

Lotus Sutra, Lecture No. III-6

Third Lotus Sutra Series
Thursday Evening, October 30, 1969
Zen Mountain Center

The print you have got there is mostly translated from Kumarajiva's translation. Kumarajiva is a famous Chinese translator, and his translation is famous for his beautiful words, and easy to understand. That is why most Chinese people liked his translation, and at the same time the Lotus Sutra became a very popular sutra. It is not exactly a literal translation, but because he was a great scholar, his translation is very correct and very easy to understand. And as literature, it is also good.

Kumarajiva's father [Kumarayana] was an Indian, and his father came to Kashmir. Do you understand [laughs]?

Student: Yes.

SR: Kashmir. *Kiji*, in Chinese. *Kiji-koku*. And he [Kumarayana] got married with the emperor's sister [Jivaka].

And Kumarajiva when he was quite young, he started studying Buddhism. When he was seven, he already read scriptures. And when he was nine years old, he started to study Mahayana already. At first, under some teacher he studied Hinayana mostly. And when he was twelve, he went to some other neighboring country and studied more about the teaching of the Prajnaparamita group [of sutras]. And when he came back to his father's country, his former teacher became his disciple [laughs]. He was such a smart fellow. And the teacher said, "You are my Mahayana teacher, and I am your teacher of Hinayana teachings," he said. And he studied under him [laughs].

We don't know how long he was there. But anyway, his mother went back to India. Maybe his country became more and more weak, and Chinese people more and more ready to invade his country. Maybe that is why. But he stayed [in] his father's country and was teaching Mahayana teachings.

His name was known even in China. So a Chinese general sent his men to Kumarajiva's country to get him. And they were defeated by the Chinese, and he was captured. And before he arrived [in] the capital city of China, Choan [Ch'ang-an],¹ Lo Ko [Lu Kuang], the general, his king was killed. So Lo Ko stayed [in] the northern part of China [holding Kumarajiva in captivity].

And soon they went to Choan, the capital city of China, and started various translations. And he had—I don't know how true it is—but he had 8,000 disciples. At least he had ten famous scholars as his disciples, among them Sojo. Sojo is very famous, especially for his Zen-like

teaching. So we find various Zen technical terms in Sojo's book. Anyway, Kumarajiva is a big translator. And we call his translation and before Kumarajiva we call "old" translations, and after Genjo we call "new" translations.

As you know, this sutra—the original text of Kumarajiva's translation—no one knows exactly what kind of a text it was. So far we have many Sanskrit texts: Nepal, Tibet, and the northern part of Asia. And some of them are in Russia—a famous Sanskrit original text is in Russia—Petrograd? And some of them are in England. And some copies are, maybe, in Germany, and France, or Holland. We have many texts, but we don't know which original text Kumarajiva used.

But anyway, the copy [of Hurvitz's edition] is mostly translated from Kumarajiva's translation, which is very familiar to Japanese people. Most Japanese people use this—Kumarajiva's translation. One-hundred years before [after] Kumarajiva, Dharmagupta translated this scripture, but we don't use it so much. And we have several copies, but the copies are not perfect because we didn't use them for a long, long time.

Now Shariputra is asking Buddha because Buddha wouldn't talk about his final teaching. So Shariputra is now asking [Buddha] many times to speak about it. Page 22.² I think we finished this gatha, didn't we?

[Suzuki starts to read from Chapter II of the Lotus Sutra, Leon Hurvitz' translation, 1976, p. 26.]

The Sun of Wisdom, the most venerable of the great saints,
After a life-long time preaches this dharma—

SR: Oh. Excuse me [laughs]. The gathas we finished is:

The Sun of Wisdom, the most venerable of the great saints,
After a life-long time preaches this dharma,
Himself saying that he has got such
Strength, fearlessness, *samadhi*,
Dhyana-concentration, release, and other such—

Did you find out? I think we have finished those gathas, didn't we?

Student: I don't think we did those [?].

SR: You don't think so? Then this is a repetition of, maybe by your book Page 4.

Now Shariputra is asking Buddha to speak about the final truth. Yeah, I think I did it. I briefly explained important words like "platform of the path."

Student: What does that mean again?

SR: “Platform of the path” means where Buddha attained enlightenment. So strictly speaking it is under the Bodhi tree. But here, platform of the path means, where Buddha is. Later this kind of building is *dojo* in Japanese; in Sanskrit *bodhi-manda*. I think I explained it. *Bodhi-manda*? And sometimes scholars say this is a translation of *bodhi-mandala*. But it looks like *bodhi-manda* is correct. I don't know.

And I told you about cheese. I don't know how you make it, but in India, in scriptures, I understand in this way. You divide milk, water, and oil—the rich part. And from the rich part you make cheese. And on the surface of the cheese you will see many beautiful pictures. That is a mandala—something like oil on water. So that is why we call essential teaching mandala—something beautiful, and something essential, and something very genuine. That is mandala. So if the original word is *bodhi-mandala*, the meaning will be like that.

Bodhi-manda is where the *bodhi* is—like some place to practice. Manda.

Peter [Schneider], will you read it? It may be difficult to understand me if I read this gatha:

The Sun of Wisdom, the most venerable of the great saints,

Peter:³

After a life-long time preaches this dharma,
Himself saying that he has gained such
Strengths, fearlessness, *samadhis*,
Dhyana-concentrations, releases, and other such
Inconceivable dharmas.
On the dharmas attained on the platform of the path,
No one is able to put questions.
“My mind (says the Buddha) is difficult to fathom,
Nor is anyone able to question it.”
Unasked (oh Buddha), you preach it yourself,
Praising the path you have trodden
And that most subtle of wisdoms
Which the buddhas have gained.
The arhats without outflows
And they who seek nirvana
Have now fallen into a net of doubt,
Asking themselves why the Buddha has preached this.
Those who seek to be condition-perceivers,
As well as *bhikshus*, *bhikshunis*,
Gods, dragons, demons, spirits,
And *Gandharvas*,
Look at one another and harbor uncertainties,
Entreating the Most Venerable of Two-Legged Beings,

“Why is this?
We beg the Buddha to explain it to us.”
Of the multitude of voice-hearers
The Buddha has said that I am the first.
I now, with respect to my knowledge,
Cannot resolve my doubts
As to whether this is the ultimate dharma
Or whether it is (merely) a path to tread (toward that
dharma).
The sons born of the Buddha's mouth,
Their palms joined and looking up in expectation,
Beg you to emit a subtle sound
And thus make timely explanation in keeping with reality.
The gods, dragons, and spirits,
In number like to Ganges sands,
Bodhisattvas seeking to be buddhas,
Their great number being eighty thousands,
And of several myriads of millions of realms
The saint wheel-turning kings have arrived,
With palms joined and with thoughts deferential,
Wishing to hear of the perfect path.

SR: Yeah. All the disciples and people and animate beings wanted something from him because they have doubts—especially Shariputra had great doubt. After waiting for him for a long, long time—after attaining arhatship, which is the last stage to attain for them, Buddha said there are more important things to say which are difficult to understand. Only Buddha and bodhisattvas could understand, but the rest of the people—voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas would not understand. So it is no wonder that they were very curious about Buddha's last teaching—the teaching which was in Buddha's mind. So in this way they were asking Buddha to talk about it.

And there are several important words which I have to explain. The fourth line: “strengths.” “Strengths” means here we count five strengths. Sometimes we say ten strengths, or as we chant, to attain ten powers. This is five or ten. Sometimes we count ten, sometimes we count five.

Ten powers are—it may take long time if I explain it:

- [1] no outflow—power of no outflow;
- [2] power of controlling birth and death: he has a choice in birth and death;
- [3] and he knows his former life, and he knows everything like a great teacher of geography, he knows everywhere that is;
- [4] and he knows the results of various practices;
- [5] he has precise and deep understanding of teaching;
- [6] and he knows how to help people;

[7] and he knows how to calm down his mind;
[8] and the way to liberation;
[9] and how to keep precepts—

He has those power.

[10] he has power to change his karma—he can change his own karma.

Those are the ten powers. And the next one is fearlessness. Fearlessness mostly means when he gives a statement, when he talks about dharma, he has nothing to fear because of his wisdom. And his wisdom is so perfect that he has nothing to fear because he has no danger of persecution, and no danger from enemies. Fearlessness mostly means fearlessness in his spirit to give his talk. Of course, some other fearlessness is included, but mostly when we say “fearlessness,” it is something like this.

Those are the virtues or powers only buddhas and bodhisattvas have. We count eighteen powers. In some other scriptures we count different virtues, but anyway, those are the powers limited to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

And the third line from the last: “the saint wheel-turning kings.” A king turns the wheels of power, wheels of politics. But a saint turns the wheel of dharma. And those kings are mostly supposed to protect right teaching.

And next: at that time, the Buddha proclaimed to Shariputra: “Cease! Cease! There is no need to speak further. If I speak of this matter, gods and men in all the worlds shall be alarmed.”

[Laughs.] It is good [laughs]. But not only “alarmed” [laughs], they may [???] [laughs].

Shariputra again addressed the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One, I do but beg you to preach it, I do but beg you to preach it!” That is—what is the reason? “In this assembly numberless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of *asaukhyeyas*⁴ of living beings, having seen buddhas, their faculties being sharp and their wisdom pellucid, if they hear the Buddha's preachment, shall be able to put reverent faith therein.” At this time Shariputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke forth a gatha, saying:

Oh, King of the Dharma, venerable one among the unexcelled,
Do but preach! I beg you to have no second thoughts.
In this assembly the incalculable multitude
Includes those who can put reverent faith in you.

So, “please speak.”

The Buddha again restrained Shariputra: “If I preach this matter, all the gods, men, and *asuras* in all the world shall be alarmed, and the arrogant *bhikshus*—*bhikshus* shall fall into a great

trap.” At that time the World-Honored One again speaks forth a gatha, saying:

Cease! Cease! No need to speak.
My dharma is subtle and hard to imagine.
Those of overweening pride,
If they hear it, shall surely neither revere
it nor believe therein.

At that time, Shariputra again addressed the Buddha, saying: “I do but beseech you to preach, I do but beseech you to preach! In the present assembly, the [beings] like of me, numbering a hundred thousand myriads of millions, have already in successive incarnations been converted by buddhas. Such men as these shall surely be able to revere and believe. Throughout the long night of time they shall be secure, deriving much advantage there from.”

At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke forth gathas, saying—

Ah. Peter, will you read this gatha?

Peter:⁵

Oh you Supremely Venerable among Two-Legged Beings,
I beg you to preach the prime dharma!
I am the Buddha's eldest son:
Do but deign to preach explicitly.
Incalculable multitudes in this assembly
Can revere and believe this dharma.
The Buddha has already, generation after generation,
Taught and converted many like these.
All of one mind, with palms joined,
Wish to listen to the Buddha's word.
We twelve hundred
And the others who seek to be buddhas
Beg that, for the sake of this multitude,
You will but deign to preach explicitly.
If they hear this dharma,
Then they shall evince great joy.

At that time the World-Honored One declared to Shariputra: “Since you have now thrice earnestly besought me, how can I not preach? Now listen with understanding and with careful thought, for I will state it to you explicitly.”

SR: Yeah. So far it's okay, isn't it [laughter]?

Students: [Brief statements unclear.]

SR: Hmm? Now five thousand disciples left.

When he was speaking these words, in the assembly there were *bhikshus*, *bhikshunis*, and *upasakas* to the number of five thousand who straightaway rose from their seats and, doing obeisance to Buddha, withdrew. For what reason? This group had roots of sins deep and grave and overweening pride, imagining themselves to have attained and to have borne witness to what they, in fact, had not. Having such faults as these, therefore they did not stay. The World-Honored One, in silence, did not restrain them.

This is a famous parable. Buddha did not restrain them. This is one point. And why they didn't stay was another point. This is something which we should think about.

These words are *intoku-intoku ichijo-ichijo*—in Chinese, eight characters. Which—“to think he attained which he really didn't, to think he is enlightened when he is not really.” That is one point.

And after they left, he started to talk about the final truth. This—to think he has attained something which he hasn't—this is a very important warning to Zen students especially. So that is why we remember these [laughs] words. So the opposite will be beginner's mind—to have beginner's mind always. This is very important—especially for Zen students. [Laughs.]

If you have no such danger, you are lucky [laughs], or you are not lucky [laughs]? If you are very smart, you will have this kind of danger. But for most people, this is not so dangerous, maybe. But the final teaching is not something to understand just by your mind. The final teaching which is expressed by vivid action [?] and by actual works [?]. Living world—not dead state [?]. If you have no intention to express your experience, sometimes you are expressing your wisdom. I think this is a very meaningful part [point?].

Now, do you have some questions? Hai.

[The poor sound quality of the rest of the lecture makes accurate transcription impossible. (The batteries in the original recorder appear to have faded.) At this point in the tape, Suzuki has finished his lecture, and the question-and-answer session is about to begin.]

¹ Suzuki gives these names in their Japanese form.

² Page 22 of their manuscript photocopy, not of the published edition.

³ Peter reads the rest of the gathas in this section. He is barely audible on the tape, but it is clear that he is reading the Hurvitz translation, and that the version he is reading is very slightly different than the 1976 published version. The gathas reproduced here are mainly from Hurvitz' 1976 published edition, revised to conform to Peter's reading when audible.

⁴ asaükyeya: (San.) incalculably large number.

⁵ Peter's off-mike reading is inaudible. Hurvitz' 1976 version is presented here, slightly edited for consistency.

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (10/24/01). Lightly edited for readability by Peter Ford and David Chadwick (8/1/2020).