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LOTUS SŪTRA, LECTURE NO. 4
Fall 1968
Zen Mountain Center

NOT VERBATIM

The point of my previous lecture was that since it may be difficult for you to understand the *Lotus Sūtra*, I wanted to clarify who is supposed to have told it. The sūtras usually look like they were spoken by the historical Buddha himself. But our Buddhist sūtras were not actually spoken by him. So when you read a sūtra, if you think it was spoken by Buddha himself, you will be confused, because there are actually many elements in it which did not exist in Buddha's time. Afterwards, when the sūtra was compiled, it was interspersed with various thoughts that existed then. Buddhist thought itself developed from the understanding of the direct disciples of Buddha to that of Buddhists several generations afterward. So you will be very confused when you read the sūtra as if it was spoken by the historical Buddha.

Actually, the sūtra was told by so-called Mahāyāna Buddhists several hundred years after Buddha passed away. Buddhism had developed from the *śravaka* to the Mahāyāna understanding. If I say Buddhism developed in this way, then you may think it developed or changed. But in reality, it did not change or develop, but tried to resume the original understanding of Buddhism. In this way, for many thousands of years, Buddhists have been trying to restore Buddha's teaching. It looks as if this effort changed Buddhism from the original way to some different teaching, but that is not so. Do you understand what I am saying? It is rather difficult, with my language problem, to explain this part. This sūtra was told by someone who was a Mahāyāna Buddhist. It looks like the historical Buddha, over here, spoke this sūtra, but actually someone who was over here told it. And Buddhism itself developed from here to here. So you may say what is taught in this sūtra is not Buddha's teaching, but a teaching which developed from Buddha's teaching. So if you are attached to Buddha's original teaching, you may be disappointed, you see?

But what I want to say is that there is no need for you to be disappointed, because what Buddhists have been trying to do was to find out what was fundamental Buddhism. So they thought, this is not fundamental Buddhism, and this is not, until finally they thought *this is* Buddha's original purpose in teaching. When they reached this kind of understanding, someone invented this story with such conviction and on such a great scale. That is why this sūtra is called the king of all sūtras. Do you understand?

Nowadays we have various sects in China or Japan, but the reason so many founders of various schools continue to make that kind of effort

today is only in order to understand who Buddha was. When someone found that Buddha was such and such a person, he became the founder of some school. All the effort we have been making has been to know who Buddha is and what his purpose for teaching was. Do you understand this point? For a Buddhist, Buddha is not just a historical person—he is truth itself. We think he should be truth itself, and the historical Buddha cannot be perfect. But the background of the historical Buddha should be truth. If so, truth itself should be the real Buddha for us.

Then what is truth? How should we understand the truth, or how should we accept truth in the situation of this age? Because of questions like that is why we have various schools. Do you understand? In this way, with that kind of attitude, this sūtra was told. So it is necessary for me to tell you about the history of Buddhism from the original, fundamental, form to the Mahāyāna form. If I say "Mahāyāna", there is also the "Hīnayāna" school, its opposite. When the Mahāyāna Buddhists reached Buddha's original teaching, they called all the teaching from before Mahāyāna Buddhism arose "Hīnayāna". But while the Mahāyāna school was being established, there was no Hīnayāna school.

According to the Tendai school, which was founded by Tendai Chih-i in China, there are two kinds of Mahāyāna. One is the last stage of the development of Buddhism, which is very different from the so-called Hīnayāna, or teaching of the *śravakas*. The Pratyekas have no teaching, because they are the ones who have no teacher, who studied by themselves. So there is no school for the Pratyeka Buddhist. They have no way that they are teaching; they have no written material for their disciples. The trees we see, the flowers we see, the stars and moon, or the mountains and rivers, are the teaching. So there is no Pratyekayana. But the Śravakas have a teaching, and the Mahāyāna teachers who reached this point ["the last stage in the development of Buddhism"], criticized the *śravakas* by calling their way the Hīnayāna. Of course, according to the Tendai, this is not the real Mahāyāna, or real teaching. The real teaching is the one which can include Śravakas, Pratyekas, and the so-called "one vehicle" or "great vehicle" teaching. That is the true teaching. So the Buddhists who discriminate between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are not true Mahāyānists.

For the true Mahāyāna Buddhist, there are no Śravakas, Pratyekas, "Great One Vehicle," or "Mahāyāna." This is called the truth vehicle, while the other is called the special teaching. The special teaching is not good enough. It should be perfect teaching. So according to the Tendai analogy, there is the perfect teaching, the special teaching, and the teachings of the Pratyekas and Śravakas. This is a more proper understanding of Buddha's teaching.

In this way, our understanding of Buddha's teaching improved more and more. Finding out how we should improve and accept Buddha's teaching as a perfect teaching is the effort we have been making. So Buddhism should change, it should not be completed. One after another, we must have new teachers, and we must improve our understanding of the teaching from an immature one to a mature one. We should study this sūtra with this in mind. Did you understand what I'm trying to say?

Today I want you to present some questions if you have any.

Student A: If that was the interpretation of Buddhism that was perfect for that time, maybe some new interpretation is perfect for this time. Or do you think that the *Lotus Sūtra* is the best expression of Buddhism for the present?

Suzuki-rōshi: Another way of understanding is by logic. Or, culture is also a truth for carving Buddhism. So I think that nowadays you should use some other truth to carve Buddha's image.

Q: Do you think the *Shōbōgenzō* may have been the best sūtra for that time?

Suzuki-rōshi: For that time, it was. And he used a very unusual truth for a person who was born several hundred years ago. Most of the truths he used may be very appropriate for us to use too. In this sense, many scholars are interested in the *Shōbōgenzō*. But even so, you cannot say Buddhism was completed by Dōgen-zenji. If you think it was, the *Shōbōgenzō* becomes like a coffee shop on the freeway. Dogen will be very angry if you stay there. That is why he wrote it. His intention was not to stay here. You should go on and on. That was the point he put emphasis on. He said Buddhism is not valuable because of the teaching, but because of the continuous practice, such as the four vows.

Q: I didn't understand the emphasis this sūtra places on the future lives of the different disciples. How is that of value?

Suzuki-rōshi: "Future disciples" means that Buddhism is the teaching which has a limitless future and beginningless beginning, and which should always be true. So, in the sūtra, there are many disciples and buddhas who will exist in the future and who existed aeons ago.

Q: We shouldn't be concerned about that, and it seems so difficult to understand.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, it's difficult to understand. That was the point of my previous lecture on this sūtra. If your understanding does not lead to the Sambhogakāya Buddha or Dharmakāya Buddha, this kind of description doesn't make any sense. It looks like a fable or tale. Do you understand? As you will see later in this sūtra, Buddha said to many of his eminent, direct disciples, "You should live until Maitreya Buddha appears, many, many aeons in the future," and they said, "Yes." You cannot understand this kind of thought without the idea of the Sambhogakāya Buddha. And you may say the Sambhogakāya Buddha is just some idea, but if you have some experience of zazen, you can accept it. That is why Zen Buddhism arose.

Q: What does the understanding of the vow have to do with the understanding of Sambhogakāya Buddha?

Suzuki-rōshi: First of all, Sambhogakāya Buddha is the perpetual one, who exists from beginningless beginning to endless end. And secondly, Nirmānakāya Buddha is the one who exists moment after moment with various forms, so Sambhogakāya Buddha is the background of Nirmānakāya Buddha. And Nirmānakāya Buddha is the embodiment of Sambhogakāya Buddha. So Sambhogakāya Buddha will give birth to Nirmānakāya Buddha. Nirmānakāya Buddha is the Buddha which exists moment after moment with various forms. Do you understand? That is why we say sentient beings are numberless, and we exist from beginningless beginning and to endless end.

Q: I think a lot of us have felt that some of the things in that sūtra are hard to understand from our experience, in the same way that the vow seems to be impossible to our understanding. But there seems to be a relationship between making that vow and the *mmm*.

Suzuki-rōshi: It may be difficult to explain. I think you know pretty well, and Claude [Dalenberg?] explained it pretty well in his answer to someone's question. That is actually how we exist here. We exist moment after moment, taking the form and color of the great Sambhogakāya Buddha. That is true. Don't you think so? If I say "Sambhogakāya Buddha," since you don't know the technical definition of the term, it may be more difficult. But we exist here, and we are not permanent beings. Only in this moment do we exist like this. Tomorrow I will not be the same person. This is true. Next moment I shall be the future buddha. Yesterday I was the past Buddha. And you will be another Buddha. In this way there are many, many Buddhas.

But we are incarnated bodies, with a certain color and form and character. So there must be a source or root of each being, as the Sambhogakāya Buddha was the source of the Nirmānakāya Shākyamuni Buddha. When he realized this point, he accepted himself

as Nirmānakāya Buddha, as Sambhogakāya Buddha, and as Dharmakāya Buddha. When we understand ourselves in this way, we exist in this world to continuously try to express Buddha Nature, moment after moment. That is the effort we should make, rather than being caught by a certain color or form.

But even so, we shouldn't ignore things, we should make our best effort in each moment. That is a kind of attachment, but this attachment is, at the same time, detachment, because the next moment you should make your best effort again. So it means detachment from the previous being. In this way, moment after moment, we exist. This kind of understanding is expressed by our technical terms of Nirmānakāya Buddha, Sambhogakāya Buddha, and Dharmakāya Buddha.

Q: Can all sentient beings, then, be considered Nirmānakāya Buddha?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yes, all sentient beings are Nirmānakāya Buddha. Whether or not they realize it, it is actually so. They do not accept themselves as a Nirmānakāya Buddha, that's all. For them, they are not, but for us who understand ourselves and others, all of them are Nirmānakāya Buddha, based on Sambhogakāya Buddha and Dharmakāya Buddha.

Q: You said some people live by karma and some live by vows.

Suzuki-rōshi: People who do not understand this truth live a karmic life. But those who know this point do not live a karmic life. Karmic life is another version of Buddhist life.

Q: You mentioned the triple world.

Suzuki-rōshi: The triple world: past, present, and future.

Q: Can you explain bringing people from this world

Suzuki-rōshi: There is no separate past, present and future. Past and future actually exist in this present moment. Do you understand? If you do something good, your future is bound to be good; and that you are good means that your past life was good.

Q: You speak of our existence in only an instant, but at each instant, that existence should make its best effort. And the more I think about this idea of best effort, the less I'm able to understand at all what it means. I think I've asked you this before, but maybe I'm ready to hear it again. What do you mean by making your best effort on each instant?

Suzuki-rōshi: I don't mean to sacrifice this moment for the future, and I don't mean to be bound by past life and try to escape from it. This is the kind of effort you usually make. But there's a more important point in your effort. What is it? To stand on your own two feet is the most important thing. To sacrifice this moment for your future, even for your ideal, means that you are not standing on your own two feet. So the most important thing is to accept yourself, to have subjectivity in each moment. Or, don't complain—accept things as it is and satisfy yourself with what you have right now. You should think, this is the only reality, the *only* Buddha you know, the only Buddha you can see, experience, have, worship. And then if you want to do something, at that time you are Nirmānakāya Buddha and Sambhogakāya Buddha and Dharmakāya Buddha.

[The following fragment was originally labeled SR-68-10-22-A. It was subsequently found to be the end of the present lecture, SR-68-10-00-C. It is included here because it is a different edited version of the same text. —WKR, 2/13/96.]

FOURTH LECTURE OF TRAINING SESSION AT TASSAJARA

October 22, 1968

... that is how, actually, we exist here. We exist moment after moment, as taking form and color of great Sambhogakāya Buddha. That is true. (chuckle) Don't you think so? If I say Sambhogakāya Buddha, you know, by technical term—because of technical—because you don't know, what does it mean, definition of Sambhogakāya Buddha, it makes you, more difficult maybe. But we exist here; and we are not permanent being. Only in this moment we exist as like this. But next moment I will change to—tomorrow I will not be the same person. This is rue. Next moment I shall be future Buddha. Yesterday I was past Buddha. In this way there is many and many Buddhas. And you will be another Buddha. In this way, there are many Buddhas, but Source of—or—we are incarnated body, with some certain color and form and character.

So there must be source of Shākyamuni Buddha, who is called, Nirmānakāya Buddha. But when he realize this point, he accept himself as Nirmānakāya Buddha, as Sambhogakāya Buddha, as Dharmakāya Buddha. When we understand ourselves in this way, you know, what will be the way—why we live in this world is to try to

continuously try to express Buddha Nature, moment after moment. And that is the effort we should make, instead of being caught by some certain color or form. But even so (laughing), we should not ignore—we should make our best effort in each moment. So that is a kind of attachment. But this attachment is, at the same time, detachment, because next moment you should make best effort (chuckling). So, it means detachment to the last being. In this way, moment after moment, we exist. So this kind of understanding will be expressed by our technical term of Nirmānakāya Buddha, Sambhogakāya Buddha, and Dharmakāya Buddha.

Dan's question: Can all sentient beings, then, be considered Nirmānakāya Buddha?

Suzuki-rōshi's answer: Yeah. All sentient beings are Nirmānakāya Buddha. But (laughing) you know, whether or not they realize it, it is actually so, but they do not accept themselves as a Nirmānakāya Buddha. For them, they are not. But for us who understand ourselves and others, they are—all of them are Nirmānakāya Buddha and Sambhogakāya Buddha based on Sambhogakāya Buddha and Dharmakāya Buddha.

[Text may be missing: Dan's second question.]

Dan's third question: Some people live by karma, you said, and some people live by vows.

Suzuki-rōshi: By vows, yeah, for people who do not understand this truth, they live their life, life is karmic life. Those who know this point, our life is not karmic life. The karma is—karmic life is another version of Buddhist life.

Student: Can you explain "triple world"?

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh, triple world: past, present, and future.

Student: Can you explain "bringing people from this world"?

Suzuki-rōshi: There is no separate past, present, and future. Past, present, and future exist in present. Past exists in this present moment ... future also. Do you understand? If you do something good, your future is, you know, bound to be good. That you are good means your past life was good.

Student: What do you mean by making your best effort on each moment?

Suzuki-rōshi: I don't mean to sacrifice this moment for the future. I

don't mean, you know, that ... to be bound by past life, and try to escape from, is not—this kind of effort will be the effort you make, usually. But there is more important point in your effort. What is that? To stand on your feet (laughing) is the most important thing. You know, to sacrifice this moment for your future, for your ideal, even, means that you are not sitting, standing on your feet. So, the most important things is to accept yourself, you know, to have subjectivity on each moment. Or to accept yourself: Don't complain. Don't make any complaint and accept things as it is, and satisfy yourself with what you have right now. And you should think, "this is the only reality, only Buddha, you know; you can see, you can experience, you can have, you can worship." And then, you know, if you want to do something, as a ... and at that time you are Nirmānakāya Buddha, and Sambhogakāya Buddha, and Dharmakāya Buddha.

[Transcription checked and edited by Brian Fikes.]

This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript by Brian Fikes. It is not verbatim. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (7/17/01).