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**LOTUS SŪTRA, LECTURE NO. 5**  
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**NOT VERBATIM**

What is told in this sūtra is the view of the Dharmakāya world, Sambhogakāya world and Nirmānakāya world. We say *shoho jisso* [the real state of all elements or dharmas]. *Shoho* means various dharmas or various beings. *Jisso* is reality. So this is the right view of life and the world, in which various famous disciples of Buddha and *arhats* and various Sambhogakāya Buddhas and Dharmakāya Buddhas and Nirmānakāya Buddhas would appear. I think it's better to start little by little.

The first chapter is an introduction to the whole sūtra, and it describes the scale of the sūtra. "Thus have I heard." All sūtras are started with these words. *Nyoze gamon* [*evam maya shrutam*], "Thus have I heard." At the meeting of the compilation [of the sūtras] after Buddha passed away, the leading disciples decided on [the correct form of] Buddha's words. So they started with, "Thus I heard." All the sūtras are supposed to have been spoken by Buddha, but it is not actually so. It is a kind of formal way of starting sūtras.

*Thus I have heard.*<sup>1</sup>

"Once upon a time." It doesn't say when.

*Once upon a time the Lord was staying at Rāgagriha, on the Gridhrakūta mountain, with a numerous assemblage of monks, twelve hundred monks, all of them Arhats, stainless, free from depravity, self-controlled, thoroughly emancipated in thought and knowledge, of noble breed, (like unto) great elephants, having done their task, done their duty, acquitted their charge, reached the goal; in whom the ties which bound them to existence were wholly destroyed, whose minds were thoroughly emancipated by perfect knowledge, who had reached the utmost perfection in subduing all their thoughts; who were possessed of the transcendent faculties; eminent disciples, such as the venerable Ajnata-Kaundinya, the venerable Asvajit, the venerable Vashpa, the venerable Mahanaman, the venerable Bhadrika, the venerable Maha-Kasyapa, the venerable Kasyapa of Uruvilva, the venerable Kasyapa of Nadi, the venerable Kasyapa of Gaya, the venerable Shāriputra, the venerable*

<sup>1</sup> Suzuki-rōshi is reading from H. Kern's translation of the *Lotus Sūtra: Saddharma Puōarāka or The Lotus of the True Law*, New York: Dover, 1963 (an unaltered reprint of the 1884 edition of *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXI), Chapter I, "Introductory," p. 1.

*Maha-Maudgalyayana, the venerable Maha-Katyayana, the venerable Aniruddha, the venerable Revata, the venerable Kapphina, the venerable Gavampati, the venerable Pilindavatsa, the venerable Vakula, the venerable Bharadvaga, the venerable Maha-Kaushthila, the venerable Nanda (alias Mahananda), the venerable Upananda, the venerable Sundara-Nanda, the venerable Purna Maitrayaniputra, the venerable Subhuti, the venerable Rahula; with them yet other great disciples, as venerable Ananda, still under training, and two thousand other monks, some of whom still under training, the others masters; with six thousand nuns having at their head Mahaprajapati and the nun Yasodhara, the mother of Rahula, along with her train; (further) with eight thousand Bodhisattvas, all unable to slide back, endowed with the spells of supreme perfect enlightenment, firmly standing in wisdom; who moved onward the never deviating wheel of the law; who had propitiated many hundred thousands of Buddhas; who under many hundred thousands of Buddhas had planted the roots of goodness, had been intimate with many hundred thousands of Buddhas, were in body and mind fully penetrated with the feeling of charity, able in communicating the wisdom of the Tathagatas; very wise, having reached the perfection of wisdom; renowned in many hundred thousands of worlds; having saved many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of beings; such as the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Manjusri, as prince royal; the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta, Sarvarthanaman, Nityodyukta—*

This is very difficult. I may bite my tongue.

*—Anikshiptadhura, Ratnapani, Bhaishagyaraga, Pradanasura, Ratnakandra, Ratnaprabha, Purnakandra, Mahavikramin, Trailokavikramin, Anantavikramin, Mahapratibhana, Satatasamitabhiyukta, Dharanidhara, Akshayamati, Padmasri, Nakshatraraga, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Maitreya, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Simha."*

There are many names, but I will only explain some of the important ones among them.

*Thus have I heard. Once upon a time the Lord was staying at Ragagriha, on the Gridhrakuta mountain, with a numerous assemblage of monks, twelve hundred monks, all of them Arhats.*

*Sravakas practice their way in order to attain arhatship. Arhatship is called, "no learn." It means there is nothing more to learn or study after reaching arhatship. An arhat was a perfect being—not Buddha*

himself, but next to Buddha. As you know, after Mahāyāna Buddhism arrived, there were the bodhisattvas and buddhas above the arhats.

Those who attained arhatship were free from depravity, stainless. Stainless means that they annihilated all the stains, or all the evil desires.

*Free from depravity, self controlled.*

Yesterday I explained self-control. You know the difference between controlling self, or desires, and annihilating desires? There is a slight difference. Do you remember? Sally asked that question. Controlling desires is a more autonomous or voluntary way. You do it by yourself. Annihilating is a more negative way. You annihilate some desires because they are evil and we have to get rid of them. Self control is a more positive way. If you switch your practice over from negation to self control, it becomes more religious in its true sense.

Actually, this difference between the attitudes of annihilating or controlling divides Buddhism right in two. You may not like either of them. You don't like to control your desires, but that is not Zen. We have limitless desires, so if you let all your desires go as they want, what will happen to you? You must do something with them, that is true. Do you agree with that? You may say, "Desires as they are," but that does not mean to let them go as they want.

Usually when we say "desires," they are not just desires, they are desires plus something. That something may be various powers or faculties you have, and even reason will act with those limitless desires. With the aid of all the faculties we have, those limitless desires will extend themselves until we get lost. So something should be done with them. The first stage is to know what they are and how they work. When you know what they are and how they work, you will know how to develop them. That is actually our practice. I tentatively call this kind of effort "self-control" or "controlling desires". Control is not such a good word; you may find some better, beautiful, fancy word for that. But what I mean is to know the nature of desires and how they work, what kinds of friends they have, and what kind of things they do. We should know this and develop desires appropriately; that is self control. So instead of annihilating them, we should know what they are. Instead of trying to attain arhatship by annihilating desires, one by one, you will develop them.

These are opposite ways—one is negative and the other is positive, and Buddhism is divided in two. One way goes from top to bottom, the other from bottom to top. *Hongaku homon* [the dharma gate of innate buddha-nature] means to start from Buddhahood and work on our world and our desires. *Shikaku homon* [the dharma gate of

realizing one's buddha-nature by undergoing religious exercises] means to begin with annihilating greed, and annihilate more and more subtle desires until you attain enlightenment. But the other way is to start from Dharmakāya Buddhahood, or Sambhogakāya Buddhahood, and come down to our world to help others.

*Hon* means origin, *gaku* means enlightenment, *shi* means beginning. It looks like the two ways are quite different, but what we actually do is not different. To annihilate or to control is the same thing, because desires are coexistent with our being. That I am here means desire is here. If you annihilate all the desires, you don't survive. So to annihilate actually means to control, because you cannot annihilate them. If you say to cut out all desires, that looks like there is a strong feeling of controlling them. "Cut out!" If you cut them out, you will die, but that much confidence is necessary. If you extend the practice of annihilating seriously, it will end in asceticism. But if you know the real nature of desires and how they work, those two practices are the same.

If you think that they are evil desires which we should get rid of, and you are worried about them, then that is not our way. So it may be better to say to control them. Here, in the sutra, it says "self controlled," but for *sravakas*, it is a more annihilistic way.

*With a numerous assemblage of monks, twelve hundred monks, all of them arhats, stainless, free from depravity, self controlled, thoroughly emancipated in thought and knowledge.*

It is necessary to be emancipated from thought and knowledge. They are "of noble breed, (like unto) great elephants." In India there were strong feelings of class discrimination. "Having done their task"—the task of annihilating evil desires—"done their duty"—their duty to attain emancipation—"acquitted their charge"—acquitted their karmic life charge—"reached the goal"—goal of arhatship—"in whom the ties which bound them to existence were wholly destroyed."

We have buddha-nature, but at the same time, buddha-nature is covered by something—first of all, ignorance. This point should be explained clearly, but I don't think I have enough time. Figuratively speaking, our desires look like a cloud in front of the moon, but it is not actually so. If there is a cloud, it should be destroyed.

*Whose minds were thoroughly emancipated by perfect knowledge.*

Perfect knowledge is wisdom. Perfect wisdom is different from the wisdom of knowing something. Perfect knowledge is not knowledge in a dualistic sense.

*Who had reached the utmost perfection in subduing all their thoughts.*

Perfect knowledge is called wisdom. Perfect wisdom is called non-discriminating wisdom or non-judgmental wisdom or non-thinking wisdom. So unless we subdue all our thoughts, we cannot have perfect knowledge.

*Who were possessed of the transcendent faculties.*

There are many transcendent faculties: clairvoyance, or hearing something from a distance, seeing through some substance; *arhats* had these kinds of faculties. Those *arhats* were there when this sutra was told.

The group mentioned next is the eminent disciples, such as the ten disciples of Buddha. I should explain them one by one, but I will only explain the most important ones, the ten eminent disciples or the four eminent *sravakas*. *Sravakas* are also Buddha's disciples. They are the most direct disciples of Buddha, so we call them "Theravāda." The Theravāda are the old disciples or *shiniya* [?] disciples.

The five disciples, including Kaundinya and the venerable Asvagit were the disciples to whom Buddha spoke his first sermon. Originally those five disciples were Siddhartha's men. When he escaped from the castle, those five men followed him. And as you know, when Shākyamuni Buddha gave up asceticism, they thought, "My master is not strong enough, so he gave up the practice." They continued to practice asceticism, but Buddha started to practice zazen under the Bodhi tree and attained enlightenment. He thought for forty-nine days about how to explain his experience and whom to explain it to. At last Buddha went back to his five men and told the first sermon. Those are the five disciples. And ten more disciples follow those five.

Thank you very much. Do we have more time?

**Claude:** Yes, we have eight minutes.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** *Hai.*

**Q:** Are we *sravakas* in that we are listening and learning from you, and are the bodhisattvas the ones of the Mahāyāna school, of the younger generation who sort of split away from the elders? Just because we can hear the Buddha directly doesn't mean we can't still stand on our own feet.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Actually, this is how Buddhism developed. When I

explain how Buddhism actually developed from original Buddhism, I cannot say this is also how it developed from the *sravakayana* to the Mahāyāna. I should explain it in order as it happened. But at least when I am explaining this sutra, I should explain from the viewpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism, since this is a Mahāyāna scripture. For the Mahāyāna Buddhist, there is no *sravaka* or *pratyeka*. True Mahāyāna includes everything. Actually, when we discriminate, that is the *Sravakayana*. What was wrong with them was that they were too proud of their teaching as direct disciples of Buddha, saying, "This is true Buddhism, and those who observe Buddha's precepts and can recite his teaching are priests, and those who cannot do that are laymen." That was wrong; they had too much confidence in themselves. That is why we say they are just trying to save themselves, that they just help themselves but not sentient beings, or that they are too proud of his teaching. So there are no sentient beings in their minds. That is why they are called "Hīnayāna". They made this mistake, but at least their practice was good and their knowledge was good.

**Q:** You speak of true wisdom being the wisdom of non-discrimination. How are we to understand the emphasis placed on the view that ignorance is like clouds in front of the moon? It sometimes seems like that's the way it is.

**Suzuki-rōshi:** I wanted to explain that, but it is too complicated, so I didn't. The *sravakas* developed their rigid, or substantial, understanding of Buddhism and set up teachings like *kusha* [abhidharma] and *yuishiki* [*vijnana-matrata* = "consciousness only"]. *Yuishiki* is pretty good, but *kusha* is philosophically very complicated. It takes nine years to study *kusha* and three to study *yuishiki*, or, if you want to study all the Hīnayāna philosophy, it takes twelve years. Even if you devoted yourself solely to the study of *kusha*, it would take nine years. They established such a fancy, complicated philosophy. It may be interesting for some intellectual people, but if you study it, more and more you will be involved in thinking Buddhism. And why were the direct disciples of Buddha the ones who subdued all their thought, you see? They went more and more in the wrong direction. This is the point for which they are blamed.

But originally it was very good. So, especially in Soto, every morning we recite the sutra for the *arhats*. We say *sammyo rokutsu mappo shobo ni kaeshi*. *Sammyo rokutsu* is the *arhat's* power. [*Sammyo* = *tisro vidyah* = three types of knowledge: of former births, of future destinies of all beings, and of the origin and way to remove suffering. *Rokutsu* = *sad abhijnah* = six kinds of supernatural powers of buddhas and *arhats*: free activity, eyes capable of seeing everything, ears capable of hearing everything, insight into others' thinking, remembrance of the former state of existence, and perfect freedom.

*Mappo* = *saddharma-vipralopa* = last of the three time periods of Buddhism. *Shobo* = *sad-dharma* = true law or period of righteous law. *Kaeshi* = ?] We should be like the *arhats*, who practiced Buddhism so hard and devoted themselves so well. Although right now we are in the last period of Buddhism, when we practice our way as the *arhats* did, this time is not the last period any more, this time is like the time when Buddha was there. So Buddha should be with them, and Buddha is here. With this spirit, we worship the *arhats* every morning. We are very critical about some of the philosophy they created, but we respect their practice very much—not their teaching, but their practice, their sincerity.

*[Transcript checked and edited by Brian Fikes.]*

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This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript by Brian Fikes. It is not verbatim. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (7/17/01).