

Universal Values and the Lotus Sutra

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THE Lotus Sutra is the scripture par excellence of Ekayāna (ichijō in Japanese). It is the ultimate teaching of the Buddha in that all sentient beings are capable of attaining Bodhi.

The rivers of the earlier yānas lead to this ocean of Ekayāna or ichijō kai. This concept is illustrated in the Lotus Sutra in the parable of the children trapped in a burning house whose father rescues them with promises of various kinds of pleasing carts. Once they are safe he rewards them with a more magnificent cart. The second chapter on expedient means says that the Buddhas employ only a single yāna to preach the dharma to all beings in all lands throughout the universe. This doctrine is an enunciation of the universality of values.

“Nalanda is the concretisation of the Lotus Sutra”

The famous Chinese pilgrim and philosopher Hsüan-tsang (602–664) says that King Śākrāditya/Kumāragupta 1 (ruled 414–455) established the Nalanda University due to his faith in the Ekayāna. The word ‘lotus’ (rengue) in the title of the sutra refers to lotuses blooming all over Nalanda. I-tsing (Yijing/ 635–713) confirms this observation of Hsüan-tsang and adds that monk Rājavarṃśa from Uttarāpatha or Trans-Gandhara region requested King Śākrāditya to construct a monastic centre at Nalanda the birthplace of Śāriputra one of the two main disciples of Lord Buddha. This request of Rājavarṃśa has a historic basis. The monasteries and stupas of Gandhara and Trans-Gandhara were destroyed by the Hunas and a new academic centre was an urgent need. The Gupta kings were in constant combat with the Hunas. The monks of the region were their constant allies and a crucial factor for peace to enhance prosperity. Nalanda is the concretisation of the Lotus Sutra.

Nālika is the lotus flower and Nala is the lotus stalk. Lotus is space. The ‘One lotus in the sky’ is the Sun or Brahman. The lotus of the heart

is dwelt by the Golden Person of the Sun. The lotus is a metaphor for purity in the Sāmyutta-nikāya. The Lotus Sutra is unique in celebrating the lotus in its very title. The choice of salutation to the title by Nichiren Daishonin¹ (1222–1282) reflects this infinite ‘lotus wisdom’ (renguchi). The Lotus Sutra has the unique privilege of being the founding concept of future Nalanda, that became the light of Buddhism across many countries. Lotus Sutra became the generative power of immense systems of Buddhism at Nalanda.

Lotus Sutra Teaches of “Light within Us”

Nichiren Daishonin triggered a new spiritual energy through this sutra and continues to inspire us in the ‘sweet dew’ of Dharma so that we can attain serenity and warm reality of life in a rationale of humanised dedication to our fellow-beings, as well as to natural surrounds to ensure global peace.

The Lotus Sutra is the searching of modern minds for direction and purpose in life to fill the spiritual emptiness. Growth-mania has become the imperative but it brings in its wake something missing. As we advance in search of light, the words of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda come to mind:

To dispel the dark clouds in my mind
To seek a great tree unbowed by the storm
I spring from earth.

Dr. Ikeda makes it more specific in contextualising wisdom in the innermost being of sentient beings in the words of Hesse:

For the light for which you seek
Dwells within you.

The Lotus Sutra is the core philosophy of this light within us.

Dr. Ikeda reminisces the imprisonment of Mr. Toda in 1944 when he read the Lotus Sutra over and over again. Pondering over a difficult passage, he realised that Buddha is life. He was reading the Sutra with his whole being. He perceived that Buddha is life itself, and Buddhism is the most profound essence endowed with infinite meaning for all.

Lotus Sutra Brings forth Powerful Energy for Living

All humans are endowed with life. Life is an open entity in constant exchange with matter and energy. Nichiren Daishonin says that myō of myōhō has three meanings; to open, to be perfect and to revive. The Lotus Sutra is the perfect opening. Toda told Dr. Ikeda that we achieve nobility when we encounter problems. In his most difficult exile, Nichiren Daishonin perceived that the Lotus Sutra is to transform the inner state of life and there is no distinction between the mind, the Buddha and human beings. It is a way of relevance, which brings forth powerful energy for living.

The universe is identical to life, and life is identical to the universe. In the revitalisation of life, life force will be the radiation of spirituality along with a material order of restraint. Mr. Toda opened the door to a 'Century of Life' with a reverence for a non-material order, as practitioners of the Soka Gakkai hum the daimoku with eyes of challenge and dedication.

The pure-hearted women of the Soka Gakkai are a continuation of the appearance of an order of bhikshuni's. The Lotus Sutra frequently speaks of "good men and good women", to indicate the equality for women. It is a sutra open to all people and was expounded for the true happiness and peace of all people. Kumarajiva who transcreated the Sutra into Chinese says that it is to "benefit and bring peace and happiness to living beings in large measure"². The members of the Soka Gakkai are from all classes, leading a life in the secular world but assume full responsibility. Nichiren Daishonin wrote: "when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs"³.

Nichiren Daishonin says: "one dances with joy when one comes to the realization that the elements of the body and the mind are the Wonderful Law"⁴. When Śāriputra understood the replacement of the three vehicles by one vehicle, he danced with joy.

The ox-carts are offered to the children in a burning house to lure them out. This is an allegory that the world is suffering, the white cart is the wonderful myōhō or dharmā, and the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra leads us to unsurpassed happiness. These great carts traverse the most treacherous peaks as they roam in the realm of values. Nichiren Daishonin remarks that Kumarajiva has shortened their description in the Chinese transcreation and he refers to the Sanskrit text for details of their splendour which had more than 69,380 Buddhas and bodhisattavas sitting on lotuses⁵. The Chinese text has 69,384 characters. So each character of the Lotus Sutra is a Buddha. Using this parable of the

burning house the Buddha tries to awaken deluded beings to recognise the burning samsara and to enliven their years with the splendid vision of the Lotus Sutra. Vasubandhu (ca. 400–450) said that this parable refers to the folly of seeking happiness in the flaming house of the threefold world.

Faith in the Lotus Sutra Opens our Inherent Wisdom

Dr. Ikeda points out that hearing only the parables does not contribute understanding. Understanding entails a transformation of one's entire being.

Dr. Ikeda says that the distortion of our times derive from a confusion of holistic wisdom and fragmentary knowledge. Nichiren Daishonin says that 'myō' means 'to open'. Life is the opening of full potential and limitless advancement. Kumarajiva titles the fourth chapter as 'belief and understanding' which is continuous seeking of self-improvement.

The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is a "cluster of unsurpassed jewels". Everyone possesses the jewel of life, and we have to recognise it. After the 1995 Hanshin Earthquake, someone said: "I realised that the most important things in life are those that money cannot buy: life, air and human kindness".

Dr. Ikeda cites the Spanish philosopher Gasset: "We have ideas, but we live based on our beliefs." Beliefs are the "vessel" of life. We are suddenly awakened when they crumble and we find ourselves in a desperate condition. Faith and reason have to be unified in a holistic vision. Lotus Sutra emphasises faith or belief to eliminate fundamental darkness of ignorance. Faith opens, doubt closes. In the words of Nichiren Daishonin "This word "belief" is a sharp sword that cuts off fundamental darkness or ignorance"⁶. Faith will restore the wholeness of society and will help to attain the summit of true life.

Lotus Sutra Aims for "Human Flowers" in Full Bloom

The Lotus Sutra says: "A great cloud... rises up in the world and covers it all over"⁷. The great cloud represents the Buddha and his preaching are the "Dharma Rain". The preaching of the sutra is to benefit all people equally, without any class or other distinctions. It is to look upon all as universally equal, without a mind of favour or hate, greed or attachment. It is a recognition of diversity, and of treasuring the individual.

Dr. Ikeda says clearly: "The Soka Gakkai, without ever departing

from the individual human being, has been fighting to enable all people to realize absolute happiness. This is a lofty endeavor that will shine brilliantly in the annals of human history”⁸.

The metaphor of the cloud and the sound of thunder are the voice of compassion of the Buddha and the rain falling down is the loving protection to all, that moistens the lives of people in their infinite diversity.

The Soka Gakkai is the Dharma rain that is fast ushering in a century of “human flowers” in full bloom. My friends, the practitioners of the Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) congregated here today, are the flavoured rain that moistens human flowers so that each is able to bear fruit⁹.

Nichiren Daishonin planted the realisation of the myōhō that each one can develop the boundless potential of life. When we enter the Soka, we can enjoy the storms, blizzards and withering gales of life, as well as its spring breezes, blue skies and sunshine.

Lotus Sutra Shows the Supreme Path in Life

The SGM is the “jewel in the robe”¹⁰ to change destiny into mission. Life is an evanescent dew, but with the ocean of the Lotus Sutra and the great earth of myōhō, it will be connected with eternity of life. Members of the SGM have to continue to deepen their understanding of the myōhō, while feeling happy in helping others. Their seeking and saving are the supreme path in life.

In the chapter “The Teacher of the Law”, Śākyamuni propounds three rules of preaching of robe, seat and room. The robe of gentleness and forbearance, the seat of the emptiness of all phenomena and room of compassion. It is a compassionate life-space to embrace all as equals. Forbearance or patience generates the greatest strength. Emptiness of phenomena means taking selfless action. In the words of Nichiren Daishonin the world has to be a Land of Tranquil Light.

In the latest issue of SGI Graphics the message of Dr. Ikeda is:

When one makes through a night of adversity
A morning of clear and serene skies follows.
Only when one endures trials of wind and snow
Does the sun shine magnificently.¹¹

I have followed in letter and spirit inimitable clarifications of the Lotus Sutra by Dr. Ikeda to awaken us to the dormant but shining life inside ourselves. The distinguished members of the SGM deserve the highest

appreciation in their solid efforts to pervade their world with boundless love. The raptures of our roots have to live in the kinetics of tomorrows. The Soka Gakkai is the song wafting in from the dreams of centuries.

NOTES

¹ “Daishonin” in Japanese means “Great Sage” or “Great Teacher”.

² *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 32.

³ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1.* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999) , p. 376.

⁴ *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, trans. Burton Watson (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2004), p. 45

⁵ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2.* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2006) , p. 976.

⁶ *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 54.

⁷ *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 100.

⁸ *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: A Discussion, vol. 2.* (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2000), p. 72.

⁹ *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 105.

¹⁰ “One of the seven parables in the Lotus Sutra. It is related in the “Five Hundred Disciples” (eighth) chapter by five hundred arhats to demonstrate their understanding of the one vehicle teaching. It tells of an impoverished man who goes to visit a close wealthy friend. Being treated to wine, he becomes drunk and falls asleep. The wealthy friend must go out on business, but before leaving, he sews a priceless jewel into the lining of his sleeping friend’s robe. When the poor man awakens, he has no idea that he has been given the jewel. He then sets out on a journey. To provide himself with food and clothing, he searches with all his energy, encountering great hardship. Being always in want, he is content with whatever little he can obtain. Later he happens to meet his old friend, who is shocked at his poverty and shows him the jewel in the robe. The man realizes for the first time that he possesses a priceless jewel and is overjoyed. The five hundred arhats explain that, just as this man was ignorant of the treasure he possessed, so the Buddha’s disciples were unaware that the Buddha had caused them to plant the seeds of an unsurpassed aspiration and were instead satisfied with provisional teachings and a small portion of nirvana.” (from *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*)

¹¹ January 2014 issue of *the SGI Graphic*