivers." (P.269, LL.19~p.270, LL.7)

According to this phrase, we can see the bottom of hell to the highest heaven with our eyes given by our parents. There is one condition for this; it is to expound the Lotus Sutra fearlessly. This means that we must preach without discrimination, prejudice or preconception. Then our minds naturally will be purified. However, our Physical Eyes (肉眼) see things only what is in front of us just like a headlight brightening the road ahead. We cannot see things in darkness. Heavenly Eyes (天眼) can see not only the bright side of things but also the other side of things as well. Wisdom Eyes (慧眼) can see things as it is; therefore, his or her mind will not be affected his or her attitude. There is no attachment to whatever he or she sees. Dharma Eyes (法眼) are for Bodhisattvas to see all people in order to lead them towards Enlightenment. Buddha's Eyes (仏眼) are the four kinds of eyes enumerated above in the Buddha.

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra, will be able to obtain twelve hundred merits of the ear. With their pure ears, they will be able to recognize all the various sounds and voices inside and outside the one thousand millions Sumeru-worlds, down to the Avici Hell and up to the Highest Heaven." (P. 270, LL.15~21)

The conditions to obtain the 1,200 merits of the ear are to *keep, read, recite, expound* or *copy* the Lotus Sutra. There are five kinds of ears like the five kinds of eyes such as the Physical Ears, Heavenly Ears, Wisdom Ears, Dharma Ears and Buddha's Ears. Our physical ears are very convenient because we can hear only what we want to hear; on the contrary, hearing aids catch all sounds around you, as a result it becomes too noisy and we cannot sort out what we want to hear. Another example is that we cannot listen to bitter criticism about ourselves or hear the high noble truth.

"Their ears given by their parents will be purified, not defiled. With their natural ears, they will be able to recognize the sounds of voices of the one thousand million Sumeru-worlds." (P. 271, L.5~8)

"They will be able to recognize the voices of elephants, horses and cows; the sounds of carts, gongs, bells, conch-shell horns, and of drums, lyres, harps, reed-pipes and flutes. Although they recognize pure and sweet songs, they will not be attached to them." (P.271, LL.9~14)

The natural ears mean that we hear or listen regardless of the time or the condition of our bodies and minds. Our feelings differ from time to time, depending on the environment. When we are hungry, we may not give our attention to others, but while we are eating, we tend to listen to others easier; therefore, business meetings are often taken place while eating. The natural ears also mean not to attach to a good voice, bad voice, harsh voice or gentle voice. Do not be attached to one type of voice but rather, listen to all voices.

Prince Shotoku, who established the Constitution of Japan for the first time in 604 C.E., was able to listen to ten different testimonies at the same time and gave each a correct response. He was one of the very first practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in Japan.

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the nose." (P.273, LL.14~16)

The sense of smell is important. For example, we judge food that are edible or not by smell before eating. The smell of incense at temples signifies a solemn place for worship. It is said in Buddhist scriptures that Heavenly Beings and Buddhas come to listen to our chanting by the smell of incense. By "smell of incense" we may be able to calm down our mind while some women's perfume makes men excited. The sutra says you can tell a boy or a girl by smell before birth.

With developments in technology and science, we can see and listen to the other side of the world through radio, TV and the internet at home. A computer that detects different odors may soon be developed and capable of sending odors through it. According to the Lotus Sutra, one can detect not only the smell of elephants and lions, but also underground reserves of gold, silver and copper. The technology today can take over our five senses.

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra will be able to obtain twelve hundred merits of the tongue. Anything which tastes good, bad, delicious, distasteful, bitter or astringent will become as delicious as the nectar of heaven and not distasteful when it is put on their tongues." (P.278, LL.20~25)

The sense of taste is different depending on the condition of our body and mind. When we are happy, food tastes good, when we are unhappy, food tastes bad even though we may be eating the same thing. The digestive process is also different depending on the conditions of our body and mind.

Nichiren Daishonin was exiled to Sado Island in the Japan Sea at the age of 50, in 1272. He was placed in a snow-covered shelter with a tattered roof and broken walls at Tsukahara

Cemetery in November. The Kamakura Government wished him to die there, so food was not given to him. However, Abutsubo, who tried to kill Nichiren but was later converted, brought food for him at midnight with his wife. A practitioner of the Lotus Sutra will not starve to death.

"When they expound the Dharma to the great multitude with their tongues, they will be able to raise deep and wonderful voices, to cause their voices to reach the hearts of the great multitude so that the great multitude may be joyful and cheerful." (P.278, LL.25~29)

The merits of the tongue not only refers to taste but also voices and speeches like those blessed with a silver tongue. A Dharma Teacher with beautiful voice will please others listening to his or her sermons. People who have heard the rumor of the beautiful voice of a priest will also come to listen to the Dharma. Therefore, Nichiren Shu priests chant daily for a few hours to keep up their good chanting voice.

Singing is an international language for all people around the world that delights and makes everyone happy. A singer attracts more people than a priest. I wish my chanting will be like a popular singer's voice, so that many people will come here to listen my chanting.

"The good men or women who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra, will be able to obtain eight hundred merits of the body. Their bodies will be able to become as pure as lapis lazuli." (P.280, LL.26~29)

The sutra explains that the teacher's body will be able to have his or her body purified like lapis lazuli just as a reflection is seen in a clear mirror. The mirror has no self. Because the mirror has no self, it clearly reflects things just as they are. When a person faces the teacher who practices the Five Practices, their wrong conducts are reflected in his mind, and he will thus repent his wrong conducts. There are several stories of angry/resentful people or animals that when looking at the face of Sakyamuni Buddha, they repented their wrong conducts, like a time when a drunken elephant who tried to smash and kill the Buddha, or Hariti/Kishimo who sucked the blood of many children.

When our bodies are purified, we will emit special colors or energy from our bodies. With this energy, people feel very peaceful and happy just being around him or her. In order to be like him or her, we must take good care of our physical bodies received from our parents. One of the ways to accomplish this goal is not to have too many things, not to do unnecessary tasks, not to be angry, not to be too excited and not to attach to too many things. This will lead to calmness in our daily lives.

"The good men or women, who keep, read, recite, expound or copy this sutra after my extinction, will be able to obtain twelve hundred merits of the mind." (P.282, LL.13~15)

We inherited the five organs from our parents. We cannot change the shapes of the organs without surgery. Animals also have the five senses but senses of many animals are much more keenly developed than human beings. However, human beings have a highly developed brain, and we are able to control our minds. When we control our minds, our faces can change to show gentleness. If we lose control of our minds, our faces will show disgust, anger and hatred.

The five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching are the five characters of "Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo." Nichiren Daishonin said that when the rays of the five characters in "Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo" shine in the body of a person, he or she would become an *honorable one*. This is called the Gohonzon. When our bodies are purified, we receive the 800 to the 1,200 merits of the organs. All human beings originally possess these honorable merits, but lose them through anger, ignorance and selfishness. We must rediscover the Gohonzon in our body that we have originally possessed. Therefore, Nichiren Daishonin also says, "Do not seek the Gohonzon outside of you because it exists within your body,"

"When they expound the scriptures of non-Buddhist schools, or give advice to the government, or teach the way to earn a livelihood, they will be able to be in accord with the right teachings of the Buddha. They will be able to know all the thoughts, deeds, and words, however meaningless, of the living beings of the one thousand million Sumeru-worlds each of which is composed of the six regions. (P.282, LL.22~28)

The Teacher of the Dharma, when their body and mind is purified, is able to talk about any worldly matter according to the right teachings of the Buddha, such as the constitution, economy, business, farming or any industry. Therefore, the teacher of the Dharma must lead the worldly matters.

The Teacher of the Dharma is able to read a person's mind and know what is important and what is not for him or her. Therefore, the teacher can lead the people around the world correctly to right way in a short amount of time.

When Shijo Kingo, one of Nichiren's disciples, asked his master, Nichiren, that he wanted to become a priest, Nichiren Daishonin advised him to serve his master, Lord Echi, obediently as a samurai warrior. He said, "To serve your master (in your work) is to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra says that worldly politics and economy are not against its ultimate reality."

So, let us practice Buddhism in our daily lives since we are all Teachers of the Dharma. Then our bodies will be purified and become like the Buddha.