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## **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 Three

The Buddha of the essential teaching denies that he first attained Buddhahood in this life. The difference between the theoretical and the essential teachings is as great as that between heaven and earth. The latter reveals the eternity of the Ten Worlds and, further, the realm of the environment. The theoretical teaching, the first four flavors of teachings, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, and the Nirvana Sutra were all preached according to the capacities of the people. All these teachings that fall into the three categories of preaching are therefore easy to believe and easy to understand. In contrast, the essential teaching, which transcends the three categories, is difficult to believe and difficult to understand, for it directly reveals the Buddha's own enlightenment. Nevertheless, even the difference between the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life of the theoretical teaching and that of the essential teaching pales into insignificance [before the ultimate teaching contained in the depths of the "Life Span" chapter].

The essential teaching [contained in the depths of the "Life Span" chapter] also has its preparation, revelation, and transmission. Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra in the past as the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence. When he appeared in his present life [in India], he also preached teachings for some fifty years, from the Flower Garland Sutra to the fourteen chapters of the theoretical teaching [of the Lotus Sutra] and the Nirvana Sutra. All these sutras as well as the countless sutras of the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences are preparation for revealing [the heart of] the "Life Span" chapter.

All the teachings other than the "one chapter and two halves" are Hinayana in nature and erroneous. Not only do they fail to lead to enlightenment, but also they lack the truth. Those who believe in them are meager in virtue, heavy with defilement, ignorant, poor, solitary, and like birds and beasts [that do not know their own parents].

The first half of the Lotus Sutra and the sutras preceding it contain the perfect teaching, but even this is not the cause for Buddhahood. Much less so are teachings of a Hinayana nature, such as the Mahāvairochana Sutra. It is out of the question to think that the scholars and teachers of the seven schools, including the Flower Garland and the True Word, preach the cause for attaining Buddhahood.

These inferior sutras seem to fall within the Tripitaka, connecting, and specific teachings, but actually they are no better than the lowest two. They may maintain that their doctrines are incomparably profound, but nowhere do they clarify when the Buddha planted the seeds of Buddhahood, or when he nurtured and reaped them. These doctrines are no

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different from Hinayana, which demands that one reduce one's body to ashes and annihilate one's consciousness, for they do not reveal when the Buddha started teaching and when he finished. If a consort of a king were to conceive by a beast, her baby would be inferior to a chandāla.

Setting aside these lesser teachings, the eight chapters of the revelation section [the second through the ninth chapters] of the theoretical teaching seem to have been expounded for the sake of the persons of the two vehicles rather than for the ordinary people and bodhisattvas in Shakyamuni's lifetime. From a more profound viewpoint, they are intended for the ordinary people after the Buddha's passing—in the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law—and, in particular, for the ordinary people in the beginning of the Latter Day.

Question: On what authority do you say so?

Answer: The "Teacher of the Law" chapter of the Lotus Sutra 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 "Treasure Tower" chapter states, "They [the Buddhas] make certain that the Law will long endure. . . . [The Thus Come One Many Treasures, I myself], and these emanation Buddhas who have gathered here, surely know this is our aim." Look at what the "Encouraging Devotion" and "Peaceful Practices" chapters state about the future. The theoretical teaching was preached for the people after Shakyamuni Buddha's passing.

As regards the essential teaching, it was addressed exclusively to the people early in the Latter Day of the Law. On the surface, the Buddha seems to have preached this teaching for the enlightenment of the people of his day; he planted the seeds of Buddhahood in their lives in the remote past [numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago] and nurtured the seeds through his preaching as the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence [major world system dust particle kalpas ago] and through the first four flavors of teachings and the theoretical teaching in this life. Then with the essential teaching he brought his followers to the stage of near-perfect enlightenment and finally to that of perfect enlightenment.

In actuality, however, the essential teaching bears no resemblance whatsoever to the theoretical teaching. The preparation, revelation, and transmission of the essential teaching are intended entirely for the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. The essential teaching of Shakyamuni's lifetime and that revealed at the beginning of the Latter Day are both pure and perfect [in that both lead directly to Buddhahood]. Shakyamuni's, however, is the Buddhism of the harvest, and this is the Buddhism of sowing. The core of his teaching is one chapter and two halves, and the core of mine is the five characters of the Daimoku alone.

Question: On what authority do you say [that the essential teaching is meant for the generations of the Latter Day of the Law]?

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Answer: The “Emerging from the Earth” chapter states: “At that time the bodhisattvas mahāsattva who had gathered from the lands of the other directions, greater in number than the sands of eight Ganges Rivers, stood up in the midst of the great assembly, pressed their palms together, bowed in obeisance, and said to the Buddha: ‘World-Honored One, if you will permit us in the age after the Buddha has entered extinction to diligently and earnestly protect, embrace, read, recite, copy, and offer alms to this sutra in the saḥā world, we will preach it widely throughout this land!’ At that time the Buddha said to the bodhisattvas mahāsattva: ‘Leave off, good men! There is no need for you to protect and embrace this sutra.’” This statement totally contradicts the Buddha’s exhortations in the preceding five chapters from the “Teacher of the Law” [to the “Peaceful Practices”]. In the latter part of the “Treasure Tower” chapter is the passage: “In a loud voice he [Shakyamuni Buddha] addressed all the four kinds of believers, saying, ‘Who is capable of broadly preaching the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law in this saḥā world?’” Medicine King and the other great bodhisattvas, Brahmā, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings would have followed Shakyamuni’s command before anything else even if no other Buddha had supported his exhortations, but Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas from throughout the ten directions came to this world to exhort them to propagate the sutra after Shakyamuni’s passing. Thus, hearing the Buddha’s solemn appeal, the bodhisattvas all pledged, saying, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives,” for they desired solely to fulfill the Buddha’s will.

[In the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter,] however, the Buddha suddenly reversed himself and forbade all the bodhisattvas, more numerous than the sands of eight Ganges Rivers, from propagating the sutra in this world. We therefore face what appears to be an insoluble contradiction, one that is beyond ordinary understanding.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai Chih-che gave three reasons for Shakyamuni’s stopping the bodhisattvas, and three more for his summoning the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Essentially, the great bodhisattvas taught by the Buddha in his transient status and the great bodhisattvas who gathered from the other worlds were not qualified to inherit the “Life Span” chapter that reveals the eternal Buddha’s inner truth. At the dawn of the Latter Day evil people who slander the correct teaching would fill the land, so Shakyamuni Buddha rejected the pledge of these bodhisattvas and instead summoned the multitude of great bodhisattvas from beneath the earth. He entrusted them with the five characters of MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo, the heart of the “Life Span” chapter, for the enlightenment of all beings in the land of Jambudvīpa. The bodhisattvas taught by the Buddha in his transient status were also unqualified because they had not been the disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha since the time he had first set his mind on and attained enlightenment in the remote past. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai states, “[The Buddha said of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth,] ‘These are my disciples, destined to propagate my Law.’” Miao-lo says, “The children propagate the Law of the father, and this benefits the world.” *The Supplement to “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra”* states, “The Law embodied therein [in the Lotus Sutra] is the Law that was realized countless

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kalpas in the past, and therefore it was entrusted to persons who had been the Buddha's disciples from countless kalpas in the past."

[In the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter] Bodhisattva Maitreya questioned Shakyamuni Buddha as follows: "We ourselves have Strong mind in the Buddha, believing that he preaches in accordance with what is appropriate, that the words spoken by the Buddha are never false, and that the Buddha's knowledge is in all cases penetrating and comprehensive. Nevertheless, in the period after the Buddha has entered extinction, if bodhisattvas who have just begun to aspire to enlightenment should hear these words, they will perhaps not believe or accept them but will be led to commit the crime of rejecting the Law. Therefore, World-Honored One, we beg you to explain so we may put aside our doubts, and so that, in future ages when good men hear of this matter, they will not entertain doubts!" Here Bodhisattva Maitreya was imploring the Buddha to preach the "Life Span" chapter for those to come after his passing.

The "Life Span" chapter states: "Some are completely out of their minds, while others are not. . . . Those children who have not lost their senses can see that this is good medicine, outstanding in both color and fragrance, so they take it immediately and are completely cured of their sickness." The sutra explains that all bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, and human and heavenly beings received the seeds of Buddhahood numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. The seeds were nurtured by the preaching of the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence as well as by Shakyamuni Buddha's four flavors of teachings and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Then they finally gained the way when they heard the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

The "Life Span" chapter continues: "Those who are out of their minds are equally delighted to see their father return and beg him to cure their sickness, but when they are given the medicine, they refuse to take it. Why? Because the poison has penetrated deeply and their minds no longer function as before. So although the medicine is of excellent color and fragrance, they do not perceive it as good. The father thinks to himself, 'I must now resort to some expedient means to induce them to take the medicine.' So he says to them: 'I will leave this good medicine here. You should take it and not worry that it will not cure you.' Having given these instructions, he then goes off to another land, where he sends a messenger home to announce . . ." According to the "Distinctions in Benefits" chapter, [the good medicine of the "Life Span" chapter is left for those] "in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law."

Question: Who is the messenger mentioned in the passage, "he sends a messenger home to announce"?

Answer: It means the four ranks of sages. They fall into four categories. [First,] most of the four ranks of sages of Hinayana appeared in the first five hundred years of the Former Day of the Law, and [second,] most of those of [provisional] Mahayana came in the second five hundred years. Third, those of the theoretical teaching appeared mainly in the next

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thousand years, the Middle Day of the Law, and the rest, in the beginning of the Latter Day. Fourth, the four ranks of sages of the essential teaching are the bodhisattvas emerging from the earth, numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, who are certain to appear in the beginning of the Latter Day. When the sutra says, “he sends a messenger home to announce,” it refers to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. “This good medicine” is the heart of the “Life Span” chapter, or NaMu-MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo, which is endowed with name, entity, quality, function, and teaching.<sup>74</sup> Since the Buddha would not entrust this good medicine even to the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching, how much less could he have done so to the bodhisattvas of other worlds?

The “Supernatural Powers” chapter states: “At that time the bodhisattvas mahāsattva who had emerged from the earth, numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, all in the presence of the Buddha single-mindedly pressed their palms together, gazed up in reverence at the face of the Honored One, and said to the Buddha: ‘World-Honored One, after the Buddha has entered extinction, in the lands where the emanations of the World-Honored One are present, and in the place where the Buddha has passed into extinction, we will preach this sutra far and wide.’” T’ien-t’ai says, “The great assembly witnessed the Bodhisattvas of the Earth alone making this pledge.” Tao-hsien remarks: “As far as transmission goes, this sutra was entrusted solely to the bodhisattvas who had welled up out of the earth. The reason for this is that the Law embodied therein is the Law that was realized countless kalpas in the past, and therefore it was entrusted to persons who had been the Buddha’s disciples from countless kalpas in the past.”

Bodhisattva Manjushrī is a disciple of the Buddha Immovable, who dwells in the Golden-colored World to the east. Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds is a disciple of the Buddha Infinite Life in the west. Bodhisattva Medicine King is a disciple of the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue. Bodhisattva Universal Worthy is a disciple of the Buddha Jeweled Dignity. They came to this saḥā world to help Shakyamuni Buddha teach the people of his day. They were bodhisattvas of the provisional and theoretical teachings, and were not entrusted with the supreme Law, so they could not possibly appear and propagate it in the Latter Day.

[In the “Supernatural Powers” chapter] the sutra states: “At that time the World-Honored One . . . before all these he displayed his great supernatural powers. He extended his long broad tongue upward till it reached the Brahmā heaven . . . The other Buddhas, seated on lion seats underneath the numerous jeweled trees, did likewise, extending their long broad tongues.” In no other sutra, whether Hinayana or Mahayana, exoteric or esoteric, is there a passage that describes Shakyamuni Buddha and all the other Buddhas, seated together, extending their tongues to the Brahmā heaven.

See part 4