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Feb., 1968, Lotus Sutra #4

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(first half of transcription checked, edited by Brian F.)

"Now, young men of good family, long before the time of that Tathagata Kandrasuryapradipa, the Arhat, perfectly enlightened one, there had appeared a Tathagata, perfectly enlightened one, likewise called Kandrasuryapradipa, after whom, O Ajita, there were twenty thousand Tathagatas, perfectly enlightened, all of them bearing the name of Kandrasuryapradipa, of the same lineage and family name, to wit, of Bharadvaga. All those twenty thousand Tathagatas, O Ajita, from the first to the last, showed the law, revealed the course which is holy at its commencement, holy in its middle, holy at the end."

This teaching wasn't new. Even before Buddha started to tell the *Lotus Sutra*, Kandrasuryapradipa appeared and told the same teaching. And one after another, Kandrasuryapradipa Buddhas appeared in the same name and left the same teaching. That is what Manjusri saw, actually, in his previous life. This is your homework. What does it mean? You may wonder if this is just a fairy tale or if it means something. This is, I think, good homework for you. And if you want to ask this on the final day of the training period, during question and answer, you can ask me. Be careful not to get a big slap, okay? What does it mean? One after another, Buddhas appeared in the same name, Kandrasuryapradipa, and told the same *Saddharma-Pundarika Sutra*.

"The aforesaid Lord Kandrasuryapradipa, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one, when a young prince and not yet having left home (to embrace the ascetic life), had eight sons, viz. the young princes Sumati, Anantamati, Ratnamati, Viseshamati, Vimatisamudghatin, Ghoshamati, and Dharmamati. These eight young princes, Ajita, sons to the Lord Kandrasuryapradipa, the Tathagata, had an immense fortune. Each of them was in possession of four great continents, where they exercised the kingly sway. When they saw that the Lord had left his home to become an ascetic, and heard that he had attained supreme, perfect enlightenment, they forsook all of them the pleasures of royalty and followed the example of the Lord by resigning the world; all of them strove to reach superior enlightenment and became preachers of the law. While constantly leading a holy life, those young princes planted roots of goodness under many thousands of Buddhas."

Kandrasuryapradipa Bodhisattva, when he was at home, before he became an ascetic, had eight sons. When they heard that their father attained enlightenment and was giving the supreme teaching, they followed their father's way. They also attained enlightenment and gave the supreme teaching.

The next part is exactly the same as page 6, second paragraph, except the name is

different. So it may not be necessary to read it, but:

"It was at that time, Ajita, that the Lord, Kandrasuryapradipa, the Tathagata, perfectly enlightened one, after expounding the Dharmaparyaya called 'the Great Exposition,' a text of great extension, serving to instruct Bodhisattvas and proper to all Buddhas, at the same moment and instant, at the same gathering of the classes of hearers, sat cross-legged on the same seat of the law, and entered upon the meditation termed 'the Station of the exposition of Infinity;' his body was motionless, and his mind had reached perfect tranquility. And as soon as the Lord had entered upon the meditation, there fell a great rain of divine flowers, Mandaravas and great Mandaravas, Manjushakas and great Manjushakas, covering the Lord and the four classes of hearers, while the whole Buddha-field shook in six ways; it moved, removed, trembled, trembled from one end to the other, tossed, tossed along.

"Then did those who were assembled and sitting together at that congregation, monks, nuns, male and female lay devotees, gods, Nagas, goblins, Gandharvas, demons, Garudas, Kinnaras, great serpents, men and beings not human, as well as governors of a region, rulers of armies and rulers of four continents, all of them with their followers gaze on the Lord in astonishment, in amazement, in ecstasy.

"And at that moment there issued a ray from within the circle of hair between the eyebrows of the Lord. It extended over eighteen hundred thousand Buddha-fields in the eastern quarter, so that all those Buddha-fields appeared wholly illuminated by its radiance, just like the Buddha-fields do now, O Ajita."

The same thing happened then as is happening now, O Ajita, he says.

"At that juncture, Ajita, there were twenty kotis of Bodhisattvas following the Lord. All hearers of the law in that assembly, on seeing how the world was illuminated by the lustre of that ray, felt astonishment, amazement, ecstasy, and curiosity.

"Now it happened, Ajita, that under the rule of the aforesaid Lord there was a Bodhisattva called Varaprabha, who had eight hundred pupils. It was to this Bodhisattva Varaprabha that the Lord, on rising from his meditation, revealed the Dharmaparyaya called 'the Lotus of the True Law.'"

Here at last appears the name of the Sutra.

"He spoke during fully sixty intermediate kalpas, always sitting on the same seat with the immovable body and tranquil mind. And the whole assembly continued sitting on the same seats, listening to the preaching of the Lord for sixty intermediate kalpas, there being not a single creature in that assembly who felt fatigue of body or mind."

A great difference from my lecture! What does it mean, by the way? Do you understand what it means?

"As the Lord Kandrasyapradipa, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one, during sixty intermediate kalpas had been expounding the Dharmaparyaya called 'the Lotus of the True Law', a text of great development, serving to instruct Bodhisattvas and proper to all Buddhas, he instantly announced his complete Nirvana to the world, including the gods, Maras and Brahmas, to all creatures, including ascetics, Brahmans, gods, men and demons, saying: Today, O monks, this very night, in the middle watch, will the Tathagata, by entering the element of absolute nirvana, become wholly extinct."

After Kandrasyapradipa gave out this *Lotus Sutra*, he announced his Nirvana. Before he took Nirvana, he appointed his successor.

"Thereupon, Ajita, the Lord Kandrasyapradipa, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one, predestinated the Bodhisattva called Srigarbha to supreme, perfect enlightenment, and then spoke thus to the whole assembly: O monks, this Bodhisattva Srigarbha here shall immediately after me attain supreme, perfect enlightenment, and become Vimalanetra, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one."

So he appointed Srigarbha Bodhisattva to be his successor, and said his name should be Vimalanetra. To assure someone's enlightenment in the future like this is called *juki* in Japanese. In the *Shobogenzo* there is a fascicle called *Juki*, where Dogen explains in his own way what *juki* is. He also gives his interpretation of this sutra in another chapter called *Turn the Lotus Sutra*. *Juki* in Sanskrit is *vyakarana*. *Vy* and *a* are prefixes, and *kar* means to divide. If there was a question and answer part of a scripture, this part was called *vyacarana*. Later it meant to give some title to a disciple, tell when he would attain enlightenment, or tell where he would be born after this life. Especially this kind of description is called *juki* or *vyakarana*. Here Buddha gave Srigarbha Bodhisattva the name of Vimalanetra and said he will attain enlightenment and will be his successor.

And here it says this sutra was continued by Kandrasyapradipa for sixty intermediate *kalpas* of time. An intermediate *kalpa* is a unit of time, actually. There are many ways of explaining how long one *kalpa* is. It is so long that no one knows. Buddhists think that in the past human beings lived to a limitless age. We didn't die at ninety or one hundred; we had limitless age. But we became busier and busier in this life, and our life became shorter and shorter, until the average life became ten years. That took one *kalpa*. So we don't know how long it is. Since human life was limitless, this is an almost limitless unit of time. And after our lifespan comes to ten years, it will increase little by little. We will be around. There will be no human nature when that happens to us. We will think more and improve our way of life. By this kind of effort, our lifespan will be extended more and more until it reaches eighty-thousand years. When it reaches eighty-thousand years, as we are human beings, we will become lazier and lazier, inventing airplanes and mechanical things. And we will lose our life, our lifespan will become shorter and shorter until it comes to ten years. This is also one *kalpa*. The first *kalpa* of this cycle is the time it takes our life spans to change from limitless to ten years. We will repeat the

same increasing and decreasing of our lifespan over and over, eighteen times.

The last *kalpa* will be when everything will go, including human life. *Juko* is the name for the *kalpas* when everything existed pretty firmly, without losing its form, and *eko* [*samvarta-kalpa*] means the time at the end of *juko* when everything will disintegrate. Integrated age and disintegrated age. An integrated age is twenty *kalpas* long, and one *kalpa* is our lifespan going up and down, from ten to eighty-thousand.

Student 1: Will there still be Buddha after the disintegration?

S.R.: There is a koan which is exactly the same as your question.

Student 1: What is the answer to the koan?

S.R.: That is also a koan, so this is your homework. Interesting question.

Student 2: I didn't understand. I thought you just said that they can go eighteen times up and down from ten to eighty thousand, which is eighteen *kalpas*, and then there's disintegration and the whole thing's over. So how can they talk about twenty intermediate *kalpas* or other numbers of *kalpas* they give as examples which go way over eighteen?

S.R.: It is explained as just eighteen *kalpas*. A *kalpa* is already innumerable, but even so it means some length of time. Eighteen or twenty of those lengths of time is a *juko*, or integrated *kalpa*.

Student 3: The footnote [see below] said that a *kalpa* was half an hour. [There was lots of laughter during this section.]

S.R.: No, no.

Student 3: In the book it says so.

S.R.: It doesn't say so. It is....

Student 3: It says in Sanskrit a lot of intermediate *kalpas*, and it says in the footnote that it's an afternoon.

S.R.: No, I don't think so. Where is it?

Student 4: It's just the translator. He's not a Buddhist.

S.R.: No, no, no, he is.... I don't know where it is, but....

Student 5: I think there was a piece of symbolism, on....

[Footnote #5 on p. xxvi of Kern's *Saddharma-Pundarika* says: "One intermediate *kalpa* is, in the system, equal to 8 *yugas*. As 4 *yugas* number 4,320,000 years, it follows that the pause (of 50 intermediate *kalpas*) lasted 432 millions of years. Esoterically, *kalpa* has certainly denoted a short interval of time, but even if we take the 'intermediate *kalpa*' to mean, in reality a lapse of time equal to a few hours the pause would not refer to an historical event.]

S.R.: And this is just one of many ideas of *kalpas*. Did I explain another way of understanding one *kalpa*? There is a big rock, like Tassajara. And every five hundred years, maybe, or more, an angel comes to the rock, and she makes her sleeve rub off some stone. When that stone has vanished from the angel's sleeve rubbing it, it is one *kalpa*. So there are many ways of explaining what one *kalpa* is.

But here it is specifically an intermediate *kalpa*, so I must follow this idea of intermediate. Maybe what you are saying is immediately, and they repeat the same thing. So that is the explanation to it [the half hour *kalpa*?]. I think I will come to that

sentence or clause.

"Thereafter, Ajita, that very night, at that very watch, the Lord Kandrasuryapradipa, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one, became extinct by entering the element of absolute Nirvana. And the aforementioned Dharmaparyaya, termed 'the Lotus of the True Law,' was kept in memory by the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Varaprabha; during eighty intermediate kalpas did the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Varaprabha keep and reveal the commandment of the Lord who had entered Nirvana. Now it so happened, Ajita, that the eight sons of the Lord Kandrasuryapradipa, the Mati and the rest, were pupils to that very Bodhisattva Varaprabha. They were by him made ripe for supreme, perfect enlightenment, and in after times they saw and worshipped many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of Buddhas, all of whom had attained supreme, perfect enlightenment, the last of them being Dipankara, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one."

Here appears Dipankara. Usually, as you know, Dipankara Bodhisattva is the oldest of all the Bodhisattvas. But according to this sutra, even before Dipankara there were so many Bodhisattvas, like Srigarba, whose enlightened name is Vimalanetra, or like Varaprabha, or Kandrasuryapradipa. And what does this mean? Actually, there is no first bodhisattva. Actually, everyone is a bodhisattva. This sutra suggests this kind of teaching.

"Amongst those eight pupils there was one Bodhisattva who attached an extreme value to gain, honour and praise, and was fond of glory, but all the words and letters one taught him faded (from his memory), did not stick. So he got the appellation of Yasaskama. (Desirous of Glory) He had propitiated many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of Buddhas by that root of goodness," -- Even so, he served many buddhas, and planted good roots. -- "...and afterwards esteemed, honoured, respected, revered, venerated, worshipped them. Perhaps, Ajita, thou feelest some doubt, perplexity or misgiving that in those days, at that time, there was another Bodhisattva Mahasattva Varaprabha, preacher of the law. But do not think so. Why? Because it is myself who in those days, at that time, was the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Varaprabha, preacher of the law; and that Bodhisattva named Yasaskama, the lazy one, it is thyself, Ajita,..."

Maitreya was once lazy, you know. He was the bodhisattva named 'Desirous of Glory' or Yasaskama.

"...it is thyself, Ajita, who in those days, at that time, wert the Bodhisattva named Yasaskama, the lazy one. And so, Ajita, having once seen a similar foretoken of the Lord, I infer from a similar ray being emitted just now, that the Lord is about to expound the Dharmaparyaya called 'the Lotus of the True Law.'

"And on that occasion, in order to treat the subject more copiously, Manjusri, the prince royal, uttered the following stanzas:"

Manjusri said the same thing again, except in the form of stanzas or *gathas*. There is some difference between the prose part and the *gatha* part, but they are nearly the same, and there will be no need to repeat it. But I want you to read it. This is also your homework.

I want to point out something important. Several people don't know. In the prose section, on page 22, the last paragraph, it says, "Amongst those eight pupils there was one Bodhisattva who attached an extreme value to gain, honour and praise,..." This part needs some explanation. The Sanskrit word translated as "praise" here is *jnati* [*jnatra?*]. *Jnati* means many things. Sometimes it means to try to be protected by one's kinsmen or family. For instance, a wife and husband are usually very intimate, so they help each other. That is alright, but then sometimes he or she cannot be fair to everyone, and this is not so good. In this way many things will happen.

Another interpretation of this word is some talent, or sagacity, or studiousness, or witty-mindedness, or cleverness with the hands, or cleverness in doing things. This also may create some trouble for the community or society. In *gatha* 90 the same thing is repeated, but here it is translated differently: "Among the pupils of Varaprabha, the son of Jina, at the time of his teaching the law, was one slothful, covetous, greedy of gain and cleverness." Here *jnati* is translated as "cleverness", and in the prose part the same word is translated as "praise". If the original word is *jnati*, it means "getting protection from his kinsmen". The Sanskrit for "cleverness" should be another word.

Anyway, both are very subtle points about which we should be very careful. There are similar instances in many scriptures. In the *Dharmapada* it says that, for the fool, cleverness will invite loss, and it will destroy his happiness, or merit, or it will cut off his head. In the explanation in Pali there is a parable. There was a man who was good at hitting something with a stone, and because of this art, he won a big prize. Someone was watching and studied how to do this, but then he was killed by hitting something with a stone. In another sutra it says, "If a clever heretic studies, he will lose his life, but a clever Buddhist will gain from his cleverness." This kind of story is found all over.

In the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen Zenji says that whether one is clever or dull doesn't matter. If we practice zazen, we will get the same attainment. This is Buddhist understanding, or a Buddhist idea, of human character. This point should always be remembered, especially by the intelligent ones. When the clever ones do not help others, the Sangha will be destroyed. Only when clever and talented people help others will the Sangha last long. This is our teaching.

Another difference between the prose and *gatha* parts is that in *gatha* #87 it says, "*He had eight hundred pupils, who all of them were by him brought to full development. They saw many kotis of Buddhas, great sages, whom they worshipped.*" In the prose part it says "*eight disciples who were the sons of Kandrasyurapradipa.*" It says eight sons, or eight pupils, instead of eight hundred pupils. Scholars say "eight hundred pupils" may be right, and when the prose part was added, it was put in a more interesting way, but no one knows.

Student: Wasn't there something you read in the prose part about a Bodhisattva who had eight hundred pupils?

S.R.: No. You noticed that from a different part: *"Now it happened, Ajita, that under the rule of the aforesaid Lord there was a Bodhisattva called Varaprabha, who had eight hundred pupils. It was to this Bodhisattva Varaprabha that the Lord, on rising from his meditation, revealed the Dharmaparyaya called 'the Lotus of the True Law.'" What I mean is this part: "The aforesaid Lord Kandrasuryapradipa, the Tathagata, the perfectly enlightened one, when a young prince and not yet having left home, had eight sons, namely, (so and so)..." This part corresponds to gatha #87. The Chinese rendering translated by Kumaragiva says, "He had eight pupils," meaning Vimalanetra, not Kandrasuryapradipa. Those eight sons became this bodhisattva's disciples. Do you understand?*

Student: Roshi, what is the meaning of their leaving home just because their father became a monk?

S.R.: In India, after their householder's life was finished, they went in the *aranya* or forest and practiced the religious way. That was their custom. Everyone did so.

Student: The sons go too, if their father goes?

S.R.: That was an exception, maybe, like Buddha. When Buddha attained enlightenment, his son and his father and his mother-in-law and aunt, who raised him, joined his order.

Student: I thought it should have a deep meaning. [?]

S.R.: This is figurative, and it is because he was so great; he was an exception. But usually even laymen left their homes and practiced their way in the forest with many people who had finished their household life. That was their custom. They are very religious people.

I am supposed to finish this lecture by tonight, but maybe there are too many things to say. This is not such an easy study, because it is very complicated. Many scholars are still continuously studying it, and, day by day, the meaning of this sutra becomes clearer and clearer. So it is rather difficult to make it absolutely clear. What I said won't be absolutely right; there must be many mistakes, naturally.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 68-02-00-D
