

Excerpts from the Indigo of president Ikeda's Study Lecture Series - THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN, ILLUMINATING THE WORLD, SGI Newsletter 11404

Key Passages from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*

[6] "The Parable of the Phantom City" Chapter

The Lotus Sutra Is a Chronicle of the Shared Struggle of Mentor and Disciple Spanning Past, Present, and Future

April, the month of cherry blossoms, is here. [*Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda passed away on April 2, 1958.*] [...]

The Example of a Great Human Revolution

In Buddhism, the mentor serves as an example and model for how to live the best possible life. The mentor opens the way and the disciple vows with the mentor to realize kosen-rufu. Mentor and disciple work side by side for this goal and together carry out their human revolution. In that sense, mentor and disciple can also be described as comrades who share deep bonds and strive to demonstrate the boundless potential people possess and the inherent dignity of life. In addition, the disciple has the mission to carry on the mentor's legacy and realize the mentor's vision. Today, we have built a vast network of Bodhisattvas of the Earth encompassing 192 countries and territories. [...]

Kosen-rufu Is the Flow Itself

Kosen-rufu is not the end point of the flow—a destination reached after spreading the Mystic Law. It is the flow itself, an unending movement joined by ever-growing numbers of people to spread the Mystic Law. It is the vibrant coursing of a living Buddhism throughout society and the world. The great river of kosen-rufu created through the shared struggle of mentor and disciple is also producing capable individuals who will build a better society. It is a powerful force for actualizing world peace that prioritizes respect for the dignity of life.

The Lotus Sutra depicts the grand drama of mentor and disciples continually striving together as one to broaden and extend that magnificent flowing river of kosen-rufu. In this installment, we will focus on the section in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* on "The Parable of the Phantom City" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.¹ It highlights that the mentor-disciple relationship in the Lotus Sutra

¹ At the end of the "Bestowal of Prophecy" (6th) chapter, Shakyamuni declares: "Concerning the relationship between you and me / in past existences / I will now preach. / You must listen carefully" (LSOC6, 153). He then does this in "The Parable of the Phantom City" (7th) chapter, in which he recounts the story of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence of the immensely distant past. This Buddha was a king with sixteen sons, of which Shakyamuni was the sixteenth. Shakyamuni states that the voice-hearers of the present had entreated him at that time to preach the Lotus Sutra. As a result, they had awakened the desire for enlightenment and thus forged a connection with him in that distant past. In the following "Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples" (8th) chapter, 1,200 voice-hearers, including Purna, receive prophecies of enlightenment, and in the "Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adepts" (9th) chapter, 2,000 voice-hearers, including Ananda and Rahula, receive prophecies of enlightenment, thus completing the three rounds of preaching and opening the way for the unfolding of a new drama in the "The Teacher of the Law" (10th) chapter.

represents a profound karmic bond forged throughout a continuous journey of shared struggle from the infinite past.

Chapter Seven: The Parable of the Phantom City *Seven important points*

Point One, concerning “the phantom city” (*kejo*)

In effect, now Nichiren and his followers, people who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, gain enlightenment into the fact that our bodies and minds are the Wonderful Law itself, namely, that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land.

The Ten Worlds are all of them phantom cities, and each of these Ten Worlds is a treasure land (...) In this statement that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land, the single word “identical” is symbolic of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Each moment of life in the phantom city is a moment of life in the treasure land. (OTT, 72)

The One Buddha Vehicle Explained through the Parable of the Phantom City

Shakyamuni says that in the inconceivably distant past of major world system dust particle kalpas ago,² there was a Buddha named Great Universal Wisdom Excellence. He was a king with sixteen sons. After attaining Buddhahood, he preached numerous teachings to these sons, culminating in the Lotus Sutra. He then withdrew and entered meditation. In his place, the sixteen princes preached the Lotus Sutra to many different beings. (This is known as the restatement of Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha’s teaching).

Shakyamuni explains that, in a former lifetime, he was the sixteenth prince, and the voice-hearers assembled on Eagle Peak now are reunited with him, their teacher, through the cause of having heard his preaching of the Lotus Sutra those countless eons ago. He indicates that the relationship between him and his disciples is not limited to their present existence.

Shakyamuni then goes on to explain that the life states of the practitioners of the three vehicles (voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas), which he had thus far taught people to aspire to are like a phantom city, while the true treasure land is the true nirvana (enlightenment) taught in the one-vehicle teaching of the Lotus Sutra. In this way, the parable of the phantom city elucidates the very important principle of the “replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle.”³

² Major world system dust particle kalpas: An immensely long period of time described in “The Parable of the Phantom City” (7th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra to indicate how much time has passed since Shakyamuni preached the sutra to his voice-hearer disciples as the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence. It is calculated as the number of kalpas (one kalpa is approximately 16 million years) equivalent to the number of dust particles that would result if a person smashed a major world system, completely crushing its earth particles and reducing them all to dust, and then passed through a thousand lands and dropped one speck of dust, and if he continued in this manner until he had exhausted all the specks of dust, and if he then took all the lands he had passed through, both those he dropped a speck in and those he did not, and once more ground their earth into dust. This is the number of kalpas ago that Buddha Great Universal Wisdom lived. In the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the even longer time period of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas—in other words, the infinite past—is said to measure the time of Shakyamuni’s original enlightenment.

³ Replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle: The theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra (the first fourteen chapters), teaches that the three vehicles of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas expounded in the

The parable of the phantom city is as follows.

A party of merchants sets forth on a perilous journey of five hundred *yojanas*⁴ to reach a wonderful treasure land. Along the way, they become so exhausted that they want to give up and turn back. Their wise leader, feeling it would be a pity if they should quit and return without the treasure, employs his transcendental powers to create a phantom city and encourages the travelers by offering it as a place they can rest and recuperate.

The merchants rejoice, enter the city, and rest. When the leader sees that they have all recovered, he makes the phantom city disappear and reveals the truth to them. The city was just a mirage—the true treasure land is close at hand, he says, and he urges them to press on.

The Phantom City Is the Treasure Land

Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the phantom city and the treasure land are in fact not two distinct entities, declaring: “The phantom city is identical with the treasure land” (OTT, 72).

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, he explains the phantom city in terms of impermanence and earthly desires. [...]

The Daishonin tells us that by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our bodies and minds, which we thought were impermanent, are in fact “the Wonderful Law [Mystic Law] itself, namely, that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land” (OTT, 72).

He also says that the treacherous path to our destination represents nothing other than earthly desires that comprise the three categories of illusion⁵: “This distance of five hundred yojanas [from the phantom city to the treasure land] is symbolic of the illusions of thought and desire, of the dusts and sands that impede religious practice, and of darkness or ignorance” (OTT, 72). He then continues: “To understand that these five hundred yojanas of earthly desires are the five characters of the Wonderful Law [Mystic Law] means to realize that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land” (OTT, 72).

The Daishonin is describing the path to a great transformation. It is not separate from our impermanent selves and does not entail eradicating all earthly desires. Rather, it means realizing that we ourselves are the Mystic Law, the five characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,⁶ opening and manifesting the life state of Buddhahood that exists within us, and becoming aware that the path to the phantom city is in itself the treasure land. [...]

This principle of transforming the phantom city into the treasure land can also be explained in terms of our Buddhist practice. Through the power of the Mystic Law, all of our hardships and struggles in *kosen-rufu* and in life to realize one goal after another become a brilliant expression of infinitely precious value creation. We can also use all kinds of trials as fuel for our human revolution and

sutras prior to the Lotus Sutra are only expedient means, but the Buddha’s true intent is the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra that leads all living beings to enlightenment.

⁴ *Yojana*: A unit of measurement used in ancient India, said to equal the distance that the royal army could march in a day. According to one explanation, it corresponds to about 10 kilometers (6 miles).

⁵ Three illusions: Also, three categories of illusions. A classification of illusions, established by T’ien-t’ai: (1) illusions of thought and desire (namely, deluded thoughts and beliefs, and distorted perceptions and emotions); (2) illusions innumerable as particles of dust and sand (namely, myriad kinds of delusions that hinder bodhisattvas from teaching and guiding people; and (3) illusions about the true nature of existence (namely, fundamental ignorance that is unaware of the ultimate truth of Buddhism).

⁶ Myoho-renge-kyo is written with five Chinese characters, while Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is written with seven (*nam*, or *namu*, being comprised of two characters). The Daishonin often uses Myoho-renge-kyo synonymously with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in his writings.

attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime—turning earthly desires into enlightenment and viewing them as a treasure trove of joyous benefits.

The Word *Soku* Refers to Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

What transforms the phantom city into the treasure land?

The Daishonin states: “The single word ‘identical’ [Jpn *soku*] [in the statement that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land] is symbolic of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” The word *soku* expresses the transformation realized through faith in the Mystic Law. Nichiren Buddhism teaches the principle of “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form.”⁷ This means we can realize a state of indestructible happiness in our lives just as we are.

The Place We Are Right Now Is the Grand Stage for Changing Our Karma

I stressed to them that the places where they undertook activities for kosen-rufu were, just as they are, “treasure lands of Eternally Tranquil Light” (OTT, 77), Buddha lands. This is because when we realize that the place where we are, wherever it may be, is the land of our true mission, and exert ourselves there, we are guaranteed to attain a boundless state of life overflowing with benefits. This is the essence of Buddhism.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches that we can shine with the great radiant state of Buddhahood right here and now, not in some other place or time. [...]

Awakening to the Vow “Deep in Our Hearts from the Start”

In “The Parable of the Phantom City” chapter, Brahma kings gathered in the assembly declare to Shakyamuni: “We beg that the merit [we have] gained . . . / may be spread far and wide to everyone, / so that we and other living beings / all together may attain the Buddha way” (LSOC7, 168). The Daishonin quotes this passage in letters to disciples, including Nanjo Tokimitsu.⁸

These words embody a vow that is identical to the Buddha’s wish to enable all living beings to attain enlightenment—in other words, to make it possible for all people to become happy. That is why it resonates as a call for “all together” to advance toward the goal of attaining Buddhahood. Seeking to share the teaching one has awakened to with everyone so that they, too, may awaken to it—this is the essence of Buddhist humanism. Rather than just establishing Shakyamuni alone as a great being, the fundamental aim of Buddhism is to elevate all people to the same great state of life as Shakyamuni.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that mentor and disciples strive together eternally to transmit this great teaching to all people. [...]

⁷ Attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form: The sutras prior to the Lotus Sutra taught that Buddhahood could only be attained after long eons of practice, but the Lotus Sutra, based on the principles of the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds” and “three thousand realms in a single moment of life,” teaches that we can reveal our inherent Buddha nature just as we are and immediately attain Buddhahood in our present form. *Soku*, the word translated as “identical” in this passage of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, also appears in the Japanese terms “earthly desires are enlightenment” (*bonno soku bodai*), where it is translated as “are,” and “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form” (*sokushin jobutsu*), where it is encompassed in the phrase “in one’s present form.”

⁸ For instance, Nichiren Daishonin cites this passage in “The Dragon Gate,” addressed to Nanjo Tokimitsu (WND-1, 1003).

Hearing Shakyamuni's preaching, the voice-hearers realize that they are not Shakyamuni's disciples in the present existence alone, but in fact have heard him preach the bodhisattva practice of the Lotus Sutra in the distant past and vowed long, long ago to carry it out. [...]

“Constantly Reborn in Company with Their Teachers”

“The Parable of the Phantom City” chapter also states: “Those persons who had heard the Law / dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, / constantly reborn in company with their teachers” (LSOC7, 178). This passage also shows that the ties connecting mentor and disciples who embrace the Lotus Sutra are eternal—extending throughout past, present, and future. And from the standpoint of the bodhisattva vow, it can be read as affirming the shared struggle of mentor and disciple that continues forever to guide them to happiness.

“As Long As They Are Together with Nichiren, They Will Reach the Treasure Land”

The section in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* titled “Chapter Seven: The Parable of the Phantom City: Seven important points” concludes: “Nichiren and his followers, those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, one and all will ‘together reach the place where the treasure is.’ This one word ‘together’ means that, as long as they are together with Nichiren, they will reach the treasure land” (OTT, 78). [...]

Here, the Daishonin is saying to his disciples “We will always strive together.” That’s the meaning of “together with Nichiren.”

For us, this means pressing forward together with our great shared vow to realize worldwide kosen-rufu, the Daishonin’s wish.

And that is nothing other than advancing “together with the Soka Gakkai,” which is making worldwide kosen-rufu a reality. [...]

The Shared Struggle of Mentor and Disciple, a Journey for a Brighter Future

As I was about to make my first visit to Kansai after becoming the third Soka Gakkai president, I wrote in my diary: “Will treat each and every person in a friendly manner. Will talk with every person, hold dialogues and ask that we share one another’s happiness and sufferings for the rest of our lives. This is my credo. I shall advance, fight and suffer as an emissary of the Buddha, an uncrowned hero and an honorable ally of the ordinary people.”⁹

Let us cheerfully continue our great journey of the shared struggle of mentor and disciple for worldwide kosen-rufu committed to changing the destiny of all humankind.

It is time for our successor Bodhisattvas of the Earth to take the stage.

Strengthen your life force through confident prayer! With vibrant courage build a brighter future! Keep encouraging and supporting one another throughout all! Advance to victory!

⁹ Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary: One Man's Journey from the Beginning of Faith to Worldwide Leadership for Peace* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2000), p. 503.