

68-02-00.L5 [68-02-00-E]

Feb., 1968, Lotus Sutra #5

Z.M.C.

(transcription checked, edited by Brian F.)

Manjusri again is answering Maitreya, telling him what he has seen. He is so sure that the Buddha will tell them the *Lotus Sutra*.

"And so, Agita, having once seen a similar fore-token of the Lord, I infer from a similar ray being emitted just now, that the Lord is about to expound the Dharma-paryaya called the Lotus of the True Law."

"And on that occasion, in order to treat the subject more copiously, Manjusri, the prince royal, uttered the following stanzas:"

(Stanza #57:) "I remember a past period, inconceivable, illimited kalpas ago, when the highest of beings, the Jina of the name of Kandrasuryapradipa, was in existence.

"He preached the true law, he, the leader of creatures; he educated an infinite number of kotis of beings, and roused inconceivably many Bodhisattvas to acquiring supreme Buddha-knowledge.

"And the eight sons born to him, the leader, when he was prince royal, no sooner saw that the great sage had embraced ascetic life, than they resigned worldly pleasures and became monks."

All of them, all of his eight sons resigned worldly pleasures and became monks.

"And the Lord of the world proclaimed the law, and revealed to thousands of kotis of living beings the Sutra, the development, which by name is called 'the excellent Exposition of Infinity.'

"Immediately after delivering his speech, the leader crossed his legs and entered upon the meditation of 'the excellent Exposition of the Infinite.' There on his seat of the law the eminent seer continued absorbed in meditation."

He was absorbed in meditation like Shakyamuni Buddha is doing.

"And there fell a celestial rain of Mandaravas, while the drums (of heaven) resounded without being struck; the gods and elves in the sky paid honour to the highest of men.

"And simultaneously all the fields (of Buddha) began trembling. A wonder it was, a great

prodigy. Then the chief emitted from between his brows one extremely beautiful ray,

"Which moving to the eastern quarter glittered, illuminating the world all over the extent of eighteen thousand fields. It manifested the vanishing and appearing beings.

"Some of the fields then seemed jewelled, others showed the hue of lapis lazuli, all splendid, extremely beautiful, owing to the radiance of the ray from the leader.

"Gods and men, as well as Nagas, goblins, Gandharvas, nymphs, Kinnaras, and those occupied with serving the Sugata became visible in the spheres and paid their devotion.

"The Buddhas also, those self-born beings, appeared of their own accord, resembling golden columns; like unto a golden disk (within lapis lazuli), they revealed the law in the midst of the assembly.

"The disciples, indeed, are not to be counted: the disciples of Sugatas are numberless. Yet the lustre of the ray renders them all visible in every field.

"Energetic, without breach or flaw in their course, similar to gems and jewels, the sons of the leaders of men are visible in the mountain caves where they are dwelling.

Numerous Bodhisattvas, like the sand of the Ganges, who are spending all their wealth in giving alms, who have the strength of patience, are devoted to contemplation and wise, become all of them visible by that ray.

"Immovable, unshaken, firm in patience, devoted to contemplation, and absorbed in meditation are seen the true sons of the Sugatas while they are striving for supreme enlightenment by dint of meditation.

"They preach the law in many spheres, and point to the true, quiet spotless state they know. Such is the effect produced by the power of the Sugata.

"And all the four classes of hearers on seeing the power of the mighty Kandrakadipa were filled with joy and asked one another: How is this?

"And soon afterwards, as the Leader of the world, worshipped by men, gods, and goblins, rose from his meditation, he addressed his son Varaprabha, the wise Bodhisattva and preacher of the law:" And he aroused himself from meditation.

"Thou art wise, the eye and refuge of the world; thou art the trustworthy keeper of my law, and canst bear witness as to the treasure of laws which I am to lay bare to the weal of living beings.'

"Then, after rousing and stimulating, praising and lauding many Bodhisattvas, did the

Jina proclaim the supreme laws during fully sixty intermediate kalpas."

Now Kandrasurya is starting to give the *Lotus Sutra*.

"And whatever excellent supreme law was proclaimed by the Lord of the world while continuing sitting on the very same seat, was kept in memory by Baraprabha, the son of Jina, the preacher of the law."

He was the one who told this *Lotus Sutra*.

"And after the Jina and Leader had manifested the supreme law and stimulated the numerous crowd, he spoke, that day, towards the world including the gods (as follows):

"I have manifested the rule of the law; I have shown the nature of the law; now, O monks, it is the time of my Nirvana; this very night, in the middle watch.

"Be zealous and strong in persuasion; apply yourselves to my lessons; (for) the Jinas, the great seers, are but rarely met with in the lapse of myriads of kotis of Aeons.'

"The many sons of Buddha were struck with grief and filled with extreme sorrow when they heard the voice of the highest of men announcing that his Nirvana was near at hand.

"To comfort so inconceivably many kotis of living beings the king of kings said: 'Be not afraid, O monks; after my Nirvana there shall be another Buddha.

"The wise Bodhisattva Srigarbha, after finishing his course in faultless knowledge, shall reach highest, supreme enlightenment, and become a Jina under the name of Vimalagranetra.'

"That very night, in the middle watch, he met complete extinction, like a lamp when the cause (of its burning) is exhausted. His relics were distributed, and of his Stupas there was an infinite number of myriads of kotis."

There is, you know, a similar story in China. When a Zen Master Nangyo Ejo passed away, the Emperor asked him, "What should we do about your relics? Is there anything we can do to help you? What do you want me to do?" And Ejo said, "If you build me a mound for my relics, it is enough." "How should I build it?" the Emperor asked. Ejo said, "My disciple will know it well, so ask him." So after he passed away, the Emperor asked his disciple how to make the mound. The disciple said, "Make the best mound." "How do you make the best mound?" The disciple said, "From the east side of the Yangtse to the west side of the Yangtse River." And the Emperor couldn't understand. It would cover the whole country! So he couldn't answer, he couldn't say yes. Ejo's true body covers everything, you know. He is one with everything, so even though he dies, there is no difference.

"The monks and nuns at the time being, who strove after supreme, highest enlightenment, numerous as sand of the Ganges, applied themselves to the commandment of the Sugata."

The *Lotus Sutra* should not be understood literally. What it describes is how things exist, animate and inanimate beings, human and non-human beings, from the lowest being of the six worlds to the highest being of Buddha. You know the six worlds. Among the six worlds, the celestial world is the highest, next is the human world, and the hell world and hungry ghost world are the lowest. Above the celestial world are *sravakas*, *pratyekas*, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. Buddha is the highest. This sutra includes all of those beings. We describe reality in terms of those beings, but that is not enough. We should understand in that way. If so, the *Lotus Sutra* is not the only valuable sutra, or the highest sutra. All the sutras are very valuable. There may be sutras not yet described by anyone.

So, as Dogen Zenji said, even the sound of the bell and the color of the mountain are bodhisattvas--they all can teach. Actually, he means that all we see teaches the *Lotus Sutra*. That is how we Zen Buddhists understand this sutra. Zen Buddhism, especially Dogen's Zen, actually arose from the Tendai school and teaching. But the difference is that the other school treats this sutra as the king of sutras, the highest sutra, but we do not. We think this is one of the important sutras, but all of the sutras are important. When we understand everything, everything will be important. This is the difference between our understanding of the *Lotus Sutra* and the understanding of other schools. And, according to Dogen, whether or not we attain enlightenment, we are actually fluently speaking about the truth.

Here it says, *daiichigi[-tai]*, "the First Principle". What does it mean? The first Principle is the reality, the absolute, which cannot be conveyed in terms of good or bad, supreme or common. It is the principle that everything is revealed through everything, revealing itself and fluently speaking about the First Principle. So he understood enlightenment in this way. But it does not mean that there is no need to attain enlightenment. If you understand in that way, it is already the Second Principle, not the First Principle. If it is necessary or not necessary, this is the Second Principle. So if it is necessary to say something, you must say, "Sometimes necessary, sometimes not necessary." Whatever you say, that is right. That is more like Dogen Zenji's understanding.

The other day, in the fireplace room, Lama Govinda talked about the Shingon understanding, the so-called "Tantric" understanding --not the physical Tantric, but the original Tantric, esoteric teaching of Buddhism. The reason we say "esoteric" is that true teaching is beyond understanding. Esoteric means you can't see or hear it. When you cannot see or understand it, you may say that is mystery or mystical. But that is not true understanding. There may be two kinds of things you cannot understand. One is something mystical --just because you cannot see or cannot understand it. But there is another thing which you cannot understand. It is too obvious. The reality is too real to

speaking about. We say, "If you want to explain what water is, give him water, don't speak about it. Even though you speak about it, it is not possible to explain what water is." That kind of true experience, or reality, is not possible to talk about. In this sense, there is esoteric teaching.

Tantric or Shingon Buddhism emphasizes this point. Their basic scripture is the *Diamond Sutra*, which was told by Buddha, but not by the historical Buddha. Buddha didn't speak this sutra with his mouth. He didn't tell it for an audience, but for himself. This means that we should not read that scripture with our mind. That is why they explain the sutra with various *mudras*. The Zen understanding is very similar to this, but Zen does not depend on any sutra, because everything is a sutra. But the Shingon school chooses one scripture. They say this sutra was told by the Bodhisattva Dainichinyorai [Mahavairocana-tathagata].

We say *kenzoku* [?], which means "like his hands or legs or ears". He told it to himself. *Kenzoku* means "his name", actually. But when they say Dainichinyorai's name, it means his *mandala*. The whole *mandala* of Dainichinyorai is his body. There are many buddhas in the *mandala*, and all of them are a part of his body. Dainichinyorai is telling the truth to himself, to those buddhas in the *mandala*. Since they are a part of himself, he is not giving some special teaching to anyone else. Do you understand? It is like the universe is telling the truth to the universe, the whole cosmic being is telling the truth to the cosmic being. So whatever is going on in the cosmos is the teaching itself. When we understand their teaching in this way, it is very close to Zen.

In the *Shobogenzo* we have the fascicle called *Hokke Ten Hokke*, which means "Turning the *Lotus Sutra*". The title of this fascicle came from the Sixth Patriarch. I think you know that. Once the Sixth Patriarch was giving Dharma to people, and a bold disciple, a very arrogant fellow, appeared in front of him. But he couldn't bow to the floor, he failed to lower his head to the floor. So the Sixth Patriarch said, "Why are you so arrogant? Why do you bow in that way?" And the monk said, "I am very sorry." "If you say so, it is alright. But if you fail to lower your head to the floor, you must have something in your mind. What do you have in your mind?" The boy said, "The *Lotus Sutra*. I am reading it every day, and I must have read it maybe thousands of times." "Even though you are reading the *Lotus Sutra*, you don't understand what it means," the Sixth Patriarch said. "What is the true meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*?" the boy asked him. And he said, "I will explain it to you, but I cannot read it, so please read it to me." So the boy started to read it, and the Sixth Patriarch said, "If your mind is deluded, you will be turned by the *Lotus Sutra*. If you are enlightened, you will turn it."

Dogen Zenji, referring to this story, said to be turned by the sutra, or to turn the sutra, or to be deluded or to be enlightened, are all the First Principle. The *Lotus Sutra* says there is no difference. That is Dogen Zenji's understanding. What the Sixth Patriarch meant is not different from Dogen Zenji's understanding, but Dogen Zenji made what the Sixth Patriarch said clearer. To be turned by the *Lotus Sutra* means to read it literally, or in an intellectual or dualistic way: "I read the *Lotus Sutra*." To turn it means the *Lotus Sutra* turns the *Lotus Sutra*, like the Shingon understanding of the

Bodhisattva or Tathagata of the *Diamond Sutra* giving the teaching to himself. That is how we turn the *Lotus Sutra*.

So there is no difference. If you are enlightened, you are one with the whole universe, and the whole universe is telling the truth to the whole universe, to everything, or the whole universe is revealing itself through every being. What is happening is the activity of big, One Being, which is called Buddha. This is how we should understand the *Lotus Sutra*.

In short, if we explain Buddhism or Zen Buddhism in this way, that whatever we are doing is a part of that activity, what we are discussing may seem too big, and seem to have nothing to do with our everyday life. But this is not just our understanding. We say, "When we talk about the greatness of the teaching, it will be as great as the universe. But when we talk about it on a small scale, it will penetrate the smallest particle of being imaginable."

That is why you may think our way is too careful and particular. We say, "Don't place something that way," or, "You should put something which belongs in a higher place in a higher place, and something which belongs in a lower place in a lower place. Don't mix them up." Our way is very careful in this respect. So our teaching is limitless in both ways. Our teaching is on a great scale, and, at the same time, it is very particular on a small scale. This is the nature of our world.

As you know, I like stones very much, but especially big ones. Someone came to me the other day with a magnifying glass and said, "Look at those stones." So I looked at them one by one. But to my great astonishment, those small stones were exactly the same as big ones! They were as interesting as big ones, the shapes were different, and some had very good shapes. You could make a beautiful garden with those stones. I was very pleased. I thought, this is what the universe consists of and how everything is going. So, if you cannot accomplish something great, you can work on a very small thing, in a very small scale, and the meaning is not any different at all. This is the nature of our practice and teaching.

So those teachings were not started by Buddha. Before Buddha there must have been many many Buddhas, limitless, numerous Buddhas. There *must* have been, in this way this sutra describes reality.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript – 68-02-00-E
