

THE WISDOM OF THE LOTUS SUTRA, VOLUME 1

Q59: The Daishonin spoke of the Lotus Sutra in terms of its comprehensive, abbreviated and essential forms. What is the essential and most appropriate form of the Lotus Sutra for today's practice? (p. 68) # Nichiren Daishonin spoke of the Lotus Sutra in terms of its comprehensive, abbreviated and essential forms. ## The essential form of the Lotus Sutra was his own Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. And the practice most appropriate for today is that of this essential Lotus Sutra. #

The Daishonin doesn't specifically identify what the comprehensive and abbreviated forms of the Lotus Sutra are, but if we think of the enormous and lengthy versions of the Lotus Sutra preached by the past Buddhas as the comprehensive form, then the twenty-eight chapter version would be the abbreviated form. Or, if we regard the twenty-eight chapter version as the comprehensive form, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra would be the abbreviated form.

Mr. Toda also spoke of three kinds of Lotus Sutras: (1) the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, (2) Tien-t'ai's Maka Shikan (Profound Concentration and Insight), and (3) Nichiren Daishonin's Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

Q60: The Lotus Sutra begins with the passage "This is what I heard. " From the standpoint of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, what is the essence of this passage? (pp. 73-75)

From this perspective, "This is what I heard, " in terms of the Lotus Sutra, means to concentrate one's entire being on apprehending and connecting with the pulsing resonance of the Buddha's life. "This" refers to the faith and understanding that enables those who hear the teachings to "hear them exactly as they are preached" and engrave them in their lives. And since this is an activity that involves our entire being, the expression "what I heard" is used. Our entire being "hears, " not just our ears. The "I" in this phrase is usually Anancia, 11 the disciple of Shakyamuni said to have been central in compiling the scriptures. But today, in this time of the Latter Day of the Law, the "heart, " or true essence, of "I" signifies each of us as individuals. Each of us listens to the Daishonin's teaching of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with our whole being and embraces faith in it. This is the true meaning of "This is what I heard. " The Daishonin says: The meaning behind each and every word and phrase of the twenty-eight chapters of the sutra refers to the hearing of this doctrine as it applies to one's own self, and this is summed. -up in the words "This is what I heard. " That which is heard is Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. Therefore, the sutra says "all attain the Buddha way. " (Gosho Zenshu, p. 794)

We are not to read the sutra as something separate from ourselves. Instead, we should "hear" it "as it applies to our own self " and "as the very Law of our own life. "

##Ikeda: The essence of "This is what I heard" is the oneness of mentor and disciple. And that is the quintessence of the transmission of Buddhism. ##

Q61: What is the significance of the assembly of various beings at Eagle Peak as described in the "Introduction" chapter of the Lotus Sutra? What do those beings in the assembly signify in terms of the Ten Worlds? (p. 86)

Saito: In that sense, we can interpret all the different beings who have gathered to hear the sutra as symbolizing the different functions and workings inherent in life itself. In terms of the Ten Worlds, the assembly on Eagle Peak is comprised of beings from the world of Bodhisattva, Learning, Heaven, Humanity, Anger, Animality--these six, we can assume, are meant to represent all nine worlds from Hell to Bodhisattva. In other words, the great assembly of the "Introduction" chapter is a manifestation of all beings of the nine worlds enfolded within the Buddha's own life.

Q62: In the Lotus Sutra, there is no distinction between men and women in attaining Buddhahood. Substantiate this claim using more than one example from the sutra. (p. 88)

after them, women followers--the nuns Mahaprajapati and Yasodhara--are mentioned. And when King Ajatashatru is mentioned, there is also a reference to his mother, Vaidehi.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Fukyo) addresses everyone he encounters, men and women alike, with the promise: "You are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood" (LS20, 267). Viewed in its entirety, the Lotus Sutra takes it for granted that there is no distinction between men and women in attaining Buddhahood.

In the "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter, Shakyamuni bestows a prophecy of enlightenment on a large number of nuns--of whom Mahaprajapati and Yasodhara are representatives--in a manner confirming what is already certain to happen. Both Mahaprajapati and Yasodhara were introduced on an equal footing with male members of the assembly in the "Introduction" chapter. The enlightenment of women--a distinctive feature of the Lotus Sutra marking a sharp departure from the provisional teachings which deny this potential--is anticipated from the very first chapter.

The dragon kings Nanda, Upananda, Sagara, Vasuki, Takshaka, Anavatapta, Manasvin, and Utpalaka are in the assembly, each accompanied by a vast number of followers. It is the daughter of dragon king Sagara who later demonstrates that women, too, can attain enlightenment.

Q63: Nichiren Daishonin states: "Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful. " In light of this passage, what is the symbolic meaning of the treasure tower in the Lotus Sutra? What does it teach us? (p. 93)

Ikeda: Mr. Toda taught us clearly what the Treasure Tower is and the significance of its emergence. That colossal Treasure Tower is an expression of the state of Buddhahood that lies dormant within each of us. It teaches us the infinite nobility of life. Saito: That is what the Daishonin meant when he wrote to one of his lay followers, Abutsu-bo: "Therefore, Abutsu-bo is the Treasure Tower itself, and the Treasure Tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful" (MW-1, 30). #Ikeda: In response to a question Abutsu-bo had asked him about the Treasure Tower, the original Buddha #makes a definitive declaration: "Your very life is the Treasure Tower. " We can almost hear the Daishonin's #warm and compassionate voice.

Q64: According to the Daishonin, what does it mean to "reside in the Ceremony in the Air"? The Daishonin also declares: The 'place' where Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and dwell in faith corresponds to the passage 'reside in the air. ' In other words, they reside in the Ceremony in the Air. (Gosho Zenshu, p. 740)

By exerting ourselves in faith, chanting daimoku and performing gongyo before the Gohonzon, we immediately become a part of the assembly in the air. Nothing could be more wonderful than this. Mr. Toda often said, "In the daily lives of us ordinary people, there is no place as sacred as the place where we practice gongyo and chant daimoku. "

To 'rise into the air' means to elevate our state of life through our determined and unwavering faith. This is the significance that pertains to the sutra's progression from the first assembly on Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air.

Explain the significance of the Lotus Sutra's progression from the first assembly on Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air and back again to Eagle Peak in terms of our practice. (pp. 96-97)

Saito: Then the subsequent progression from the Ceremony in the Air back to Eagle Peak represents returning to the reality of daily life and society and facing its challenges based on the life-force of Buddhahood that we have tapped through gongyo and daimoku.

The defiled realm of the nine worlds is transformed into the world of Buddhahood. This is the meaning of "the nine worlds have the potential for Buddhahood" (MW-3, 81). The progression from the first assembly on Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air in the Lotus Sutra illustrates this principle. Meanwhile, the progression from the Ceremony in the Air back to Eagle Peak indicates that "Buddhahood retains the nine worlds" (MW-3, 81). In other words, when we willingly return from the world of Buddhahood into the nine worlds to courageously guide others to enlightenment, the impure land of the nine worlds is illuminated by the world of Buddhahood and transformed into the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, a shining Buddha land. Here we see the principle of "the impure land is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light" at work.

Q65: What is the distinction between Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and Shakyamuni's Buddhism from the viewpoint of the three assemblies and the two places? (pp. 97-99)

Ikeda: Yes. As a matter of fact, the distinction between the Daishonin's Buddhism and Shakyamuni's Buddhism can be explained in terms of the framework of the "three assemblies in two places. "

Suda: Could you amplify on that?

Ikeda: Shakyamuni's Buddhism, if anything, emphasizes the movement from Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air--in other words, leaving this world in search of the realm of the Buddha's wisdom. The goal of this search, in a nutshell, is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the teaching implicit in the depths of the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" (Juryo; sixteenth) chapter expounded during the Ceremony in the Air.

In contrast, the Daishonin's Buddhism emphasizes the progression from the depths of the "Life Span" chapter expounded during the Ceremony in the Air back to Eagle Peak--in other words, from Nam-myoho-renge-kyo back to real life. It is a Buddhism that aims for the transformation of reality, and the practice of this Buddhism is to under-take compassionate actions among the people.

Ikeda: That's precisely it. Of course, it goes without saying that tireless efforts to "seek enlightenment above" are essential to any efforts to it guide sentient beings below. " Another way of describing the difference in emphasis is to say that the dynamic of Shakyamuni's Buddhism is "from the cause to the effect, " while that of the Daishonin's Buddhism is "from the effect to the cause. " This is a somewhat difficult subject, but basically the principle "from the cause to the effect" refers to people of the nine worlds (the cause) practicing in order to attain Buddhahood (the effect). In contrast, the principle "from the effect to the cause" indicates people who, based on the state of Buddhahood (the cause) they have attained instantly through chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon, pursue and challenge the reality of the nine worlds (the effect) in daily life.

Q66: The Daishonin states: "The nine worlds have the potential for Buddhahood" and "Buddhahood retains the nine worlds. " Explain each of these passages in terms of "the three assemblies in two places" as described in the Lotus Sutra. (p. 97)

Once we have dwelt in the Ceremony in the Air, the reality of daily life, however hateful it may have formerly seemed, becomes a means for demonstrating our Buddhahood to others. Sufferings and problems enable us to deepen our faith and, by overcoming them, to show actual proof of the benefit of faith. This is the meaning of the Buddhist principles "earthly desires are enlightenment" and "changing poison into medicine." The defiled realm of the nine worlds is transformed into the world of Buddhahood. This is the meaning of "the nine worlds have the potential for Buddhahood" (MW-3, >81). The progression from the first assembly on Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air in the Lotus Sutra illustrates this principle. Meanwhile, the progression from the Ceremony in the Air back to Eagle Peak indicates that "Buddhahood retains the nine worlds" (MW-3, 81). In other words, when we willingly return from the world of Buddhahood into the nine worlds to courageously guide others to enlightenment, the impure land of the nine worlds is illuminated by the world of Buddhahood and transformed into the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, a shining Buddha land. Here we see the principle of "the impure land is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light" at work.

At that moment, this world of impermanence, suffering, non-self and impurity becomes a world of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. The Daishonin writes, "Illuminated by the five characters of the Mystic Law [Myoho-rengue-kyo], they display the enlightened nature they inherently possess" (MW-1, 212). All of the nine worlds, as symbolized by the various beings who gather to hear the Lotus Sutra in the Introduction" chapter, are illuminated by the Mystic Law. Ordinary people, just as they are, can reveal their true and most supremely noble selves, and in turn light up society with their radiance.

From real life to the Ceremony in the Air and then back to real life--in this continuous process back and forth lies the path of human revolution, the path of transforming our state of life from one motivated by the Lesser Self to one inspired by the Greater Self. In life, we must not permit ourselves to be totally absorbed with only immediate realities. We must have ideals and strive to achieve them, thereby transcending present realities. On the other hand, we must not allow ourselves to become alienated from reality. We can change nothing unless our feet are firmly planted on the ground.

Many people and also many religions tend to choose one of two paths. Either they compromise with the realities of society and lose their identity, or seeking to evade these realities, they remove themselves entirely from society and try to create their own separate world. Both approaches are mistaken.

Q67: The "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: "The Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone." According to the sutra, what is the "one great reason" the Buddhas appear in the world? (pp. 114-15)

He then reveals to Shariputra that the "one great reason" that Buddhas appear in the world is to open the door to the Buddha wisdom for all people, to show it to them, to cause them to awaken to it and gain entry to it.

[The "Expedient Means" chapter states:

. . . the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone. . .

The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, to allow them to attain purity. That is why they appear in the world. They wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to cause living beings to awaken to the Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom, and therefore-e they appear in the world. (LS2, 31)]

Advanced Study Questions and Phill selection of answers for pages 55-115 of Vol 1 of Wisdom of Lotus Sutra

Suda: Yes, Shakyamuni says: "The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone" (LS2, 31). That one great reason is revealed as the four aspects of the Buddha's wisdom--to open, show, awaken and help enter.

Ikeda: The fact that the Buddha seeks to open the door of Buddha wisdom (the state of Buddhahood) to living beings means that living beings already possess the Buddha wisdom inherent in their lives. The reason they possess the Buddha wisdom is that they are originally Buddhas. Shakyamuni's words are in fact a great declaration that all living beings are worthy of supreme respect.