

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 Two

When he preached the Lotus Treasury World³⁰ [in the Flower Garland Sutra], Shakyamuni appeared as Vairochana Buddha seated on the lotus pedestal with other Buddhas surrounding him in the ten directions. When he preached the Āgama sutras, he appeared as a Buddha who had eliminated illusions and attained the way by practicing thirty-four kinds of spiritual purification. When he preached the Correct and Equal sutras, he was accompanied by a great multitude of Buddhas. One thousand Buddhas joined him when he preached the Wisdom sutras. In the Mahāvairochana and Diamond Crown sutras, he made a dignified appearance as the twelve hundred and more honored ones.³¹ In the “Treasure Tower” chapter of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha manifested himself in four different ways, corresponding to the four kinds of lands. When the Buddha preached the Nirvana Sutra, those assembled saw him variously as a Buddha sixteen feet tall, as having a small or large body, as Vairochana Buddha, or as a Buddha with a body as vast as space. Thus he manifested four kinds of bodies.³² When the Buddha passed into extinction at the age of eighty, he left his relics³³ to benefit people in the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law.

Now, the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra says that Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, attained Buddhahood numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago, and that the cause that made this possible was the practice he had carried out at that time. Since then he has manifested emanation bodies throughout the worlds of the ten directions and preached all the sacred teachings of his lifetime to teach and convert people as numerous as the dust particles of the land. When we compare the number of disciples in the essential teaching with that of disciples in the theoretical teaching, the former is like the ocean, and the latter, like a drop of water, or the one, like a great mountain, and the other, like a speck of dust. What is more, a bodhisattva of the essential teaching is far superior to any bodhisattva of the theoretical teaching, including Manjushrī, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, or any of the others who gathered from the worlds in the ten directions. The difference between them is even greater than that between Shakra and a monkey. Are you saying that besides these bodhisattvas, the persons of the two vehicles who obtained their enlightenment by destroying their illusions, Brahmā, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, the four wheel-turning kings, and the immense flames of the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering—all beings and all things in the ten directions are inherent in the Ten Worlds and in the three thousand realms of our own lives? Even if you say that this is what the Buddha taught, I still cannot believe it.

When we consider the matter in this light, we see that the sutras that came before the Lotus Sutra are genuine in both substance and wording. The Flower Garland Sutra describes enlightenment [at the stage of security] as “ultimately perfect and free from all falsehood and defilement, like the empty sky.” The Benevolent Kings Sutra reads, “[If one obtains the great wisdom of nirvana], one can penetrate the ultimate source of delusion and realize one's essential nature until nothing but wonderful wisdom remains.” In the Diamond Wisdom Sutra it says, “[When one reaches enlightenment], nothing but pure goodness will remain.” Bodhisattva Ashvaghosha states in The Awakening of Strong mind in the Mahayana, “Only pure blessings exist within the matrix of the Thus Come One.” Bodhisattva Vasubandhu remarks in his Treatise on the Consciousness-Only Doctrine, “When adamant meditation is achieved, other remaining defilements and a lesser form of non-defilement will draw forth the ultimate consciousness of perfect clarity and total purity. Then, being no longer necessary, they will be abandoned forever.”

A careful comparison of the Lotus Sutra and the sutras taught before it shows that those sutras are innumerable, and that they have been taught over a long time. Therefore, although both are the Buddha's teachings, if these two contradict each other, you should accept the earlier sutras. Bodhisattva Ashvaghosha was the Buddha's eleventh successor, whose appearance had been foretold by the Buddha himself. Vasubandhu was the author of one thousand treatises and was numbered among the four ranks of bodhisattvas. How then can you believe the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, a lowly priest living far away from the birthplace of Buddhism who [interpreted the sutras but] did not write a single treatise? Still, I might be able

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to disregard the many and accept the few, if the Lotus Sutra said anything to prove this point. But where in the sutra can you find any passages that definitely verify the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the hundred worlds and thousand factors, and three thousand realms in a single moment of life?

In the Lotus Sutra we find the following passage: “He [the Buddha] has rooted out evil from among the phenomena.”³⁴ Neither Bodhisattva Vasubandhu’s Treatise on the Lotus Sutra nor Bodhisattva Sāramati’s Treatise on the Treasure Vehicle of Buddhahood makes any mention of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. Nor are there any writings by the great teachers of the northern and southern schools in China, or by the priests of the seven temples of Japan, that expound this principle. It is simply T’ien-t’ai’s own biased view, and Dengyō made the mistake of transmitting it. That is what the Teacher of the Nation Ch’ing-liang³⁵ meant when he said, “This is an error of T’ien-t’ai’s.” The Dharma Teacher Hui-yüan said, “By defining Hinayana doctrines as the Tripitaka teachings, T’ien-t’ai has confused Hinayana and Mahayana, [for both contain the Tripitaka, or three divisions of the canon].” Ryōkō³⁶ criticized him, saying, “T’ien-t’ai is the only one who did not understand the true meaning of the Flower Garland Sutra.” Tokuitsu reproached him, saying, “See here, Chih-i, whose disciple are you? With a tongue less than three inches long you slander the teachings that come from the Buddha’s long broad tongue that can cover even his face!”³⁷ The Great Teacher Kōbō commented, “The Buddhist teachers of China vied with one another to steal the ghee [of the dhāraṇī or True Word] and claim that it is the possession of their own school.”³⁸ Thus, the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is not mentioned in either the provisional or the true teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha. It did not appear in the writings of any of the four ranks of Indian scholars, and no Chinese or Japanese teacher has ever espoused it. How then do you dare to believe it?

Answer: Your criticisms are extremely harsh. Nonetheless, the differences between the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras are clear from the text of the sutras themselves. In them we find statements that the Buddha did not reveal the truth in the first forty-two years of his teaching, and that he will reveal it in the Lotus Sutra. Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas of the ten directions presented themselves to attest to the truth of the Lotus Sutra, something they did not do for any other sutra. With the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni enabled the people of the two vehicles to attain Buddhahood, whereas with the earlier sutras he did not. In the earlier sutras he stated that he attained enlightenment for the first time in this world, but in the Lotus Sutra he revealed that his enlightenment actually occurred in the remote past.³⁹

I will now address the problems posed by the scholars you mentioned above. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai comments: “Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna clearly perceived the truth in their hearts, but they did not teach it. Instead, they employed the provisional Mahayana teachings, which were suited to the times. The Buddhist teachers who came later, however, were biased in their understanding, and the scholars obstinately clung to their own views, until in the end they began to battle with one another. Each defended one small corner of the teachings and thereby completely departed from the sacred way of the Buddha.”⁴⁰ The Great Teacher Chang-an says of T’ien-t’ai, “Even the great scholars of India were not in a class with him, and the Chinese teachers—well, one need hardly mention them. This is no idle boast—the doctrine he taught was indeed of such excellence.”

In their hearts Vasubandhu, Nāgārjuna, Ashvaghosha, Sāramati, and other Buddhist scholars knew [the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life], but they did not reveal it to others because the time for it to be expounded had not yet come. As for the Buddhist teachers in China who preceded T’ien-t’ai, some kept this treasure in their hearts, and others knew nothing about it. Among those who came after him, some accepted this doctrine only after first trying to disprove it, and others never accepted it at all.

Concerning the passage in the Lotus Sutra that you quoted, “He [the Buddha] has rooted out evil from among the phenomena,” here the Buddha is referring to a teaching from one of the earlier sutras. But when you take a closer look at the sutra, it is clear that the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is being explained. For, in the same sutra, this passage is found: “The Buddhas wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings.” T’ien-t’ai comments on this passage as follows: “If people do not possess innate Buddha wisdom, how could the Buddha say he wanted to open it? One must understand that Buddha wisdom is inherent in all human beings.”⁴¹ The Great Teacher Chang-an concludes, “How could people open the door to and realize their Buddha wisdom if it did not exist within them? How could a person show the poor woman her treasure repository if the treasure repository did not exist?”⁴²

It is, however, extremely difficult to convince you that Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, exists within us [just as the other nine worlds do]. Therefore, he gives us this admonishment beforehand: “Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and

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the most difficult to understand.”⁴³ The “six difficult and nine easy acts” he expounds in the next chapter explains how difficult it is. Hence the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai states, “Because the theoretical and the essential teachings [of the Lotus Sutra] contradict all the earlier sutras, they are extremely difficult to believe and difficult to understand—no less difficult than facing an enemy who is armed with a spear.”⁴⁴ The Great Teacher Chang-an comments, “The Buddha intended these as his ultimate teachings. How could they ever be easy to understand?” The Great Teacher Dengyō remarks, “The Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and to understand because in it the Buddha directly revealed what he had attained.”

In the more than eighteen hundred years after the Buddha’s passing, only three persons throughout the three countries perceived this correct doctrine. They are Shakyamuni Buddha of India, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai Chih-che of China, and the Great Teacher Dengyō of Japan. These three men are all Buddhist sages.

Question: What about Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu?

Answer: Those sages knew, but did not expound it. They expounded part of the theoretical teaching, but did not expound either the essential teaching or the truth that the Buddha had observed in his mind. Perhaps the people in their age were capable of believing it, but the time was not ripe to expound it. Or perhaps neither the people’s capacity nor the time was appropriate.

After the advent of T’ien-t’ai and Dengyō, many Buddhists learned of the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life through the wisdom of these two sages. They included Chia-hsiang of the Three Treatises school; more than one hundred priests of the three schools of the south and seven schools of the north in China; Fa-tsang and Ch’ing-liang of the Flower Garland school; the Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang and the Great Teacher Tz’u-en of the Dharma Characteristics school; the Tripitaka masters Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k’ung of the True Word school; and Tao-hsüan of the Precepts school. At first they all opposed T’ien-t’ai, but later they totally accepted his teachings.

Now, to dispel the grave doubts you have about Buddhahood within the human world, I refer you to the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, which states: “[Good men], such persons are like a prince newly born to the king of a country and his queen. When he is one day, two days, or seven days old; one month, two months, or seven months old; one year, two years, or seven years old, though he is not yet able to manage the affairs of state, already he is respected and looked up to by the ministers and the people. He is a companion to the sons of other great kings, and the king and queen love and dote on him and are forever talking with him. Why? Because he is still just a child.

“Good men, the person who upholds this sutra is like this. The Buddhas, who are the king, and the sutra, which is the queen, join together in harmony to give birth to this bodhisattva son. If the bodhisattva is able to hear this sutra, whether it is one line or one verse, one repetition, two repetitions, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, or immeasurable, countless repetitions equal to the sands of a million ten thousand Ganges Rivers, though he cannot fully grasp the extent of its truth . . . already he is revered and looked up to by all the four kinds of Buddhists and the eight kinds of nonhuman beings, and he has the great bodhisattvas for his companions. . . . He is constantly guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas, who pity and love him, favor and shelter him, because he is new in these studies.”

The Universal Worthy Sutra says: “This great vehicle sutra is the treasure storehouse of the Buddhas, the eye of the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences, the seed from which spring the Thus Come Ones of the three existences. . . . You should practice the great vehicle and never let the seed of Buddhahood die out.” It also declares: “This correct and equal sutra is the eye of the Buddhas. It is through this sutra that the Buddhas are able to acquire the five types of vision. A Buddha’s three types of bodies are born from this correct and equal sutra, which is the great seal of the Law that assures entry into the sea of nirvana. It is from this sea that a Buddha’s three types of pure bodies are born. These three types of bodies are fields of good fortune for human and heavenly beings.”

Now we should go on to survey the entire range of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni’s teachings, the exoteric and esoteric as well as Hinayana and Mahayana, and specifically the sutras on which each school, such as the Flower Garland and the True Word, depends for its doctrine. For example, the Flower Garland Sutra describes Vairocana Buddha seated on the lotus pedestal extending in the ten directions; the Great Collection Sutra, a cloud of Buddhas who had gathered together; the Wisdom Sutra, the emergence of one thousand Buddhas teaching the non-duality of pure and impure; and the Mahāvairocana and Diamond Crown sutras, the more than twelve hundred honored ones. These sutras all explain the past practices of

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Shakyamuni Buddha and the Buddhahood he consequently attained in this life, but they do not reveal the original cause for his enlightenment in the remote past.

It is true that the immediate attainment of Buddhahood is revealed in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, but they do not mention Shakyamuni Buddha teaching his disciples since major world system dust particle kalpas ago or numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. Therefore, no revelation is made of when the Buddha started teaching or when he finished.⁴⁵ The Flower Garland Sutra seems to belong to the higher two and the Mahāvairochana Sutra to all of the four teachings—the Tripitaka, connecting, specific, and perfect teachings—but these sutras actually fall into the category of the Tripitaka and connecting teachings, the two lower of the four, because they do not expound the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature.⁴⁶ Then how can we define these sutras as the seeds of enlightenment?

The translators of the newer versions of the sutras⁴⁷ learned about T'ien-t'ai's doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life when they came to China. When they translated Sanskrit sutras into Chinese, some put T'ien-t'ai's principle into their translations, and others claimed that the originals they had brought from India already contained it. Some of the scholars of the T'ien-t'ai school were simply pleased that other schools were expounding the same doctrine as theirs, while others praised the Buddhism of India and slighted that of China, or discarded their original doctrines and adopted new ones. These scholars yielded to their devilish nature and to foolishness. Ultimately, however, without the seed of Buddhahood, that is, the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, sentient beings cannot become Buddhas, and any statue or painting would be an object of devotion in name only.

Question: You have not yet fully answered my question about the Ten Worlds, Buddhahood in particular, being inherent in the human world.

Answer: The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra states, "Although they have not yet been able to practice the six pāramitās, the six pāramitās will of themselves appear before them." The Lotus Sutra says, "All wish to hear the teaching of perfect endowment." The Nirvana Sutra states, "*Sad*⁴⁸ indicates perfect endowment." Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna comments, "*Sad* signifies six."⁴⁹ *The Profound Meaning of the Four Mahayana Treatises*⁵⁰ states, "*Sad* connotes six. In India the number six implies perfect endowment." In his commentary Chi-tsang writes, "*Sad* is translated as perfect endowment."⁵¹ The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai remarks, "*Sad* is a Sanskrit word, which is translated as *myo*, or wonderful."⁵² If I add my own interpretation, it will be as if I had profaned these passages, but in essence they mean that Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the five characters of MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo. If we believe in these five characters, we will naturally be granted the same benefits as he was.

With full understanding of Shakyamuni's teachings, the four great voice-hearers said, "This cluster of unsurpassed jewels has come to us unsought."⁵³ They represent the world of the voice-hearer that is within ourselves. The Buddha stated, "At the start I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us, and what I long ago hoped for has now been fulfilled. I have converted all living beings and caused them all to enter the Buddha way."⁵⁴ Shakyamuni Buddha, who has attained perfect enlightenment, is our own flesh and blood. His practices and the resulting virtues are our bones and marrow. The "Treasure Tower" chapter of the Lotus Sutra says, "He who is capable of guarding the Law of this sutra will thereby have offered alms to me and to Many Treasures. . . . One who guards this sutra will also have offered alms to the emanation Buddhas who have come here adorning and making brilliant all the various worlds." Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions represent the world of Buddhahood within ourselves. By searching them out within us, we can receive the benefits of all these Buddhas. This is what is meant by the following passage: "If one listens to them [the preachers of the Law] for even a moment, one will immediately attain supreme perfect enlightenment."⁵⁵ The "Life Span" chapter reads, "It has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood." The Shakyamuni Buddha within our lives is the eternal Buddha since time without beginning, who obtained the three bodies more than numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. The "Life Span" chapter states, "Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed." He was speaking of the world of the bodhisattva within ourselves. The bodhisattvas, as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, who emerged from beneath the earth, are the followers of the Shakyamuni Buddha present in our lives. They follow the Buddha just as T'ai-kung Wang and Tan, the Duke of Chou,⁵⁶ served as ministers to King Wu of the Chou dynasty and later assisted his son and successor, the infant King Ch'eng; or just as the Chief Minister Takenouchi⁵⁷ supported Empress Jingū and later her grandson Crown Prince Nintoku as a highly valued minister. The bodhisattvas Superior

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Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices, and Firmly Established Practices represent the world of the bodhisattva within ourselves. The Great Teacher Miao-lo says: “You should understand that one’s life and its environment at a single moment encompass the three thousand realms. Therefore, when one attains the Buddha way, one puts oneself in accord with this fundamental principle, and one’s body and mind at a single moment pervade the entire realm of phenomena.”⁵⁸

First, at his place of enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha [preached the Flower Garland Sutra in which he] revealed the Lotus Treasury World. In the following fifty years, until he entered nirvana in the grove of sal trees, Shakyamuni preached about the lands of the various Buddhas, such as the Lotus Treasury World and the Land of Secret Solemnity [in the Secret Solemnity Sutra], revealed the three kinds of lands when he three times purified countless lands [in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra], and revealed the four kinds of lands according to the four different views⁵⁹ [in the Nirvana Sutra]. These lands—the Land of Transition, the Land of Actual Reward, and the Land of Tranquil Light; the Land of Peace and Sustenance, the Pure Emerald World, the Land of Secret Solemnity, and the lands of all the other Buddhas—are transient lands that change in the course of the kalpas of formation, [continuance, decline, and disintegration]. The Buddhas of these lands had been magically conjured by Shakyamuni Buddha, and when the lord of teachings entered nirvana, all these Buddhas likewise entered extinction. In the same way, their lands also vanished.⁶⁰

The sahā world Shakyamuni Buddha revealed in the “Life Span” chapter is the eternal pure land, impervious to the three calamities and to the cycle of the four kalpas. The Buddha neither has entered into extinction in the past nor will be born in the future. And the same is true of his disciples. This means that their lives are perfectly endowed with the three thousand worlds, that is, with the three realms of existence. The Buddha did not reveal this truth in the theoretical teaching, or the first fourteen chapters, of the Lotus Sutra because the time was not right and the people’s capacity was not yet developed.

Shakyamuni Buddha did not transmit the five characters of NaMu-MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo, the heart of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, even to the bodhisattvas Manjushrī and Medicine King, let alone to any lesser disciples. He summoned from beneath the earth the great bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds and, as he preached the eight chapters,⁶¹ transferred it solely to them.

The true object of devotion is described as follows:

The treasure tower sits in the air above the sahā world that the Buddha of the essential teaching [identified as the pure and eternal land]; MyoHo-RenGe-Kyo appears in the center of the tower with the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures seated to the right and left, and, flanking them, the four bodhisattvas, followers of Shakyamuni, led by Superior Practices. Manjushrī, Maitreya, and the other bodhisattvas, who are all followers of the four bodhisattvas, are seated below. All the other major and minor bodhisattvas, whether they are disciples of the Buddha in his transient status or of the Buddhas of the other worlds, are like commoners kneeling on the ground in the presence of nobles and high-ranking court officials. The Buddhas who gathered from the other worlds in the ten directions all remain on the ground, showing that they are only temporary manifestations of the eternal Buddha and that their lands are transient, not eternal and unchanging.

During the entire fifty years of Shakyamuni’s teaching, only in the last eight years did he preach the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra. Again, of all these chapters, only in the eight chapters did he reveal and transfer the object of devotion to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.⁶² During the two millennia of the Former and Middle Days of the Law, statues were made showing Mahākāshyapa and Ānanda flanking the Shakyamuni Buddha of Hinayana, and Manjushrī and Universal Worthy flanking the Shakyamuni Buddha of the provisional Mahayana, the Nirvana Sutra, and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Even though statues and paintings were made of these Shakyamuni Buddhas during the two millennia, no image or statue was made of the Buddha of the “Life Span” chapter.⁶³ Only in the Latter Day of the Law will the representation of that Buddha appear.

Question: During the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law, the four ranks of bodhisattvas and the teachers constructed images of and built temples and pagodas for Buddhas of other worlds or for the Shakyamuni Buddha of Hinayana, of provisional Mahayana, of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, or of the theoretical teaching of the sutra. No one in India, China, or Japan, however, neither rulers nor subjects, revered the object of devotion of the “Life Span” chapter of the essential teaching and the

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four great bodhisattvas. Though I think I generally understand what you are saying, I have never heard such a thing before, and therefore it startles my ears and perplexes my mind. Will you explain it to me again in greater detail?

Answer: All the teachings that Shakyamuni Buddha expounded during his lifetime—all the eight volumes and twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the first four flavors of teachings that preceded the sutra, and the Nirvana Sutra that came after the Lotus—make an unbroken series of teachings like one perfect sutra. [These teachings can be divided into three parts—preparation, revelation, and transmission].⁶⁴ Preparation indicates the part from the Flower Garland Sutra, his first preaching at the place of enlightenment, to the Wisdom sutras; revelation indicates the ten volumes of the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, and the Universal Worthy Sutra; and transmission indicates the Nirvana Sutra. The ten volumes of the revelation section likewise can be divided into these three parts. The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra and the “Introduction” chapter of the Lotus Sutra are preparation. The fifteen and a half chapters from the “Expedient Means” chapter to the nineteen-line verse of the “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter are revelation. The remaining eleven and a half chapters and one volume, from the section in the “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter clarifying the four stages of Strong mind for people in the Buddha’s lifetime to the Universal Worthy Sutra, are transmission.

The ten volumes of the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, and the Universal Worthy Sutra can also be divided into two parts: theoretical and essential.⁶⁵ Each part has the three divisions. In the theoretical teaching, preparation comprises the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra and the “Introduction” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, revelation comprises eight chapters, from the “Expedient Means” through the “Prophecies” chapters, and transmission comprises five chapters, from the “Teacher of the Law” to the “Peaceful Practices.” The Buddha of the theoretical teaching declared that he first attained Buddhahood in this life. He revealed the hundred worlds and thousand factors inherent in life, but he did not expound their eternal nature. Since the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra thus directly reveals a part of the Buddha’s own enlightenment, it excels all the other sutras that the Buddha had preached, now preached, or would preach, and is the correct teaching that is difficult to believe and difficult to understand.

The relationship between Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples can be traced back to the time when, as the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, he planted the seeds of Buddhahood in their lives. In Shakyamuni’s present lifetime a few of these disciples discovered the seeds when they heard the Flower Garland Sutra and the other teachings of the first four flavors. This was not, however, the Buddha’s true intention. Their discovery through these teachings was like poison having a positive effect. Ordinary people and the persons of the two vehicles came to the Lotus Sutra gradually through the first four flavors of teachings. They then revealed the seeds of Buddhahood from within themselves and were able to obtain the fruit of enlightenment.

Among the human and heavenly beings who listened to the eight chapters for the first time in Shakyamuni’s days, some took the seeds into their lives by hearing just a single phrase or verse. Some nurtured and harvested the seeds they had received. Others brought their seeds to fruition when they came to the Universal Worthy and Nirvana sutras. Still others appeared in the Former, Middle, or Latter Day of the Law and, through the Hinayana and provisional Mahayana teachings, obtained the fruit of enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra. These last are like the disciples in Shakyamuni’s lifetime who discovered their seeds of Buddhahood through the first four flavors of teachings.

Preparation, revelation, and transmission also exist in the fourteen chapters of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The first half of the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter is preparation. The latter half of this chapter, the “Life Span” chapter, and the first half of the following “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter—one chapter and two halves—are revelation. The remainder is transmission.

See Part Three...