

Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi
LOTUS SŪTRA, LECTURE NO. 6
[Third Lotus Sūtra Series]
Thursday Evening, October 30, 1969
Zen Mountain Center

The print¹—print you have got there is trans- [partial word]—mostly translated from Kumārajīva's translation.² Kumārajīva is Chinese famous translator, and his translation is famous for his—for his beautiful words. And easy to understand. That is why most people—most Chinese people liked his translation, and at the same time *Lotus Sūtra* became very popular sūtra. It is not exactly literal translation, but because he was a great scholar, his translation is very correct and very easy to understand. And as a literature, it is also good.

Kumārajīva's father [Kumārayāna] was an Indian, and his father came to—I don't know what you call—Kashmir—Kashmir? Do you understand [laughs]?

Student: Yes.

Suzuki-rōshi: Kashmir. Kiji—Kiji, in Chinese. Kiji-koku. And he—he [Kumārayāna] got married with emperor's sister [Jīvaka].

And Kumārajīva was—when he was quite young he started study of Buddhism. When he was seven, he already read scriptures. And when he was nine years old, he started study of Mahāyāna already. At first, under some teacher he studied Hīnayāna mostly. And—and when he was twelve he went to some other neighboring country and studied more about teaching of *Prajñāpāramitā* group [of sūtras]. And when he came back to his country—his father's country, his former teacher became his disciple [laughs]. He was so, you know, smart fellow. And the teacher said, "You are my Mahāyāna teacher, and you are—and I am your teacher of Hīnayāna teaching," 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 weaker, 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 Mahāyāna teaching.

Chinese people—his n- [partial word]—scholarly na- [partial word]—his name was known to even China. So Chinese general sent his men to

¹ A manuscript version of the translation by Leon Hurvitz (1976).

² Kumārajīva (344–413) translated the *Lotus Sūtra* from Sanskrit to Chinese in 406.

his country—to Kumārajīva's country to get him, you know. And they were defeated by Chinese, and he was captured—captivated. And before he arrived [in] capital city of China, Chōan [Ch'ang-an],³ his—**Lō Kō** [Lu Kuang] was the general—Lō Kō was—Lō Kō had that—his—his king—maybe king—his king was, you know, killed.⁴ So he stayed there—Lō Kō stayed [in] northern part of China [holding Kumārajīva in captivity].

And soon he—they went back—they went to Chōan, the capital city of China, and started translation—various translation. And he—he had—I don't know how true it is, but he had 8,000 disciples. At least he has ten famous scholars as his disciple, among them Sōjō,⁵ you know. Sōjō is very famous, especially for his, you know, Zen-like teaching. So we find various technical—Zen technical terms in Sōjō's book. Anyway, Kumārajīva is a big translator. And we call his translation or—and—before Kumārajīva we call "old" translation, and after Genjō⁶ we call "new" translation.

As you know, the—this sūtra—the original—original text of Kumārajīva's translation is not—no one knows exactly what kind of a text book. We have ma- [partial word]—so far we have many Sanskrit text book: Nepal, Tibet, and northern part of Asia. And some of—some of them in Russia, you know—the famous Sanskrit original text in Russia—Petrograd—Petrograd? The—and some of them in England. And some copies are, maybe, in Germany, and France, or Dutch—Holland. We have many translations—texts, but we don't know which original text Kumārajīva used.

But anyway, the copy [of Hurvitz's edition] is mostly translated from Kumārajīva's translation, which is very familiar to Japanese people. Most Japanese—most Japanese people use this—Kumārajīva's translation. The rest of the tr- [partial word]—there are—100 years before [after] Kumārajīva, Dharmagupta⁷ translated this scripture, but

³ Suzuki-rōshi gives these names in their Japanese form.

⁴ Fu Chien, warlord/emperor of the Chin Dynasty, was overthrown before General Lu Kuang could return to Ch'ang-an with Kumārajīva. Lu Kuang then established an independent state at Ku-tsang (Jap. Kozō), holding Kumārajīva as a virtual hostage for 16 years. Kumārajīva was rescued by the second ruler of the new dynasty of Ch'ang-an, Yao Hsing (Jap. Yō Kō), in 402.

⁵ Sengzhao (Jap. Sōjō): c. 374–414. Chinese monk born in Chang-an. He was a student of Kumārajīva and was on his staff of translators. He wrote *Zhaolun* (*Chao-lun*, *Jōron*), a collection of essays that is said to have inspired Shitou Xiqian (Sekitō Kisen) to write the *Sandōkai*.

⁶ Hsüan-chuang (WG) (Jap. Genjō): 602–664. Chinese monk of the Tang dynasty who came back from India with 657 Buddhist texts. He translated many of them from Sanskrit to Chinese.

⁷ Dharmagupta (Chin. Da-mo-ji-duo): d. 617. Buddhist monk from southern Indian who came to China in 590. He translated many Mahāyāna sūtras and *shāstras* (instructional commentaries on sūtras). Dharmagupta

we don't use it so much.

So—and we have several, maybe copies, but the copies are not perfect because we didn't use it for a long, long time.

Now Shāriputra asking Buddha, you know, to—because Buddha wouldn't talk about his final teaching, so Shāriputra [is] now asking [Buddha] many times to speak about it. Page 22.⁸ I think we finished this *gāthā*, didn't we?

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

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

[Page] 22.

Student: Twenty-two?

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. 22.

Student: [Unclear brief question.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm?

Student: [Unclear brief response.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Oh. Excuse me [laughs]. The *gāthās* we finished is:

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

Did you find out? I think we have—we have finished this—those *gāthās*, didn't we?

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

and Jñānagupta translated their version of the *Lotus Sūtra* after Kumārajīva. Suzuki-rōshi's point remains that although Dharmagupta and Jñānagupta's translation was later, more complete, and more literal than Kumārajīva's, the latter proved to be more popular.

⁸ Page 22 of their manuscript photocopy, not of the published edition.

Suzuki-rōshi: You—oh. You don't think so? Then—this is repetition of, maybe, Page—by your book—Page 4.

Now Shāriputra [is] asking Buddha to give them speech about the final truth. Yeah, I—I think I did it. I—I did—I briefly, you know, explained important words like "platform of the path," you know.⁹

Student: What does that mean again?

Suzuki-rōshi: "Platform of the path" means where Buddha attained enlightenment. So strictly speaking it is under Bodhi tree. But here, [it means] where Buddha is—platform of the path. The—later, you know, this kind of building is *dōjō* in Japanese, *dōjō*; in Sanskrit *bodhi-maḍōā*. I—I think I explained it.¹⁰ *Bodhi-maḍōā*? And sometime it is supposed—people say—scholars say this is translation of *bodhi-maḍōāla*. But it looks like *bodhi-maḍōā* is correct. I don't know about [?].

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

Bodhi-maḍōā is where the *bodhi* is—the place like—like some place to practice. *Maḍōā*.

Peter [Schneider], will you read it? I want to—it is rather—you may be difficult to understand me if I read it—this *gāthā*:

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

Peter: ¹¹

⁹ The confusion seems to be that these *gāthās* are very similar to the preceding ones discussed in SR-69-10-25 (p. 5). Many phrases are repeated, such as "platform of the path." So it is likely that the *gāthās* in the present lecture had not, in fact, already been discussed in this series of lectures.

¹⁰ SR-69-10-25, pp. 5–6.

¹¹ Peter reads the rest of the *gāthās* 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 *gāthas* reproduced here are mainly from Hurvitz' 1976 published edition, revised to conform to Peter's reading when audible.

After a life-long time preaches this dharma,
 Himself saying that he has gained such
 Strengths, fearlessness, *samādhis*,
Dhyāna-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 *nirvāna*
 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*, *bhikshunīs*,
 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.

Suzuki-rōshi: Yeah. All the disciples and peoples and animate beings, you know, wanted to—something from him because they have

doubt—especially Shāriputra, you know, had a great doubt. After waiting for him for long, long time—after receiving—after attaining arhatship, which is the last stage to attain for—for them, you know, if—Buddha said there is more important things to say which is difficult to understand. Only Buddha and bodhisattva could understand it, but rest of the people—voice-hearers and *pratkekabuddhas* will not understand it. So, you know, there is no wonder. At least they—they were very curious about his last teaching—Buddha's last teaching—teaching which has in Buddha's head—mind. So in this way they are asking Buddha to talk about it.

And there is several words—important words, which I have to explain. The four—one, two, three, four—four line: "strengths." "Strengths" means, you know—we—here we count five strengths. Sometime we say ten strengths, you know—ten or—as we chant, you know—to attain ten power. This is five or ten. Sometime we count ten, sometime we count five.

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

- [1] no outflow, you know—no outflow—power of no outflow;
- [2] power of, you know, controlling birth and death: he can have a choice in birth and death—he has a choice in birth and death;
- [3] and he has—he knows his former life, and he knows everything like a great—like a great teacher of geography, he knows everywhere that is;
- [4] and he knows the result of various practice;
- [5] he know—he has precise and deep understanding of teaching;
- [6] and he know how to help people;
- [7] and he knows how to calm down his mind;
- [8] and way to liberation;
- [9] and how to keep precepts—

He has those power.

- [10] he has power to change his karma—he can—he is possible to change his own karma.¹²

Those are ten powers. And next one is fearlessness.¹³ Fearlessness mostly means when he give statement, when he talk about dharma, he has no—he—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: no danger of persecution, or no danger of enemy—from

¹² It is not clear to the transcriber if Suzuki-rōshi intended this as the tenth power, or if No. 3 is two distinct powers.

¹³ Next in the sequence of Line 4: "Strengths, fearlessness, *samādhis*."

enemy. Most, you know, fearlessness is mostly means fearlessness in his spirit to give his talk. Of course, some other fearlessness is included, but mostly when we say "fearlessness," fearlessness is something like this.

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

And the last—one, two, three—third line from the last: "the saint wheel-turning kings."¹⁴ You know, king turns, you know, wheel of—wheel of power, wheel of politics. But saint turns, you know, wheel of dharma. And those kings are mostly supposed to protect right teaching.

And next:

At that time, the Buddha proclaimed to Shāriputra: "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—not only "alarmed" [laughs], they may, you know—they may [1-2 words] to die [laughs].

Shāriputra 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—assembly numberless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of *asaikhyeyas*¹⁵ of living beings, having seen Buddha—buddhas, their faculties being sharp and their wisdom pellucid,¹⁶ if they hear the Buddha's preach—Buddha's preachment shall be able to put reverent faith therein." At this time Shāriputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke forth a *gāthā*, 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."

¹⁴ The 1976 edition reads, "wheel-turning sage kings."

¹⁵ *asaikhyeya*: (San.) incalculably large number.

¹⁶ Transparently clear.

The Buddha again restrained Shāriputra: "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 speak forth a *gāthā*, 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 [revere]
it nor believe therein.

At that time, Shāriputra again addressed the Buddha, saying: "I do but beseech you to speak—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 incarnation has been over—has been covered by buddhas—converted by buddhas, excuse me.

[Repeats.]

—has already in successive incarnations been converted by buddhas. Such man as these shall surely be able to revere and believe. Throughout the long night of time they shall be secure, delivering [deriving] much advantage therefrom."

At that time, Shāriputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke forth *gāthās*, saying—

Ah. Peter, will you read it—this *gāthā*?

Peter:¹⁷

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

¹⁷ Peter's off-mike reading is inaudible. Hurvitz' 1976 version is presented here, slightly edited for consistency.

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 Shāriputra:
"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."

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

Students: [Brief statements unclear.]

Suzuki-rōshi: Hmm? Now five thousand of, you know, disciples left.

When he was speaking these words, in the assembly there were *bhikshus* and—*bhikshus*, *bhikshunis*, *upāsakas*, and—*upāsakas*—*upāsakas* to the number of five thousand who straight—who st- [partial word]—who straightaway rose from their seats and, doing obeisance to Buddha, withdraw—withdrew. For what reason? This group had roots of sins deep and grave and—deep and grave and overweening pride, imagining themselves to have attained and to have borne—to have borne witness to what they—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 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].

You know, this word is *intoku-intoku ichijō-ichijō*¹⁸—eight—in Chinese, eight characters. Which—"to think he attained which he really didn't"—"to think he is enlightened when he is not really—did not." That is one point.

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

If you have no such danger, you are lucky [laughs], or you are not lucky [laughs]—which? If you are very smart, you will have this kind

¹⁸ Phonetic guess only. Spelling is not verified.

of danger. But mostly—for most people, this is not so dangerous, maybe. But final teaching is not something to understand by—just by, you know, 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, sometime you are expressing your wisdom. I think this is very meaningful part [point?].

Now, do you have some question? *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-rōshi has finished his lecture, and the question-and-answer session is about to begin.]

Source: City Center original tape. Verbatim transcript by Bill Redican (10/24/01).