

Chapter 16

THE DURATION OF THE LIFE OF THE TATHAGATA

如来寿量品

Lecture #37 (April 20, 2011)

Lecture #38 (April 27, 2011)

Lecture #39 (May 4, 2011)

Summary

“Tathagata” is one of the epithets of a Buddha and means “One who comes thus.” The Buddha had already attained Enlightenment a long, long time ago during his many previous lives. He was supposed to stay in the realm of truth or in the spiritual realm, but he appeared again in this world in order to save all living beings. Thus, the Eternal Buddha takes the form of a human being and comes to this world in order to show us how to attain Buddhahood and show that “We can do it, too!”

In the preceding chapter, countless number of Bodhisattvas appeared from the underground. Bodhisattva Maitreya asked Sakyamuni how the Buddha could teach these countless number of people during his last forty odd years after his enlightenment.

In this chapter the Buddha answers his question and explains the existence of an everlasting and immortal life of the Buddha. It also explains how we should adore the Original Eternal Buddha.

***The Four Kinds of Buddha's Teachings* 化法の四教**

In Lecture One, we studied the Five Periods of the Buddha's Teachings. The Great Master T'ien T'ai (538-597) of China analyzed the entire teachings of the Buddha and separated them according to the periods when Buddha Sakyamuni taught them. He revealed that there were inferior and superior sutras.

At the same time he also analyzed the entire teachings according to the contents of the sutras and divided it into four sections. They are:

1. **Zō-kyō** (藏經): **The Preparatory Teachings**: Sakyamuni Buddha had to spread his newly found teachings and practices to all living beings who had never known what Buddhahood was. He must use very basic and elementary teachings to educate those who only sought their own salvation. They were selfish. The Buddha taught the preparatory teachings to these self-minded people. Thus, the preparatory teachings can save only a limited amount of people. Suppose the teaching is a vehicle, only a few people can ride; therefore, it is called *Small Vehicle* (小乗).

At this stage the Buddha appeared as a human being. He was born as a prince at the Kapilavastu Palace. He renounced his luxurious life and sought salvation for all mankind. After six years of practice, he quenched all desires and destroyed all evils of the mind to attain Enlightenment at the age of 35. Then he was called the Buddha. This Buddha lived until 80 years old. As Great Nirvana grew near, he stated that he would not be born again as a human being. This Historical Buddha is called *Nirmana-kaya* Buddha or *ō-jin* 応身 in Japanese.

2. **Tsu-gyō** (通教): **The Common Teachings** are popular to the ordinary people in the three vehicles such as *Sravakas* (声聞), *Pryataka-buddhas* (緣覺), and *Bodhisattvas* (菩薩); however, the Buddha tried to lead these selfish people towards thinking about others. His audience was mostly *Bodhisattvas* who sought salvation for themselves but also for others. Therefore, he emphasized his disciples and followers to do something good for others. The common teachings are aimed not only for the individual but for many people, so this is the teachings of the *Large Vehicle* (大乘). By saving other people, quenching their desires and destroying attachment to worldly matters, they would become Buddhas, but in order to become a Buddha, they must practice the way of *Bodhisattvas* for many lives repeatedly as the early chapters of the Lotus Sutra revealed. During these two levels of teachings, the Buddha taught the concept of emptiness (空), so he emphasized quenching of all desires, not attaching to any worldly matters and thinking about nothingness. At this level the ideal way as a Buddhist was not to be born again and to liberate from birth in any of the Six Realms; hell, hungry spirit, animals, *asuras* (fighting spirit), human being, or even heaven. Sakyamuni Buddha is still the Buddha in *Nirmanakaya* or the Historical Buddha.

3. **Bek-kyō** (別教): **The Different Teachings** are for *Bodhisattvas* who seek their own enlightenment but also try to save other people. At this level the Buddha taught not only emptiness but also the Middle Way. Buddha's essential teaching is the Middle Way of not exceeding one way or the other. Siddhartha Gautama did not return to his luxurious palace when he gave up six years of ascetic practices, but instead meditated under the *bodhi* tree and reached Enlightenment. What he found was not only to quench all desires and not to be born again but also the ultimate goal for all Buddhists; to exploit the inexhaustible ability of our Buddha nature.

At this level when we exploit our Buddha nature, we wish to share the wisdom with others. If we destroyed all desires and became Buddhas, we may not be able to return to this earth to save other beings; therefore, Buddhists in this stage often keep some desires that will be utilized in some way for the good of others. The Buddha introduced *Sambhoga-kaya* Buddha or the Reward Buddha who is able to become a Buddha but withholds doing so to continue as a *Bodhisattva* in order to save others.

Beginners in Buddhist study are only able to understand Sakyamuni Buddha as a historical figure. When they advanced in study, they will learn that they are also able to become Buddhas as a result of practicing over many life times. Well-practiced Buddhists understand that the Buddhas are not physical beings but the embodiment of the truths or teachings. The Buddha taught the *Dharma-kaya* Buddha which is truth itself.

4. ***En-gyō***(**円教**): **The Perfect Teaching** is the Lotus Sutra unifying the entire teachings of the Buddha. At this level everything is vanquished. There is no difference between the Historical, Reward, and Dharma Buddhas. There is no difference between good or bad, pure or filthy, darkness or brightness, saint or ordinary, etc. Everything appears as it is. They exist only for short moment. This is the Reality of all Things.

Because this stage teaches that there is no difference between the Three Bodies of the Buddha (the Historical, Reward, and Dharma Buddha), the three is one. Thus, we become Buddhas instantly when we chant the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra, ‘NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO.’ Such teachings have never been revealed in any other sutras except the Lotus Sutra.

Explanations

Four Cautions and Four Begging四誠四請

“Thereupon the Buddha said to the great multitude including Bodhisattvas and others, ‘Good men! Understand my sincere and infallible words by faith!’” (P.241, First Paragraph)

This chapter begins with the above words that Sakyamuni Buddha repeated three times and signifies how important this chapter is. It is hard for us, ordinary people, to understand the Buddha's words logically, so we must believe them through faith.

“Thereupon the great multitude of Bodhisattvas, headed by Maitreya, joined their hands together and said to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One, tell us! We will receive your words by faith.’ They said this three times. Then they said once again, ‘Tell us! We will receive your words by faith.’” (P.241, Fourth Paragraph)

Responding to the Buddha, the congregation repeated three times, “We will receive your

words by faith”. And again they said the same thing one more time.

“Thereupon the World-Honored One, seeing that they repeated their appeal even after they repeated it three times, said to them: ‘Listen to me attentively! I will tell you about **my hidden core and supernatural power.**’” (P.241, Sixth Paragraph)

Then after the fourth time, the Buddha finally started to explain the truth. It was a solemn ceremony to repeat the phrases four times; this symbolizes the importance of this chapter. The same thing happened in Chapter Two, “Expedients.” The Buddha said to Sâriputra, “No more, Sâriputra, will I say because the Dharma attained by the Buddhas is the highest Truth, rare to hear and difficult to understand.”(P.24) Sariputra requested: “Explain all this.” They exchanged the dialogs three times, and then the Buddha finally said, “You asked me three times with enthusiasm. How can I leave the Dharma un-expounded? Listen to me attentively.” (P.31) Thus, the Buddha began to reveal the highest truth in Chapter Two. This is a ritual act.

This ritual of vigilance and pleading is never seen in the other sutras. One of the reasons is that the Buddha expounded the other sutra at the listener’s level, so the sutras are easy to understand, while the Lotus Sutra is expounded at the Buddha’s highest wisdom level. It can be understood among Sakyamuni Buddha and the other Buddhas. For us to comprehend, we must have faith of mind in offering, honoring, gratifying, and admiring the sutra. Therefore, we must listen attentively.

***Buddha's Hidden Core and Supernatural Power* 如来の秘密・神通の力**

“My hidden core and supernatural power,” this is the key in answering Bodhisattva Maitreya's question.

“Hidden Core” means that the teaching of the Buddha has never been revealed before. As we have learned already, Sakyamuni Buddha expounded various teachings to make his listeners elated using similes, parable, expedients and stories of previous existences of himself and his disciples. At first he only taught *Sravaka* 声聞 and *Pryataka-buddhas* 縁覚.

‘To tell the truth, it is many hundreds of thousands of billions of nayutas of kalpas since I became the Buddha.’ (P.241, L.19~21)

All sutras except the Lotus Sutra accept the historical Buddha only: Siddhartha Gautama, who left Kapilavastu Palace of the Sakya Clan, sat under the Bodhi Tree, attained Buddhahood and died at the age of 80. This historical Buddha who is mortal and tangible is also called “*Shaku-butsu*(迹仏).” On the other hand, “*Hom-butsu*(本仏)” is the Original and Eternal Buddha who became the Buddha many hundreds of thousands of billions of *nayutas* of *kalpas* ago.

Shaku-butsu is a manifestation of the *Hom-butsu*. *Hom-butsu* is the Buddha who has no beginning and no end, just like a circle. If there is a beginning, there must also be an end, like a line. Therefore, Siddhartha Gautama who was born at Kapilavastu Palace was already a Buddha

at the time of his birth, but in order to show us that we could become Buddhas like him, he renounced his kingdom and practiced many religious exercises and meditation; as a result, he became a Buddha.

Here, we can see three different types of the Buddha: the Original Buddha, the Manifestation Buddha, and the Reward Buddha. Although there are many types of Buddhas, only Sakyamuni Buddha has these three types of the Buddhas within himself, because all other Buddhas have never existed as physical beings or never existed historically.

The Original Buddha (*Hom-butsum* 本仏) taught the Bodhisattvas from Underground in Chapter 15, while all other Bodhisattvas, like Maitreya and Manjusri, were educated by the Manifestation Buddha. The teachings of the Lotus Sutra is specially aimed for the people in the Declining Latter Age of Dharma (末法), which is 2,500 years after historical Buddha's death; therefore, it is necessary for the Buddha to reveal the concept of the Eternity and Originality who lived in the past, lives in the present, and will live in the future in order for us to appreciate the Dharma. Siddhartha Gautama left his palace to seek the liberation from sufferings of birth, disease, old age, and death. The Historical Buddha had to face these sufferings; however, the Eternally Existing Buddha has no beginning and no end; thus, he is never born, never gets sick, never gets old, and never dies since he is not a physical being.

Answering Maitreya's question in the preceding chapter, "**How did you teach these great deeds of the Buddha in such a short time?**" (P.237)

"In such a short time" means the forty years after Sakyamuni's enlightenment. It was impossible for the Historical Buddha to teach these countless number of Bodhisattvas from

Underground, but it was possible because the Original Buddha had taught all of them since the eternal past. How long was the eternal past? Sakyamuni Buddha explained this in the following simile:

The Five Hundred Dust-atom Kalpas 五百塵点劫

“Suppose someone smashed into dust **five hundred thousand billion nayuta⁽¹⁾ asamkhya⁽²⁾ worlds, which were each composed of one thousand millions Sumeru-world⁽³⁾**, and went to the east carrying the dust with him. When he reached a world at a distance of **Five Hundred thousand billion nayuta asamkhya worlds** from this world, he put a particle of the dust on that world. Then he went on again to the east, and repeated the putting of a particle of the dust until the particles of the dust were exhausted.” (P.241, L.21~P.242, L.4)

⁽¹⁾*Nayuta* (那由多) a Hindu numerical unit of hundred thousand million, while ⁽²⁾*asamkhya* (阿僧祇) means innumerable. ⁽³⁾*Sumeru* (須弥)-world; according to the ancient Hindu philosophy, is a world consisting of the highest mountain called Mt. Sumeru surrounded by four continents that are also surrounded by nine mountains and eight oceans. The world is like a huge cone. God Sakura lives on the top of Mt. Sumeru and the Kings of the Four Quarters live on the four sides. All of these are considered a world.

Our solar system has ten planets including Pluto. They are the Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. This is only one solar system. According to the astronomers, there are up to 400 billion stars in the Milky Way alone. Our solar system is only one small part of the vast galaxy. There are billions more galaxies like the Milky Way in the universe, many we can see and many we cannot. With the Hubble Telescope, scientists are now able to discover many far off galaxies previously missed. Hindu concept of a world in the shape of huge cone sounds very childish, but a scientist may discover that the Milky Way itself is shaped like a cone and not just a spiral. It is amusing to guess with such wild imagination.

It is also interesting how the Eternal Buddha was able to talk about the vast universe 2,500 years ago. Suppose someone smashed 5,000 millions *nayuta* worlds composed of 1,000 millions worlds into dust (5,000 million x 1,000 millions = countless worlds), he carries the dust and drops one dust particle when he passed through 500 thousand million worlds. Thus he continues until all dust particles are gone. How many dust particles will there be? How many worlds will he pass until all dust particles are gone? One dust is considered to be a length of one *kalpa* (the period required for a celestial woman to wear down a ten-mile cubic stone if she touched it with her garments once every three years.) Sakyamuni Buddha's original Enlightenment occurred the number of the dust *kaplas* times the hundred-thousand *nayuta asamkhya* years ago.

This phrase means countless eternal years ago. The similar explanation was revealed in chapter 7: "Suppose someone smashed all the earth-particles of one thousand million *Sumeru*-worlds into ink-powder. Then he went to the east of the world at a distance of one thousand worlds from this world. Then he repeated the inking of a dot on the world at every distance of one thousand worlds until the ink-powder was exhausted." (P.126, second paragraph)

In any case, this phrase explains eternity that we can hardly image.

"All this time I have been living in this Saha-World, and teaching by expounding the Dharma to them."(P.242, LL.20~22)

The Original Buddha is always alive and teaching the Dharma to us. The physical Buddha who was born in Nepal passed away in India about 2,500 years ago, so we cannot see him or hear from him; however, the Original Buddha exists as the Dharma. Human beings,

animals, plants, wind, air and everything in the universe is the manifestation of the Dharma. This is called “*Myo-ho* 妙法” or Wonderful Dharma. The spiritual realm has no beginning and no end.

“During this time I gave various names to myself,” (P.242, L.25)

For instance, he named himself Sun-Moon-Light Tathagata in Chapter 1, Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha in Chapter 7, Many-Treasurer Buddha in Chapter 12, Burning-Light Buddha in Chapter 16, and Never-Despising Bodhisattva in Chapter 20. None of the other sutras except the Lotus Sutra says that Sakyamuni Buddha had different names and appeared as a Buddha or a Bodhisattva with a different name. Other sutras reveal Sakyamuni only as the Historical Buddha.

“I also said, ‘That Buddha entered into Nirvana.’ I did all these things only as expedients.” (P.242, LL.26~27)

“I expounded the Wonderful Dharma with these various expedients, and caused all living beings

to rejoice.” (P.242, LL.32~34)

A lie and an expedient are very different. A lie is to deceive others and cause them harm while an expedient can be a white lie to lead others to a better situation or salvation. Nichiren Shu has many expedients such as amulets, *ofuda*, *Kito* blessing and *rei-dan*. These are for people to rejoice and to start chanting “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.” Rejoicing is one of the ways for people to approach the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Sakyamuni expounds his teachings so skillfully and with such a gentle voice that living beings are delighted.

It is very important for us to rejoice or be delighted in whatever we are doing. We make others feel better and we increase our vitality. Please practice sharing your happiness with others at least once a day with a smile, giving a seat to the elderly or giving hand to the disabled.

“All the sutras that I expounded hitherto were for the purpose of saving all living beings.” (P.243, LL.7~8)

“I showed my replicas and my transformations.” (P.243, LL.10~11)

All teachings of the Buddha even expedients are for the purpose of saving all living

beings. All teachings expounded before the revelation of the Original Buddha in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra are called "*Shaku-mon* 迹門" or Provisional teachings. The "*Hom-mon* 本門" is the latter half of the sutra that reveals the eternal nature of the Buddha. Some Nichiren Buddhist Schools concentrate only the section of the *Hom-mon*. Nichiren Shu places equal value on the *Shaku-mon* and the *Hom-mon* because even though *Shaku-mon* is an expedient, it is still for the purpose of saving all living beings. It is the teaching to help us understand the *Hom-mon*, just like education in elementary and middle schools is a step to understanding high school education.

Therefore, the Eternal Buddha manifests as Sakyamuni, Amida, Dainichi, Yakushi Buddhas or other Bodhisattvas. It is possible to say that the Eternal Buddha might also manifest as Jesus Christ, Moses, Allah or Confucius, depending on the culture, place, time, and level of understanding of the people. But people in other religions may not appreciate this point of view. If we were able to understand all religions and the cultural background at the time when each faith was born, there would be no need to fight due to the differences. We are all still part of the same global community.

“I see that the triple worlds is the world in which the living beings have neither birth nor death, that is to say, do not appear or disappear, that it is the world in which I do not appear or from which I do not disappear, that it is not real or unreal, and that it is not as it seems or as it does not seem. **I do not see the triple world in the same way as the living beings of the triple world do.**” (P.243, LL.14~19)

The triple world is the world of unenlightened beings. It is divided into:

1. The world of desire (欲界), whose inhabitants have appetite and sexual desire, like human beings and animals.

2. The world of form (色界), whose inhabitants have neither appetite nor sexual desire, like plants and metals.
3. The formless world (無色界), whose inhabitants have no physical forms like air, electric waves, and spiritual beings.

The Buddhas see the essence of all things while we see things as differences: black or white, good or bad, wise or fool, beneficial or harmful, or winning or losing.

Christians see differences like good or bad, God or Satan, heaven or hell, while Buddhists are supposed to see things in totality and individually as they are. We should not attach ourselves to anything or any matter. See things as the difference among equality and equality among difference.

“The duration of my life is innumerable, asamkhya kalpas. I am always here. I shall never pass away.” (P.243, LL.25~27)

The Eternal Buddha is never born nor passes away. Although the Historical Buddha passed away many centuries ago in India, the Original Buddha is always with us and anywhere. The Buddha reveals the following parable for us to easily understand the existence of the

Original Buddha:

THE PARABLE OF THE EXCELLENT PHYSICIAN

There was once an excellent and wise physician. He was good at dispensing medicines and curing diseases. He had many children. One day he went to a remote country on business. After he left home, the children accidentally took some poison. The poison passed into their bodies and the sons writhed in agony, rolling on the ground.

At this time the father returned home. Some of his children had already lost their senses while others still had not. All of them begged him to cure the poison sickness and said, "We were ignorant. We took poison by mistake. Cure us and give us back our lives!"

Seeing his children suffering, he created a medicine by pounding and sieving many herbs and gave it to them, saying, "It has good color, smell and taste. Take it! It will remove the pain at once. You will not suffer any more."

Those who had not lost their right minds took it at once and were cured completely. But the rest of them, who had already lost their right minds, did not consent to taking the remedy given to them, because they were so perverted that they did not believe that this medicine had good color, smell, good taste and would cure them.

The father thought, "These children are pitiful. They are so poisoned that they are perverted. Although they rejoice at seeing me and asked me to cure them, they do not consent to take this good medicine. Now I will have them take it with an expedient."

Then he said to them, "Now I am old and decrepit. I shall die soon. I am leaving this medicine here. Take it. Do not be afraid, you will be cured!" Having advised them, he went to a remote country again. Then he sent home a messenger to tell them, "Your father has just died." Having heard that their father had passed away leaving them behind, they felt extremely sorry. They thought, "If our father was alive, he would love and protect us. Now he has deserted us and died in a remote country."

They felt lonely and helpless because they thought that they were parentless and shelterless. Their constant sadness finally caused them to remember what the father had said as his last words, "Take this remedy!" Then they took it and completely recovered from the poison.

Upon hearing that they had recovered their health, the father returned home and showed him to them.

What do you think of this? Do you think that anyone can accuse this excellent physician of falsehood? The answer is "No!"

EXPLANATIONS of the parable

The Buddha is like the father. It has been many hundreds of thousands of billions of *kalpas* since he became the Buddha. In order to save the perverted people in the world after the Buddha's death, he says expediently, "I shall pass away." Although Sakyamuni has been gone for almost 2,500 years, his teachings exist today and will exist forever. Just as the physical body of the doctor could not cure the sickness but rather it was the remedy that cured the poor children, the Buddha's teachings, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, is continuing to cure the people in the Declining Latter Age of the Law.

***Odaimoku as the Good Remedy* 良薬としてのお題目**

Nichiren Daishonin said the title of the Lotus Sutra, which is the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," is just like the remedy of good color, taste, and fragrance. He also said, "Chant the Odaimoku. It is the only way to attain Buddhahood in the Latter Age of the Law."

By chanting "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo," you will have at minimum the four powers of the Odaimoku. They are to cure some physical and spiritual illness, to protect practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, to erase one's bad karma and to attain the truth or Enlightenment.

Enjoy Chanting the Odaimoku

Many people ask, "I am chanting the Odaimoku for many hours, many months or many years. Why do I not get benefit of such and such." These people seem to chant and pray hard, but their chanting and prayer is in the stage of the sixth consciousness (the mind externally dealing with the five senses) and seventh consciousness (the reason and self-awareness realm). They doubt the power of the Odaimoku and doubt themselves. This doubt is buried deep in their sub-consciousness where the karmic attributes lie (the eighth consciousness). In order to gain the attributes of the Odaimoku they must purify themselves.

How can we purify the sub-consciousness and bad karma? It is through by positive thinking, appreciation, and smiling all the time. Try chanting the Odaimoku with a smiling face. Look up at the *Gohonzon*, so your eyes will go up slightly and that makes your face turn into a smile.

Do not force yourself to chant. If you force yourself to chant, you simply build up negative sub-consciousness because it is hard or painful. Enjoy chanting the Odaimoku. If you do not feel happy chanting, you should change your chanting methods: for instance, sitting, timing, speed, or other factors.

The Original Buddha is always thinking how to cause all living beings to enter into the unsurpassed way and quickly become Buddhas.

***Realization of the Original Buddha without Any Practice* 本覺無作三身**

Before we go into *Jiga-ge* (poem form of Chapter 16), let us review the Four Kinds of Buddha's Teachings learned in Lecture #37. They are: 1) *Zō-kyō* (藏經) or the preparatory teachings, 2) *Tsu-gyō* (通教) or the common teachings, 3) *Bek-kyō* (別教) or the different teachings and 4) *En-gyō* (円教) or the perfect teaching.

Generally speaking Buddhism teaches us to become Buddhas. However there are different concepts of becoming Buddhas. 1) The Preparatory Teachings were very basic Buddhism revealed by the historical Buddha called *Nirmana-kaya* Buddha. The Buddha and we

are vastly different; therefore, it was extremely difficult for us to become Buddhas. 2) The Common Teachings were popular among ordinary people in the three vehicles (Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas). Since they only sought salvation for themselves, they must quench all desires and have to master emptiness (not be attached to anything). It was very difficult for them to quench all desires; thus, it was still very hard for them to become Buddhas. 3) The Different Teachings were for Bodhisattvas who sought enlightenment for themselves but also for others. They must not attach themselves to others; that is to say, they must learn the Middle Way; not to attach one way or the other. At this level, people were able to become Buddhas as a result of practicing the Middle Way; therefore, *Sambhoga-kaya* Buddha or the reward Buddha was revealed. Lastly 4) The Perfect Teaching is the Dharma itself, *Dharma-kaya* Buddha.

The Lotus Sutra teaches unification of all teachings into one. It teaches that there is no difference among the three bodies of the Buddha as it is one in the same. The Lotus Sutra reveals the possibility for us to become Buddhas instantly, especially while we chant the Sacred Title of the Sutra, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.”

Chapter 16 reveals that all these three different bodies of the Buddha are expedients. There is only the Original Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni. This Buddha has neither practiced anything nor appeared before. If you think that your purpose is trying to become a Buddha, you cannot understand the concept of the Original Buddha; however, to think that to become a Buddha means to act in a perfect relationship with all other living beings, then we can understand the concept of the Original Buddha. Ecology is a good example; all living beings are alive with a purpose. I am here because of you and them. You live because of me and them. They survive because of you, me and others. This is to realize the mutual existence of all and to help each other. The real meaning to become a Buddha is for us to realize that we were born from the tremendous energy of the universe so as other beings were born and are living with the tremendous energy of the universe. This is called “Myo-Ho,” or Wonderful Dharma. We must keep good relationship and harmony with all people, things and whatever we encounter. To keep harmony means to understand others, to pardon others and to show compassion to others. Then this world will be peaceful and will continue to evolve infinitely. There will be no end for evolution. To realize such issues and to act on that realization is for us to become Buddhas. There is no strict rule or precept. We are the manifestation of the Eternal Original Buddha and it is for us to become Buddhas.

Verses of Eternity 自我偈

Sakyamuni Buddha repeats the central message of Chapter 16 in verses. Although it is a repetition of what was previously stated, there are many important doctrines in this *gatha*. These verses comprise the best known lines in the Lotus Sutra. Japanese call this *gatha*, *Jiga-ge*, the “Verses of Eternity.” Many long-time members memorize *Jiga-ge* in Japanese even though they are not able to speak or understand the Japanese language. It is extremely popular and read often at various occasions.

“It is many hundreds of thousands, of billions of trillions of *asamkhyas of kalpas* since I became the Buddha.” (P.246, First Verse)

Our mathematical counting of numerals is one, ten, hundred, thousand, million, billion, trillion, etc. “*Asamkhyas of kalpas*” means infinite or eternal. For the past innumerable *kalpas*, the Eternal Buddha has always expounding the Dharma in order to lead all living beings the Way to Buddhahood.

During the innumerable *kalpas*, he disappears and appears many times just like playing hide-and-seek.

For instance,

1) **“I expediently show my Nirvana, ... In reality I shall never pass away.”**(P.246, Third Verse)

2) **“When they see me seemingly pass away, ... I reappear on Mt. Sacred Eagle.”** (P.246, Last Verse and P.247, L.3)

3) **“I always live here. I shall never be extinct. I show my extinction to you expediently although I never pass away.”** (P.247, LL.6~8)

4) **“You thought that I pass away.”**(P.247, L.14)

5) **“Therefore, I disappear from their eyes. ... I appear and expound the Dharma to them.”** (P.247, LL.17~20)

6) **“I live on Mt. Sacred Eagle and also in the other abodes for asamkhya kalpas.”** (P.247, LL.22~24)

7) **“The duration of my life is innumerable kalpas.”** (P.248, L.26)

8) **“I shall pass away although I shall not.”**(P.249, L.9)

Mt. Sacred Eagle靈鷲山

Mt. Sacred Eagle is the English translation for Mt. Grdharkuta located near the city of King-House, Rajagriha, in Northeastern India. The mountain looks like the head of an eagle, thus it is called Mt. Sacred Eagle. The city was probably the largest in India at that time, so people in

the city were able to feed many monks who had never cultivated nor produced their own food. Sakyamuni Buddha expounds the Lotus Sutra and other sutras at the mountain for the last eight years of his life.

In Nichiren Shu, Mt. Sacred Eagle is not only the place where the Buddha taught the sutras, but also wherever the Lotus Sutra is expounded and practiced. Therefore, Nichiren Daishonin said that Mt. Minobu in Japan is worthier than the Mt. Grdharkuta in India, because he taught the Lotus Sutra there for the last nine years of his life to benefit the people of the Latter Age of the Dharma. Please consider your temple and your home as your Mt. Sacred Eagle.

“When they see me seemingly passes away, and makes offerings to my sariras (*ashes*), **and adore me, admire me, and become devout, upright and gentle, and wish to see me with all their hearts.**” (P.246, Last Verse)

“Therefore, I disappear from their eyes and cause them to **admire me. When they adore me, I appear and expound the Dharma to them.**” (P.247, LL.17~20)

These phrases are one of my favorite because they are very vivid and very practical. Have you ever fallen in love with someone? When you fall in love, you always want to be with your loved one. Even when you say, “Good bye” for the day or night, you wish to see him or her right away. This is “Adore.” So adore the Buddha! “Admire” means to respect someone for what they are or for what they have done. In Kumarajiva’s translation, he uses a term, “*katsugo* 渴仰” which means to respect with a feeling of thirst. Suppose you are in a middle of a desert without water, no matter what, you want to have water right away. You wishing to see the Buddha are more like wishing to have water in the hot day. It is very important for us to have

enthusiasm of “Adore” and to “Admire.” The Buddha disappears from us to cause us to have this kind of enthusiasm to see him.

I know many people become religious after a loved one’s death. They want to experience adore and admire towards the loved one even though their physical body no longer exists. This is also a good time to be more religious.

“I live on Mt. Sacred Eagle.” (P.247, L.22)

On his deathbed, Nichiren Daishonin requested that his ashes be interned at Mt. Minobu because that is where he preached the Lotus Sutra to his disciples and followers as well as for the people after him. He also said his spirit would dwell at Mt. Minobu forever. Mt. Minobu is a very sacred mountain surrounded by four other mountains and four rivers. Please make a pilgrimage to Mt. Minobu at least once in your life time. You will be cleansed spiritually.

***Buddha Land Is Very Peaceful* 我此土安穩**

“The perverted people think: ‘This world is in a great fire. The end of the kalpa of destruction is coming.’ In reality this world of mine is peaceful. **It is filled with gods and men. The gardens, forests, and stately buildings are adorned with various treasures; The jeweled trees have many flowers and fruits; The living beings are enjoying themselves; And the gods are beating heavenly drums, Making various kinds of music, and raining mandarava-flowers**

on the great multitude and me.” (P.247 Last Paragraph~P.248,L.7)

This phrase is another favorite of mine. Buddhism teaches the destruction of the earth will come someday with wars, famine, earthquakes and lawlessness, culminating with the world ending up in a “great fire.” However, the Lotus Sutra also teaches that, in reality, the Buddha Land is very peaceful filled with gods and men; the gardens, forests, and stately buildings are adorned with various treasures, and so on. It is Buddha’s point of view on this earth. We, Nichiren Buddhists are trying to create this peaceful land on this earth.

“It is filled with gods and men.”(P.247,Second line from the bottom of the page)

Our deities do not live far away in the west or far up in the heaven. They live with us; therefore, they can watch us and protect us day and night as we learned in Chapter 14, **“the gods will protect him day and night for the sake of the Dharma.”**(P.220) This is because we adore and admire the Buddha and his teachings as well as the gods always wish to listen to the Dharma, our recitation of the Lotus Sutra and our chanting of the Sacred Title of the sutra. Nichiren Daishonin warned us saying, “If we do not practice righteousness, the gods will leave us, and the evils will take over this land. We must vow to practice and to expound the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and then this world is peaceful and has security.”

“I am always thinking: ‘How shall I cause all living beings to enter into the unsurpassed Way and quickly become Buddhas?’”(P.249, Last Verse of this chapter)

This verse is the summary of the entire chapter. These words represent the deepest desire of the Buddha and his innermost heart of compassion. Shinjo Suguro says in his book,

Introduction to the Lotus Sutra, "Ordinary people see the world as a defiled land, but the Buddha leads such people and saves them from the agonies of defilement, transforming their concept of reality as a lotus rises above the muddy water. And just as the Buddha's life span is eternal, so also is his yearning to save all beings from suffering."