

The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period after the Thus Come One's Passing

Nichiren, the shramana of Japan

Part Four

The Amida Sutra states that Buddhas covered a major world system with their broad long tongues, but lacks the truth that such a gesture would substantiate. The Wisdom Sutra tells how the Buddha's tongue covered a major world system and radiated infinite light when he expounded the *prajñā* (wisdom). Yet this certainly cannot be a proof [comparable to that of the "Supernatural Powers" chapter]. Because these two sutras include provisional teachings, they obscure the Buddha's enlightenment in the remote past.

After the Buddha displayed his ten supernatural powers, he entrusted the five characters of the Mystic Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. As the sutra states: "At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices and the others in the great assembly of bodhisattvas, saying: 'The supernatural powers of the Buddhas, as you have seen, are immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable. If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were to employ these supernatural powers for immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of *asamkhya kalpas* to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.'" T'ien-t'ai says, "The passage that follows the words 'At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices' constitutes the third stage of the chapter, the transfer of the essence of the Lotus Sutra." Dengyō states: "The 'Supernatural Powers' chapter says, 'To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One . . . are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.' From this it is clear that all the doctrines, all the freely exercised supernatural powers, the storehouse of all the secret essentials, and all the most profound matters possessed by the Buddha as the fruit of his enlightenment—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in the Lotus Sutra." Demonstrating ten supernatural powers, the Buddha transferred the five characters of MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo to the four great bodhisattvas: Superior Practices, Firmly Established Practices, Pure Practices, and Boundless Practices.

[Miao-lo states that] the first five of the ten supernatural powers are meant for those living in Shakyamuni's lifetime, and the last five for the generations after his passing.⁸¹ But in a deeper sense all are intended for future generations. The Buddha confirmed this later in the same chapter, "Because after the Buddha has passed into extinction there will be those

[Type text]

Nichiren writing

[Type text]

who can uphold this sutra, the Buddhas are all delighted and manifest immeasurable supernatural powers.”

The following “Entrustment” chapter states: “At that time Shakyamuni Buddha rose from his Dharma seat and, manifesting his great supernatural powers, with his right hand patted the heads of the immeasurable bodhisattvas mahāsattva and spoke these words: ‘Now I entrust it [the Lotus Sutra] to you.’” The Buddha first transferred the Lotus Sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and then to the bodhisattvas taught by the Buddha in his transient status, the bodhisattvas of other worlds, Brahmā, Shakra, the four heavenly kings, and others. Then “Shakyamuni Buddha caused the Buddhas who were emanations of his body and had come from the ten directions to return each one to his original land, saying, ‘The tower of Many Treasures Buddha may also return to its former position.’” After the Bodhisattvas of the Earth had departed, from the “Medicine King” chapter through the Nirvana Sutra, the Buddha transferred the sutra again to the people taught by him in his transient status and to the bodhisattvas from other worlds. This was gleaming in order to entrust.

Question: Did the Bodhisattvas of the Earth then appear in Jambudvīpa during the two millennia of the Former and Middle Days of the Law to spread the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: No, they did not.

Question: Your answer comes as a surprise. If the Lotus Sutra, especially the essential teaching, is intended primarily for those people living after the Buddha’s passing, and the Buddha entrusted the sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, why did they not appear during the Former and Middle Days of the Law to spread the sutra?

Answer: I will not say.

Question: I am asking you again, what was the reason?

Answer: I will not disclose it.

Question: Once more, what was the reason?

Answer: If I disclose it, all will refuse to believe and, what is worse, will slander the sutra, as in the Latter Day of the Law of Awesome Sound King Buddha. Even my own disciples would slander the sutra if I tried to explain, so I can only keep silent.

Question: Nonetheless, I urge you to answer. Unless you do, you will be guilty of the fault of greed and stinginess.

Answer: Then since I have no choice, I will try to give you a brief explanation. The “Teacher of the Law” chapter states, “[Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world], how much more will this be so after his passing?” The “Life Span” chapter states, “I will leave this good medicine here.” The “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter speaks of “the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law.” The

[Type text]

Nichiren writing

[Type text]

“Medicine King” chapter says, “In the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa.” A passage in the Nirvana Sutra reads, “Suppose that a couple has seven children, one of whom falls ill. Though the parents love all their children equally, they worry most about the sick child.”

With the clear mirror of these passages one can guess the Buddha’s intent. They show that the Buddha did not appear for the sake of those present during the eight years when he revealed the Lotus Sutra at Eagle Peak, but for those who would come after him in the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law. His advent was specifically for people like us, those living in the beginning of the Latter Day, not for those who lived in the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days. “The sick child” mentioned in the Nirvana Sutra represents those who slander the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha’s passing. The Buddha will now “leave this good medicine here” especially for those who, the sutra says, though the medicine is of excellent color and fragrance, do not perceive it as good.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth did not appear in the Former or Middle Day of the Law for good reason.

Hinayana and provisional Mahayana were spread in the first millennium, the Former Day of the Law, because the time was not ripe [for the Lotus Sutra] and the people were not ready to embrace it. The four ranks of bodhisattvas in the Former Day led those who had received the seeds of Buddhahood by hearing the Lotus Sutra during Shakyamuni’s lifetime to harvest the fruit of Buddhahood through Hinayana and provisional Mahayana teachings. [If the Bodhisattvas of the Earth had spread the Lotus Sutra at that time instead of later,] the people would have reviled it and thereby destroyed all the merit they had accumulated by maturing their seeds. Therefore, the bodhisattvas did not appear then. People of the Former Day are like those in the Buddha’s lifetime who gradually matured and attained enlightenment through the first four flavors of teachings. In the middle and latter part of the Middle Day of the Law, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds was reborn as Nan-yüeh, and Bodhisattva Medicine King as T’ien-t’ai. Preaching the text of the theoretical teaching and employing the meaning of the essential teaching to supplement it, they fully revealed the doctrine of the hundred worlds and thousand factors and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. They expounded it in principle, but they did not establish the actual practice of the five characters of NaMu-MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo or establish the object of devotion of the essential teaching. The time was not right for propagation, although even then some people had the proper capacity.

Now, in the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, Hinayana adherents attack the doctrines of Mahayana, and provisional Mahayana believers denounce the true Mahayana teaching. East is mistaken for west, and heaven and earth are turned upside down. The four ranks of bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching are gone, and all the heavenly gods have deserted the country and no longer lend it protection. At this time the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear in the world for the first time solely to bring the medicine of the five characters of MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo to the ignorant people of the Latter

[Type text]

Nichiren writing

[Type text]

Day. This is what is meant by the words, “Even if one reviles the correct teaching and falls into the evil paths, one can create causes for the eventual attainment of benefit.”

You who are my disciples, take this to heart! The countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth were the disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, from the time he first set his mind on and attained enlightenment in the remote past. But they did not come to his place of enlightenment in India, nor did they come to the grove of sal trees when he entered nirvana. They were un-Strong mindful to him. They also failed to appear when the Buddha preached the first fourteen chapters, or the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and they left the assembly when he preached the last six chapters of the essential teaching. They only attended the Buddha during the first eight chapters of the essential teaching. Since these noble bodhisattvas received [the five characters of MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo] and made a solemn oath to Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, is it possible that they will not appear now at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law? Know this: in the time for the practice of shakubuku the four bodhisattvas appear as worthy rulers who rebuke and convert ignorant rulers, and in the time for the practice of shōju they appear as priests to embrace and spread the correct teaching.

Question: Does the Buddha predict their coming in the Latter Day of the Law?

Answer: The Buddha states, “In the last five-hundred-year period the Lotus Sutra will spread abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa.” The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai predicts, “In the last five-hundred-year period, the mystic way will spread and benefit humankind far into the future.” Miao-lo predicts, “The beginning of the Latter Day of the Law will not be without inconspicuous benefit.” The Great Teacher Dengyō says, “The Former and Middle Days are almost over, and the Latter Day is near at hand.” The latter part of this quotation means that his was not the right time for propagation. The Great Teacher Dengyō, who was living in Japan, foresaw the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, saying: “Speaking of the age, [the propagation of the true teaching will begin] in the age when the Middle Day of the Law ends and the Latter Day opens. Regarding the land, it will begin in a land to the east of T’ang and to the west of Katsu. As for the people, it will spread among people stained by the five impurities who live in a time of conflict. The sutra says, ‘Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?’ There is good reason for this statement.”

“A time of conflict” in this commentary refers to the two disasters of internal strife and invasion from the western sea that are occurring at present. At this time the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear and establish in this country the object of devotion, foremost in Jambudvīpa, that depicts Shakyamuni Buddha of the essential teaching attending [the eternal Buddha]. This object of devotion has never appeared in India or China. Its time had not come when Prince Jōgū in Japan constructed Shitennō-ji temple, so he could only make a statue of Amida, a Buddha of another world, the object of devotion. When Emperor Shōmu erected Tōdai-ji temple, he enshrined a statue of the

[Type text]

Nichiren writing

[Type text]

Buddha of the Flower Garland Sutra [Vairochana Buddha] as the object of devotion, but could not manifest the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Dengyō almost revealed the truth of the sutra. The time had not yet come, however, and so he built a statue of the Buddha of the Eastern Region,⁹¹ but did not represent the four bodhisattvas of the essential teaching in any form. Ultimately, this was because the revelation of the true object of devotion had been entrusted only to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. They have been waiting for the right time to emerge from beneath the earth and carry out the Buddha's decree. They did not appear in the Former or Middle Day. But if they do not appear in the Latter Day of the Law, their vows would be outright lies, and the prophecies of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions would be no more than froth on the waters.

We have recently experienced great earthquakes, huge comets, and other calamities such as never occurred in the Former or Middle Day. These signs could not be caused by garuda birds, asura demons, or dragon deities. They must foretell the appearance of the four great bodhisattvas. T'ien-t'ai states, "By observing the fury of the rain, we can tell the greatness of the dragon that caused it, and by observing the flourishing of the lotus flowers, we can tell the depth of the pond they grow in." Miao-lo says, "Wise men can perceive the cause of things, as snakes know the way of snakes." When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs.

Showing profound compassion for those unable to comprehend the gem of the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the Buddha wrapped it within the five characters [of MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo], with which he then adorned the necks of the ignorant people of the latter age. The four great bodhisattvas will protect anyone who embraces the five characters as Strong mindfully as T'ai-kung Wang and the Duke of Chou supported King Wen, and as devotedly as the Four White-Haired Elders served Emperor Hui.

Written by Nichiren.

The twenty-fifth day of the fourth month in the tenth year of Bun'ei (1273), with the cyclical sign *mizunoto-tori*