

CHAPTER 7

THE PARABLE OF A MAGIC CITY

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Causality from the Previous Lives 宿世の因縁

Before we proceed any further, let us review what we have learned so far:

After Sakyamuni Buddha preached the Innumerable Meaning Sutra, he entered into deep meditation. He emitted rays of light from his forehead and lit up the 18,000 worlds in the East. Finishing his meditation, he started to talk to Sariputra that the Buddha Wisdom is profound and hard to understand except through faith. He insisted that all teachings preceding the Lotus Sutra were expedients and that all those teachings were for Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas to be lead into the highest truth, the Lotus Sutra.

The entire congregation gathered at Mt. Sacred Eagle were shocked to hear these words but still requested the Buddha to reveal the truth. In order for them to understand step by step, the Buddha revealed first the theory of the “One Vehicle一乘” in Chapter 2. Next he illustrated the teaching of the One Vehicle by parables in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. These are the parables of the “Burning House”, “The Rich Man and His Poor Son” and “The Simile of Herbs”. Many of his disciples were able to understand the meaning of the One Vehicle, so the Buddha assured them of becoming Buddhas by giving each of them a Buddha Name. However, there were still hundreds and thousands of people in the congregation who could not understand the reality of all things. Buddha clarifies the teaching of the One Vehicle in Chapter 7 with a story from his previous existence.

OVERVIEW

Chapter 7 reveals that the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* are always the same in any era; that all Buddhas attained enlightenment through the doctrines of the Lotus Sutra. However, a process used to lead all living beings to the Lotus Sutra is referred to *ho-ben*方便, which in this chapter takes the form of a parable about a magic city.

A very long time ago, there was a Buddha called Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata大通智勝如来. This Buddha had formerly been a king of a country and

had 16 princes. When their father attained Buddhahood, the sixteen sons also wished to become Buddhas and renounced their royal titles. Later, they all became Buddhas under the guidance of the Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Among them, the 13th prince was Amitâbha Buddha and the 16th was Sakyamuni Buddha.

When the king became Great-Universal-Wisdom- Excellence Buddha, he preached the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve Causes and Causation.

However, these teachings are intended only for the individual salvation and the doctrines are for people of the realms of Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas. They are not the teachings for *Bodhisattvas*. When the congregation was not ready to comprehend the Lotus Sutra, the Buddhas taught the lesser vehicle teachings as a method to lead them to the way of the greater vehicle.

The Three Thousand Dust-Atom Eons三千塵点却

Buddhism always talks about the cause, condition and effect. There was original cause for Siddhartha Gautama to attain Buddhahood in his infinite previous life. He became a Buddha unthinkable years ago, which is referred to as *the three thousand dust-atom eons*.

“Suppose someone smashed all the earth-particles of **one thousand million Sumeru-worlds into ink-power. Then he went to the east, carrying the ink-powder with him. He inked a dot as large as a particle of dust with that ink powder on the world at a distance of one thousand from his world. Then he went again and repeated the inking of a dot on the world at every distance of one thousand worlds until the ink-powder was exhausted.”**(P.126, LL.11~17)

“Bhiksus! Now all the worlds he went through, whether they were inked or not, were smashed into dust. The number of the *kalpas* which have elapsed since that Buddha passed away is many hundreds of thousands of billions of *asamkhyas* larger than the number of the particles of the dust thus produced. **Yet I remember the extinction of that Buddha by my power of insight as vividly as if he had passed away today.”** (P.126, Second line from the bottom of the page~P.127, L.5)

“One thousand million Sumeru worlds” is the way Hindu thought of the universe. One world is consisted of Mt. Sumeru, the highest mountain in the center and surrounded by four continents and oceans. When one thousand of these worlds gathered, this is called *small one thousand worlds*; when one thousand of these small thousand worlds gathered, this is called *medium one thousand worlds* (1,000x1,000=1,000,000 worlds). Then when one thousand of these medium thousand worlds gathered, this is called *large one thousand worlds* (1,000,000x1,000=1,000,000,000 worlds). The universe is consisted of one billion worlds according to the Hindus.

Our solar system has ten planets including Pluto. They are the Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. Suppose each planet is considered one world then you can see the universe outlined in the Lotus Sutra is tremendously huge.

This simile detailed a man smashing the entire universe to make ink powder then traveled to the East and dropped one dot of dust when he passed one small thousand world and he continued until the all particles of dust were gone. Then again if the man smashed the entire worlds he dotted the ink and not dotted, can you calculate how many particles of dust will be produced? And can you calculate the numbers of these worlds passed until all the dust particles were depleted? The sutra still goes further as one dust is equal to one *kalpa* (the period required for a celestial woman to wear away a ten-mile cubic stone if she touched it with her garments once every three years). Sakyamuni Buddha tried to explain how eternally long ago, a Buddha called Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata 大通智勝如来 passed away.

All sacred scriptures including the Bible talk about the end of the world. Even in the field of mathematics, the theory of infinity arose only in the nineteenth century. The idea of the Eternal Buddha who attained Enlightenment in the infinite past is revealed in Chapter 7 and Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra only and in none of the other scriptures.

“Yet I remember the extinction of that Buddha by my power of insight as vividly as if he had passed away today.” What this means is that the insight of the Buddha does not change. Buddha Dharma, the truth, is always the same regardless of time and place. The truth transcends time and place.

Enlightenment in the Infinite Past 無限大の過去での成仏

I would like to remind you that Chapter 7 details the infinite previous existence of Sakyamuni Buddha who was the sixteenth prince of a king who later became Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata 大通智勝如来.

“The duration of the life of Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha was five hundred and forty billion nayuta kalpas. Before he attained Buddhahood, he sat at the place of enlightenment and defeated the army of Mara. He wished to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, but could not because the Dharma of the Buddhas had not yet come into his mind.” (P.128, LL.8~13)

Chapter 7 explains in more detail the process how he sat cross-legged, how gods prepared him a lion-like seat under a bodhi tree, how heavenly-kings rained heavenly flowers around him, how those flower petals were blown away by fragrant winds and then new flowers rained down, how heavenly kings played heavenly drums and played heavenly music and offered to help him attain Buddhahood.

Generally speaking in our daily lives, when we are extremely busy and pressed for time, we do not get sick or become involved in a mishap. However, when we relax and think

that everything is all right now, sickness or mishaps often occur. This is the same with the king in this chapter, although he defeated the army of Mara, he still could not attain Buddhahood. He had repeatedly defeated Mara, but the result was no-enlightenment. One's goal is not that easy to reach as he or she may think. We must, however, continue to strive to attain Buddhahood.

When we wish to welcome a Buddha, we must clean the altar, offer flowers, incense, music and other things time after time as the sutra states. At your *butsudan*, you offer fresh water, cooked rice, water, tea, fresh fruits, etc. Buddha, Deities, Nichiren Shonin, your ancestors do not eat or drink these food and drinks; however, they taste the smell. So please offer them while they are fresh and do not leave them at the altar for too long. After a service or chanting, you may eat them or drink them to share the offerings with your ancestors.

“Bhiksus! At the end of the period of ten small kalpas, the Dharma of the Buddhas came into the mind of Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha. Now he attained Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Before he left home, he had sixteen sons.” (P.128, LL.31~34)

The king, the father of the sixteen sons finally reached Nirvana after practicing for ten small *kalpas*. All of us who read the Lotus Sutra could be in the process of becoming a Buddha. Who will be the next person to become a Buddha?

The sixteen princes praised the Buddha, their father, and begged him to turn the wheel of the Dharma. Their mother saw them off while weeping. She was sad to see them go.

The Rays of the Buddha Illuminate All Darkness 暗闇にも光輝く

“When Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha attained Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, five hundred billion Buddha-worlds in each of the ten quarters quaked in the six ways, and all those worlds, including those intercepted from the brilliant rays of light of the sun and the moon by the neighboring worlds, were illumined by the great rays of light.” (P.131, LL.6~11)

“Five hundred billion Buddha-worlds in each of the ten quarters quaked in the six ways.” We have seen the same sight in Chapter 1. (P.3). This symbolizes that Buddha Wisdom destroys ignorance of the people just as when a rock and roll band is playing and young people rejoice as if the earth moved.

“All those worlds, including those intercepted from the brilliant rays of light of the sun and the moon by the neighboring worlds, were illumined by the great rays of light.” Most Buddha statues or pictures have *kohai* or aura behind them. This symbolizes the rays of light emitted from the statues or images.

The rays of the sun and the moon often symbolize the truth not only in Buddhism but also other religions. The spiritual world is only described physically by the light. The Buddha Land in the Lotus Sutra is called, “*Jo Jakko Do*,” or the “Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.” Tranquil refers to the nature of the truth and the light, to wisdom. Compassion of the Buddhas illuminates even where the rays of the sun and the moon cannot reach, such as the world of hell.

When Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha attained Enlightenment, the rays of the light brightened whole universe in the ten directions. Thus, gods, heavenly kings, people and even non-human beings wondered:

“Why are our palaces illumined more brightly than ever? Let us find the place from where this light has come. Did a god of great virtue or a Buddha appear somewhere in the universe?” (P.131, LL.24~29)

The ray of the Buddha's compassion illuminated not only the place where the Buddha resided but also the ten directions of the universe. Gods and men throughout the ten quarters of the universe consequently tried to locate the place where this light originated. Eventually they found Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha sitting on the lion-like seat under a Bodhi-tree in the place of enlightenment surrounded by gods, dragon-kings, men and non-human beings.

Heavenly-Kings in the east, the southeast, the south, the southwest, the west, the northwest, the north, the northeast, the nadir and the underworld had the same thought, where was this source of light? Carrying flower-plates filled with heavenly flowers, they eventually found the origin of the light.

The Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple has published a bimonthly newsletter named “RADIANCE” since January 2009. The name of “Radiance” came from Chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra. Rev. Shokai Kanai imagines the rays of the Odaimoku, “*Namu Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo*,” brightening the entire world. He wishes that people will come to Las Vegas from all over the world in order to recite the sutra and chant the sacred title together, so that they will be delighted and feel happy.

“They saw that Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata was sitting on the lion-like seat under the Bodhi tree at the palace of enlightenment, surrounded respectfully by gods, dragon-kings, gandharvas, kimnaras, mahoragas, men and non-human beings. They also saw that the sixteen princes were (1) begging the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Dharma.”(P.132, LL.2~8)

Heavenly-kings from the ten directions were so delighted, excited and strewed flower petals around the Buddha. All of them wished to hear the Dharma, so that all living beings may be saved.

願わくはこの功德を以って、普く一切に及ぼし我らと共に仏道を成ぜん。

**“May the merits we have accumulated by this offering
Be distributed among all living beings,
And may we and all other living beings
Attain the enlightenment of the Buddha!”**(P.139, Last Gatha)

This phrase in Chapter 7 is very important for all people regardless of their faith. Most Buddhist priests quote this phrase at the end of their general prayers. After I read this phrase during a Japanese American Memorial Day Service for Veterans in Salt Lake City, Utah, a Christian minister came to me and praised it.

This phrase is very famous. It is rephrased in the Nichiren Shu prayer as follows: “May all beings be blessed with this merit and together with us to attain Buddhahood.” I hope you can memorize this phrase and finish your prayer with this phrase every day. This is the Bodhisattva's spirit. This is the way of faith for Mahayana Buddhists.

Shinjo Suguro explains in his book, *Introduction to the Lotus Sutra*, the ‘merits’ spoken here refer to the benefits they will receive for offering their palaces. Needless to say, they also imply merits in general which we all can attain throughout faith in and veneration for the Buddha. The Great Vehicle teaches that all living beings will attain the enlightenment of the Buddha, become Buddhas themselves, and be freed from sufferings.

Kenji Miyazawa, the Japanese poet and author of children’s stories, once said, “Individual happiness is impossible unless the world as a whole becomes happy.”

“Thereupon Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata, having assented to the appeals made by the Brahman-heavenly-kings of the worlds of the ten quarters and also by the sixteen princes, (2)turned the wheel of the teaching of the four truths three times, making twelve proclamations altogether.”(P.140, LL.9~13)

What Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata revealed infinite kalpas ago was nothing new to most of us because we have heard the terms of the *Four Truths* and the *Twelve Causes* in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, Manjusri explained the reason why Sakyamuni Buddha would speak on the Lotus Sutra through stories of his previous existence at the time of a Buddha called Sun-Moon-Light. (P.140, LL.3~7)

The Four Noble Truths四諦

All Buddhas reveal these four truths first just as Sakyamuni Buddha did at Deer Park in India some 2,500 years ago. The four truths are the basic concepts in Buddhism, which explains the cause of suffering and the way of deliverance from them. They are as follows:

1. All existence is suffering. 苦諦

2. The cause of suffering is illusion and desire. 集諦
3. Nirvana is the realm free from suffering. 滅諦
4. The way for the attainment of Nirvana 道諦 is the practice of the Eightfold Noble Path.

We have known the term of the four truths in Chapter 1 and learned some explanations in Chapter 3. In this chapter the Tathagata “**turned the wheel of the teaching of the four truths, three times.**” Now we will learn the proof of the four truths in this chapter. That is what it meant with the turning the wheel of the teaching of the four truths three times.

1. 苦諦 : **All existence is full of sufferings** such as birth, disease, old age, death, separation from loved ones, being together with hated ones, not receiving what we wish to have and other mental sufferings that come from our attachment to various things. When we often experience these sufferings, we try to get out of these suffering by blaming others; however, we have not tried to see the reality of these sufferings. Most people are afraid of death. One reason is because we do not know what will happen after death. We see the obituaries in newspapers every day. We are shocked and become sad to find that a person whom we were acquainted to passed away, while we do not feel any sadness or remorse when looking at the obituaries of anyone we do not know. Even when afflicted with cancer, some people feel painful, depressed and with lost sense while others accept the sickness as it is and do not suffer much. We usually suffer when we cannot get what we want, but some people do not care even though he or she could not get what they wanted. Thus, the amount of our sufferings depends on our attachment to various things. That is why we must take care of our mind in Buddhism.
2. 集諦 : We now know **the cause of suffering** comes from our mind. All living beings including human beings have desire to survive. In order to survive, they must kill others as a means for food; however, animals except human beings kill only when they are hungry. Human beings kill more than necessary; therefore, we must learn how to control our desire. We, human beings, also seek the easy way of living rather than suffering. As a result, we only seek the simple way and forget the truth that the suffering and joy are two sides to a coin. To seek only joy is an illusion and also trying to destroy only our desires is also an illusion. Because there is suffering, there is joy when we overcome the suffering. Put in another way, we feel the joy of victory and the agony of defeat.
3. 滅諦 : **Nirvana is the realm free from suffering.** The concept of Nirvana differs between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. In Hinayana, everyone must quench all desires; therefore they practice 250 precepts for a monk and 500 precepts for a nun, while Mahayana priests hardly practice any precepts except standard moral values. Nirvana in Hinayana is only attainable after they destroy all desires while Mahayana teaches to use our desires for something good such as helping others. If you are hungry, someone else is also hungry, so share your food. Do not become attached too much to either side of joyfulness and suffering. Not to attach to joy or suffering is Nirvana in Mahayana Buddhism.

4. 道諦：**The way for attaining Nirvana is the practice of the Eightfold Path.** As we already learned that our mind creates suffering, therefore, we must learn how to control our mind and to attain the Reality of All Things is way to Nirvana in the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Eightfold Paths 八正道

We have already learned the terms of the Eightfold Path at the end of Chapter 3. I would like to explain a little more about these paths. These are daily practices not only for Buddhists but also for the general public. The Buddhist symbol is the eight spoke dharma wheel. This is called “Wheel of the Law.” It symbolizes the teachings of Buddha, who turned this wheel when preaching; hence, such preaching is called “turning the wheel of the law.”

1. **Right View 正見**：When we wear a pair of rose colored glasses, we do not see the correct color of things, so that is wrong view. Prejudice is an example of wrong view. In order to avoid wrong view, we must have Buddha Wisdom, such as the relationship of cause, condition, and effect, the Four Noble Truths; and the Reality of All Things. In Buddhism, happiness and unhappiness depend on our karma. We cannot erase bad karma formed in the past, then how can we change them? The answer is to create good karma now in our daily lives. You may create good karma by bringing joy to others by cleaning, giving, smile, patience, keeping to the rules in your community, effort, meditation, prayer for others and charity.
2. **Right Thoughts 正思**：This is to think in the right way. In order to have good karma, you must not be greedy, avoid stupid conducts, and not get angry. Greediness, stupidity, and anger are the three poisons. If you act within these three poisons, you simply create more bad karma; and you bring trouble to others. Sometimes even if you tried to create good karma; a trouble or a mishap happens. At that time, please appreciate whatever happens. The mishaps are for you to learn some lessons. Please appreciate everything every day. To appreciate is right thought.
3. **Right Speech 正語**：This is not to tell a lie, not to speak ill of others, not to talk with doubled tongues, not to speak recklessly and deceitfully.
4. **Right Action 正業**：It is sometimes hard to determine what is right and what is wrong. The definition of right and wrong differs depending on religion, culture, country, etc. However, the Five Precepts in Buddhism apply to any religion and country. They are not to kill, not to tell a lie, not to steal, not to commit immoral sex acts and not to intoxicate. In order to survive, we or someone else kill for food. This is reality in this life. Therefore, we should not waste food and must appreciate the sacrifice made. Most Japanese say, “*Itadaki-masu*” before we eat. This means that we respectfully receive the food; therefore, we should not waste them and we must gain energy from the food to return the favor by doing something good in our society. It is very important that our right view, thought, speech and action keep in consensus.

5. **Right Livelihood 正命** : This is having a good living style. Our behavior must be not shameful. Avoid behaviors that would lead to someone pointing their finger at you. To choose the right job fit to your skill and knowledge is also right livelihood. Or to enjoy your work whatever given to you is right livelihood.
6. **Right Endeavor 正精進** : To be an expert in any field, one must practice for many hours every day for years. As followers of Nichiren Shu, you must chant Odaimoku, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” daily and hold morning and evening chanting everyday. You must practice it daily so you need effort.
7. **Right Mindfulness 正念** : This is to think deeply on a single matter. When we chant the Odaimoku or meditate, our minds often jump around like a monkey swinging from tree to tree. We need to try and control that monkey to sit still.
8. **Right Meditation 正定** : This means to settle your mind on one thing or matter. We must concentrate in order to accomplish our goal.

This Eightfold Path applies to anyone regardless their religions and culture. They are very reasonable and very morally natural. To create good karma and to build up your virtue are to practice the Eightfold Path and bring delight to others. Please start with making your spouse, parents or children delighted today.

It is generally said that the teaching of the Four Noble Truths is for *Sravakas*, and that of the Twelve Causes is for *Pratyekabuddhas*.

The Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination 十二因緣:

All phenomena have a certain principal. The Twelve-linked Chain of Dependent Origination is a principle of birth and death in the three generations in Buddhism:

“Ignorance causes predisposition. Predisposition causes consciousness. Consciousness causes name-and-form. Name-and-form causes the six sense-organs. The six sense-organs cause impression. Impression causes feeling. Feeling causes craving. Craving causes grasping. Grasping causes existence. Existence causes birth. Birth causes aging-and-death, grief, sorrow, suffering and lamentation. When ignorance is eliminated, predisposition is eliminated. When predisposition is eliminated, consciousness is eliminated. When consciousness is eliminated, name-and-form is eliminated. When name-and-form is eliminated, the six sense-organs are eliminated. When the six sense-organs are eliminated, impression is eliminated. When impression is eliminated, feeling is eliminated. When feeling is eliminated, craving is eliminated. When craving is eliminated, grasping is eliminated. When grasping is eliminated, existence is eliminated. When existence is eliminated, birth is eliminated. When birth is eliminated, aging-and-death, grief, sorrow, suffering, and lamentation is eliminated.”(P.140, L.19~Last line of the page)

The preceding Four Noble Truths starts with “Life is full of Suffering, on the other hand, this Twelve-Linked Chain of Dependent Origination starts with original cause of

suffering. The original cause is something we have never known in our unknown previous lives, thus this is called ignorance.

1. **IGNORANCE** or 無明 *MUMYO*, is the cause of all illusions in our past lives.
2. **PREDISPOSITION** or 行 *GYO*, ignorance produces predisposition. Ignorance and predisposition cause one to be born in this world. 1 and 2 are from one's previous lives.
3. **CONSCIOUSNESS** or 識 *SHIKI*, is the first stage of consciousness after conception that takes place in the mother's womb. This is one's prepossessed character.
4. **MENTAL FUNCTIONS & MATTER** or 名色 *MYO-SHIKI* is the stage of forming one's body and mind inside the womb. Today we can see inside a mother's womb by ultrasound and say, "This is the head, and these are hands and legs." This is a stage of objects and the naming of each of these objects.
5. **THE SIX SENSES** or 六入 *ROKUNYU*. In this stage, the five organs and the brain are connected. This still takes place in the mother's womb. Today it is said that education before one's birth is very important because it will affect the future of the baby to be born. 3, 4, and 5 are inside mother's womb.
6. **CONTACT** or 触 *SOKU*. A baby is born in this stage. To be born in this world is a great contact for the new born. 6 is birth in this world.
7. **PERCEPTION** or 受 *JU*. In this stage, one feels good or bad, has a sense of pleasure or displeasure, feels comfortable or uncomfortable, and so forth. This is a stage which lasts from the birth until one's early teens. 7 is about late elementary school age.
8. **DESIRE** or 愛 *AI*. In this stage one wishes to keep the things and material that he or she feels good, prefer, comfortable, and so forth; while he or she keeps the negative away from him or her. 8 is adolescence.
9. **ATTACHMENT** or 取 *SHU*. In this stage, if one likes the thing or material, he or she has attachments of feeling good, pleasure, being comfortable, and so forth. One will be happy when he or she is able to keep what he or she likes to keep, but one will hate and suffer when the opposite occurs. This is a stage from adolescents to adulthood. However this attachment causes one to be born again in the next life. 9 is adulthood.
10. **EXISTENCE** or 有 *U*. In this stage, one discriminates against others. Our daily lives are full of discrimination; profit or non-profit, good or bad, "mine" or "others", black or white, long or short, etc. This is our life in this world. 7, 8, and 9 are causes to be born again.
11. **BIRTH** or 生 *SHO* Thus, we will be born again in the next life because of suffering in the preceding stage. 11 is future life.

12. **OLD AGE & DEATH** or 老死 *RO-SHI*. One gets old eventually and dies. 12 is the continuation of birth and death until one reaches Nirvana.

Ignorance and Predisposition are two causes in one's previous lives. **Consciousness, Mental Function & Matter, The Six Senses, Contact and Perception** are the five results in this life after one's birth. **Desire, Attachment, and Existence** are three causes to be born in the next life. **Birth and Old Age/Death** are the two results in our future lives. Thus we repeat countless lives from the past, present and future.

Sakyamuni Buddha never answered the questions, "How was the earth created?" or "Who created a human being?" His thought of not answering the questions were probably that there are more important matters you must take care of first rather than finding the origin of universe. That is for us to realize who I am, why I am here, how I am alive. However if we must answer the question, "who created us," the answer is unknown, *mumyo* or ignorance. Ignorance originally creates repetition of birth and death. If you do not want to be born again, you must attain enlightenment. If you would like to be born again, let us try to improve ourselves little by little, day by day, year after year and life after life.

When the great multitude of gods and men gathered from the ten directions heard these teachings, they obtained profound and wonderful concentrations, six supernatural powers because they gave up wrong views.

The Sixteen Princes' Renounce 十六王子の出家

"The sixteen princes were young boys at that time. (3) They renounced the world and became *sramaneras* 沙弥." (P.141, LL.12~13)

Listening to the Buddha's teachings of the lesser vehicle: the Four Noble Truths, the Eight Fold Path and the Twelve Dependent Causations, the princes were glad to hear them and took ordination to become priests. At this stage they are not full priests yet. In Nichiren Shu, we call this stage as a "*sha-mi*." A *sha-mi* needs a lot of guidance and practice under his master.

"(4) They had already made offerings to hundreds of thousands of billions of Buddhas, performed brahma practices, and sought Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi in their previous existences." (P.141, LL.14~17)

It was surprising to know that the sixteen princes at the time of the Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata in the Three Thousand Dust-Atom Eons ago had previous existence and served many Buddhas. In their previous lives they practiced Brahmanism, precursor to Hinduism. Since we are able to understand the Lotus Sutra, we might practice the teachings of the sutra and served many Buddhas in our previous lives. Therefore, we are able to understand it.

“When the Buddha completed the expounding of this sutra, the sixteen *sramaneras* kept, recited and understood this sutra in order to attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.” (P.141, Last Paragraph)

The sixteen princes’ father was a king. When their father renounced the crown and became a Buddha called Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata, the princes also gave up their lifestyle in the kingdom and became monks to search for truths. They kept, recited and understood the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the Twelve Dependent Origination of Birth and Death. At this stage, the sixteen princes were still at the level of Sravakas because their enlightenment was only for themselves. They only kept the teachings, recited them and understood them for their own sake but did not expound the Dharma to others. This means that they were not practicing the way of Bodhisattvas yet.

“(5) The sixteen Bodhisattva-sramaneras each sat on a seat of the Dharma, expound the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma to the four kinds of devotees for eighty-four thousand kalpas, and saved six hundred billion *mayutas* of living beings, that is, as many living beings as there are sands in the River Ganges.” (P.142, LL.9~14)

Please note “the sixteen Bodhisattva-sramaneras” in the above sentence. A Bodhisattva is a person who seeks Enlightenment for himself but also must lead others to the way of the salvation. Although there is no word of the Six Paramitas, a Buddha called Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Tathagata must have expounded the way of the Bodhisattva, that is, the practices of the Six Paramitas. We have also learned in previous chapters that all Bodhisattvas became Buddhas with the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Now the sixteen princes who became Bodhisattvas are ready to expound their missionary works in the ten quarters. (6) Each of them received a name of a Buddha. Among them, the one who went to the West was Amitâbha Buddha. The one who remained in this Saha-World was Sakyamuni Buddha. He had chosen this earth planet where we live for his missionary work since the Three Thousand Dust-Atom Eons ago. The Buddha appeared again on this earth as a prince of Kapilavastu Palace 2,500 years ago in order to show us that we are also capable of becoming Buddhas. This is the Causality from the Previous Lives宿世の因縁 as we learned at the very beginning of this chapter.

Sakyamuni Buddha possesses the three virtues of Sovereign, Teacher and Parent that was revealed in Chapter 3: “This triple world is my property” signifies the Sovereign. “All living beings therein are my children” signifies the Parent. “Only I can save all living beings” signifies the Teacher. However, Amitâbha Buddha dwells in the West. He is neither our Parent, nor Sovereign on this earth. Sakyamuni was the only Buddha who was born and raised as a human being in this world. In this *Saha* world we must accept Sakyamuni Buddha as the most honored one because he is our Sovereign, Teacher and Parent.

In the preceding pages, I put a number from (1) to (6) in orange color. They are the process of any person in becoming a Buddha. *People Still Need the Teaching of the Lesser Vehicle.* それでもまだ方便の教えが必要

“Bhiksus, know this! I can enter skillfully deep into the natures of all living beings. Because I saw that they wished to hear the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle and that they were deeply attached to the five desires, I expounded the teaching of Nirvana to them. When they heard that teaching, they received it by faith.” (P.144, LL.20~24)

Nirvana in the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle (Sravakas and Pratyekabuddha) is not the real Nirvana. Why did the Buddha not teach real Nirvana from the beginning? This was because the people were still deeply attached to the five desires (Senses of seeing, listening, smelling, tasting, and touching OR desires for possession, sex, food/drinks, fame, and sleep).

Even Nichiren Shu members still need some sort of expedients such as amulets, prayer tablets, *kito* blessing, *Reidan* reading, and so forth. But these expedients are one of two tools to lead not only members but also non-members to the realization of the Reality of All Existence.

Then, Sakyamuni Buddha told the following parable to show the necessity of expedients:

THE PARABLE OF THE MAGIC CITY 化城の譬え

Once upon a time there was a dangerous, long and frightening road. This path was so fearful only one man lived in the vicinity. Now many people wished to pass through this road in order to reach a place of treasures. They were led by a man who was clever, wise, and well informed of the conditions of the dangerous road.

Halfway through their journey, the people got tired of walking and said to the leader, “We are tired. We are also afraid of the dangers on this road. We cannot go a step further. Our destination is still far off. We wish to go back.”

The leader, who knew many expedients, thought, “What a pity! They wish to go back without getting great treasures.” Having thought this, he expediently made a city appear by magic in the distance. He said to them, “Do not go back! You can stay in that great city, and do anything you like. If you enter that city, you will be peaceful. If you go on afterwards and reach the place of treasures, then you can go home.”

Thereupon the worn-out people had great joy. They said, “We have never had such joy as this before. Now we shall be able to get off this bad road and become peaceful.” They entered the magic city and felt peaceful.

Seeing that they had already rested and were now relieved from their fatigue, the leader caused the city to disappear and said to them, “Now the place of treasures is near. Let us go

further to get the treasures. I made this city by magic in order to enable you to rest.” (P. 144, 3rd Paragraph ~ P. 145)

EXPLANATION

The Buddha is like the leader of the treasure hunt. He knows the dangerous road that is comprised of birth, death and illusion. Those who are satisfied with the magic city are the people of the Sravaka or *shomon* and Pratyekabuddha or *engaku*. Although they may think that they have reached enlightenment, they have not reached it yet. It is similar to their satisfaction in the magic city. Real Enlightenment is farther away and obtained by practicing the way of the Bodhisattva.

This parable also teaches that we sometimes need expedients. *Kito* or special blessing or prayers in Nichiren Shu is one of those expedients. Prayers for material satisfaction are necessary for some people, but the final the goal is to reach the treasure land which signifies attainment of Buddhahood.

This parable also shows us that part of the Lotus Sutra was composed during the time of the Silk Road trade. Trade merchants traveled through long and huge deserts and passed through many countries throughout the region. An oasis along the journey was used to rest for a while before getting the real treasures that existed beyond the oasis.

“Many-storied gates and tall buildings in that city were filled with men and women.”
(P.151, LL.4~5)

In Nichiren Shu *Kito* Blessing, priests often use this phrase for prosperity of a shop or store or even for a temple. They also write this phrase on a prayer tablet.

“The Buddhas, the Leaders, expound the teaching of Nirvana in order to give a rest. When they see them having already had a rest, they lead them to the wisdom of the Buddha.” (P.152, Last four lines)

We should not be satisfied with prosperity and happiness of our own but should seek for the salvation of all mankind. We must look for the treasure of Enlightenment.

Chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra is an introduction to Chapter 16 that reveals the existence of the Eternal Buddha. Although the physical body of Sakyamuni Buddha is gone, his teachings remain forever.



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