

Shoju versus Shakubuku

In the Lotus Sutra, after the first nine (9) chapters of the justifications and preparation for a large paradigm shift in the teachings of enlightenment for the entrenched monastic communities maintaining of ancient ideas of “re-incarnations” or some form of “after-life” (*directly in the face of the doctrines of “Impermanence”, “Emptiness”, “Liberation” and “Cessation”*). This is a very profound problem in the proper understanding and practice of Lotus Sutra Buddhism and therefore must be confronted. In the parable of the **Conjured City** or *Apparitional City* of chapter seven (7), Shakyamuni introduces the idea that those Srāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas looking to the achievement of Arhat or Arahant as the ultimate goal of their Buddhist practice in the attainment of nirvana. For these Arhats the idea or eventuality of Buddhahood or the experience of Buddha was some far distant if ever attainable state involving multitudes of lifespans and not imaginable in this lifetime. This is only attributable to the ingrained ideas of previous generations of Indian culture and religions for whom reincarnation was simply a fact of life. It was now time to dissolve this erroneous and improper concept in Buddhist practice. In “The Conjured City”, Shakyamuni makes it clear that the “nirvana” that the Arhats accept they have achieved is in fact a *false belief*, a conjured nirvana like the conjured city, simply to assuage their laziness and lack of resolve to attain the true goal of practice. This provisional nirvana was like the conjured city, a resting space for the preparation of the practitioners to aspire to the final journey to Buddhahood. It was, after all, Siddhartha’s stated mission on his determined path to Enlightenment that the only thing that would suffice is the ultimate truth for all living beings to live THIS lifetime free of stress and anxieties, to enable all sentient beings to live this life fully without regret to the full of their potential. Buddhahood, as it came to be called, was a goal for this life, not some future dream or fantasy.

For Nichiren, this was a palpable and obvious paradigm shift in propagation. The achievement of calm and equanimity of the Sravaka and Pratyekabuddha were a “soft” propagation (**Shoju**) indicative of the second Dharma age, the **Semblance Dharma**, incomplete and falling short of the true goal of attainment of Buddhahood. In order for these fourfold or sixfold assemblies to progress, what was required was a strong break of misunderstanding and erroneous beliefs. The word **Nichiren** used was **Shakubuku**, literally, (Japanese: "**break and subdue**"), in which the resistance of the other Buddhist person is destroyed by forceful argument. It must be noted that this was a practice devised and directed at other Buddhist schools and practitioners rather than those ignorant of Buddhist teachings altogether.