

What does the *Lotus Sutra* Say?

Chapter 3 – Those Who Can Nurture Awareness

What is “enlightenment”?

When you hear the word “enlightenment” in connection with Buddhism, what do you imagine? The state of mind that Buddha attained? To become a buddha? The ideal state that Buddhists strive to attain? In any case, you may regard it as an exalted state that is quite far away from our mundane ordinary condition. The “enlightenment” depicted in the *Lotus Sutra*, however, is quite different from those conceptions. The *Lotus Sutra* shows that “enlightenment” is something that can be shared by buddhas and people together.

Then what is “enlightenment,” and what kind of significance does it have for us? What is it like to live with a constant consciousness of “enlightenment”? In chapter seventeen of the Sanskrit text of the *Lotus Sutra*, “An Outcome of Joy” (chapter eighteen, Beneficial Effects of Joyful Acceptance, in Kumārajīva's Chinese translation), we can find a reference like this (paraphrased):

Suppose an adult or a child becomes very happy after hearing someone talk about how they live. Then that adult or child shares what he or she learned from that talk by speaking about it to other people at various times and places. What do you think might result from that?

When we look at our own situations, we talk about our daily experiences at our workplaces, in our homes, or with our friends. I, too, have many opportunities to listen to people at my office and at home: A young colleague at work may tell of the cute behavior of his or her newborn child; I often listen to my daughter at home as she releases her frustrations in long descriptions of situations at her office. And although I might not immediately recognize it, listening to all these experiences is making my daily life richer.

Sometimes when I am asked what I want to say—or what I have said—I find that, for whatever reason, I cannot immediately respond; and in such cases I cannot imagine that my silence is a good thing. I am constantly telling myself that the more I can communicate, the more I can enjoy my life. I think we can readily notice that realizations take place—for both speakers and listeners—within mutual communications, and that this happens repeatedly every day.

We will have such realizations as we go through the daily process of living, and these various realizations are things that will surely become reflected in our daily behavior. These are the “enlightenments” that are shown in the *Lotus Sutra*.

“When I said it in *that* way, he understood!” Rather than being locked away in our memory and

collecting “mental dust,” realizations like this should be reflected in the way we do things from that moment on. Our everyday lives should benefit from the use of such “aha” moments, and I think that this is what Shakyamuni Buddha is proposing in the *Lotus Sutra* as a fundamental aspect of the process of living. The sutra says that this is bodhisattva practice—a way of life that makes maximum use of every accumulated “aha” moment of enlightenment, and it is the basis of the Buddha’s teachings in the *Lotus Sutra*.

“Enlightenment” is the mental power of an awakened one—it is the capability of awakening as well as the actual use of that capability to awaken to things. In short, “enlightenment” is “being awake.” When any person has a dynamic approach to life, that person will often experience “Aha!” or “That’s it!” moments in his or her process of living. For every actively living individual, each such realization is an “enlightenment.” These enlightenments, these awakenings, these realizations, become sources of energy to live life positively. If we can recognize this, a willingness to fully live our lives at each moment will automatically arise. This is the proper mechanism of coordination between human awakenings and the actions that follow them.

Bodhisattvas actively accumulate enlightenments

Right at the beginning, the *Lotus Sutra* indicates that enlightenment exists in our daily lives. Even before talking about the state or condition of buddhahood, it is made clear that enlightenment—*bodhi*—is not only limited to that state or condition.

In the descriptions of the eighteen thousand worlds illuminated in the eastern direction found in the first chapter of the Sanskrit text of the *Lotus Sutra*, there is this statement about people who are doing practices:

To other children of the *sugatas* [buddhas]
Who engage constantly in various endeavors
While questing for supreme wisdom,
They [the buddhas] speak praises for their enlightenments.

Here, it should be particularly noted that “their enlightenments” is applied to those who are doing bodhisattva practices.

In his translation into Chinese, Kumārajīva translated the last line of this reference as 為說淨道. In Japan, this portion has traditionally been read, “the pure path was expounded for them.” However I believe the character 淨 is acting as a verb, and the Japanese reading of Kumārajīva’s translation should then be, “their purifying the path was expounded for them.” It can be seen here that Kumārajīva must have translated “their enlightenments” as 道 (path/pathway). And it will be shown later that, with regard to endeavors that bodhisattvas undertake to produce enlightenments, his translation was 求佛道 (seek the pathway of buddhahood).

In the Sanskrit verse quoted above, the portion that we have translated as “their enlightenments” is rendered differently in other translations, which shows differing interpretations of the passage among translators. The first translation of a Sanskrit text of the *Lotus Sutra* into a western language was a translation into French by Eugène Burnouf that was published at the end of 19th century. In Burnouf’s translation, the last line of the reference reads, “à ceux-là aussi ils adressent des éloges pour qu’ils parviennent à l’état de Buddha” (to these [the children of the buddhas] also they [the buddhas] address praises so that they [the children of the buddhas] arrive at the state of Buddha). At the beginning of the 20th century, Hendrik Kern translated the *Lotus Sutra* into English. In his translation, the last line reads, “them also [the children of the buddhas] they [the buddhas] admonish to enlightenment,” and “enlightenment” is not linked to any possessive pronoun. In the recent translation into Japanese by Seiren Matsunami (published by *Chuokoron-sha*, as part of the *Chuko-bunko Daijobutten* 4) this part is translated as “...are expounding praises of *bodhi*.” In another translation by Hiroshi Iwamoto (the *Lotus Sutra*, published in the *Iwanami Bunko*), the rendering is almost the same as that of Matsunami.

In regard to this, a translation by Zuiryu Nakamura (published by *Shunju-sha*) renders this portion as “praises *bodhi*.” In Chinese, *bodhi* is transliterated as 菩提 (Jp. *bodai*), and that form is generally used. Nakamura’s translation is structurally the same as the other Japanese translations, but in a footnote regarding the Sanskrit *bodhi*, he states that when the Chinese transliteration for *bodhi* is translated into Japanese, it is rendered as 道 (Jp. *dō*), or 仏道 (Jp. *butsudō*), meaning “awareness.” In short, Nakamura’s translation is based on the recognition that Kumārajīva’s 仏道 (*butsudō*) means “awareness or enlightenment.”

Thus, when dealing with the relationship between “enlightenment” and people who are not buddhas, I believe that the traditional Buddhist understanding is exerting a negative influence on how the sutra is interpreted. However, as I mentioned above, the *Lotus Sutra* does indeed say “their enlightenments” when it talks about people who carry out bodhisattva practices. Nevertheless, it is not easy to come to any conclusions solely by discussing the reading of a pronoun.

A little later on in the same verse section, however, we find the line that I discussed previously in the last two segments of the previous chapter:

“...[bodhisattvas,] having produced an enlightenment, continue to practice.”

The phrase, “having produced an enlightenment,” reflects the appearance of a verb form of *bodhi*. The translation comes about through consideration of different expressions in the various Sanskrit texts. Copies found in Nepal that are used for published Sanskrit texts, say “producing enlightenments.” A copy of a Sanskrit text found in Central Asia reads, “practicing in the midst of enlightenment.” Kumārajīva’s translation of this part reads:

“我見彼土 恒沙菩薩 種種因緣 而求仏道

I see, in those lands,

Bodhisattvas, as numerous as the Ganges River's sands
Who, under all kinds of conditions and causes,
Are seeking the pathway of buddhahood.

Here, 仏道 (path/pathway of buddhahood) is Kumārajīva's translation of the Sanskrit *bodhi*.

I may have gone into too much detail, but as can be seen from the examination to this point, we can say that “enlightenment” (*bodhi*) as depicted in the *Lotus Sutra* is something to be grasped by people as they live as bodhisattvas. It has also been understood that way historically.

Enlightenment does not just indicate the far-off condition of being a buddha. Enlightenment is produced one-by-one amidst the process of living our daily lives as bodhisattvas, and these “enlightenments” open up our own 仏道—our own pathway of buddhahood. This is what the *Lotus Sutra* says.

Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi

In addition to the word *bodhi*, there is another phrase, *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, that often appears in the *Lotus Sutra* to express the concept of enlightenment. Although Kumārajīva used 仏道 as a translation of *bodhi*, he did not translate the phrase, *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, but simply used a transliteration (阿耨多羅三藐三菩提) instead.

However, in commonly available modern versions of the *Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* (妙法蓮華經) there is a translation of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* that appears in chapter twelve, Devadatta. In Sanskrit originals, the text corresponding to chapter twelve is actually the concluding portion of chapter eleven. In fact, the text corresponding to chapter twelve seems to have been missing from the Sanskrit text that Kumārajīva translated from, and the translation that appears in modern versions as the Devadatta chapter was added later and was not Kumārajīva's work. This explains why an actual translation of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is only found in chapter twelve, despite appearing throughout the rest of the sutra as a transliteration.

Nevertheless, if we examine the translation of that phrase in the Devadatta chapter, we can find clues as to how it was understood in China toward the end of Kumārajīva's time. Instead of being translated as a fixed phrase throughout the chapter, various combinations are used. There is 無上菩提 (supreme enlightenment; Jp. mu-jō-bo-dai [菩提 is the transliteration of *bodhi*]); and there is 菩提 (enlightenment; bo-dai) alone. Sometimes 無上道 (supreme path; Jp. mu-jō-dō), or 道 (path/pathway; dō) alone are used. Additionally, 菩提道 (path of enlightenment; Jp. bo-dai-dō) is used once, and 正覺 (correct enlightenment/truly awakened; Jp. shō-gaku) is also used. In dictionaries, *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is generally listed with the translation 無上正等覺 (unsurpassed, correct, all-inclusive knowledge; Jp. mu-jō-shō-tō-gaku), but that way of translation is not used in this chapter.

Then what is *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*? It generally seems to be regarded as the exclusive

state of buddhahood. I have a different opinion on how this expression should be understood, however, and, as I interpret it, *anuttara-samyaku-sambodhi* means, “complete mindfulness and actualization of the innate condition of being able to become fully aware of and grasp every aspect of any matter.” And I consider that buddhas are not the only ones who can actualize this innate condition, that people other than buddhas—i.e., all of us—also possess this condition, and that we all have the capability to connect with it. I believe that such a connection is taking place each time that we fully grasp every aspect of something.

To speculate on how the expression *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* could be directly translated, it comprises the noun *bodhi* (enlightenment), to which the adjectives *anuttara* and *samyak*, and the prefix *sam* (with regard to) are added. The expression would then be rendered in translation as “such-and-such a kind of enlightenment” (where such-and-such are the untranslated adjectives *anuttara* and *samyak*).

But how to interpret the “such-and-such” became a point of contention, and the inclination to assume that “enlightenment” is the exclusive state of buddhahood confused the issue even further. I believe that this may be the reason why even Kumārajīva, rather than trying to make a translation based on each element of the expression (*anuttara* is generally translated as “supreme,” and *samyak* as “proper”), gave up and used a Chinese transliteration for it instead.

Then what is the relationship between *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* and the state of buddhahood? Actually, in the Sanskrit text, when “to become a buddha” is meant, a special verb *abhi-sam-√buddh* (to become totally aware of everything by oneself) is used together with *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. Thus, “to become a buddha” is expressed as *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi abhisambuddh*. Sometimes a buddha is called [*anuttara*] *samyak-sambuddha*. In the word combination *sambodhi*, *bodhi* is an abstract noun (e.g., enlightenmentness), but, in *sambuddha*, *buddha* is a noun derived from the perfect form in Sanskrit, and means “enlightened one.”

How is *abhisambuddh* translated into Chinese? Kumārajīva used only the single character, 得 (acquire; Jp. toku) for *abhisambuddh*, and thus, 得 plus the transliterated characters for *anuttara samyak sambodai* (得 阿耨多羅三藐三菩提) is his “translation” into Chinese of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi abhisambuddh*.

In the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, (which, as previously mentioned, was not translated by Kumārajīva), *abhisambuddh* appears translated variously as 得仏 (acquire buddhahood; Jp. toku-butsum), 得成仏 (to attain buddhahood, to become a buddha; Jp. toku-jyō-butsum), or 成正覺 (attain proper awakening; Jp. jyō-shō-gaku). In any event, these translations show the same sense of “acquire” or “attain” (得 or 成) that Kumārajīva used.

Therefore, as long as one only reads the Chinese translation, one cannot trace back to grasp the Sanskrit’s particular usage of *abhisambuddh* only in connection with becoming a buddha.

The reason I believe that it is wrong to take *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* only as being relative to buddhas is based on the usage of a phrase in the *Lotus Sutra*. Let’s examine the Sanskrit text: In chapter thirteen, “Living Contentedly” (in the Chinese text, chapter fourteen, “Composure in

Practice”), the proposed attitudes of the sutra’s practitioners are shown in descriptions of perspectives that should be taken by a male renunciant, one of which reads:

“To those practitioners who are following something other than the bodhisattva path—followers of the *shravaka* vehicle, the *pratyekabuddha* vehicle, or other Mahayana followers practicing the bodhisattva path in a different way; in short all the people who are following the Buddha's teaching in ways different from your way—you should not say:

‘Oh, you of good intent, you are far away from *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. I cannot see you there.’”

In the translation, *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is the antecedent of the locative pronoun “there.” This use of the phrase in the *Lotus Sutra* clearly indicates that *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is a concept whose scope can include a discussion of whether practitioners are “there” or not. And this also shows that, with regard to what the *Lotus Sutra* is teaching, the general understanding of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* as being only the state of buddhahood as the ultimate goal for a Mahayana Buddhist follower does not apply. Rather, I think the sutra indicates that *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is part of a mindset that people other than buddhas can also be in.

Enlightenment—the condition of being fully aware of and understanding every aspect of any matter—as an innate capability

Then how should we practically understand the concept of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* if it something that people other than buddhas can also be in?

When one says, “that person is doing Judo,” for example, we do not know whether the person is a beginner or a master; but at any rate, we know that the person is doing Judo. In the Japanese manner of speaking, that person is on the “Judo path,” i.e., what that person is doing is Judo rather than Kendo. Whether doing Judo as a beginner or as a master, with regard to “doing Judo” there is no difference between them. I believe that the sense of Kumārajīva’s translation, 仏道 (pathway of buddhahood; Jp. butsudō), is the same as this sense of “doing Judo.”

Let’s look at mountain climbing as another example. Once a person has determined to go mountain climbing, that person is “on the road” to climbing the mountain the moment he or she leaves home. The actual process of ascending the mountain begins with the first step at its base, but that person has already been “doing mountain climbing,” (i.e., has entered the “state of climbing a mountain”) long before reaching the peak.

A story in the Sanskrit text of chapter seven of the *Lotus Sutra*, “Connection from the Past” (chapter seven, “Apparitional City,” in the Chinese version), narrates that, in the past, there was a buddha, named All-Surmounting Transcendent Power of Great Insight, who had sixteen sons. While

that buddha was meditating in a quiet room for an extremely long period of time, the sixteen sons expounded the *Lotus Sutra* to the people, and by doing so they:

“...succeeded in guiding, encouraging, inspiring, gladdening the people and maturing them in *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.”

In this story, the Sanskrit word that I translated as “in” can also be translated in the locative case as “toward.” But considering the usage and context of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* in chapter thirteen, the word should be read as “in,” in the same sense as “people are trained ‘in’ Judo.”

Returning to the question of what *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* means, I previously wrote that the phrase is made up by combining some words with *bodhi* (enlightenment). *Anuttara* is “supreme,” or “unsurpassed.” *Samyak* is 正 (Jp. shō), as in “the eightfold right path” (八正道; Jp. hasshōdō). The dictionary meaning is “right,” or “correct,” but it implies “true,” or “essential.” Then there is *sam* prefixed to *bodhi*. As a prefix, *sam* adds the meaning of “together,” “whole,” “fine,” “comprehensive,” or “perfect” to the following word. In the Chinese translation, *sam* was translated as 等 (all-inclusive; Jp. tō), as in 無上正等 覺 (unsurpassed, correct, all-inclusive knowledge; Jp. mujō-shō-tō-gaku). Then the whole expression, *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, can be directly translated as “supreme, true, comprehensive, enlightenment.” And I think it means “complete mindfulness and actualization of the innate condition of being able to become fully aware of and grasp every aspect of any matter,” and the mindset that leads to it. The Buddha is one who *abhisambuddh*—one who recognized, fully awakened to, and actualized his own innate capability to become fully aware of and grasp every aspect of any matter.

A fundamental realization

Then what are the ramifications of the condition of being fully aware of and grasping every aspect of any matter?

When we think of enlightenment as simply meaning awakening or becoming aware, we can see that it can be achieved by anyone—that it is everyone’s inherent ability. In the same way, the condition of being fully aware of and understanding every aspect of any matter is the innate capability of enlightenment that can be realized equally by all human beings. All human beings should awaken to the fact that they have this capability.

I think it should be quite natural for us, as human beings, to change our behavior after coming to some understanding or realization. But numerous grudges and strained feelings have accumulated in our minds, and such feelings hinder us from acting to improve our conduct. I really feel the truth of this as I am writing, and I think it is very important that all of us come to an understanding and realization of this particular situation.

In Chinese translations, these strained feelings are rendered as 障 (obstruction, obstacle,

hindrance; Jp. shō), or 罪 (Jp. zai). This 罪 is traditionally translated as “sin,” but it is fundamentally different from that concept. A more appropriate translation in most contexts is “unwholesomeness.” When we have such unwholesomeness—so many grudges and strained feelings—in our minds, it is difficult to act positively or voluntarily. We may only be able to live our lives hesitantly and passively because our minds are impure, or hindered and obstructed. Unless and until our minds are well conditioned to be able to feel, think, judge and act freely, we cannot take responsibility for our lives. We tend to seek excuses by blaming others or other factors.

In Chinese, such a condition is translated as 不淨 (impurity; Jp. fujō). This condition of impurity (不淨) is unwholesome (罪) for human beings. To overcome such a condition and secure an unhindered and unobstructed mind is to become “pure” (清淨; Jp. shōjō) in mind. It is the same 清淨 as in 六根清淨 (purification of the six sense faculties; Jp. rokkon-shōjō). We need to have purity of mind, because without it we cannot say, “we are living our own lives.” We tend to blame others for things, and live in a condition in which we have no awareness or recognition of personal responsibility.

We can attain purity of mind through the process of becoming aware of the realities of human life. Becoming aware of the realities of human life means to recognize how human nature in general—and our own in particular—is reflected in the daily process of living. Purity of mind enables us to become active instead of being passive; and to the extent that our mind becomes pure and free, our will can work freely, which then allows us to act freely.

Sometimes we can become instantly aware of the greater realities of human life. At other times we realize things little by little, one by one, and we gain purity and freedom of mind gradually in the daily process of living. I believe that the enlightened condition of being fully aware of and grasping every aspect of any matter does not concern achieving perfection in human life, but instead concerns making infinite discoveries along a path of continuous advancement.

An essential foundation for humanity

For human beings, being aware and being awake are integrally related to the judgments we make and the actions we take with regard to our daily actions and interrelations within our communities, our countries, and even the world at large. With regard to such judgments and actions, a point that should not be ignored is that the teachings of past and present religions have been—and are—highly influential, and I would like to strongly emphasize that socially disruptive influences of religions have been appearing more and more often in Japan and in the world in this 21st century.

Looking at the horrors inflicted by suicide bombers in Iraq and in other countries, such acts were originally targeting American forces; but nowadays even other sects of Islam are being victimized. Ongoing turmoil in the Middle East and the unstable political situation in Afghanistan can both be said to be due to international power struggles by big countries, or due to economical imbalances in those areas. While this may be the case to a certain extent, we cannot deny the fact that religious

issues are also root causes of many tragedies and calamities in those arenas. And in Japan, even after that horrible domestic terrorist attack with sarin gas, many deranged incidents caused by some cult-like groups continue to happen.

Religious groups and their activities sometimes unduly influence the group's followers, sometimes leading them into inhumane behaviors. And such incidents cast a very bad light upon religion itself.

What is the main concern for human kind that is common to all these issues? It must be the natural human tendency to unthinkingly follow the charismatic charm and skillful manipulation of words of people and leaders whose goal is manipulation. It is the same characteristic that allows us to fall victim to any type of fraud. If and when we become involved in a movement headed by such a leader, we fall under the influence of the organization and become enmeshed in the interrelationships with the others in the group. Thus influenced and enmeshed, we do things without being able to make appropriate judgments, and the conviction that we are acting according to our own free will becomes the rationalization for all of the actions we take.

This is nothing but human weakness. I mean to say that it is a human condition that appears when we lack awareness, do not grasp the meaning of awakening, and do not seek to connect with our innate condition of being able to become fully aware of and grasp every aspect of any matter. It is a human shortcoming to be so detached from this innate capability that is a foundation for humanity.

Even when one's actions or judgments seemed to be based on the *Lotus Sutra*, one is still not immune to such a shortcoming. Historically in the past and even now, the same problem of not being able to make appropriate judgments can be found among the various type of movements based on the *Lotus Sutra*.

Developing a mindset to become mindful of and actualize the innate condition of being able to become fully aware of and grasp every aspect of any matter is extremely meaningful for human life and activities within the process of living. This is what the *Lotus Sutra* teaches us, and I feel strongly that now is time to look carefully at this teaching amidst the confused situations of current times.

Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi—complete mindfulness and actualization of the innate condition of being able to become fully aware of and grasp every aspect of any matter, and the mindset that leads to it—is “enlightenment” for all human kind. It is an essential basis for creation of societies in which every person is aware of his or her human dignity and people truly respect one another.

Wanting to live as someone who can nurture awareness

In the second chapter¹ of the *Lotus Sutra*, Shakamuni Buddha comprehensively indicates what Buddhism is.

¹ (Reference previous note regarding Sanskrit to Japanese translation by Dr./Ms. Kubo)

The first part of such an indication is Shakamuni Buddha's declaration that buddhas appear in the world for the purpose of guiding all living beings to become the same as themselves. Here we can see an initial form of the "all living beings have the buddha-nature" concept that is expounded in a later Mahayana text, the *Nirvana Sutra*. However if we simply understand "buddha-nature" as the potentiality or the possibility to become a buddha, such an understanding will differ slightly from what the *Lotus Sutra* intends, which is revealed in a unique statement in the verse portion² of the same chapter two.

In chapter two's verse portion it says that even a child who, just once, created a *stūpa* (a memorial tower for the Buddha) while playing with sand, or a person who simply bowed to a *stūpa*, is becoming one who can nurture awareness. This portion is translated by Kumārajīva as, 皆已成仏道 (Everyone has attained the pathway of buddhahood), and the 仏道 (pathway of buddhahood) found here is a non-literal translation of the original text that can be literally translated as "attained enlightenment."

This part of the *Lotus Sutra* appeals to me because of its practical standpoint. The sutra does not make a simple ideological statement that there is buddha-nature in everything. Rather, within the sutra Shakamuni Buddha shows that paths of awareness are there for anyone, at whatever stage of life. In short, it provides each of us a motivation to look back and reflect on how we have come to be where we are, and helps us to discern the best ways to travel the road of life we are actually on.

The practical standpoint of the *Lotus Sutra* is again clearly seen in chapter two when it is stated that the Buddha appears when the conditions of people and the world are unwholesome, i.e., the world where the Buddha appears is not a paradise.

Traditionally, the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* has always been connected with the concept of an era in which the teaching of the Buddha is completely lost (末法; mappō in Japanese). As a result, I think that a fundamental idea of Buddhism—that buddhas will always appear and have work to do because of the unwholesome conditions of people and their worlds—has become obscured. To put it in another way, I think that the basic stance of the *Lotus Sutra*—a Buddhism to teach people to awaken themselves to any unwholesomeness within worlds that they are perceiving as good—has been lost sight of.

It is true that expressions like "when the proper teaching is lost" can be found in the sutra. And, in particular references to time frames of five-hundred year periods after the Buddha has passed away, the idea that the condition of the world becomes unwholesome due to the absence of the proper teaching also can be found. In traditional Buddhism there is a descriptive framework of a three-stage process of degeneration of the Buddha's teaching: 1) An age of five hundred years in which the teaching properly endures [Jp. shō-hō, 正法], followed by; 2) a five hundred year age when only the form of the teaching remains [Jp. zō-hō, 像法], and then there is; 3) mappō [末法], the age when the teaching is completely lost. While this traditional framework is not described in the *Lotus Sutra*, the

²As in other Mahayana Sutras, most chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* consist of both repetition of the prose and the verse. Generally, but not always, whatever is stated in the prose is summarized in the verse portion. Sometimes, however, the verse portion narrates a different story or is a continuation of the prose.

characters 末法 (for mappō) do appear in the Chinese translation, and the sutra's fundamental perspective is that the Buddha appears in unwholesome times. It should be noted, however, that in chapter fifteen, The Life Span of the Buddha (chapter sixteen of the Chinese translation), there is a teaching by Shakamuni that the Buddha has a constant presence in the world.

I would like to finally point out that the *Lotus Sutra's* practical perspective is also well reflected in its description of the people who, in the sutra's words, "cannot accept" the teachings narrated by Shakamuni Buddha throughout the entire sutra.

A reality that extends throughout the history of Japanese Buddhism, and which continues to the present day, is that a seemingly exclusive and self-righteous perspective of *Lotus Sutra* followers has been observed and pointed out. Actually, the original words for the above-mentioned "cannot accept" were mostly rendered as "speak ill of" or "slander" by Kumarajiva in his Chinese translation. Consequently the purport of the original text can be missed, which gives rise to the possibility of conveying a meaning that deviates from the original.

On each occasion and in every place that we read the phrasing "[those who] slander or speak ill [of the teaching]," instead of the *Lotus Sutra's* original phrasing, "[those who] cannot accept [it]," we are reading something that differs from what the original intends to say. Moreover, there is then the great possibility of making the mistake of thinking that what the sutra is saying is not relative to us, and thinking instead that it is talking about people other than ourselves whom we see and want to criticize. But that is not the point of the *Lotus Sutra's* discussion regarding the people who cannot accept its teaching. The sutra wants to point out the great difference that results from being able to nurture awareness or not being able to accept Shakamuni's teaching of the importance of nurturing awareness. And it is telling us to recognize that the condition of being able to nurture awareness and the condition of not being able to accept the Buddha's teachings can both be conditions of human beings.

Incidentally, people who reject the Buddha's teaching are described in the *Lotus Sutra* as 增上慢 (Jp. zōjōman)—conceited ones, or as those who are blinded by greed.

The condition of conceitedness is that in which one believes that one understands everything and refuses to listen to others anymore. It is a longstanding concept in Buddhism, and is even listed in the 律藏 (Jp. ritsuzō)—the codes of conduct for monks and nuns.

I believe there are two important aspects regarding the fact that the zōjōman concept is mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra*. The first aspect is a warning that losing the aspiration to learn more is a most unwholesome condition for human beings. Yet, within this, there is an indication of the Buddha's attitude that one can awaken from this condition and forever rid oneself of its stigma. The second aspect is that when we become blinded by greed we are helpless. Human beings always have a tendency to be blinded by greed. I myself have had such an experience, and, having experienced it, I never want to be like that again. I sincerely aspire to follow the path of becoming one who can nurture awareness.