

A Guide to Kyoten Sutra Readings

Expression of Shakyamuni Buddha



From The Threefold Lotus Sutra:

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom

Rissho Kosei-kai International
of
North America

A Guide to Kyoten Sutra Readings from The Threefold Lotus Sutra

This study guide was created for the use of the members of Rissho Kosei-kai
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Meditation on the Place of the Way

Text

Let it be known that this is a place of the Way! Here, the buddhas attain supreme enlightenment. Here, the buddhas turn the Dharma-wheel. Here, the buddhas enter parinirvana.

Commentary

The Buddha knew it would be easier for his disciples to follow his teachings while he was alive than it would be after his death. This verse is from the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, Chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata.” It is a declaration by the Buddha of the mental attitude that followers of his teachings must maintain after his death.

The Buddha is no longer here to talk directly with us, so by listening to the sutra, reading it and practicing the teachings of the sutra, we are directly encountering the Buddha even though he is not on this earth. In this sutra, the Buddha states that any place where a volume of the sutra is kept; or wherever it is sincerely read, studied or believed; or wherever the teachings are practiced - in a temple, in a grove, under a tree, in a monastery, in one’s home, in a palace, on a mountain, in a valley or in the wilderness - is a place or throne of enlightenment. This chapter emphasizes the holiness of Enlightenment and the Buddha’s wisdom. It teaches that the right way to maintain faith is to receive, keep, cultivate and practice the teachings. “Here” does not refer just to physical places where an object like the sutra is kept or where an action is performed. It refers to any and all places where the teaching is correctly practiced and maintained.

This verse is placed at the beginning of the Kyoten to remind us of the importance of the idea that the Buddha’s teachings are wherever we are. The teachings are an integral part of our daily lives. One important place for members of Rissho Kosei Kai is the home altar, where one can start and end each day with a recitation of the sutra. However, everywhere and anywhere we sincerely recite the sutra and practice the Dharma, is a place of enlightenment, whether it be at home, at work, or even in our cars.

By understanding that everywhere is a place of enlightenment, we come to understand that the Buddha is always watching over us with undivided love and compassion, just as our parents do. When we visit places where our parents lived, or worked, or died, we remember our parents and what they taught us. In the same way, we remember the teachings of the Buddha in these places of enlightenment.

Thus, we can seek the Buddha Way in all facets of our lives, truly realizing that we have been given the precious gift of life, and that we share in one great universal life which binds us to our parents, our children, all those around us, and the Buddha.

Life of Shakyamuni Buddha

The historical Buddha is best known today by the name Shakyamuni Buddha. His given name was Siddhartha and his family belonged to the Gautama clan. He was born about 2,500 years ago in a small state in northeastern India, the son of King Suddhodana of the Shakyas. Siddhartha grew up in comfort and luxury, educated, as were princes of the day, in both arts and arms. He was closely chaperoned and protected from all that was harsh, ugly and painful

Unfortunately, shortly after Siddhartha's birth his mother, Queen Maya, passed away. He was raised by his mother's sister, Mahaprajapati, who loved him greatly. Nevertheless, the loss of his mother affected him deeply and probably contributed to the development of his deep thinking about the nature of suffering.

As a young man, Siddhartha made four fateful trips into the world beyond the protected life of the palace. On the first trip he left by the eastern gate and saw an old decrepit man. On another trip he left by the southern gate and encountered a sick person in great suffering. On the third trip he left by the western gate and met a funeral procession. Siddhartha became keenly aware that all people, poor and rich alike, are subject to the four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. The pleasures of the palace lost their charm for Siddhartha in the face of these realizations. On the fourth trip outside the palace, leaving by the north gate, he saw a wandering holy man, alone, dressed in rags, clearly having no material possessions, yet possessing obvious tranquility. Siddhartha wondered what the holy man knew that gave him such serenity in the face of suffering.

At the age of 29, Siddhartha renounced his princely life, left his wife and small son, and began his quest to find a solution to the essential problem of human existence, the problem of suffering. First he studied with learned teachers. Next he followed a path of extreme asceticism. He lived alone. He slept on beds of thorns. He starved himself to the point of extreme emaciation.

He had now experienced both extremes - wealth and luxury, and extreme deprivation. Yet, the answer still eluded him. Finally, he decided to try a middle way. He made a cushion of grass beneath the famous bodhi tree and entered a deep meditative state, during which he saw the world for the first time as it truly was. He was no longer Siddhartha, but the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

Shakyamuni Buddha was about 35 years old at the time of his enlightenment. For the next forty-five years he traveled throughout north central India, teaching the causes of suffering, how to eradicate them, and thus how to free oneself from the cycle of birth and death. The disciples who gathered around Shakyamuni Buddha during these years of teaching became the sangha, or community of believers.

Shakyamuni Buddha died at the age of 80 while still traveling and teaching with his followers. His last words are ones of advice and encouragement: “All phenomena are always changing. Strive to practice my teachings diligently.”

Definitions

- **supreme enlightenment** - Wisdom of the Buddha
- **buddha** - A title meaning one who is Enlightened, or Awake. With a capital and a preceding ‘the’ it means Shakyamuni Buddha. Buddhas are those who have completely realized the truth of all things in the universe.
- **Dharma** (Sanskrit) - The Truth; the teaching of the Buddha.
- **Dharma-wheel** - The power of Buddha is so strong that it diminishes all desire; therefore, it is called the Dharma-wheel. To turn the Dharma-wheel means to convey the teachings. (In old India, kings with great virtues were said to receive the wheel treasure from heaven, and when the kings turn that wheel treasure they can conquer all. The wheel treasure precedes the kings wherever they go, destroys enemies and levels the ground. In Buddhist terms there are four such kings, each with a precious wheel of gold, silver, copper, or iron. The kings reign over the four great regions, north, south, east, and west. The king of the gold wheel rules the entire world. The king of the silver wheel rules the east, west and south regions. The king of the copper wheel rules the east and south, and the king of the iron wheel rules the south alone. One of the prophecies of the Buddha is that the king of the gold wheel will come to unify the world.)
- **parinirvana** - Literally, complete extinction; perfect quietude, when all illusion is destroyed. This word is frequently used to signify the death of Shakyamuni.
- **nirvana** - Literally, extinction; emancipation from all forms of existence; non-action; the highest and absolute state of spiritual bliss.
- **Tathagata** - Defined in *Buddhism for Today* as one who has come from the truth; one who has reached the Truth and come to declare it; the highest epithet of a buddha.

- **sutra** - Literally, thread or string; the scriptures containing the teachings of the Buddha. Most of the major sutras were originally in Pali or Sanskrit, though some were written in Tibetan or Chinese.
- **Kyoten** - *Kyo*: teachings. *Ten*: book. A collection of excerpts from the Lotus Sutra.
- **Recitation and Chanting** - When we recite the Kyoten verses, we do it by chanting. This melodic recitation brings us in step with the rhythm of the eternal life force throughout the universe. By chanting, we go beyond the words and the grammar of the sutra passages to the very heart of the teachings.
- **shravakas** - Those who learn the Dharma by listening.
- **pratyekabuddhas** - Those who study the Dharma, but do not share it.
- **samadhi** - deep concentration, contemplation or meditation.
- **liberation** - Freedom from suffering.

Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures

Text

Buddham saranam gacchami

*(We take refuge in the Buddha.)
May we, with all living beings,
Deeply experience the Great Way and
Give rise to the supreme aspiration.*

Dhammam saranam gacchami

*(We take refuge in the Dharma.)
May we, with all living beings,
Embrace the riches of the sutra and
Make our wisdom as wide and deep as the sea.*

Sangham saranam gacchami

*(We take refuge in the Sangha.)
May we, with all living beings,
Guide the great community and
Be freed from all hindrances.*

Commentary

The Three Treasures are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These are the basics taught by Shakyamuni Buddha from the moment he started his teaching. The Three Treasures are the foundation of the Buddha Way.

Throughout its history, faith in the Three Treasures has been the primary religious characteristic of all Buddhism. The formula “I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha” appears repeatedly in the earliest Buddhist literature. Sincere repetition of this vow meant then, and still means, the person reciting the vow is a true Buddhist, a disciple of the Buddha who walks the Buddha Way.

Buddha

The Original Buddha is the universal life energy which permeates everything. It is omnipresent in the universe. It exists in all situations, at all times, in all places. There is no place where the Original Buddha does not exist. The Buddha gives each of us the protection of unconditional love and compassion. By realizing this love and compassion we obtain limitless hope and courage.

This does not mean our lives will be filled with unending enjoyment and constant happiness. Our daily lives will not always be easy. We may experience sadness, difficulty, greed, jealousy, ill health, and loss. It is by facing the realities of life, both its ups and its downs, that we experience the compassion of the Buddha, and have the power and strength to overcome adversity.

Dharma

The Dharma, or Universal Law, is the Buddha's teachings. 'Dharma' refers to all things that exist in the universe and all events that occur in the world. It also means the one Truth that permeates all things. The Dharma is an established rule when the Truth appears as a phenomenon that we can see with our eyes and hear with our ears. And it means the teaching of the Truth.

The Dharma is expressed in "The Three Seals of the Dharma." The first Seal is: "All things are impermanent." All things are changing. The only thing that is unchanging and unchangeable is the Truth that presides over the existence, the workings, and the changes of all things.

The second Seal states, "Nothing has an ego." Nothing in this world has an isolated existence. All things exist in relationship with one another and are interdependent.

The third Seal taught by the Buddha is: "Nirvana is quiescence." We are frequently swayed by changing phenomena and too often influenced by immediate gain and loss. If we come to have the spirit of perfect freedom, being detached from temporary and superficial considerations, we are in a spiritual condition of peace and calm, even in what might be considered by others as a painful situation.

When we see the world in terms of the Three Seals, we understand that all things in the world are interrelated. All phenomena are the result of causes meeting conditions and producing an effect. A seed may be a potential flower blossom, but if the seed does not meet with soil, water, and sunlight, it will not grow and produce the blossom. If there is no blossom, people will not experience the beauty and joy they would have had from the blossom.

Cause and effect is important on a personal level, since an understanding of cause and effect helps us grow toward peace and calm - toward quiescence. As an example, if a person who is behaving hatefully is criticized, she may resent not only the criticism, but also the person who criticized. The relationship between these two people may suffer. However, if she changes her point of view and exercises the wisdom to listen and accept criticism with a sense of appreciation for the opportunity to examine herself and

learn, the outcome will be quite different. This person has the opportunity to change, to look within, to grow, and to engage in a richer relationship with others.

Thus, while we have choices in the way we behave and are responsible for our actions, our choices and our actions should always be in accordance with the Dharma. When we understand that all phenomena unfold according to the Dharma, we are able to live our lives freely.

Sangha

The word *sangha* or *samgha* is often interpreted to mean a community of Buddhist monks and nuns, or members of a religious or monastic order. Shakyamuni Buddha gave the name of Samgha to the community of fellow believers who sought the same teachings as his disciples.

In Sanskrit, the word *sam-ha* means the two hands joined with the open palms brought together. In Rissho Kosei-Kai, this gesture is called *gassho* (Japanese). The hands together denote the disciples. Bringing the hands together symbolizes bringing the group of believers together.

The Sangha - a community of fellow believers - is a vital part of our growth in Buddhism. Most people find it difficult to seek the Dharma and practice it in complete isolation. On our own, we are apt to become lazy in our practice. When we face daily difficulties alone, we risk feeling isolated and becoming depressed. By being involved with a community of friends who practice the Dharma, we find encouragement and help. We teach each other. We learn from one another.

Through association and interaction with members of the Sangha, we are better able to overcome hardship, to live more positively and to come closer to the state of peace and calm we seek. Our own faith deepens, and as the circle of the Sangha widens, we lead many other people to the Buddha Way.

When we take refuge in the Three Treasures, believing sincerely in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, we have the tools to live in harmony with ourselves and others no matter what comes our way.

Invocation

Text

*We put our faith in
The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni - Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One;
The Tathagata Abundant Treasures, witness to the Lotus Sutra;
The emanations of the Buddha in the ten directions in the past, present and future;
The four Great Bodhisattvas: Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice,
and Steadfast Practice;
The Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas: Manjushri, Universal Wisdom, Maitreya, and all
other Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas;
Great Bodhisattva Nichiren, revered practitioner of the Lotus Sutra;
Founder Nikkyo, Great Teacher of the One Vehicle;
Cofounder Myoko, Bodhisattva of the Way of Compassion;
The guardian spirits of Rissho Kosei-kai;
And the countless heavenly spirits in the ten directions.
May you all be present among us and know our deep devotion.*

Commentary

In ancient India, worshipers drew a circle on purified land and created a sacred place to which they invited and welcomed all the buddhas and gods. This circle was called a *mandala* (Sanskrit) meaning ‘pure or true nature.’ The Invocation is an oral mandala. Like all invocations, it is an appeal to a higher power for assistance. As we begin our Lotus Sutra recitation, we call on a number of higher powers to gather in the place where we are reciting - at the Dharma Center, at home, wherever it might be. The Invocation sets the mood. It is a sincere request for guidance. It indicates a welcoming attitude, and it is a sign that we intend to accept this guidance, and put the Dharma into practice. Recitation of the Invocation puts us in a state of mind that allows us to experience oneness with the Buddha. It puts us in the present moment where we can be awake to the wisdom of realizing the truth of the Dharma, and be ready to practice it.

The Dharma is the invisible Existence that sustains us and improves us. It is the root of our being, but because it is invisible and intangible, we cannot perceive it clearly. By seeing the tangible form of Shakyamuni Buddha, by reciting the sutra and chanting the Mantra, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, we can feel assured of the compassion and warmth of the Buddha. If we feel this oneness with the Buddha every morning and every night, we will develop the confidence and firm belief that Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni is

always with us wherever we are. This confidence gives us the strength and power to live in each moment, each day.

The Guides

- **Shakyamuni Buddha** refers to the actual historical human being, born in India 2,500 years ago, who was enlightened to the Truth and became the Buddha, founder of Buddhism. He is the tangible, human form of the universal life energy, a living example of the Dharma. **Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni** refers to the great omnipresent life force that sustains and guides everything - human beings, animals, plants, and all other living and non-living beings. It is explained in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra. We call on Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni's guidance because we respect and honor both the human being who conveyed the Dharma for the liberation of all beings from suffering, and the universal life energy which is within each of us.
- On the altar is a standing Buddha. Above the Buddha's head in the large flame-shaped halo is a stupa which symbolizes the Buddha-Nature that all people possess. In this stupa, is the **Tathagata Abundant Treasures**, who symbolizes the absolute Truth that is realized by the Tathagata Shakyamuni. This Truth never changes and it has existed throughout the universe forever. We call on the Tathagata Abundant Treasures as the one who verifies the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and praises the teachings wherever they are presented.
- **Emanations of the Buddha in the ten directions in the past, present, and future** is a reference to all the buddhas everywhere and throughout time, who transmit the teachings of the Buddha. To support and guide us, the Buddha appears to people in different forms appropriate to the particular time and place for their needs, by means suited to their capacity to understand his teachings. These forms are part of the universal life energy. We welcome their guidance. We know it will be suited to our needs.
- **Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and Steadfast Practice** are identified in the Lotus Sutra with the four fundamental vows of all Buddhists: to liberate all living beings from suffering; to extinguish all delusions; to study all the Buddha's teachings; and to attain the Truth. The word "Practice" in each of the names points out that our own actions put the teachings of the Dharma into practice. It is by our own effort, that we realize happiness in our lives. We ask the guidance of these four bodhisattvas because they have made these four vows. They are here specifically to help us.
- **The Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Manjushri** represents the Buddha's wisdom. **The Bodhisattva-Mahasattva Universal Wisdom** typifies the Buddha's practice. These two bodhisattvas are regarded as a pair. The wisdom represented by Manjushri symbolizes our realization of the Truth. The practice shown by Universal Wisdom represents our own practice of the Truth. **The Bodhisattva-Mahasattva**

Maitreya, The Kindly One, is the Buddha of the future, and embodies the compassion of the Buddha.

- **Nichiren** was a Japanese Buddhist priest (1222 -1282) and founder of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. Nichiren believed the true teaching of Buddhism was found in the Lotus Sutra. He advocated the recitation of the Mantra (Namu Myoho Renge Kyo) as the main spiritual practice. He was greatly criticized for his views. We appreciate his work in the face of the hardships he had to overcome.
- **Founder Nikkyo Niwano** (1906-1999), Great Teacher of the One Vehicle, believed in and accepted the world of the One Vehicle (Ekayana), established Rissho Kosei-kai, devoted himself to true bodhisattva practice, and was a great leader at spreading the teachings.
- **Cofounder Myoko Naganuma** (1889-1957), Bodhisattva of the Way of Compassion, with the Founder, volunteered herself to work for the liberation of all people, and verified the Dharma through the Bodhisattva practice.
- **Guardian spirits** is a reference to the Japanese tradition of recognizing the presence of local and traditional heavenly spirits in the temple or shrine.
- **Countless heavenly spirits in the ten directions** include all the guides, spirits, and higher powers who protect us. We are asking that they protect us, purify this place and watch over us as we move forward in our faith.

Definitions

- **Bodhisattvas** - People who seek the wisdom and enlightenment of the Buddha, not only for themselves, but for all sentient beings.
- **Mahasattvas** - Literally, great beings. *Maha* means great or large. *Sattva* means person. People with great aspiration.

Opening Verse

Text

*The unsurpassed, profound, wonderful Dharma
Is rarely met in myriads of kalpas.
Now we see and hear it; receive and embrace it.
May we understand the Tathagata's foremost teaching.*

Commentary

Recitation of the opening verse is recognition that we are encountering the Dharma. We appreciate this opportunity to recite the sutra and concentrate on its meaning in our lives.

The Dharma is described as unsurpassed. It is unequaled, and unique. It is also profound, and consequently sometimes difficult to understand.

In addition, we are not always prepared to understand the teachings, or even at times to hear them. It requires not only openness to the teachings, but time and effort to develop the wisdom necessary to understand the Dharma and to achieve the knowledge and insight needed to liberate ourselves from suffering. In other words, the Dharma is “rarely met.” “In myriads of kalpas” emphasizes the time and effort required. Shakyamuni Buddha explained that length of time with this example: There is a rocky mountain in an area of about ten miles. By stroking the mountain peak with a soft fabric once every hundred years, the mountain will erode little by little, and eventually disappear. It will take longer than eons (kalpas) of years to erode the mountain. “Myriads of kalpas” is, an immeasurably long time.

Throughout the Lotus Sutra the terms ‘ordinary people’ and ‘human beings’ are used. As ordinary people and human beings, we are subject to daily challenges tugging at our emotions, blinding us to, or distracting us from the Dharma. We often close our minds to the Truth. On the other hand, the term ‘human being’ underscores the fact that we are able to encounter the Dharma, to hear it, read it, study it and practice it. Since we have in fact seen, heard, received (accepted) and kept (practiced) the teachings, we will develop understanding - not just an academic understanding, but the working, living understanding manifested through our thoughts and deeds in accordance with the Dharma.

President Niwano, in his book, *Cultivating the Buddhist Heart*, states, “There are countless numbers of life forms in this world interconnected in a single life system. All

of life is precious. To have been given life as a human is especially important because as human beings we are capable of recognizing the Truth (Dharma).”

On a personal, individual level it is important for us to understand that we are here as human beings because, out of all the people on earth - over 6 billion - our parents met one another. Likewise their parents met one another, and their parents, and their parents. It is sobering to realize that just the right set of circumstances had to exist at the right time and place for us to be here today as human beings. It is even more sobering when we consider the number of life forms which have become extinct since life was created on earth. Our being here is a miracle. If we realize this, we understand just how precious our lives are. Against the odds, we were born as humans and because of that, we are able to encounter the Dharma.

To listen to and recite the sutra whole-heartedly, sincerely puts us in the right frame of mind to be open to the teachings and to apply them in our lives. At the end of the Opening Verse, we chant, “May we understand the Tathagata’s foremost teaching.” We are preparing to recite the sutra with an open mind and with sincerity. We open our minds and hearts to the Dharma, so we may apply it in our daily lives.

The first principle of the Tathagata is the Law of Transience. Shakyamuni Buddha saw this universe as one large, radiantly shining, living world. He realized that all phenomena in this world are interrelated and interdependent. Nothing has an ego (separate existence). He also understood that all phenomena change. All things are impermanent or transient. However, human beings, although interconnected in a single life system, tend to be self-centered and caught up in their own desires. They look at themselves as totally separate from others. They do not think how their actions affect others. This self-centeredness is the cause of their suffering.

By realizing the Law of Transience and incorporating it into our thinking and behavior, we awaken to the wisdom of seeing things the way they are. We understand how our behavior affects all those around us. By thinking of every encounter with another person as an opportunity for growth and enlightenment, we learn to live responsibly. For example, we know how easy it is to be kind in return for kindness, and when someone is rude, how quickly we can be rude in return. Whatever our behavior is, it affects many other people. If we respond with a smile and kindness, the effect is quite different than if we respond with a frown and a rude comment. When we accept the challenge of each encounter as an opportunity to practice the Dharma and to behave in a positive way, we spread the peace and calm of enlightenment.

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings

Chapter 3, Ten Merits

Text

*The Buddha said,
“My good children! First, this sutra can:
Make an unawakened bodhisattva aspire to the mind of awakening,
Make one without kindness give rise to the mind of compassion,
Make one who likes slaughter give rise to the mind of great mercy,
Make a jealous one give rise to the mind of joy for others,
Make one with attachments give rise to the mind of non-attachment,
Make a miserly one give rise to the mind of generosity,
Make an arrogant one give rise to the mind of keeping the precepts,
Make an angry one give rise to the mind of forbearance,
Make a lazy one give rise to the mind of diligence,
Make a distracted one give rise to the mind of meditation,
Make an ignorant one give rise to the mind of wisdom,
Make one who does not think of liberating others give rise to the mind of
liberating them,
Make one who commits the ten evils give rise to the mind of the ten virtues,
Make one drawn to conditioned phenomena aspire to overcome them,
Make one who regresses build the mind of progressing,
Make one who commits defiled acts give rise to the mind of undefilement, and
Make one with many delusive passions give rise to the mind of extinguishing them.
My good children! This is called the first wondrous merit-power of this sutra.”*

Commentary

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings contains the lesson Shakyamuni Buddha delivered on Divine Eagle Peak (Vulture Peak) immediately before delivering the Lotus Sutra. It is regarded as the introduction to the Lotus Sutra. In this sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha explained that he had taught up to that time with a purpose and in a certain order suitable to the needs of the listeners (skillful means). He declared that while he had taught using a variety of methods, there was only one Dharma. He promised that in his next lesson he was going to reveal the depth and detail of the Dharma. He then went on to give the Lotus Sutra. Thus, the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings makes clear that the Lotus Sutra, of all the sutras taught by Shakyamuni Buddha, has unparalleled sacredness and holds an unprecedented position.

The sutra consists of three chapters. Chapter 1, “Virtues,” is the introductory part of the sutra. It tells when and where the sutra was taught, to whom it was taught, and for what purpose. This chapter praises the virtues of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Dharma that leads to the liberation of all people from suffering.

Chapter 2, “Preaching,” the main part of the sutra, is the theological chapter. It contains the subject matter of the sutra, which is the Dharma - the reality of all things. All phenomena originate from the one source, the Dharma. All phenomena of the universe, including human life, manifest in many different ways, and they are constantly changing. All phenomena, because they derive from the same eternal source and are subject to the same Dharma, are equal and in harmony. Unfortunately, we generally do not understand this. We worry and fret about these changing phenomena. We suffer. However, through understanding the Dharma and practicing its teachings, and through compassion toward one another, we are liberated and help liberate others.

Chapter 3, “Ten Merits,” is the conclusion of the sutra. It expresses what spiritual merits can be obtained through understanding thoroughly what is taught in Chapter 2, and by believing and practicing the teachings. Chapter 3, tells of the good deeds we can accomplish and the way we can be useful to people and to the world.

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings teaches that the fundamental nature of all things in this world is unborn and undying, and that we are all equal. We have a foundation based on the knowledge that however circumstances or environment may change, we are kept alive by this ultimate Truth. With that confidence, we can remain calm and exercise good judgment no matter what happens.

The Merits

- **First this sutra can make an unawakened bodhisattva aspire to mind of awakening** – ‘Unawakened bodhisattva’ appears at first glance to be contradictory. A bodhisattva is one who studies the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) teachings and practices to attain enlightenment and to assist others in attaining enlightenment. Yet there are those who appear to be bodhisattvas, but do not really have an unwavering commitment to attain the wisdom of the Buddha. This sutra has the power to cause them to truly aspire to the Buddha’s enlightenment for themselves and others.
- **Make one without kindness give rise to the mind of compassion** – Compassion is the wish to make others happy. A person without compassion is self-centered. Those who hear the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings grasp the notion that there is no distinction between self and others, that self and others are actually one. They understand that if others are unhappy, they, too, are unhappy. Therefore, they will want to bring others happiness. Their actions will reflect that intent.

- **Make one who likes slaughter give rise to the mind of great mercy** - One who likes slaughter is a person who enjoys acting cruelly, not only causing physical harm but emotional and spiritual harm as well. These cruel impulses arise from the inability to feel that self and others are actually one. When such people hear the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, they understand there is no distinction between themselves and others. They can then reach out to others in compassion.
- **Make a jealous one give rise to the mind of joy for others** - Jealousy is the envy and resentment that we feel toward others, if we think of them as either happier than we are, or superior to us. Jealousy brings discord and breeds hostility. Jealousy comes from a narrow, restricted, subjective point of view. By stepping back and looking at others from a distance, with more objectivity, we see the difference between self and others is greatly reduced. Our feelings of inferiority disappear. We begin to understand that together we make up society, each playing an important part. Grasping the Truth, we are filled with joy and the jealousy is dispelled.
- **Make one with attachments give rise to the mind of non-attachment** - It is only natural for us to love the things around us - family, wealth, reputation. But if we become too attached to the things themselves, we become preoccupied with these things and forget the truly important aspects of life. If we are prepared to discard things around us, our minds are free and autonomous. We are able to gain real harmony with family, friends and community, and gain the wisdom to use what we have in a beneficial way.
- **Make a miserly one give rise to the mind of generosity** - Being miserly means not only being stingy with one's own possessions, but coveting others' possessions. When we begin to understand that self and others are one, miserliness fades and we enjoy performing acts of kindness. Generosity, also called donation, may come in many forms - sharing the Dharma, sharing our wealth, sharing ourselves.
- **Make an arrogant one give rise to the mind of keeping the precepts** - Arrogance is being haughty or thinking too highly of oneself. Precepts are guidelines of conduct set out in the sutras. Those who hear the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings understand they make mistakes from time to time. They are humble. They have a strong desire to study harder, to keep striving to practice the Dharma, and to grow.
- **Make an angry one give rise to the mind of forbearance** – ‘An angry one’ in this case is one who is truly angry. When an angry person hears the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, his sense of oneness with others gradually deepens. He begins to look more objectively at things and is more able to understand other people's positions. He becomes more compassionate, more cool-headed and better able to make good

decisions and good choices. This spiritual condition is true perseverance. It is difficult to achieve and takes time.

- **Make a lazy one give rise to the mind of diligence** - A lazy one is lazy about doing the things that are supposed to be done. Diligence is consistent effort toward what has to be done. It is important to understand that 'what has to be done' is a task to confirm the value of the existence of each and every thing and being. When we truly comprehend the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, we understand we must completely fulfill that task.
- **Make a distracted one give rise to the mind of meditation** – 'Distracted' contains two meanings. First, is the mental attraction to change - which causes the mind to flit restlessly from one thing to the next. Second, is the inability to think consistently according to principles. If we hear the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and understand the Truth that all things are equal, we are not frustrated by change. We know that everything is striving toward harmony and balance. Our minds remain calm and stable.
- **Make an ignorant one give rise to the mind of wisdom** - An ignorant person judges based on instinct, and acts without thought of the consequences. Ignorance is a lack of reason, and a lack of wisdom. Hearing the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, we understand that human beings can, with effort, live in harmony. Wisdom begins to grow.
- **Make one who does not think of liberating others give rise to the mind of liberating them** – 'Liberating others' means leading others to freedom from suffering by instructing and guiding them in the Buddha's teachings. If we are leading self-centered lives, we think only of our own good. When we understand that self and others are interdependent, we are keenly aware there can be no happiness unless we are all liberated and the whole world is at peace. It becomes natural to guide people toward the teachings.
- **Make one who commits the ten evils give rise to the mind of the ten virtues** - The ten evils are killing, stealing, committing sexual offenses, lying, improper language, a double tongue, ill-speaking, covetousness (craving) , anger and ignorance. The state of having eliminated these ten evils is called the ten virtues (10 good acts). By hearing the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, we understand how important it is to eliminate these ten evils. By practicing the teachings we achieve the ten virtues for ourselves and others.
- **Make one drawn to conditioned phenomena aspire to overcome them** - 'Conditioned phenomena' refers to phenomena which have come into existence

through causes and conditions. Therefore, one who is drawn to conditioned phenomena is a person who pursues only the happiness that comes from phenomena. Such people are overwhelmed by many worries and disappointments. When they hear the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, they realize that although there are distinctions between people, in essence they are all equal because they are endowed with the Buddha-Nature. As a result their minds are no longer concerned with phenomenal change.

- **Make one who regresses build the mind of progressing** - Regression is backsliding in faith and practice. It refers to a person who does not know the Dharma and who thinks if one just prays, good things will happen or illness will be cured. In this kind of faith, when bad things happen or illness is not cured, faith weakens. But when we know the true aspect of all things and have faith based on that teaching, our faith is not shaken even when good results do not occur or undesirable changes happen. Our faith and practice remove the fear of sickness, aging, and unwelcome circumstances.
- **Make one who commits defiled acts give rise to the mind of undefilement** - 'One who commits defiled acts' is one who suffers from delusions. When there is no enlightenment, everything is defiled, meaning that we are captive by the phenomena around us. By hearing this sutra, we will be guided by the Truth and no longer susceptible to phenomenal appearances or be misled by them.
- **Make one with many delusive passions give rise to the mind of extinguishing them** - This is a reference to delusions of the mind which cause mental and spiritual suffering. The only way to eliminate these sufferings is to know the Dharma. Once we know the Truth we can pursue it and let it live in our hearts. To 'give rise to the mind of extinguishing them (delusions)' is to sincerely pursue the Truth.

Guidelines for Life

This passage from the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings is a guide for us to follow on our journey toward peace, tranquility and liberation for ourselves and others. The passage begins with the idea of raising the aspiration for enlightenment. Aspiration, the mental intent, is the starting point. Enlightenment is the reason for our practice and for our desire to follow these guidelines.

The next four lines of this passage set forth the Four Virtues - mercy, compassion, joy and detachment (equanimity). As we strive toward harmony, we learn that our lives are connected to every other life. We understand that we possess the same

great life energy/consciousness as the Eternal Buddha. We strive to attain the mind of the Four Virtues - the Buddha-Nature in each of us.

The Four Virtues are: The sincere desire for others to be happy, the desire to remove others from suffering, the joy expressed when we celebrate together, and not being attached to our good works (also do not dwell on inconvenience or harm caused by someone else) - simply put it aside, learn from it and move on - this is detachment.

These Four Virtues have their opposites. It is human nature to feel such emotions as jealousy, superiority, and envy. To practice the teachings of Buddhism is to purify the undesirable tendencies and work toward the positive - toward the virtues. We do this by learning and applying the Eightfold Path and the Six Paramitas (Six Perfections), through which we gain the wisdom to be merciful, compassionate, joyful, and detached.

The next six merits in this passage from the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings – Donation (generosity), Ethics (keeping the precepts), Forbearance, Effort (Diligence), Meditation and Wisdom - correspond to the Six Paramitas. These are the guidelines of the bodhisattva's practice to gain enlightenment and to help others gain enlightenment. The Sanskrit word, *paramita* is translated as 'perfection'. Its basic meaning is 'reaching the other shore.' It refers to a bodhisattva's having obtained the deep understanding of the principle of the Buddha's teachings, and having arrived at the other shore - enlightenment.

Donation is also called generosity. It involves working for others in every way - spiritually, physically, and materially. The paramita of donation has to have another person involved. You are giving of yourself. All the other paramitas are for yourself. This paramita is for others, and it is the best practice for extinguishing a greedy mind. The three types of donation are: 1) giving goods and money for others; 2) correctly sharing and teaching the Dharma; and 3) conducting oneself for the benefit of others. Donation may be as simple as offering a flower for the home altar, or sharing knowledge and experience. It might be a kind word or a smile. It starts small and grows.

The precepts are guidelines. Keeping the precepts involves perfecting ourselves by living an upright life in harmony with the Dharma; this is a life in which we make choices for the highest good for ourselves and others. It involves making every effort to be of service to others. We recognize we are not perfect; yet we are not discouraged as we strive toward perfection through service to others. As we do more for others, we harvest many benefits and continue to grow. As we grow, we are able to render more service to others. This cycle is repeated infinitely when we keep the precepts (ethics). The precepts include: 1) not to take life unnecessarily; 2) not to steal; 3) to refrain from irresponsible sexual behavior; 4) not to lie; 5) not to drink intoxicants; 6) not to speak of other people's faults; 7) not to conceal one's faults; 8) not to emphasize other people's shortcomings rather than their good points. (*reframed in a positive context: 1) respect*

all life, 2) be content with what you have, 3) have integrity in relationships, 4) always be truthful, 5) always be clear-headed, 6) see everyone's Buddha-Nature, 7) be honest about your shortcomings, 8) promote others)

Forbearance is practicing constant patience and restraint in dealing with troubles caused by others. By contrast, it also means maintaining an unassuming attitude, and showing humility - even in one's proudest moments. Forbearance involves patience and humility toward all people, all living beings and, indeed, all things.

Dogen, the 13th century founder of the Soto Zen sect, wrote this poem:

*In spring, flowers;
In summer, the cuckoo;
In autumn, the moon;
In winter, the snow cold and bright, chilly and bracing.*

Spring, summer, autumn, and winter are worthwhile simply because they are spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The poem teaches us that each individual has his or her own unique appearance and personality. Each individual may change just as the seasons change. And each individual has an underlying absolute value - the Buddha-Nature - just because it exists and has the possibility of change. Forbearance is the recognition of this basic value. It is patience with beings and circumstances, and the acceptance of change.

Life's real purpose is to reach the state of mind in which nothing really bothers us. Making effort (having diligence), is to wholeheartedly strive toward that goal. It is important to keep that goal in mind as we go through our daily tasks, solving one problem and then another. We need to remember that each specific hurdle in our lives is but a step in our journey or practice, and that solving one problem or successfully dealing with a single issue is but one step in that on-going journey. For example, if a person comes to Rissho Kosei-kai to solve a specific problem and, through discussion with friends in Dharma Circle (Hoza), solves the problem, that person may think, "I don't need to attend RK anymore. My problem is solved." But effort (diligence) involves seeing the greater purpose in life as we live each day and deal with the issues that day presents us. Rather than deal with those issues one at a time as though they were isolated from everything else, we deal with issues on a continuum in which every action, every success, every set back is building our awareness of the reality of all things. Effort (diligence) involves steadfastly and sincerely staying the course, jumping each hurdle, then renewing our focus, step by step, minute by minute. Our purpose is to engage in the constant, sincere practice of the teachings. It is the journey - the practice of the teachings - that counts.

Meditation means maintaining a calm and quiet mind that is not agitated or led astray by any circumstance. If we see our surroundings with a peaceful mind, our field

of vision will widen and we can see the Truth - the reality of things. Seek to be calm and peaceful like the smooth, glassy surface of a pond which allows the moon to be reflected as it really is.

Wisdom is the ability to comprehend the true aspect of all things and to live each day according to the teachings. We have a tendency to see things with the eyes of attachment. Wisdom is the ability to see things, not through the eyes of attachment, but through the eyes of the reality of things (Buddha's view). Wisdom is attained by continuous practice of the Six Paramitas. We start with generosity, the central and fundamental practice of Buddhism. We move toward buddha-wisdom with which we can experience a life of harmony and happiness.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 2, Skillful Means

Text

At that time the World-honored One, rising calmly from samadhi, addressed Shariputra: "The wisdom of the buddhas is infinite and very profound. The gateway to their wisdom is difficult to enter and difficult to understand --- beyond the comprehension of even shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. Why is this? Because the buddhas have been in close fellowship with countless myriads of kotis of other buddhas, fully practicing countless ways to enlightenment, boldly and diligently advancing, making their fame universally known. Having accomplished the profound and unprecedented Dharma, they have taught it according to what was appropriate; yet their intention is difficult to grasp. Shariputra! Since I became Buddha, I have widely discoursed and taught with various parables and examples from the past, and by countless skillful means I have led living beings, freeing them from their attachments. Why is this? Because the Tathagata is replete with skillful means and the paramita of knowledge and insight. Shariputra! The knowledge and insight of the Tathagata is broad, great, profound, and far reaching. With infinite and unhindered powers, fearlessness, meditation, emancipation, and samadhi, he has entered into the boundless realms and attained the unprecedented Dharma. Shariputra! The Tathagata is able to distinguish all things, explain the teachings skillfully, use gentle words, and bring joy to the hearts of all. Shariputra! In essence, the Buddha is fully accomplished in the infinite, boundless, and unprecedented Dharma. Shariputra! There is no need for me to say more. Why is this? Because the Dharma the Buddha has attained is understood only rarely and with great difficulty. Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the ultimate reality of all things. That is to say, all things have such an appearance, such a nature, such a substance, such a potency, such a function, such a cause, such a condition, such an effect, such a recompense, and yet in every case such an ultimate integration of them all."

Background and Setting

After Shakyamuni Buddha gave the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings at Divine Eagle Peak (Vulture Peak), he entered into a state of profound meditation (samadhi). In Chapter 1 of the Lotus Sutra, "Introductory," it is told how those present around the Buddha felt a strong sense of something special about to happen. Indeed, a ray of light came forth from the circle of white hair between the Buddha's eyebrows and illuminated all things everywhere. This light symbolizes Shakyamuni Buddha's supreme wisdom which illuminates and makes plain the Truth of things.

In the crowd were the two disciples, Maitreya, who represents compassion, and Manjushri, who represents wisdom. Maitreya was perplexed by the light emanating from the Buddha's brow and he saw others in the crowd who were equally puzzled. He asked Manjushri to explain this auspicious sign. Manjushri replied that the Buddha was about to teach the Great-Vehicle Sutra, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma.

In this scene, compassion appeals to wisdom. This is an important model for those who practice the bodhisattva way: compassion and wisdom acting together to obtain the best result. Maitreya expresses compassion (bodhisattva act) by asking for an explanation not only for himself, but on behalf of others as well. He represents the potential capacity of all living beings to guide others on the path to liberation. Maitreya is also the bodhisattva of the future, who will appear to guide all beings to freedom from suffering. This teaches us that the capacity to practice compassion and help others is shared by all, and is not reserved for the chosen few. Manjushri's wisdom comes from his having heard the Buddha's teachings in both past and present lives.

Skillful Means

The Japanese title of this chapter is "*Hoben*", referring to the idea of a teaching method which is applied appropriately to the needs of the person and the occasion. In this chapter Shakyamuni Buddha explains that everything taught in the previous forty years of his life was the Truth, a part of, and an introduction to his final teaching. Up to this time, he said, he had been using methods and techniques appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the people in order to avoid confusing and bewildering them. He had used tactful methods to lead listeners step by step up the ladder of understanding, so that now he could reveal the one great Truth that all human beings can become buddhas because every single person possesses the Buddha-Nature. However, before making this proclamation, he speaks at length about skillful means.

Shakyamuni Buddha explains the reason for his use of skillful means is that he (along with all previous buddhas and all future buddhas), has one goal: to reveal the buddha-knowledge to all living beings so they may obtain liberation from suffering. If a person understands this, that person will become a buddha and will be able to attain true happiness. This goal is so important that Shakyamuni Buddha emphasizes the use of "countless skillful means" appropriate to each individual's capacity. Human beings each have their own particular attachments, distractions, worries, and concerns which can blind them to the Truth. Skillful means insure understanding for all, wherever they are on the ladder of understanding.

This chapter teaches that skillful means not only lead to the Truth, they are the Truth. Skillful means are part of the process that leads to the wisdom of the Buddha.

Wisdom

The wisdom of the buddhas is that all things in the universe are different, each having its own personality, appearance, and behaviors - AND - at the same time, all things are interrelated, constantly changing, and are part of the same universal life energy. Viewing the world with this wisdom we know that our path to liberation from suffering is a continuing process which involves helping others awaken to their Buddha-Nature. We help others, and thereby ourselves, through the use of skillful means. As we employ skillful means we become more aware of our relationship to others. We know that each encounter offers us an opportunity to evaluate and choose a course of action in harmony with the Dharma. We use the wisdom we have gained to make the right choices and to grow spiritually. As we grow, we help others to grow. This is real liberation.

Commentary

- **Shariputra** - When Shakyamuni Buddha awakens from samadhi (deep meditation) he addresses Shariputra, one his chief disciples, known especially for his wisdom (which is one of the principal themes of this passage).
- **The gateway to their wisdom** - Chapter 3, “A Parable,” describes how Shariputra, after hearing the revelation of Chapter 2, “Skillful Means,” became ecstatic with joy, because he realized that he, too, could become a buddha. The instant he understood that skillful means were themselves a valuable tool in the progression toward liberation from suffering, the “gateway” was opened.
- **Beyond the comprehension of shravakas (those who only listen) and pratyekabuddhas (those who only study)** - The teachings of the Lotus Sutra can be intellectually understood through reading and study; however, intellectual understanding alone is not enough (self-centered). To practice the bodhisattva path, means that we are reaching beyond ourselves - through compassion and wisdom - to others. It is an ongoing, long-term process with no shortcuts. Because of our attachments, we often do not see opportunities to practice the teachings. Skillful means open our eyes to unnoticed opportunities.
- **The Tathagata is replete with skillful means and the paramita of knowledge and insight** - Skillful means and wisdom are knowledge and insight. The word ‘paramita’ expresses the idea of attaining perfection. Skillful means is the ability to teach in the most appropriate way for the time, place, and capacity of the listeners. The paramita of wisdom is the perfection of careful reflection in order to achieve awakening or liberation. The Buddha is equipped with the tools - knowledge and

wisdom - to teach by skillful means and bring us up the ladder, step by step, to understanding.

- **The knowledge and insight of the Tathagata is broad, great, profound, and far-reaching** - This is a reference to Buddha's virtues of mercy, compassion, joy, and detachment. These virtues empower him to bring happiness to all beings, from the infinite past to the infinite future. (*See the discussion of these virtues in "Ten Merits"*)
- **With infinite and unhindered powers, fearlessness, meditation, emancipation, and samadhi** - The Buddha has the ability to teach the Dharma openly, calmly, voluntarily, and with deep faith in the teaching methods. He provides a model for us to follow in our own practice, and a goal for us to strive toward as we practice.
- **Explain the teachings skillfully, use gentle words, and bring joy to the hearts of all** - This is a praise of skillful means and the result of using them. Overbearing methods with big words and aggressive tones offend and confuse people. Gentleness and flexibility in teaching methods allow people to open their hearts and welcome the teachings.
- **Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the ultimate reality of all things** - A buddha is an enlightened person who has the ability to see what reality truly is. Usually we see through the filter of our likes or dislikes. But one who is called a buddha has no filter. A buddha has infinite wisdom and understands all things. Human beings possess Buddha-Nature. We have the potential for attaining infinite wisdom. Because each of us has Buddha-Nature, if we are on the path together, we bring each other to the level of wisdom where we can see reality.
- **Such an appearance, such a nature, such a substance, such a potency, such a function, such a cause, such a condition, such an effect, such a recompense, and yet in every case such an ultimate integration of them all** - These are the Ten Suchnesses, an explanation of the law of cause and effect which pervades all things. (also known as "The Reality of All Existence") 'Suchness' is the essence and the Truth.

Everything has its own physical aspect (appearance), its own character or personality (nature), its own entity (substance), its own energy (potency), its own action (function). The total of these four elements becomes a cause. When a cause comes in contact with a condition, this brings about numerous results (effect) and influences (recompense). These nine elements when viewed in totality become 'the ultimate integration of them all.'

Appearance is not limited to visible things. It may be a sound, an odor, a flavor, a tactile impression. Some people can identify the ingredients in a stew from the aroma or the taste. A good mechanic can identify the problem with your car's engine by the sounds it makes. 'Appearance' is all the characteristics that appear on the outside.

The nature of a thing will appear in its appearance. Happiness or sadness shows on our faces. Optimism or pessimism can be read in our posture.

The thing itself is substance. Potency is the energy within the substance. This energy produces a degree of activity or function. So, for example, the small, white, hard (appearance) and easy-to-roll (nature) golf ball (substance) has so much power (potency) when hit by a golf club, it will fly through the air (function) a great distance.

Another example is a Dharma center's leader (substance) who always wears a smile (appearance) and listens carefully to others (nature). Wishing to help others (potency), the leader will be ready to help in time of need (function).

These five elements - appearance, nature, substance, potency, function - comprise the cause. When it comes in contact with a condition - it produces effect and recompense. If you wish to be kind to others (cause) and meet an elderly person on a crowded bus (condition), you will give your seat to that person (effect) and feel good (recompense). The effect and recompense depend on the circumstances. You may be too tired to be kind, rush ahead of the elderly person to grab the seat, and later feel remorse.

Here are some other examples of two people looking at the same recompense and viewing it differently. One person sees a flower, smells it and finds the aroma quite pleasing. Another person smells the flower, but is allergic to it and begins sneezing. One person sees frost on the window and finds the patterns beautiful. Another person can only think of how the frost is killing the new buds on the trees.

There is a story about a mother with two sons. One son sells sandals. The other son sells umbrellas. The mother is always lamenting and crying. When someone asks her why, she says, "When it rains, my son who sells sandals has no business. When the sun shines, my son who sells umbrellas cannot make a living." The person pointed out that when it rains the son who sells umbrellas makes a very good income, and when the sun shines, the son who sells sandals has more business than he can handle.

To those with buddha-wisdom, nothing is wrong, nothing is right.

The Suchnesses exist infinitely, and are intertwined in a complex way. It is sometimes difficult to understand what is cause, what is effect, and what is recompense; yet all Suchnesses are working according to the Law of Transience. Nothing in this universe can escape this Universal Law (Truth). The reality that each element of the Suchnesses is connected to the others and that each one is having an impact on the others is called 'the ultimate integration of them all.'

To understand that all things in the universe, their workings and their interrelationships are grounded in this Truth, is to understand the true aspect of all things. To understand this is to understand that we can and do change with the circumstances and environment around us.

On an individual level, each of us has limitless capacity for either good or evil. The Ten Suchnesses demonstrate that it is the way we choose to interact with others and with circumstances that determines which path we are following - the path of liberation or the path of suffering. Even buddhas have the potential for evil, and the worst criminal has the potential for good. Knowledge of cause and effect gives us all the opportunity to grow spiritually. Wisdom gives each of us the ability to make the right choice.

The value of the doctrine of the Ten Suchnesses is that we recognize the Buddha-Nature in all beings. We know we are all connected. We know that in order for us to achieve happiness individually, everyone must achieve it. Because we know the importance of helping others develop their Buddha-Nature, we practice the bodhisattva way. We use our knowledge of the teachings, appropriate skillful means, and wisdom developed through our experiences, to reach out to others. For all to have freedom from suffering - is a lofty goal. It will not happen overnight. It is worth our effort.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 3, A Parable

Text

*“Now this threefold world
Is all my domain;
The living beings in it
Are all my children.
But now it is filled
With disaster and trouble
And only I am able
To rescue and protect them.”*

Background and Setting

In Chapter 2, “Skillful Means,” Shakyamuni Buddha explains the skillful means of teaching which he had been using during the previous forty years. He explains how these teaching methods, appropriate to each person’s ability to understand, gradually bring each person to the ultimate Truth. He then proclaims the ultimate Truth - that everyone has a Buddha-Nature which gives them the capacity to become a buddha, and that enables them to guide others toward Awakening. This is an enormous revelation, causing a stir among the listeners who had settled on his previous teachings as the entire scope of the Truth. Shakyamuni Buddha explains that these skillful means were every bit as much the Truth as was this ultimate Truth revealed in the Lotus Sutra.

Shariputra, listening to the teachings of the Buddha, is overcome with immense joy at this news that he, too, is certain to become a buddha. Up until then he had been a student of Buddha, but it had never occurred to him that he had any chance of becoming a buddha himself. He speaks of his own spiritual progress, acknowledges that it is not yet complete, and shows his appreciation to the Buddha for revealing this final lesson. Shariputra goes on to tell the Buddha that his own doubts about the relationship between the previous lessons and the one being revealed in the Lotus Sutra have been dispelled; however, he asks the Buddha to speak again to the twelve hundred others at various stages of understanding, who were still puzzled by this talk of ‘skillful means.’ Then Shakyamuni tells the Parable of the Burning House.

The Parable of the Burning House

Once there was a great elder who had an enormous house with only a single narrow door. The house was in terrible shape. One day a fire broke out and began to spread rapidly. The elder had many children who were all inside the house. He begged them to come out, but they were all busy playing. It seemed certain they would be burned to death, but they took no notice, nor did they try to escape.

The elder thought for a moment. He was very strong and could load them into a big box to bring them out, but then he worried they might fall out anyway and still end up burned. He tried to warn them of the terrible fire, so they could come out by themselves. He called to them in a loud voice, but the children ignored him.

The elder then remembered that all of his children wanted carts. So he called to them to come out at once because he had goat carts, deer carts, and bullock carts for them. When the children heard this, they rushed out and were able to escape from the burning house. The elder was relieved that they were safe, and as they began to ask for their carts, he gave them each a fantastic cart – better than they had ever hoped for.

The great elder in this parable is the Buddha. We are the children. The dilapidated house is our human world, full of dangers and all that is mean and ugly in the human heart. The fire is our physical and mental attachments which are the cause of human suffering. Because we are wrapped up in our attachments, we do not even realize we are about to be consumed by them. We merrily ignore the fire around us. The elder offers the children attractive playthings as an incentive to leave the house. This is the use of skillful means. He attracts the attention of the children with things they particularly like.

The Buddha wanted all people to be awakened to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra so that all people share in the Buddha-Nature. But this was a very new and difficult concept, too difficult to be fully comprehended if thrust on the learners before they were spiritually ready. So Shakyamuni Buddha used the three vehicles, or carts, to appeal to each person's own interests and spiritual level - to lead each one gradually to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

The three types of carts the elder offers the children are the teachings of the three vehicles - goat carts for shravakas (those who listen to the teachings), deer carts for pratyekabuddhas (those who study and meditate on their own), and bullock carts for bodhisattvas (those who seek awakening for themselves and others). The children were given something they did not expect: the great white bullock cart, the best cart of all - the One Buddha Vehicle (as revealed in the Lotus Sutra). Then, the children came out of the burning house on their own, and were unconsciously drawn into the ultimate

lessons of the Buddha. When we open our eyes to receive and understand the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, we know that we are connected with all things and that each of us has the Buddha-Nature. We have the capacity to overcome our attachments, to learn from the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and to attain liberation from suffering.

Definitions

- **Threefold world** - 1) According to Rev. Nikkyo Niwano – individual, society, and the world; 2) According to Dr. Kogen Mizuno - the world of desire, form, and formlessness; 3) According to Bunno Kato, one of the translators of *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* - the universe - past, present and future;
- **Is all my domain** - “My” refers to one who is enlightened – free from suffering.

Commentary

This passage is a proclamation that the universe belongs to those who have cast away their self-focused frame of reference and view the world through buddha-eyes. If we close our eyes and think with a pure mind - “The universe is mine”- we arrive at an unbelievably expansive state of mind, transcending time and space. We realize the world is ours and we are one with it. If that is so, then all beings are our children, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, friends, lovers, companions, and we have a stake in their welfare as we all travel through this world filled with suffering. We know we have a responsibility to be compassionate, to serve others, and to help them achieve liberation along with us. Without holding hands and bringing one another toward happiness together, our sufferings will consume us. If even one person is left in the burning house, we must encourage that person to come out and find liberation.

The Four Noble Truths

In order to realize the Truth of the teachings, we strive to remove our attachments and think beyond ourselves. Self-centered thoughts are like dirt that muddies the water. If we remove the dirt from the water, the water will become crystal clear. By removing our egotistical ways of thinking, our hearts and minds are purified, and we are able to develop the wisdom to see things as they really are. This is the way to freedom from suffering. If we cannot see from a different perspective, we cannot escape suffering and difficulties. For those in this world of suffering, Shakyamuni Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths are: 1. The Truth of Suffering; 2. The Truth of the Cause of All Suffering; 3. The Truth of the Extinction of Suffering; 4. The Truth of the Way to the Extinction of Suffering.

For those who do not listen to and practice the teachings of the Buddha, the world will be filled with unending emotional, physical, and spiritual suffering. The Truth of Suffering is the realization that this world is in fact a place of suffering, and that it is important to face suffering rather than ignore it or try to escape from it. For example, we may cry and shrink away from the syringe the nurse is holding when preparing to give us a shot, but we know the shot is necessary to prevent illness. We know the pain will last only a short time. We accept the facts of the situation and make a coolheaded decision to take the shot instead of crying or running away. We must do the same thing with other painful situations in our lives. By acknowledging our distress, analyzing the causes of it and dealing directly with it in a wise fashion, we can eliminate or at least greatly minimize our suffering.

Our desires cause suffering. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha said the cause of suffering is rooted in greed. Greed is over attachment to something. This may be something we want and do not have, or something we have and do not want. Overattachment or greediness, when turned inward, becomes egocentrism. When turned outward, greediness manifests in manipulation of others. Greediness pulls out anger. That anger will overshadow the wisdom to see things as they are. Without wisdom we make poor choices in our thinking, in our words, and in our actions. As a result, suffering will never cease.

People usually do not realize that all suffering is caused by greediness. People who are attached to greediness do not escape from suffering. People who want to change their self-centered way of thinking can do this by practicing the Eightfold Path. Then the Truth of extinction of suffering follows. *(In Rissho Kosei-kai, The Truth of the Way is considered and explained as both the Eightfold Path and the Six Perfections; however, this chapter emphasizes the Eightfold Path.)*

It is important to look at greediness with serenity, with an open mind, beyond emotion. We can ask ourselves these questions: What is the reason for my attachment to this? What happens when I become hateful or angry? What will happen if I change my attitude? How will that affect the outcome? Is there another way to proceed? Will anyone else be harmed or benefited?

The Truth of Extinction is a serene state of mind. No matter what happens the serene mind is balanced and not swayed by circumstances. This true state of ease can be obtained by understanding the Three Seals: “All things are impermanent”, “Nothing has an ego”, and “Nirvana is quiescence”. This is an ongoing process, sometimes moment by moment. Therefore, it is important to practice the teachings all the time, to

keep the Three Seals in mind all the time, and to accept change and interrelatedness as the reality of life.

The fourth Noble Truth is the Eightfold Path - the path to the extinction of suffering. Because we have a hard time getting beyond our self-centeredness and have trouble being wise, clearheaded and rational in our actions, the Eightfold Path provides a concrete guideline to help us.

The Eightfold Path

Our goal is to eliminate suffering for ourselves and others. To do this we practice the teachings every day, all day. Shakyamuni Buddha said, “For the sake of the Truth of Extinction... observe and walk in the Way.” The Way is the Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. ‘Right’ means harmonious and in accord with the Buddhist teachings. It will vary from one situation to the next. It is a code of conduct which requires that each situation be weighed from as many different angles as possible, taking into account how each action affects you as well as those around you. It means you are seeking to benefit others and to eliminate harm to them if at all possible.

Right View is to go beyond your own way of thinking and to consider how an issue might be viewed by others, to consider different options, alternative actions, other possibilities.

Right Thought is to rid the mind of greed and anger, and to think with clarity and focus, embracing everything with a Buddha-mind.

Right Speech is to avoid lying, gossiping, speaking badly of others and speaking thoughtlessly. Think before you speak. Ask yourself how what you say will hurt or benefit. Words are powerful and must be chosen carefully.

Right Action is to avoid killing unnecessarily, to avoid stealing, and to avoid acting in any way which harms other beings.

Right Livelihood is to gain food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities in a thoughtful, deliberate and ethical way, understanding the sacrifices required of others.

Right Endeavor is to conduct yourself with awareness of your thoughts, words, and actions. You work toward your goal by following the Path conscientiously and with perseverance.

Right Mindfulness is to keep your mind on the goal of attaining liberation from suffering for yourself, and for others. This is done by making a habit of appreciating life and the opportunities you have, to learn and grow.

Right Concentration is the culmination of your practice along the first seven steps of this Eightfold Path. Those first seven steps keep your mind focused and attentive to your practice. Your mind will settle into the right place of meditation where you can look inside and reflect.

By constantly walking this Eightfold Path, we develop the ability to adapt and work within our circumstances. Our behavior becomes more beneficial to ourselves and others. We start to live more harmoniously with our own emotions and circumstances, as well as with those around us. Life automatically becomes more joyful, and this world blossoms into a more pleasant place for all of us. By viewing the world with buddha-wisdom, we open our eyes to our connections through time and space, and understand how this triple world is all our domain.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 10, Teachers of the Dharma

Text

“After the passing of the Tathagata, if there are good sons and good daughters who desire to teach this Dharma Flower Sutra to the four groups, how should they teach it?”

“These good sons and daughters should enter the abode of the Tathagata, put on the robe of the Tathagata, and sit on the seat of the Tathagata. Then, for the sake of the four groups, they should widely teach this sutra.

“The abode of the Tathagata is a great compassionate heart for all living beings; the robe of the Tathagata is a flexible and forbearing mind; the seat of the Tathagata is the emptiness of all things. Abiding comfortably in these, they should, with diligence, widely teach this Dharma Flower Sutra to bodhisattvas and the four groups.”

Commentary

The four groups are the four classes of disciples; monks (bhikshus); nuns (bhikshunis); and men and women lay believers (upasakas and upasikas)

Enter the abode of the Tathagata means having such a great and compassionate heart that you desire to free all people, not only good people, but also those who do harm. The abode of the Tathagata is open to anyone.

Put on the robe of the Tathagata means having such a gentle and forbearing heart that you are not susceptible to outside influences. It is unlimited patience. It is humility. It is the ability to approach situations from a balanced perspective; not being angry with difficult situations, not letting compliments go to your head. One who practices the teachings of the Lotus Sutra has a firm determination to share the teachings and is not sidetracked by outside influences, either good or bad.

Sit on the seat of the Tathagata means viewing all things as having come from the same universal life energy. It is the understanding that while everybody is different, everybody is also the same. For example, Jeffery is not good at public speaking, but he has very good carpentry skills. Susan is not particularly clever with tools, but she has a great deal of common sense. While the two have different skills and abilities, each of

them is equally endowed with the Buddha-Nature. Viewing things in this way is the meaning of “the emptiness of all things”.

This passage teaches us to faithfully abide by these three principles at all times, while steadfastly and untiringly sharing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to everyone.

Practicing the Spirit of the Teachings

In this chapter, a teacher is anyone - monk, nun, layperson, man, woman, or child - who is devoted to spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra for the sake of others. This chapter emphasizes the teacher’s frame of mind. By spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra we are spreading the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. That spirit is acknowledgment and appreciation of the universal life energy. Our gratitude for life cultivates a compassionate heart.

It is nothing short of a miracle that we are here as human beings, and not as fish or birds or giraffes. Nor do we live in this world in isolation. Through the blessings of nature we have food and water. Through the support and contributions of others we have shelter and clothing. When we deeply feel our place in the world and our relationship to it, we truly appreciate who we are, what we have, how precious our lives are and, indeed, how precious all things in the universe are. We are proud to be here and we recognize our own worth. We also recognize the worth of all others and respect them. We let this appreciation for our lives and the lives of others radiate from our thoughts, words and actions. We conduct ourselves as models of appreciation by treating others with respect and compassion. Because we do this, others see and experience the teachings. This is spreading the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

Bodhisattva Practice for All Others - Aspiration for Rebirth

In this Chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha speaks about great bodhisattvas, people who, out of compassion for all living beings, are willingly born into this world and widely proclaim this sutra. This is one of the main points of this chapter. There is special meaning in our birth as human beings. The object of our journey in life is to grow and advance spiritually, to attain liberation and feel oneness with the Buddha. In addition, as bodhisattvas, we choose to be born in this world as human beings in order to guide all others to liberation.

Understanding these two aspects of our journey provides us with the knowledge to understand the circumstances which face us each day. It is sometimes difficult to understand why we suffer certain inconveniences, losses and discomforts. When we reflect upon the fact that each circumstance provides us with an opportunity to grow spiritually as well as to be of service to others, any suffering is diminished and

understood as part of a meaningful process and an opportunity to learn. In this way our lives are fulfilled and we are truly rich.

Compassion, Gentleness and Forbearance

The word compassion in Japanese is *ji-bi*. “Ji” is the ability to see and treat others as equals, resulting in the desire to share our happiness with them. “Hi” means to hear the voice of people who are suffering and, as a result, to desire to take that suffering away. Through compassion we listen to others, share with them, learn who they are, what influences them, and how they view lives. As we understand what they experience, we grow to understand our own experiences and how they enrich all of us. We find more harmonious ways to deal with one another and our circumstances.

Gentleness means actually accepting people as they are. Gentleness is acknowledging imperfections of others while also recognizing their Buddha-Nature. We wish for others to develop their Buddha-Nature. We allow them to do that by being patient, using our knowledge and wisdom to assess difficult situations, and searching for harmonious solutions. Rather than react in anger we ask ourselves why the other person behaves this way, what experiences influence this person, or how our own reaction will help or harm both the other person and ourselves. We look for ways to allow the other person’s Buddha-Nature to shine.

Forbearance involves patience, humility, serenity, and self-control. It is the ability to endure negative encounters with others, as well as the ability to avoid becoming haughty and feeling self-important in the face of praise. Knowing that everyone and everything is part of the universal life energy keeps things in perspective.

Emptiness

Emptiness is not nothingness. It is equality. It is the idea that all things originate from the same universal life energy.

When we understand equality, we know that phenomena are not good or bad. They are the result of ‘cause and effect’ - a cause encountering a condition. The outcomes are never the same, and depend on the view point of those experiencing the phenomena at the time they occur.

We use this understanding of equality in our personal encounters with others to help us take advantage of every opportunity to grow spiritually. By appreciating the fact that everyone else has the same Buddha-Nature we have, we see how even someone who is very hurtful toward us provides us a tool for learning. For example, in a conversation with someone who is being critical, we may become defensive and leave

the conversation with a negative feeling toward that person. On the other hand, if we consider that this person may be telling us something valuable, we may listen calmly and learn something about ourselves. If nothing else, we have exercised the willingness to listen, which allows us to develop discernment and wisdom. The outcome of each encounter depends on our ability to understand cause and effect - that phenomena are not good or bad, that all things change, and that our willingness to view things as equals helps us grow.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 12, Devadatta

Text

The Buddha said to the monks: “If, in a future world, there are good sons and good daughters who hear this Devadatta chapter of the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra, and, without doubt, believe and revere it with pure hearts, they will not fall into the realms of hell, hungry spirits, or beasts but will be born into the presence of the buddhas of the ten directions. Wherever they are born, they will always hear this sutra. If they are born among human and heavenly beings, they will enjoy marvelous delight. If they are born into the presence of buddhas, they will be born from lotus flowers.”

Commentary and Definitions

In this passage, the words “hell, hungry spirits, beasts” refer to the cosmology of the universe which was believed to exist at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. While these realms of existence can refer to actual physical states, they are also symbolic of mental states of human beings, as well as of social conditions. These states and conditions are constantly shifting from one to another. This shifting is called “transmigration within the six realms.” Shakyamuni Buddha used what people at that time believed about the external world around them to explain the internal world of emotions, feelings, and relationships. He put the listener in a frame of mind to understand that we create heaven and hell in our own minds and in the world around us. Today, we do not have to believe there is literally a heavenly palace above or fiery hell below, but we can acknowledge that we do in fact create heaven and hell within ourselves and in our social arrangements. The ability to communicate instantly with people all over the world or to travel to the other side of the globe in a matter of hours is an example of heavenly blessings we enjoy. On the other hand, famine, and civil war that claim thousands of lives are hungry spirits which are not just states of mind.

- **Hell** is the mental state in which the mind is consumed with anger. Everyone else seems to be the enemy, but the one who suffers most is the person who is angry.
- **Hungry spirits** is the mental state in which the mind is consumed with desire, not only for material things, but for intangible things like honor or admiration. Because of our greed we are not satisfied even when we have gotten what we desire. This is a source of suffering.

- **Beasts (animals)** is the mental state that lacks wisdom and reasoning. This is the state in which a person acts from instinct and without reflecting on the possible consequences.
- **Humans or heavenly beings** refer to the mental states in which we practice the teachings and try to keep our desires, self-centeredness and ill-will in check. In these states we work constantly at exercising our reason and using wisdom to make choices for the benefit of everyone.
- **In the presence of buddhas** refers to the opportunity to perfect our practice of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. This is a reminder of the message of the Lotus Sutra that everyone has a Buddha-Nature and the capacity to attain liberation, while at the same time guiding others to liberation.
- The **ten directions** are north, south, east, west, the four intermediate compass points, zenith and nadir (highest and lowest points). In other words, everywhere in the universe. Wherever we are, if we practice the teachings with a pure heart, with reverence and with faith in the Truth of the teachings, we realize we are all one with the great life energy of the universe. This realization brings us peace of mind and confidence as we face each day's circumstances.
- **... will always hear this sutra** means that when we are constantly aware of the Buddha's presence, and we see the Buddha-Nature in ourselves and everyone else; the teachings are ever-present in our minds. Those who are aware of the presence of the Buddha will not forget the teachings.

Awakening to One's Buddha-Nature

In previous chapters, Shakyamuni Buddha taught that the true nature (true essence) of human beings is the Buddha-Nature. In Chapter 12, "Devadatta," he develops the theme of awakening to one's own Buddha-Nature. Each of us is a shining existence because, as Buddha's children, we have joy in growth and harmony; however, sometimes we encounter people whose behavior makes us wonder if they are Buddha's children. Shakyamuni Buddha teaches that yes, we are all Buddha's children. Each person's inner self is the same as that of the Buddha. The Buddha wishes us to apply the teachings and believe we can all be buddhas. With that wish, he teaches the Devadatta chapter.

Devadatta was a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha. He was a very intelligent man, but also acted in wicked and cruel ways, and was extremely jealous of Shakyamuni Buddha. He was ambitious and wanted to take Shakyamuni Buddha's place. Devadatta

even went so far as to attempt to kill Shakyamuni Buddha. He gave Shakyamuni Buddha poison. He shot at him with an arrow. He rolled a boulder onto the road where Shakyamuni Buddha was passing. Yet, Shakyamuni Buddha predicted that Devadatta would attain buddhahood.

The chapter opens with a story in which Shakyamuni Buddha tells of a previous existence in which he was a king searching for perfect enlightenment. He vowed to become the servant of anyone who would bring him the teachings. One day a hermit appeared who told the king that he knew the Dharma Flower Sutra and would explain the teachings to the king if the king promised to obey him. The king waited on the hermit hand and foot for many years. He practiced the teachings tirelessly and at last became a buddha.

Shakyamuni Buddha then explained that he was the king. The hermit was none other than Devadatta. It was through the good friendship of Devadatta that Shakyamuni Buddha, as the king, attained buddhahood. Shakyamuni Buddha then declared that in the future, Devadatta would become a buddha if he continued to practice the teachings and direct his actions for the benefit of others.

Shakyamuni Buddha used this story to illustrate that all people, even those who are considered evil, abusive and cruel, have the Buddha-Nature. All people have the capacity to attain Awakening. All people have the capacity to understand that everything in the universe is a means to liberation from suffering. All people have the capacity to direct their actions for the benefit of others. All people are worthy of our respect and appreciation for their Buddha-Nature.

By keeping in mind that we are all equal, that is, endowed with the same universal life energy (true essence), we can appreciate the lessons others bring to us. Rather than lock into an opinion about the worth of someone else, we open our minds to the fact that we have something to learn from them about patience, wisdom, relationships, and our own behavior.

We know that all people have the power to direct their desires and actions for the benefit of others. We realize that those who behave badly today are capable of redirecting their energies positively tomorrow. We use our knowledge and wisdom to assess each encounter rationally, open our minds to growth, and help others on their way to liberation by our example.

Learning from Adverse Situations

Shakyamuni Buddha called Devadatta a good friend and expressed thanks to Devadatta. It was because of him that Shakyamuni Buddha attained Enlightenment. The lesson for us is that even the harshest circumstances are opportunities for spiritual growth. When we face adversity, acknowledge and accept situations as they are, we see all possibilities, we think clearly, and we make wise choices. We also allow others to exercise their ability to make wise choices. Because we treat others with compassion and respect, we give them the opportunity to feel free to exercise their own Buddha-Nature.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 16, The Eternal Life of the Tathagata

Text

*“Since I became Buddha,
The number of kalpas which have
 passed
Are infinite myriads of kotis of years
 beyond measure.
I have ceaselessly expounded the
 Dharma,
Teaching and transforming countless
 kotis of beings
Enabling them to enter the Buddha Way.
In the innumerable kalpas since then,
I employed skillful means to reveal my
 nirvana
In order to ferry living beings to the other
 shore.
But in truth I did not die and cross over -
I always abide here teaching the Dharma.
Indeed, I am always dwelling in this
 world.
However, using my transcendent powers,
I cause living beings with distorted minds
To be unable to see me, although I am
 near.
All who perceive that I have perished,
Everywhere worship my relics;
All who cherish and long for me,
Look up with thirsting hearts.
At last, when living beings humbly
 believe,
Are upright in character and gentle
 in mind,
And wish with all their hearts to see
 the Buddha,
Even at the cost of their lives,
Then I, along with all the Sangha
Appear together on Divine Eagle Peak.*

*At that time, I tell all living beings,
That I am always here and did not pass
 away.
Having the use of the power of skillful
 means,
I thus manifest both my presence and my
 passing.
If, in other lands, there are living beings
Who are reverent and faithful,
I am with them as well
To teach the unsurpassed Dharma.
You, not hearing of this,
Merely think I am gone.
I look upon all living beings
Sinking in the sea of suffering.
They reach out in desperation,
Because I do not yet show myself.
When their hearts are filled with deepest
 longing,
I then come forth to teach the Dharma.
Such are my transcendent powers.
Throughout time beyond measure
I am always on Divine Eagle Peak
And abiding in all other places.
When living beings see, at this kalpa’s
 end,
The time of great fires burning,
Tranquil and calm is this land of mine -
Filled with human and heavenly beings,
Gardens and groves, halls and pavilions,
With every kind of gem adorned,
Jeweled trees full of blossoms and fruits,
Here, all living beings take their pleasure,
And heavenly beings strike heavenly
 drums -
Always making many kinds of music,*

*Showering mandara flowers
 On the Buddha and his great assembly.
 My pure land is never destroyed,
 Yet all see it as consumed by fire
 And filled with every kind of
 Grief, horror, pain and distress.
 All those deluded living beings,
 By reason of their bad karma,
 Throughout immeasurable kalpas
 Cannot hear the name 'Three Treasures.'
 But those who perform virtuous deeds,
 Who are gentle and of upright nature,
 They can all see
 That I am here teaching the Dharma.
 At times, for the sake of them all,
 I teach that a buddha's lifetime is infinite;
 To those who see a Buddha after a very
 long time
 I teach that a buddha is rarely met.
 Such is the power of my wisdom!
 Infinitely does my wisdom-light shine!
 My lifetime is of countless kalpas,
 The result of age-long good karmic
 practice.
 Those of you who have wisdom,
 Give rise to no doubt about this!
 Bring doubt forever to an end:
 The Buddha's words are true, not false.*

*Just as the physician with skillful means -
 To bring his deranged children to sanity -
 Announces his death although truly alive
 But cannot be charged with falsehood;
 So also do I – a father, and parent to this
 world –
 To relieve all suffering and disease,
 Announce my death although truly alive
 For the sake of people with delusions;
 Because, by always seeing me,
 They give rise to complacency and
 conceit,
 Become selfishly attached to the five
 desires,
 And fall into evil ways.
 I always know living beings,
 Those who practice the Way and those
 who do not,
 And, for their sake, expound many and
 various teachings,
 To rescue each of them accordingly.
 Ever making this my thought:
 How can I make living beings
 Obtain entry into the unsurpassable Way
 And quickly accomplish embodiment as
 buddhas?"*

Definitions

- **transcendent powers** - divine power; a permeating vision, a deep understanding or knowing. This has nothing to do with human vision and cannot be attained by human beings no matter how much we practice. The Eternal Buddha, being the great universal life energy which gives us life, has this power to use freely.
- **Divine Eagle Peak** - also, the Divine Vulture Peak; literally, the place where Shakyamuni Buddha was preaching; symbolically, anywhere and everywhere.
- **abiding in all other places** - everywhere besides the saha world, which is this world, the world of suffering; everywhere else.

- **mandara (mandarava) flowers** - heavenly flowers which come down when buddhas teach. We are happy when we see them.
- **All those deluded living beings . . . cannot hear the name ‘Three Treasures’** - those who are swayed by their own desire and allow their desires to overshadow their own Buddha-Nature, and do not have the opportunity to meet the Buddha, hear the teachings of the Buddha, nor be part of any group seeking the Truth. In the Japanese text, the phrase “upside down view of the world” is used instead of “delusional.”
- **Infinitely does my wisdom-light shine** - The light of the Buddha’s wisdom shines everywhere. That light will be the guiding light to those in darkness. All people can be awakened to their own Buddha-Nature through this light.

Background

Chapters 2, “Skillful Means,” and chapter 16, “The Eternal Life of the Tathagata,” are regarded as the heart of the Lotus Sutra. In Chapter 2, Shakyamuni Buddha tells how he uses skillful means (appropriate methods) to bring each person to the ultimate Truth. In Chapter 16, Shakyamuni Buddha reveals the ultimate Truth.

This verse from Chapter 16 is regarded as the most important passage in the Lotus Sutra. In this passage Shakyamuni Buddha refers to two buddhas. One is the historical Buddha, the other is the Eternal Original Buddha. The historical person, Shakyamuni Buddha, was a real man who lived about 2500 years ago. He attained Enlightenment when he was about 35 years old, and then spent the next 45 years teaching others. Yet in this passage, Shakyamuni Buddha says an unfathomably long time has passed since he attained Enlightenment. He speaks of his own death, yet says he is not dead. He says the Buddha’s life is eternal. He says he is always here. He is referring to the Eternal Original Buddha.

Commentary

In the first fifteen chapters of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha was preparing his disciples for the ultimate Truth. He used skillful means - parables, stories from his life, and teachings appropriate to the spiritual readiness of his listeners. He taught the Three Treasures, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Six Paramitas and the Law of Dependent Origination. He gave the listeners tools for dealing with life. He also understood that as long as they looked to him as their teacher, they were limited in their understanding and their ability to put the teachings into the most beneficial practice. In Chapter 16, Shakyamuni Buddha takes the listeners beyond the living person

appearing before them and personally teaching the Dharma to them. He presents them with the Truth of the Eternal Original Buddha. He reveals that the entity of the Buddha is not Shakyamuni Buddha as seen by his followers. The Buddha is the Eternal Original Buddha. The Eternal Original Buddha has existed since the infinite past. It will exist into the infinite future. It is everywhere and always. It is the power that causes all things to exist. Since the Eternal Original Buddha's life is infinite, and we share in that essence - our lives are infinite.

The Dharma, the Truth, the reality of all things, is invisible, intangible, and therefore difficult to understand, even to imagine. Shakyamuni Buddha taught that the Buddha is the life energy of the universe with immortal existence. This Buddha is the Eternal Original Buddha which can exist in any form and therefore appears appropriately to all beings. In the human world this Eternal Original Buddha appears as a human. Ordinary people believe what is visible to their eyes. Shakyamuni Buddha manifested the Dharma in the form of a person whom human beings could see directly. Furthermore, the Buddha appears when we realize this existence in all of us. We see the Buddha when we realize this omnipresent, Eternal source.

Because this teaching is so profound, we cannot interpret Chapter 16 literally. The reference to infinite myriads of kotis beyond measure is not meant to evoke a number. It is a way of indicating infinite time. "I am always on Divine Eagle Peak" is not a reference to a specific place, but instead refers to infinite space. Shakyamuni Buddha speaks of his own death, yet says he remains in this world. He is telling us that even though we see and hear him speak as a human being, the message he brings is about the Eternal Original Buddha that exists in all living beings, throughout time and in every place.

Eternal Life

Those who heard the Buddha's teaching through the years were beginning to understand that they embodied the Buddha. They were beginning to understand that they had the potential to become buddhas, and were the "children" of the Buddha. Seeing that they were aware of this, Shakyamuni Buddha realized it was time to reveal the ultimate Truth.

Shakyamuni Buddha explained that the Eternal Buddha exists throughout the universe, from the beginning of time and into the infinite future. Because it is infinite, exists forever without change, and because it is the power which gives all life, our lives, too, are infinite. We are the living appearance of the Buddha and our lives are connected with the Eternal life of the Buddha.

Our physical bodies will eventually die, just like old clothes that wear out. But our true nature is not our physical body. It is the Buddha-Nature. We are actually living the same life as the Eternal Buddha.

President Niwano said that even though our human life is finite, we are endowed with the ability to understand the eternal Truth, the Law of Transience. This law makes it possible for us to touch eternity, to join our finite lives with infinite existence. To know the Law of Transience is to know everlasting life.

This Eternal Buddha, the force that gives us life, is the same as the Truth. It is the same as the Dharma. It is both inside our bodies and outside. It is everywhere. It is life itself. Once we are able to firmly believe this Truth, we will be free from the fundamental suffering and fear of physical death. Being released from that fear, knowing the joy of having an eternal life, we are then free to advance in our personal growth and to contribute toward the liberation of others. It is this concept that makes Chapter 16 the most important chapter in the Lotus Sutra.

One Life

Humans are not the only beings connected to the eternal life of the Buddha. The flowers, birds, insects, cats, dogs, horses, cows, all other beings are connected with the eternal life energy. We share an eternal life with every other being. Therefore, every living being is connected to, or in harmony with, every other living being. Because we are connected, our thoughts, words and actions have an impact on all others.

As humans, our responsibility is great. On a personal level, our goal is to strive toward our own Awakening. But because of our interconnectedness, we also work for the benefit of others. It is two sides of the same coin. As we work for the benefit of

others, our own lives are advanced. As we grow and advance spiritually, our capacity to benefit others increases.

Parent and Child

In this passage from Chapter 16, Shakyamuni Buddha refers to the parable of the physician's children:

Once there was a wise and skillful physician who had many, many children. They were normally well-behaved, but one day while the physician was away from home, the children got into his medicine cabinet and drank a poison which made them quite ill. When the physician returned home he found his children rolling on the floor in discomfort and even agony. In spite of being sick, the children were all delighted their father had returned. They confessed they had foolishly taken a poison and asked their father to heal them.

The physician, seeing how sick his children were, carefully pounded, sifted, and mixed a wonderful tasting and smelling medication and offered it to them. Those who were not too muddy-headed took the pleasant medicine and were cured. However, the children who were completely out of their heads refused to take the medicine even though they were pleased to see their father and had asked to be cured.

The father thought, "Well, these children who are out of their heads with this sickness are not using good judgment. They beg to be cured but refuse the medicine, even though it tastes and smells delicious. I have to come up with some other way to entice them to take the medicine."

The physician told his children, "I am old and will die soon. I have a trip to take while I am still able. I am leaving some excellent medicine for you. I hope you will take it. I assure you, you will be cured." Then he left for a distant land. He sent back a messenger to tell these sick children he had died.

When the children heard of their father's death, they felt abandoned. Their grief, however, brought them to their senses. They realized the medicine their father had left was not only good tasting and smelling, but was the antidote to the poison they had taken. They took the medicine and were cured. Their father, hearing of this, returned.

In this parable the physician is the Buddha. The children are all living beings. The medicine is the Dharma. The moral is that if we sincerely accept, believe, and practice the teachings, we have the capacity to attain liberation from suffering.

There are several lessons in this parable. First, we use bad judgment and engage in harmful behavior when we avoid the teachings. When we are in daily contact with the teachings, we are equipped with the tools to avoid obsessions, delusions, and poor choices. Second, all the children in this story, no matter how ill or delusional, were delighted to see their father on his first return. Even in the worst mental state a child can recognize its father. In the same way, we recognize the value and truth of the teachings. We seek harmony, calmness, tranquility, and ease with ourselves and others. So when we encounter a teaching that gives us the tools for attaining this harmony, even though we may not be spiritually completely ready to accept it, we recognize the value of that teaching and are delighted that it is available to us.

The physician carefully prepared the medicine for the children. He pounded, mixed and sifted the ingredients with all sorts of herbs, with many flavors, scents and colors, until it was the perfect medicine. The medicine had some attraction for everyone. By pounding the herbs into the medicine, the physician was making certain the medicine was easy to swallow. The sifting process assured the purity of the medicine. So too, with the teachings. Every single person has the capacity to hear something of value from the teachings. Every single person can find something useful in the teachings. No matter where we are spiritually, there is something in the teachings to help us grow, to help us help others, and to assure we are on the path toward enlightenment.

In the parable, the father does not force his children to take the antidote to the poison. He waits for them to take it on their own. In this Kyoten passage from Chapter 16, the phrases “all who cherish and long for me”, “look up with thirsting hearts”, “and wish with all their hearts to see the Buddha”, are references to the fact that we must seek the path from our own hearts. We have to be ready to hear the Truth and practice the Path. We cannot be forced to do it. Because we all have the Buddha-Nature, eventually we will take responsibility for finding enlightenment and take the antidote - accept, believe and practice the Dharma.

The father in the parable comes home after the children are healed. This means that when we sincerely accept, believe and practice the teachings, our eyes are opened to the presence of the Buddha in all our encounters. We realize we are always with the Buddha and always protected by the Buddha.

The relationship between the Buddha and us is not that of a ruler and subjects. The parable makes it clear that the relationship is like that between a parent and child. The Buddha wants the best for us, protects us, provides us with opportunities to grow. Because we are children of the Buddha, we will grow up to be buddhas.

Every Opportunity Is the Seed for Growth

The word liberation is used throughout the teachings. It means freedom from suffering. Knowing that our physical body is finite, we understand our eternal nature and that of the entire universe. We understand how precious life is. We realize that by living according to the Dharma, we can reach a state of joy and harmony through sharing the Dharma with others.

Like a loving, compassionate parent, the Buddha provides us with opportunities for growth. Every situation, whether good or bad, is a chance to learn. Each situation comes at the most effective and appropriate time for us to learn. Unpleasant situations allow us to understand how others may feel under similar circumstances. Pleasant situations show us beauty and love in the world and allow us to develop a creative and generous heart. In all situations we have the opportunity to learn how precious others are, to honor the Buddha-Nature in them, to forgive their poor choices, and to correct our own missteps along the path.

Tuning the Antenna

It is difficult to accept adversity as Buddha's compassion. The only way for us to accept every condition – whether they feel positive or negative - as Buddha's compassion, is to fine tune our antennas - our compassion catchers. We cannot overlook any detail. Any trivial thing is a chance to be appreciative - the opportunity to read a wonderful book, to eat a delicious meal, to give up our seat for an elderly person, to smile at someone who is rude. All these small events are acts of compassion which we can appreciate deeply.

While it is natural to feel lucky and exuberant over something like a special vacation, or to wallow in self-pity over illness, it is how we act and think after the event that is important. We must not grasp too tightly onto positive feelings nor prolong negative feelings. It dulls our ability to recognize the compassion of the Buddha. It is important to tune in to our circumstances, to take note of the positive or negative aspects of an event, to recognize our feelings about it, and then to use what we have learned in the next situation. We learn to be grateful for the positive things that come our way. We learn not to expect everything to be positive. We learn to take negative things in our stride. We learn to deal with any adversity in a constructive way. We learn that things change. We learn to share our experiences with others, to learn from others, to teach others, and to see everything as a gift of compassion from the Eternal Buddha.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 20, The Bodhisattva Never Despise

Text

*“In the past there was a buddha,
Named King Majestic Voice,
Boundless in transcendent wisdom,
He was leader of all.
Humans, heavenly beings, and
dragon-spirits
All paid homage to him.
After that buddha’s passing,
When his teaching drew near its end,
There existed a bodhisattva
Whose name was Never Despise.
At that time the four groups
Were attached to their own views of
the teachings.
The Bodhisattva Never Despise
Went to wherever they were
And spoke to them thus:
‘I cannot despise you;
You are practicing the Way,
And will all become buddhas.’
When they heard this,
They ridiculed and reviled him.
The Bodhisattva Never Despise
Accepted it gracefully.
When his impurities were cleaned
And his lifetime was nearing its end,
He was able to hear this sutra
And his six sense organs were purified.
Through this transcendent power,
His lifetime was extended.
And, again for the benefit of all people
He widely taught this sutra.
Those attached to their own views of the
teachings,*

Having been taught, transformed, and

*perfected
By this bodhisattva,
Were enabled to abide in the Buddha
Way.
Never Despise, his lifetime ended,
Encountered countless buddhas.
By teaching this sutra,
He obtained immeasurable happiness,
Gradually acquired merits,
And quickly accomplished the Buddha
Way.
The Never Despise of that time
Was none other than I, myself.
The four groups of that time -
Those who were attached to their own
views of the teachings,
And heard Never Despise say,
‘You will all become buddhas,’
And, by means of this karma,
Encountered countless buddhas -
Are, in fact, the bodhisattvas of this
assembly,
The host of five hundred,
As well as the four groups,
And the men and women of pure faith
Who are now before me
Listening to the Dharma.
I, in my previous lives,
Encouraged all these people
To listen to and embrace this sutra,
The ultimate Dharma,
That I reveal and teach to people,
Causing them to abide in nirvana.
Age after age they have received and
embraced*

*Such a sutra as this,
Only after kotis and kotis of myriads of
kalpas
Of inconceivable reach,
Does the time finally arrive
When this Dharma Flower Sutra can be
heard.
Only after kotis and kotis of myriads of kalpas
Of inconceivable reach,
Does the time finally arrive
When buddhas, world-honored ones,*

*teach this sutra.
Therefore, practitioners,
When hearing such a sutra as this
After the Buddha's passing,
Give rise to no doubt.
With total concentration
You should widely teach this sutra.
Meeting many buddhas in age after age,
You will quickly accomplish
the Buddha Way.”*

Definitions

- **four groups** - bhikshus (monks), bhikshunis (nuns), upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (laywomen); everyone.
- **accepted it gracefully** - accepted others with compassion and sincerity, without hate or anger.
- **host of five hundred** - many people. Generally, numbers in the Lotus Sutra, like one thousand, five thousand, are not intended literally, but indicate a large quantity.
- **when his teaching drew near its end** - a time when the Dharma was being practiced as a matter of formalities.

The Importance of Becoming Aware of One's Own Buddha-Nature

The bodhisattva practice begins with serving others, with recognizing and respecting their Buddha-Nature. However, in order to respect the Buddha-Nature in others, we must accept the Buddha-Nature in ourselves. In Chapter 16, “The Eternal Life of the Tathagata,” the Buddha’s compassion was revealed to be present in all phenomena. We have to fine tune our awareness of what happens around us to see that both adversity and good fortune are evidence of the presence and compassion of the Buddha. As we feel this compassion in all places and at all times, the teachings become an integral part of us. We understand we are connected to the Buddha and this life is indeed precious. We begin to recognize that our essence is the Buddha-Nature.

The bodhisattva Never Despise revered everyone. Even when others mocked him, jeered at him and treated him with contempt, he said, “I cannot despise you (I

believe in you); you are practicing the Way and will all become buddhas.” The bodhisattva Never Despise had realized his own Buddha-Nature, and was therefore able to clearly see the Buddha-Nature in others. The lesson of this chapter is that by simply paying respect to the Buddha-Nature in others we grow spiritually.

It is important to understand that the behaviors we see in others exist on the outside. They are only temporary. People have the potential to change as circumstances change. Therefore, we have to look beyond these external actions to the essence within: the source of life, the Buddha-Nature. When we do that we see that others are actually like us. They laugh, they cry, they make good choices, they make bad choices. All beings have the same potential, the same Buddha-Nature. We bring light to our own lives when we bring light to others through paying respect to this Buddha-Nature. Likewise, ill-will directed toward others is ill-will directed toward ourselves because we are in reality part of the same life energy. If we encounter others with this realization ever present in our hearts, the ability to respect others will become second nature. This light of respect for ourselves and others will shine all the time, everywhere.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 21, The Divine Power of the Tathagata

Text

*“After the Tathagata has passed,
Those who know the causes, conditions,
and proper sequences
Of the sutras taught by the Buddha,
Will teach them according to the true
meaning.
Just as the light of the sun and the moon
Can chase all darkness away,
So these people, practicing in this world,
Can bring living beings out of darkness,
And cause countless bodhisattvas,
To at last abide in the One Vehicle.
After my passing,
Anyone who has wisdom,
Hearing that these virtues are beneficial
Will receive and embrace this sutra.
Such a person, while on the Buddha Way,
Will be firmly determined and have no doubts.”*

One Vehicle (Ekayana)

The word for vehicle in Sanskrit is *yana* as in Mahayana (Great Vehicle). It means a vehicle by which one reaches the goal. It is the Dharma taught and practiced by Shakyamuni Buddha. People come to the teachings with different abilities and from different backgrounds. Shakyamuni Buddha used separate and appropriate methods of teaching for the various groups of followers. Each of these methods of teaching was a skillful means, a method of teaching according to the capacity of the listener. However, all of the teachings were designed to reach one goal, that of leading all sentient beings to the buddha-mind of wisdom, tranquility, oneness with the universe, and willingness to help others. Thus, there is in actuality only One Vehicle, a One Buddha-Vehicle to the Truth.

One Teaching

In previous chapters of the Lotus Sutra, two teachings were presented: The Law of Appearance and the Law of Origin. The Law of Appearance is the ethical teaching,

showing the right way to live. It is wisdom - knowing how to live. The Law of Origin revealed “Buddha” is not limited to Shakyamuni Buddha. The Eternal Original Buddha is the great universal life energy pervading everything. It is compassion - understanding we are all part of that life energy, and knowing that what benefits or harms one, benefits or harms all. The point of Chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata,” is that there is one single Truth. The Law of Appearance and the Law of Origin are not separate teachings. Though they may seem different, in essence, they are one.

In Chapter 20, “The Bodhisattva Never Despise,” Shakyamuni Buddha urged the bodhisattvas gathered around him to continue wholeheartedly spreading and practicing the teachings after his passing, so that everyone has the opportunity to meet the teachings and attain liberation from suffering. In Chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata,” the listeners assure him they will continue to practice, teach, read, and study in appreciation for the opportunity they have had to learn and receive the Dharma. They understand their connection with all other beings. In their hearts and minds they want to take action for themselves and for others.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught that the essence of all things is the universal life energy. We are all part of the same original energy which exists everywhere and always. Everything we do has an effect on everyone else. Whatever comes our way is an opportunity to use wisdom and compassion for our own benefit and for the benefit of others. The relationship between the Original Buddha and us is like that of parent and child. The parent provides opportunities for the child to learn. Every phenomenon in the universe, whether welcomed or not, is an act of compassion - an opportunity to learn and grow.

When we awaken to this Truth, we understand that others’ lives are as important as our own. While we have different appearances, talents, physical, and mental abilities, at the fundamental level we are all exactly the same. Knowing this, we are able to work toward enhancement of our own Buddha-Nature and the Buddha-Nature of all others. We know this benefits all and eventually can create a world of harmony.

Appearance of the Great Divine Power

After the bodhisattvas assured Shakyamuni Buddha that they would continue teaching and practicing the Dharma, he revealed a number of divine powers. First, he stretched out his tongue. In ancient India, stretching out one’s tongue was an action showing that what was said was the Truth. Shakyamuni Buddha was attesting to the Truth: there is only one teaching. He first taught the guidelines to live by, then he taught that we are all one essence. Because this is actually only one teaching, we understand these guidelines are not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all.

Next, a beautiful light of infinite colors radiated from Shakyamuni Buddha throughout the universe. This signifies that the Truth is the light that dispels the darkness of illusion and ignorance.

Following this light, all those present coughed simultaneously and snapped their fingers in unison to signify the teachings are united in One Vehicle (Ekayana). If we are united with the Buddha, we will naturally live according to the Truth. Union between oneself and others is the fundamental spirit of the bodhisattva practice.

The sounds of the coughing and snapping fingers reverberated everywhere. All things in the universe shook. This is the same kind of expression we use today to indicate the profound effect of something. You cannot avoid being drawn to the bodhisattva practice if you are so profoundly affected that you are shaken to your core.

The Ideal Becomes Reality

The ultimate goal for us is that our every act be in accordance with the spirit of the Buddha. The ideal is to unite our work to attain liberation for ourselves and others with our understanding of the interconnectedness of all things as we strive toward universal harmony. If we do that, we will achieve one Buddha-land.

On this earth there are many lands and many cultures. Let us look beyond the differences and practice the bodhisattva path knowing we are all part of the universal life. By this means, we spread the light of the Truth and bit by bit create a world of eternal, tranquil light (nirvana). It may seem this Buddha-world is not possible; yet the Buddha teaches that the potential to realize this Buddha-world exists. Since we believe in the Truth, we will continue to spread its light.

Ideals are often distant dreams. To bring the ideal to reality may seem too difficult, even impossible. Yet the Buddha assures us that by practicing the Dharma every moment, we move toward the ideal. We have a goal to strive for, and we have guidelines for our actions which offer a sense of security and assurance. Progress may be slow, but progress does happen. Even when we are lazy, make mistakes or worry about meaningless things, it is easy to get back into the practice. Merely wanting to practice keeps us from going down the wrong path. Staying focused on the ideal keeps us moving toward it day by day, moment by moment.

Founder Niwano truly believed it is possible for the ideal to become reality. For many years people told him it was impossible to find harmony in the world. He was told working for peace among people of different religions and cultures through religious cooperation was not possible. Nevertheless, he established the World Conference of Religion and Peace because he felt strongly the importance of joining

hands to work toward world peace. Today, as a Category 1, United Nations Non-Governmental Organization, WCRP is working to alleviate poverty and eliminate war.

As we build our understanding of the Dharma and take firm steps toward the ideal of world harmony, our lives become fruitful and we find motivation. We continue to practice. Nothing is impossible when we practice the teachings of the Buddha. The last part of the Kyoten verse reminds us that if we live according to the teachings of the Buddha, we will have the motivation to lead others to the Buddha Way. When we recite this verse, we feel the message being given directly to us. As a result, the practice naturally arises.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 25, The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Kannon

Text

*When living beings are beset by woes,
And burdened by countless pains:
Kannon's wondrous wisdom-power
Can free them from the sufferings of the
world.
In full command of transcendent powers,
Widely practicing the skillful means of
wisdom,
In the lands of the ten directions
There is no place she does not manifest
herself.
All the evil states of existence –
Hells, hungry spirits, and beasts –
And the sufferings of birth, old age,
disease, and death,
Are all gradually made to disappear.
Her true regard, pure regard,
Vast wisdom regard,
Merciful regard, and compassionate
regard,
Are always aspired to and ever revered!
She is a pure, unclouded beacon of light;
A sun of wisdom destroying all darkness;
A subduer of the winds and flames of
misfortune;
A light shining everywhere in the world.*

*Her mercy – her precept body – is the
roaring thunder,
And her compassion – her wondrous
mind – is the great cloud,
That together pour forth the sweet dew of
Dharma-rain,
And quench the flames of delusion.
In disputes before a magistrate,
Or in fear in battle's array,
Bringing Kannon's power to mind
Vanquishes all ill will.
Wondrous voice, world regarding voice,
Brahma-voice, voice of the rolling tide;
Hers is a voice unsurpassed in the world,
Constantly to be kept in mind
With never a doubting thought.
Regarder of the Cries of the World, pure
sage,
Who surely becomes a reliable refuge
In suffering and agony, danger and death,
Is endowed with every virtue,
And beholds living beings with
compassionate eyes.
She is a boundless ocean of blessings!
Therefore let us revere her.*

Commentary

The message in Chapter 21, “The Divine Power of the Tathagata,” is that by practicing the Dharma, we unite our thoughts, words and deeds with the Buddha’s mind. It may take a long time, and we may be discouraged or even stop practicing. For this reason, Shakyamuni Buddha advised us to follow the examples of the bodhisattvas in the Lotus Sutra. Kannon, Regarder of the Cries of the World, is one of those bodhisattvas.

The bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, known as Kannon in Japan, and Kuan Yin in China, is one of the most popular Buddhist deities. The word *avalokita* means “observes the sounds of the world.” Considered the manifestation of the Buddha’s compassion and wisdom, Kannon vows to hear the cries of those in need.

Kannon is represented as female as well as male, and has the ability to assume any form necessary to relieve suffering. Kannon is sometimes depicted with many arms and heads to represent her ability to see and respond to all suffering. Her eyes, referred to as regards in the sutra, look out with compassion to seek the Truth, to see all living beings and their particular sufferings. Kannon emits the light of purity and wisdom which removes the darkness of suffering and ignorance. Her compassionate mind allows her to look at things as they really are, to see others’ points of view and to look for ways to solve problems harmoniously. She understands the sufferings and needs of people and uses appropriate teachings to help them. She can take whatever physical form is appropriate - a man, woman, child, adult, teacher, fireman, salesclerk, even a nonhuman form - whatever will be easily accepted by the one in need. These characteristics are what we strive for in our own minds as we deal with life.

It is important to understand we do not find solutions by merely praying to Kannon. We find solutions, and ultimately liberation from suffering, by making ourselves like Kannon and being aware of all the manifestations of Kannon in our lives. When we imitate Kannon and pay attention to the phenomena around us with open eyes, open arms, and wisdom, we find harmony. Whenever there is adversity, we need to remember the compassion and wisdom of Kannon.

If we put ourselves in the shoes of the other person and walk around in their workplace, their home, their environment, looking at life through their experiences, we can help according to their needs. This is the compassion and wisdom of Kannon. Following her example, we will be able to help others and ourselves find harmony.

As we learn to look at people through the eyes of Kannon, we become aware of those who have been bodhisattvas in our own lives. We all know and appreciate people who have helped us get through difficulties in the past and support our growth and development today. They give us the opportunity to look within ourselves, to find appropriate solutions to life’s problems and to be grateful for life’s gifts. These people are the messengers of the Eternal Buddha. Each one is Kannon taking on the form appropriate and necessary for our path toward liberation.

Friction and dispute, no matter how insignificant or severe, is caused by selfishness and lack of compassion and wisdom. As we go through life and stand up for our beliefs and ideas, it is natural to cause some friction. When we become overly attached to what we want or do not want, our suffering increases because of our inability

to adapt to change. When we find ourselves in these dark holes of ignorance in which we cannot compromise, listen, forgive, or see another way of thinking, we need to remember the compassion of Kannon, whose great wish is to diminish the suffering of all people. When we put ourselves in this frame of mind, the light of wisdom will shine and destroy the darkness. With wisdom and compassion we will be able to stay on the path and help others along as well.

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Chapter 28, Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom

Text

The Buddha said to the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom: "If, after the passing of the Tathagata, good sons and good daughters accomplish these four criteria, they will acquire this Dharma Flower Sutra. The first is to be safeguarded by the buddhas; the second is planting many roots of virtuous deeds; the third is joining the assembly of those resolved to become awakened; the fourth is aspiring to liberate all living beings. After the passing of the Tathagata, good sons and good daughters who accomplish these four will surely attain this sutra."

Then the bodhisattva Universal Wisdom said to the Buddha: "World-honored One! In the last five hundred years of the corrupt and evil age, I will guard and protect those who receive and embrace this sutra, free them from disaster and disease, cause them to have peace and comfort, and ensure that misfortune has no chance to find them."

Background

In the first part of the Lotus Sutra, Manjushri, bodhisattva of wisdom and knowledge, is the representative of the Buddha's disciples. The teaching in this first part of the sutra focuses on the Buddha's guidelines for leading a good life - The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Reality of all Existence. This is the starting point - knowledge of the real aspects of existence.

Midway in the Lotus Sutra, Maitreya, bodhisattva of compassion, appears as the representative of the disciples. The teaching in this section is that all beings are part of the great universal life energy and that unless we direct our practice toward others, none of us can be truly liberated. We use the knowledge we gained in the first part of the sutra to work for the spiritual growth of all.

In this last chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Universal Wisdom, bodhisattva of practice, appears as the representative of the disciples. He promises to continue to practice after the Buddha is gone as an example and encouragement for all of us. It is significant that this bodhisattva is present in this final chapter for it illustrates so well that the Dharma is nothing if not put into practice.

The order of the presence of these three bodhisattvas in the Lotus Sutra serves to remind us of the progression of our practice. First, we need knowledge and

information. We need a firm understanding of how things work. Then we need to exercise compassion in the use of that knowledge by working for the benefit of everything. Finally we must put information and compassion into daily, continuous practice.

The Four Requisites

Just before this passage, the bodhisattva Universal Wisdom asked Shakyamuni Buddha, “Honored One, I am here with this great crowd of bodhisattvas to hear you. How will the faithful receive the teachings when you are no longer personally here to teach us and answer our questions about the Dharma?”

Shakyamuni Buddha replied, giving one of Buddhism’s essential points: Sincere practitioners will have the ability to understand the Dharma and grasp the Lotus Sutra as their own if they do four things:

- **Be safeguarded by the buddhas** - know that we are protected by the buddhas. This means having an unshakable faith in the Dharma, in the universal life energy that pervades all, and in the interconnectedness of all things.
- **Planting many roots of virtuous deeds** - intend to perform good deeds all the time. Continuous acts of goodness which plant the roots of the Dharma indicate a good mind. In addition, planting roots implies nurturing those roots, caring for them and making sure they grow.
- **Joining the assembly of those resolved to become awakened** - keep company with right-minded people. By associating with people whose intent is to do good, we encourage one another with our words and actions. We share our experiences and reinforce our resolve to do good for all.
- **Aspiring to liberate all living beings** - aim for a better society by serving for the good of others. The fundamental spirit of Mahayana Buddhism is to work for the enlightenment of others as well as for self, and for the establishment of an ideal realm of harmony in this world.

The bodhisattva Universal Wisdom responds to this by saying he will protect those who practice the four requisites and ward off those who would harm the sincere practitioner. This means that those who sincerely practice find inner peace along with security and calmness in their practice. By associating with like-minded people (the sangha), and by practicing each moment, we are encouraged. As we practice, we gain wisdom through our experiences. As our faith deepens, we become a light to ourselves and others, attracting more like-minded people.

This chapter is the chapter of encouragement. It simply tells us to continue practicing and not give up. It encourages us to take things one moment at a time and to follow the example of the bodhisattva Universal Wisdom. Remember we are all part of the universal life energy. Be positive in thought, word, and deed. Seek companionship of like-minded people. Work for the Awakening of all. Eventually, we can bring all to the Dharma.

Definitions

- **Good son or daughter** - those with sincere faith in and practice of the Dharma.
- **attain this (Dharma-Flower) sutra** - have the ability to understand the Dharma, receive the virtues of the sutra and integrate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra into daily life.
- **the last five hundred years of the corrupt and evil age** - According to the Mahasamnipata Sutra, after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha there will be five periods of five hundred years each. In the first period, the teachings of the Buddha will be fresh in the minds of people. They will practice sincerely and be free from illusion. In the second period of five hundred years people will devote themselves to meditation and give great thought to the application of the teachings in anticipation of great changes to come in society. These first two periods are called the period of the Righteous Law (Dharma) because the teachings are maintained and practiced in their purity.

The third period will be devoted to reading, chanting, and studying the Dharma. Buddhism will be more of a scholarly pursuit than a living teaching. Shakyamuni Buddha will be looked on more as an historical figure than a presence in people's daily lives. In the fourth period, Buddhism will be practiced in form, but the spirit will be lost. People will build monuments and memorials, and believe liberation will come merely from these formal acts of homage. The third and fourth periods are called the Period of the Counterfeit Law (Dharma).

In the fifth period, the period of Decay of the Law (Dharma), even formal practices will be disregarded. This will be a period of great antagonism, self-centeredness and egoism, in which people pursue profit for their own interests. People will be unable to lead peaceful lives. They will lose the teachings, though the teachings themselves are eternal and indestructible. This is why Shakyamuni Buddha spoke so often about receiving, keeping, practicing, and

sharing the Lotus Sutra in this last period of five hundred years. The present time is equivalent to this period.

The Sutra of Meditation on the Practice of the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom

Text

*“When there is evil in the organ of sight;
Karmic hindrances contaminating the
eyes,
You must recite the Great Vehicle
sutras,
And reflect on their foremost meaning.
This is called clearing away all karmic
hindrances
By self-reflection upon and cleansing of
the eyes.
The organ of hearing perceives
disruptive sounds,
Upsetting the principle of harmony.
This produces a disturbed mind,
Which is just like a foolish monkey.
You must recite the Great Vehicle
sutras,
And observe the emptiness and
formlessness of all things.
This forever clears away evil, providing
you with
Heavenly ears that hear in all ten
directions.
The organ of smell is attached to
scents,
And makes contact according to these
defilements.
Such a deluded nose gives rise to
The dust of delusion, according to
these defilements.
If you recite the Great Vehicle sutras
And meditate on the ultimate reality of
all things,
You will be forever free from bad
karmas,*

*And, in future lives, not produce them
again.
The organ of speaking produces five
kinds
Of bad karmas of an evil tongue.
If you want to exercise self-control,
You must diligently practice
compassion.
Pondering the meaning of the Dharma,
the true tranquility of all things,
Divisive and judgmental thoughts will
disappear.
The organ of thinking is like a monkey,
That never rests, even for a moment.
If you want to tame it,
You must diligently recite the Great
Vehicle sutras.
Reflect on the Buddha’s completion of
His body of great awakening, power and
fearlessness.
The body, the master of its organs,
Is like dust swirling in the wind;
The six rogues are at play within it,
Totally free and uncontrolled.
If you want to reflect upon and cleanse
yourself,
To be freed forever from the dust of
delusions,
To ever dwell in the city of nirvana,
And to be peaceful with a clear heart,
You must recite the Great Vehicle
sutras
And bring the mother of bodhisattvas
to mind.
Countless surpassing skillful means*

*Are gained by reflecting on the ultimate
reality of all things.
These six disciplines
Are called the cleansing of the six
sense-organs.
The ocean of all karmic hindrances
Arises from illusions.
If you want to reflect upon and cleanse
yourself,*

*You must sit correctly, and meditate on
the ultimate reality of all things.
All sins are just as frost and dew,
So wisdom's sun can melt them away.
Therefore, with a sincere heart and
mind,
Reflect upon and cleanse the six sense
organs.*

The Six Sense Organs

The six sense organs are the traditional five senses plus that part of the mind which interprets the information received by the senses. The six sense organs are the means by which we perceive the existence of things in the world around us. Through these senses we discern shapes, textures, smells and tastes. We receive physical sensations. We come into contact with the world and develop feelings toward it. We formulate thoughts and act on them. Therefore, the way we use our senses is fundamentally important.

The six senses are discussed in several chapters in the Lotus Sutra. In Chapter 7, "Parable of the Magic City," their place as one link in the Twelve Link Chain of Dependent Causation is explained. In Chapter 19, "The Merits of the Preacher," Shakyamuni Buddha tells about the merits of the six senses. In that chapter it is explained how, with a calm and serene mind, we can grasp subtle changes in sound, listen without being controlled, and hear without confusion. We can freely discern things by smell, and grasp the true meaning of things. We can use our tongues to produce profound and beautiful voices. With our minds we can understand the infinite and boundless meanings of the teachings. We can be a shining example of how to follow the bodhisattva path.

The Meditation Sutra gives specific instructions on how to purify the six sense organs in order to develop that calm and serene mind we need for our work on the bodhisattva path. If we follow these instructions, we grow in wisdom. Wisdom is critical to our journey. As the passage says, "All sins are just as frost and dew, so wisdom's sun can melt them away."

Meditation

The Sutra of Meditation on the Practice of the Bodhisattva Universal Wisdom tells how to become one with the bodhisattva Universal Wisdom. It is not known by whom or when this sutra was first recited, but it complements the final chapter of the Lotus Sutra so wonderfully that it is considered a continuation of the Lotus Sutra. This sutra gives a practical way to apply the teachings in our daily lives - by following the example of the bodhisattva Universal Wisdom. Universal Wisdom is a role model. We wish not only to become like him, we wish to be with him, to see him. The lesson in this sutra is that if everyday we wish to see something, someday we will see it. This is not seeing with the eyes. This is seeing with the whole being, not only with all the six senses.

The Japanese title of this sutra contains the word *kan* which is translated as 'meditation'. *Kan* means to keep your spirit calm. If you practice how to clean your soul, that is, how to purify the six sense organs, then follow this sutra with your heart, you will be one with Universal Wisdom. More than that, you will be one with Buddha. Therefore, with the wisdom you gain from meditation, work diligently to be enlightened.

Reflection and Correction (Atonement)

The Sutra of Meditation on the Practice of the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue is often called the sutra of atonement. In Japanese, the word 'atonement' is *sange*. It is made up of two characters. The first, *san*, means to show who you are without hesitation, display or exhibition. It is revealing yourself honestly, without either puffing yourself up or tearing yourself down. It is simply a forthright assessment of who you are at your core. The second character, *ge*, means to regret the wrongs you have done, ask forgiveness from the person wronged, and take action to correct the situation.

Sange, reflection and correction, is important because, although human beings have Buddha-Nature, they also have shortcomings such as greed and envy. These shortcomings cover the soul just as karma covers the Buddha-Nature and as dirt covers a diamond in the ground. In order for the diamond to shine it must be cleaned and polished. For your Buddha-Nature to shine it, too, must be cleaned and polished. First, take inventory of yourself. Look honestly at the poor choices you have made. Determine to not make those choices again. Make corrections and commit to improving yourself. Next, read the sutra. Make sure your behavior is in accordance with the teachings. If it is not, reevaluate. Reflection and correction is a never ending process taken to balance a disharmonious situation. It is acknowledging responsibility and taking action to restore harmony. It is an essential part of Buddhist practice.

In this passage we are instructed to “sit correctly and meditate on the ultimate reality of all things.” This is important. Reflect on yourself. Deeply believe the Law of Cause and Effect, because no matter what you do, you are part of it. Know the One Truth. We are all part of one universal life energy. Buddha is always with us.

In summary, there are three things to remember. Know the Reality of All Existence, the True Aspect of All Things, the Law of Cause and Effect. Know the One Truth. Know in your heart the Eternal Buddha is always with us.

Founder Niwano was worried that some people would find this sutra very hard to understand and so might simply walk away from it. Some parts of this sutra are difficult, but as Founder Niwano emphasized in *Buddhism for Today*, reflecting and correcting is nothing more than learning the teaching of the Great-vehicle and practicing it every moment. He encouraged everyone to continue reading and reciting this sutra repeatedly. By practicing wholeheartedly, sincerely and without compromise, we gradually remove illusions from our minds and polish our Buddha-Nature. This is the bodhisattva practice. The teaching will lead us directly to freedom from suffering. It is not an all or nothing deal. It requires starting with only one small act, practicing just one small teaching. The sutra itself encourages us to know that the teachings are not beyond our capabilities. Eventually, we will realize the essence of the sutra. Practice is the key. Start now. Practice every day.

Universal Transfer of Merit The O-Daimoku

Text

*May these merits
Extend universally to all,
So that we, with all living beings,
Together accomplish the Buddha Way*

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo

Universal Transfer of Merit

The Universal Transfer of Merit comes from Chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra. This passage is recited by nearly all Buddhists, regardless of sect, to close the sutra-chanting service. It is known as the closing or concluding vow and contains the spirit of the Buddhist practice.

Chapter 7, “The Parable of the Magic City,” teaches that the Dharma is eternal and unchanging, all beings possess the Buddha-Nature, and we are all capable of attaining the wisdom of the Buddha. Considering the boundlessness of the universe, we realize how very important our individual existence is. Each of us is a vital part of the universe. Everything we do impacts everything else. So it is critical that each of us follows the path by which suffering can be eliminated. This is the bodhisattva path.

The sutra recitation is part of our practice at home, and at the Dharma Center with the sangha. It is an act of reverence and appreciation for the opportunity to hear and practice the Dharma. During this time, we also show our devotion to the Dharma with physical offerings such as incense, flowers and food. Physical offerings help us discard our selfish wants and wishes. All these acts of appreciation give us the opportunity to forget the ego that controls our selfishness. They allow the Dharma to thoroughly penetrate our minds.

Both physical offerings and reverence show our gratitude and devotion to the Buddha. But the highest form of veneration is through our deeds - receiving, keeping and practicing the teaching in our everyday lives. This is not to satisfy our own need for personal happiness and liberation. It is done out of our sincere wish to spread the merits of the Dharma to all people, so that everyone may attain liberation from suffering. Our lives are most fulfilled when we benefit both ourselves and others. We

strive toward buddhahood through developing a selfless mind. The experience we gain from helping others develops us spiritually. This is the meaning behind the Universal Transfer of Merit.

The act of chanting this verse with sincerity and understanding, helps us detach from our egos. We realize that all of us share this precious life with Buddha. Because this verse has such an important meaning, we recite it from the heart. When we know our connection to all things, we can experience a feeling of exhilaration as we sense our being expand within the whole universe.

Recitation of the Mantra

Following the Universal Transfer of Merit we chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. *Kyo* is a sutra or a thread which is strung with jewels of wisdom. *Renge* is the emerging white lotus. *Myo* means ‘wondrous’, referring to the mysterious workings of the universe. *Namu* comes from Sanskrit and means ‘to believe in, respect or know’ the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. *Namu* signifies detaching ourselves from material things by practicing the Dharma. We acknowledge the universal life energy and become one with the Truth. *Namu* encompasses a feeling of great appreciation and true joy which comes from practicing the Dharma. It is not praying to an object or person. It is recognizing the importance and impact of the teachings in the Lotus Sutra. We chant to express our belief in the Truth and to engrave its spirit in our minds and hearts.

It might seem that saying the Mantra once should be sufficient. But it is the repetition which deepens its impression on us and helps focus our minds on the relevance and meaning of the Lotus Sutra teachings. Therefore it is important to repeat the chant with sincerity and allow the meaning of the chant to reach deep within our hearts and minds.

When reciting the verses of the Kyoten, we chant the Mantra ten times. When we recite the sutra on our own, it is not the number of times that is important. The important thing is to develop the feeling of oneness with the Dharma, and to feel the peace and joy that comes with being in union with the Divine.

Transfer of Merit

Text

*Having respectfully recited the Great Vehicle Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma,
may we transfer its merits to and thus reciprocate the boundless compassion of
The Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni – Great Benevolent Teacher, World-Honored One;
The Tathagata Abundant Treasures, witness to the Lotus Sutra;
The emanations of the Buddha in the ten directions in the past, present, and future;
The four Great Bodhisattvas: Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and
Steadfast Practice;
The Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas: Manjushri, Universal Wisdom, Maitreya, and all other
Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas;
Great Bodhisattva Nichiren, revered practitioner of the Lotus Sutra;
Founder Nikkyo, Great Teacher of the One Vehicle;
Cofounder Myoko, Bodhisattva of the Way of Compassion;
The guardian spirits of Rissho Kosei-kai;
The guardian spirits of member families of Rissho Kosei-kai;
And the countless heavenly spirits in the ten directions.*

*We reverently offer and transfer the merits of this recitation to
The spirits of all our ancestors and
All the other spirits recorded in our memorial registers,
All the spirits whose memorial day is today, and
All spirits everywhere, known and unknown to us,
so that they may delight in the taste of the Dharma and quickly accomplish the wonderful fruit of supreme
enlightenment.*

*We earnestly pray that with the help of divine guidance and protection all living beings may awaken
to their buddha-nature and world peace be achieved.*

Commentary

When we recite the Kyoten verses, we do it by chanting. This melodic recitation brings us in step with the rhythm of the Eternal life energy throughout the universe. By chanting we go beyond the words and the grammar of the sutra passages to the very heart of the teachings. We feel the teachings.

We begin and end the Kyoten chanting with an invitation to higher powers to gather with us. Just as the Invocation sets the mood for the chanting, the Transfer of Merit sets the mood for going forth to meet the day's challenges. First, we express appreciation for the opportunity to recite the Lotus Sutra. We acknowledge the work

of those who brought the Dharma to us. Second, we transfer merit to our ancestors. Third, we remind ourselves to practice the bodhisattva way based on the Lotus Sutra, promote our own growth, help others waken to their Buddha-Nature and work for world peace.

This passage brings together what we have come to know and have faith in: the reality of all things, the interconnectedness of all things and the understanding that each of us is part of the great universal life energy. This is the knowledge we use to guide and protect us in our interactions and relationships.

In Japanese 'transfer of merit', *eko*, means 'to turn over'. It is literally turning over to others the merit we receive from the recitation. We are extending our merit to others. This is the essence and spirit of the bodhisattva practice, the Lotus Sutra, and the One Great Vehicle. By directing this sutra chanting to all beings we generate well-being toward everyone, everywhere. As we continue to recite with awareness for all beings, our spiritual connection deepens and will transfer into action. We cultivate and prepare our mind, our way of thinking, to transfer that thinking into action.

When we pay respect to our ancestors, whether they are related to us or not, we pay respect to the legacies we received from those who came before us - our way of life, our work ethic, our health, literature, art, and tools to make our lives easier. We understand how important it is to pass on good works, good thoughts, and good values to our descendants and those whom we influence. This is why ancestor appreciation is important. It makes us thankful for what we have. It helps us realize we are dependent on others. It reminds us we have an obligation to those who come after us to pass on our faith and our dreams for harmony and peace in the world.

The Lotus Sutra is a practical teaching. It guides us in the path toward awakening to our own Buddha-Nature. It gives us the tools to realize we are part of the great universal life energy shared by Buddha, all the bodhisattvas of the Lotus Sutra, and all beings. This realization gives us the energy and encouragement to practice the bodhisattva way. As we practice, we experience happiness and satisfaction in what we do in the world around us. We develop appreciation for life. We grow spiritually. And we give to others.

The secret of the Lotus Sutra: to be awakened to the Truth.

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This Study Guide borrows heavily from these resources.
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