



Frontispiece for the Lotus Sūtra, China, Song Dynasty, 12<sup>th</sup> century, handscroll, gold ink on indigo paper.

*Selections from the  
Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-Sūtra  
Sūtra on the Lotus of the True Dharma  
The Lotus Sutra*

[Certainly one of the most important and revered scriptures in all of East Asia, the Lotus Sūtra is most famous for its doctrine of ekayāna, the “One Vehicle,” which became the distinctive teaching of the T’ien-tai School of Buddhism as it developed in China (Tendai in Japan). Bewildered by the wide diversity of Indian Buddhist scriptures, and attempting to reconcile the seeming contradictions in the Buddha’s Dharma that arose as a result of the three vehicles of Indian Buddhism, the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, the teachers of the T’ien-tai emphasized that there is really only one vehicle as taught in the Lotus Sūtra. While on the lower levels of knowledge and truth there are different vehicles and different paths, on the highest third level of knowledge and truth there is only one path, one vehicle. All the various teachings found in the different scriptures are merely strategies, or ‘expedient means’ (upāya), by which the Buddha adapted his teachings to suit the needs of particular individuals in their own particular situation. This notion of ‘skill-in-means’ emphasized in the Lotus Sūtra is one of the key concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

This opening chapter presents the striking image, captured in this frontispiece, of the Buddha’s teachings or Dharma as a beam of light emitting from between the eyebrows of the Buddha, lighting up all the worlds. Seeking to understand this magical beam of light, the bodhisattva Maitreya turns to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, especially known for his great wisdom. The beam of light is a simile for the unsurpassed enlightenment of a Buddha (anuttara-samyak-sambodhi). As Mañjuśrī explains it, since the enlightened mind knows all things everywhere, and the dharmakāya universally fills the dharma realm, the Dharma penetrates everywhere and rains down upon all equally, according to their needs.]

Chapter One

*Introduction*

This is what I heard: At one time the Buddha was in Rajagriha, staying on Mount Gridhrakuta. Accompanying him were a multitude of leading monks numbering twelve thousand persons. All were arhats whose outflows had come to an end, who had no more earthly desires, who had attained what was to their advantage and had put an end to the bonds of existence, and whose minds had achieved a state of freedom. . . .

At that time the World-Honored One, surrounded by the four kinds of believers, received offerings and tokens of respect and was honored and praised. And for the sake of the bodhisattvas he preached the Great Vehicle sutra entitled Immeasurable Meanings, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas.

When the Buddha had finished preaching this Sutra, he sat with his legs crossed in lotus position and entered into the samadhi of the place of immeasurable meanings, his body and mind never moving. At that time heaven rained down mandarava flowers, great mandarava flowers, manjushaka flowers, and great manjushaka flowers, scattering them over the Buddha and over the great assembly, and everywhere the Buddha world quaked and trembled in six different ways.

At that time the monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman

beings in the assembly, as well as the petty kings and wheel-turning sage kings—all those in the great assembly, having gained what they had never had before, were filled with joy and, pressing their palms together, gazed at the Buddha with a single mind.

At that time the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, one of his characteristic features, lighting up eighteen thousand worlds in the eastern direction. There was no place that the light did not penetrate, reaching downward as far as the Avichi hell and upward to the Akanishtha heaven.

From this world one could see the living beings in the six paths of existence in all of those other lands. One could likewise see the Buddhas present at that time in those other lands and could hear the sutra teachings which those Buddhas were expounding. At the same time one could see the monks, nuns laymen, and laywomen who had carried out religious practices and attained the way. One could also see the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who, through various causes and conditions and various types of faith and understanding and in various forms and aspects were carrying out the way of the bodhisattva. And one could also see the Buddhas who had entered parinirvana, towers adorned with the seven treasures were erected for the Buddha relics.

At that time the Bodhisattva Maitreya had this thought: Now the World-Honored One has manifested these miraculous signs. But what is the cause of these auspicious portents? Now the Buddha, the World Honored One, has entered into samadhi. An unfathomable event such as this is seldom to be met with. Whom shall I question about this? Who can give me an answer?

And again he had this thought: this Manjushri, son of a Dharma King, has already personally attended and given offerings to immeasurable numbers of Buddhas in the past. Surely he must see these rare signs. I will now question him.

At this time the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, as well as the heavenly beings, dragons, spirits, and the others all had this thought: this beam of brightness from the Buddha, these signs of transcendental powers—now whom shall we question about them?

At that time Bodhisattva Maitreya wished to settle his doubts concerning the matter. And in addition he could see what was in the minds of the four kinds of believers, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, as well as the heavenly beings, dragons, spirits and the others who made up the assembly. So he questioned Manjushri,

saying, "What is the cause of these auspicious portents, these signs of transcendental powers, this emitting of a great beam of brightness that illumines the eighteen thousand lands in the eastern direction so we can see all the adornments of the Buddha worlds there?"

Then Bodhisattva Maitreya, wishing to state his meaning once more, asked the question in verse form:

Manjushri,  
 Why from the white tuft between the eyebrows  
 of our leader and teacher  
 does this great light shine all around?  
 Why do mandarava  
 and manjushaka flowers rain down  
 and breezes scented with sandalwood  
 delight the hearts of the assembly?  
 Because of these  
 the earth is everywhere adorned and purified  
 and this world  
 quakes and trembles in six different ways.  
 At this time the four kinds of believers  
 are all filled with joy and delight,  
 they rejoice in body and mind,  
 having gained what they never had before.  
 The beam of brightness from between the eyebrows  
 illumines the eastern direction  
 and eighteen thousand lands  
 are all the color of gold.  
 From the Avichi hell  
 upward to the Summit of Being,  
 throughout the various worlds  
 the living beings in the six paths,  
 the realm to which their births and deaths are tending,  
 their good and bad deeds,  
 and the pleasing or ugly recompense they receive—  
 all these can be seen from here.  
 We can also see Buddhas,  
 those sage lords, lions,  
 expounding and preaching sutras  
 that are subtle, wonderful and foremost.  
 Their voices are clear and pure,  
 issuing in soft and gentle sounds,  
 as they teach bodhisattvas  
 in numberless millions.  
 Their Brahma sounds are profound and wonderful,  
 making people delight in hearing them.  
 Each in his own world  
 preaches the correct Law,  
 following various causes and conditions

and employing immeasurable similes,  
 illuminating the Law of the Buddha,  
 guiding living beings to enlightenment.  
 If a person should encounter troubles,  
 loathing old age, sickness and death,  
 the Buddhas preach to him on nirvana,  
 explaining how he may put an end to all troubles.  
 If a person should have good fortune,  
 having in the past made offerings to the Buddhas,  
 determined to seek a superior Law,  
 the Buddhas preach the way of the pratyekabuddha.  
 If there should be Buddha sons  
 who carry out various religious practices,  
 seeking to attain the unsurpassed wisdom,  
 the Buddhas preach the way of purity.

Manjushri,  
 I have been dwelling here,  
 seeing and hearing in this manner  
 many things numbering in the thousands of millions.  
 Numerous as they are,  
 I will now speak of them in brief.  
 I see in these lands  
 bodhisattvas numerous as Ganges sands,  
 according with various causes and conditions  
 and seeking the way of the Buddha.  
 Some of them give alms,  
 gold, silver, coral,  
 pears, mani jewels,  
 seashell, agate,  
 diamonds and other rarities,  
 men and women servants, carriages,  
 jeweled hand carriages and palanquins,  
 gladly presenting these donations.  
 Such gifts they give to the Buddha way,  
 desiring to achieve the vehicle  
 that is foremost in the threefold world  
 and praised by the Buddhas.  
 There are some bodhisattvas  
 who give jeweled carriages drawn by teams of four,  
 with railings and flowered canopies  
 adorning their top and sides.  
 Again I see bodhisattvas  
 who give their own flesh, hands and feet,  
 or their wives and children,  
 seeking the unsurpassed way.  
 I also see bodhisattvas  
 who happily give  
 heads, eyes, bodies and limbs

in their search for the Buddha wisdom.

Manjushri,  
 I see kings  
 going to visit the place of the Buddha  
 to ask him about the unsurpassed way.  
 They put aside their happy lands,  
 their palaces, their men and women attendants,  
 shave their hair and beard  
 and don the clothes of the Dharma.  
 Or I see bodhisattvas  
 who become monks,  
 living alone in quietude,  
 delighting in chanting the sutras.  
 Again I see bodhisattvas  
 bravely and vigorously exerting themselves,  
 entering the deep mountains,  
 their thoughts on the Buddha way.  
 And I see them removing themselves from desire,  
 constantly dwelling in emptiness and stillness,  
 advancing deep into the practice of meditation  
 until they have gained the five transcendental powers.  
 And I see bodhisattvas  
 resting in meditation, palms pressed together,  
 with a thousand, ten thousand verses  
 praising the king of the doctrines.  
 Again I see bodhisattvas,  
 profound in wisdom, firm in purpose,  
 who know how to question the Buddhas  
 and accept and abide by all they hear.  
 I see Buddha sons  
 proficient in both meditation and wisdom,  
 who use immeasurable numbers of similes  
 to expound the Law to the assembly,  
 delighting in preaching the Law,  
 converting the bodhisattvas,  
 defeating the legions of the devil  
 and beating the Dharma drum.  
 And I see bodhisattvas  
 profoundly still and silent,  
 honored by heavenly beings and dragons  
 but not counting that a joy.  
 And I see bodhisattvas  
 living in forests, emitting light,  
 saving those who suffer in hell,  
 causing them to enter the Buddha way.  
 And I see Buddha sons  
 who have never once slept,  
 who keep circling through the forest

diligently seeking the Buddha way.  
 And I see those who observe the precepts,  
 no flaw in their conduct,  
 pure as jewels and gems,  
 and in that manner seeking the Buddha way.  
 And I see Buddha sons  
 abiding in the strength of fortitude,  
 taking the abuse and blows  
 of persons of overbearing arrogance,  
 willing to suffer all these,  
 and in that manner seeking the Buddha way.  
 I see bodhisattvas  
 removing themselves from frivolity and laughter  
 and from foolish companions,  
 befriending persons of wisdom,  
 unifying their minds, dispelling confusion,  
 ordering their thoughts in mountain and forest  
 for a million, a thousand, ten thousand years  
 in that manner seeking the Buddha way.  
 Or I see bodhisattvas  
 with delicious things to eat and drink  
 and a hundred kinds of medicinal potions,  
 offering them to the Buddha and his monks;  
 fine robes and superior garments  
 costing in the thousands or ten thousands,  
 or robes that are beyond cast,  
 offering them to the Buddha and his monks;  
 a thousand, ten thousand, a million kinds  
 of jeweled dwellings made of sandalwood  
 and numerous wonderful articles of bedding,  
 offering them to the Buddha and his monks;  
 immaculate gardens and groves  
 where flowers and fruit abound,  
 flowing springs and bathing pools,  
 offering them to the Buddha and his monks;  
 offerings of this kind,  
 or many different wonderful varieties  
 presented gladly and without regret  
 as they seek the unsurpassed way.  
 Or there are bodhisattvas  
 who expound the Law of tranquil extinction,  
 giving different types of instruction  
 to numberless living beings.  
 Or I see bodhisattvas  
 viewing the nature of all phenomena  
 as having no dual characteristics,  
 as being like empty space.  
 And I see Buddha sons  
 whose minds have no attachments,

who use this wonderful wisdom  
 to seek the unsurpassed way.

Manjushri,  
 there are also bodhisattvas  
 who after the Buddha has passed into extinction  
 make offerings to his relics.  
 I see Buddha sons  
 building memorial towers  
 as numberless as Ganges sands,  
 ornamenting each land with them,  
 jeweled towers lofty and wonderful,  
 five thousand yojanas high,  
 their width and depth  
 exactly two thousand yojanas,  
 each of these memorial towers  
 with its thousand banners and streamers,  
 with curtains laced with gems like dewdrops  
 and jeweled bells chiming harmoniously.  
 There heavenly beings, dragons, spirits,  
 human and nonhuman beings,  
 with incense, flowers and music  
 constantly making offerings.

Manjushri,  
 these Buddha sons  
 in order to make offerings to the relics  
 adorn the memorial towers  
 so that each land, just as it is,  
 is as outstandingly wonderful and lovely  
 as the heavenly king of trees  
 when its flowers open and unfold.  
 When the Buddha emits a beam of light  
 I and the other members of the assembly  
 can see these lands  
 in all their various outstanding wonders.  
 The supernatural powers of the Buddhas  
 and their wisdom are rare indeed;  
 by emitting one pure beam of light,  
 the Buddhas illuminate countless lands.  
 I and the others have seen this,  
 have gained something never known before.  
 Buddha son, Manjushri,  
 I beg you to settle the doubts of the assembly.  
 The four kinds of believers look up in happy anticipation,  
 gazing at you and me.  
 Why does the World-Honored One  
 emit this beam of brightness?  
 Buddha son, give a timely answer,

settle these doubts and occasion joy!  
 What rich benefits will come  
 from the projecting of this beam of brightness?  
 It must be that the Buddha wishes to expound  
 the wonderful Law he gained  
 when he sat in the place of practice.  
 He must have prophecies to bestow.  
 He has showed us Buddha lands  
 with their adornment and purity of manifold treasures,  
 and we have seen their Buddhas—  
 this is not done for petty reasons.  
 Manjushri, you must know.  
 The four kinds of believers, the dragons and spirits  
 gaze at you in surmise,  
 wondering what explanation you will give.

At that time Manjushri said to the bodhisattva and mahasattva Maitreya and the other great men: "Good men, I suppose that the Buddha, the World Honored One, wishes now to expound the great Law, to rain down the rain of the great Law, to blow the conch of the great Law, to beat the drum of the great Law, to elucidate the meaning of the great Law. Good men, in the past I have seen this auspicious portent among the Buddhas. They emitted a beam of light like this, and after that they expounded the great Law. Therefore we should know that now, when the present Buddha manifests this light, we will do likewise. He wishes to cause all living beings to hear and understand the Law, which is difficult for all the world to believe. Therefore he has manifested this auspicious portent.

"Good men, once, at a time that was an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable number of asamkhyā kalpas in the past, there was a Buddha named Sun Moon Bright, Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One, who expounded the correct Law. His exposition was good at the beginning, good in the middle, good at the end. The meaning was profound and far-reaching, the words were skillful and wondrous. It was pure and without alloy, complete, clean and spotless, and bore the marks of Brahma practice."

"For the sake of those seeking to become voice-hearers he responded by expounding the Law of the four noble truths, so that they could transcend birth, old age, sickness and death and attain nirvana. For the sake of those seeking to become pratyekabuddhas he responded

by expounding the Law of the twelve-linked chain of causation. For the sake of the bodhisattvas he responded by expounding the six paramitas, causing them to gain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi and to acquire the wisdom that embraces all species."

"Then there was another Buddha who was also named Sun Moon Bright, and then another Buddha also named Sun Moon Bright. There were twenty thousand Buddhas like this, all with the same appellation, all named Sun Moon Bright. And all had the same surname, the surname Bharadvāja. Maitreya, you should understand that from the first Buddha to the last, all had the same appellation, all were named Sun Moon Bright. They were worthy of all the ten epithets and the Law they expounded was good at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end."

"The last Buddha, when he had not yet left family life, had eight princely sons. The first was named Having Intention, the second Good Intention, the third Immeasurable intention, the fourth jeweled intention, the fifth Increased Intention, the sixth Cleansed of Doubt Intention, the seventh Echoing Intention, and the eighth Law Intention. Dignity and virtue came easily to them, and each presided over a four-continent realm."

"When these princes heard that their father had left family life and had gained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, they all cast aside their princely positions and followed him by leaving family life. Conceiving a desire for the Great Vehicle, the constantly carried out Brahma practices, and all became teachers of the Law. They had already planted good roots in the company of a thousand, ten thousand Buddhas."

"At that time the Buddha Sun Moon Bright preached the Great Vehicle sūtra entitled Immeasurable Meanings, a Law to instruct the Bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. When he had finished preaching the sūtra, he sat cross-legged in the midst of the great assembly and entered into the samādhi of the place of immeasurable meanings, his body and mind never moving. At this time heaven rained down mandarava flowers, great mandarava flowers, manjushaka flowers, and great manjushaka flowers, scattering them over the Buddha and the great assembly, and everywhere the Buddha world quaked and trembled in six different ways."

"At that time the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, and mahoragas, the human and nonhuman beings in the assembly, as well as the petty

kings and wheel-turning sage kings—all those in this great assembly gained what they had never had before and, filled with joy, pressed their palms together and gazed at the Buddha with a single mind.

"At that time the Thus Come One emitted a ray of light from the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, one of his characteristic features, lighting up eighteen thousand Buddha lands in the eastern direction. There was no place that the light did not penetrate, just as you have seen it light up these Buddha lands now."

"Maitreya, you should understand this. At that time in the assembly there were twenty million bodhisattvas who were happy and eager to hear the Law. When these bodhisattvas saw this beam of light that illuminated the Buddha lands everywhere, they gained what they had never had before. They wished to know the causes and conditions that had occasioned this light."

"At that time there was a bodhisattva named Wonderfully Bright who had eight hundred disciples. At this time the Buddha Sun Moon Bright arose from his samadhi and, because of the bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright, preached the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. For sixty small kalpas the Buddha remained in his seat without rising, and the listeners in the assembly at that time also remained seated there for sixty small kalpas, their bodies and minds never moving. And yet it seemed to them that they had been listening to the Buddha preach for no more than the space of a meal. At this time in the assembly there was not a single person who in body or mind had the least feeling of weariness."

"When the Buddha Sun Moon Bright had finished preaching this sutra over a period of sixty small kalpas, he spoke these words to the Brahmas, devils, shramanas and Brahmins, as well as to the heavenly and human beings and asuras in the assembly, saying, 'tonight at midnight the Thus Come One will enter the nirvana of no remainder.'"

"At this time there was a bodhisattva named Virtue Storehouse. The Buddha Sun Moon Bright bestowed a prophecy on him, announcing to the monks, "This bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse will be the next to become a Buddha. He will be called Pure Body, tathagata, arhat, samyak-sambuddha."

"After the Buddha had finished bestowing this prophecy, at midnight he entered the nirvana of no remainder."

"After the Buddha had passed away, Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright upheld the Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, for a period of fully eighty small kalpas expounding it for others. The eight sons of the Buddha Sun Moon Bright all acknowledged Wonderfully Bright as their teacher. Wonderfully Bright taught and converted them and roused in them a firm determination to gain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Those princely sons gave offerings to immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas, and after that all were able to achieve the Buddha way. The last to become a Buddha was named Burning Torch."

"Among the eight hundred disciples of Wonderfully Bright was one named Seeker of Fame. He was greedy for gain and support, and though he read and recited numerous sutras, he could not understand them, but for the most part forgot them. Hence he was called Seeker of Fame. Because this man had in addition planted various good roots, however, he was able to encounter immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas, to make offerings to them, revere, honor and praise them."

"Maitreya, you should understand this. Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright who lived then—could he be known to you? He was no other than I myself. And Bodhisattva Seeker of Fame was you."

"Now when I see this auspicious portent, it is no different from what I saw before. Therefore I suppose that now the Thus Come One is about to preach the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas."

At that time Manjushri, wishing in the presence of the great assembly to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

I recall that in a past age  
immeasurable, innumerable kalpas ago  
there was a Buddha, most honored of men,  
named Sun Moon Bright.  
This World-Honored One expounded the Law,  
saving immeasurable living beings  
and numberless millions of bodhisattvas,  
causing them to enter the Buddha wisdom.  
The eight princely sons whom this Buddha sired  
before taking leave of family life,  
when they saw that the great sage had left his family  
did likewise, carrying out brahma practices.  
At that time the Buddha preached the Great Vehicle,

a sutra named Immeasurable Meanings,  
and in the midst of a great assembly  
for the sake of the people established broad distinctions.  
When the Buddha had finished preaching this sutra  
he sat in the seat of the Law,  
sitting cross-legged in the samadhi  
called the place of immeasurable meanings.  
The heavens rained mandarava flowers,  
heavenly drums sounded of themselves,  
and the heavenly beings, dragons and spirits  
made offerings to the most honored of men.  
All the Buddha lands  
immediately quaked and trembled greatly.  
The Buddha emitted a light from between his eyebrows,  
manifesting signs that are rarely seen.  
This light illumined the eastern direction,  
eighteen thousand Buddha lands,  
showing how all the living beings there  
were recompensed in birth and death for their past deed.  
That one could see how these Buddha lands,  
adorned with numerous jewels,  
shone with hues of lapis lazuli and crystal  
was due to the illumination of the Buddha's light.  
One could also see the heavenly and human beings,  
dragons, spirits, many yakshas,  
gandharvas and kimnaras,  
each making offerings to his respective Buddha.  
One could also see Thus Come Ones  
naturally attaining the Buddha way,  
their bodies the color of golden mountains,  
upright, imposing, very subtle and wonderful.  
It was as though in the midst of pure lapis lazuli  
there should appear statues of real gold.  
In the midst of the great assembly the World-Honored  
Ones  
expounded the principles of the profound Law.  
In one after another of the Buddha lands  
the voice-hearers in countless multitudes  
through the illumination of the Buddha's light  
all became visible with their great assemblies.  
There were also monks  
residing in the midst of forests,  
exerting themselves and keeping the pure precepts  
as though they were guarding a bright jewel.  
One could also see bodhisattvas  
carrying out almsgiving, forbearances, and so forth,  
their number like Ganges sands,  
due to the illumination of the Buddha's light.  
One could also see bodhisattvas

entering deep into meditation practices,  
their bodies and minds still and unmoving,  
in that manner seeking the unsurpassed way.  
One could also see bodhisattvas  
who knew that phenomena are marked by tranquility  
and extinction,  
each in his respective land  
preaching the Law and seeking the Buddha way.  
At that time the four kinds of believers  
seeing the Buddha Sun Moon Bright  
manifest his great transcendental powers,  
all rejoiced in their hearts,  
and each one asked his neighbor  
what had caused these events.  
The one honored by heavenly and human beings  
just then arose from his samadhi  
and praised Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright, saying,  
"You are the eyes of the world,  
one whom all can take faith in and believe,  
able to honor and uphold the storehouse of the Dharma.  
The law that I preach-  
you alone know how to testify to it."  
The World-Honored One, having bestowed this praise,  
causing Wonderfully Bright to rejoice,  
preached the Lotus Sutra  
for fully sixty small kalpas.  
He never rose from this seat,  
and the supreme and wonderful Law that he preached  
was accepted and upheld in its entirety  
by the Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright.  
After the Buddha had preached the Lotus,  
causing all the assembly to rejoice,  
on that very same day  
he announced to the assembly of heavenly and human  
beings,  
"I have already expounded for you  
the meaning of the true entity of all phenomena.  
Now when midnight comes  
I will enter nirvana.  
You must strive with all your hearts  
and remove yourselves from indulgence and laxity,  
it is very difficult to encounter a Buddha—  
you meet one once in a million kalpas."  
When the children of the World-Honored One  
heard that the Buddha was to enter nirvana,  
each one was filled with sorrow and distress,  
wondering why the Buddha should so quickly seek  
extinction.  
The sage lord, king of the Law,

comforted and reassured the countless multitude,  
 saying, "When I enter extinction  
 you must not be concerned or fearful!  
 This bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse  
 has already fully understood in his mind  
 the true entity that is without outflows.  
 He will be next to become a Buddha,  
 bearing the name Pure Body,  
 and he too will save immeasurable multitudes."  
 That night the Buddha entered extinction,  
 as a fire dies out when the firewood is exhausted.  
 They divided and apportioned his relics  
 and built immeasurable numbers of towers,  
 and the monks and nuns  
 whose number was like Ganges sands  
 redoubled their exertions,  
 thereby seeking the unsurpassed way.  
 This Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright  
 honored and upheld the Buddha's storehouse of the  
 Dharma  
 throughout eighty small kalpas,  
 broadly propagating the Lotus Sutra.  
 These eight princely sons  
 whom Wonderfully Bright converted  
 held firmly to the unsurpassed way  
 and were thus able to encounter innumerable Buddhas.  
 And after they had made offerings to these Buddhas  
 they followed them in practicing the great way  
 and one after the other succeeded in becoming a  
 Buddha,  
 each in turn bestowing a prophecy on his successor.  
 The last to become a heavenly being among heavenly  
 beings  
 was named the Buddha Burning Torch.  
 As leader and teacher of seers  
 he saved immeasurable multitudes.  
 This Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright  
 at that time had a disciple  
 whose mind was forever occupied with laziness and  
 sloth,  
 who was greedy for fame and profit.  
 He sought fame and profit insatiably,  
 often amusing himself among clansmen and those of  
 other surnames.  
 He threw away what he had studied and memorized,  
 neglected and forgot it, failed to understand it.  
 Because of this  
 he was named Seeker of Fame.  
 But he had also carried out many good actions

and thus was able to meet with innumerable Buddhas.  
 He made offerings to the Buddhas  
 and followed them in practicing the great way,  
 carrying out all the six paramitas,  
 and now he has met the lion of the Shakyas.  
 Hereafter he will become a Buddha  
 whose name will be Maitreya,  
 who will save living beings extensively  
 in numbers beyond calculation.  
 After that Buddha passed into extinction,  
 that lazy and slothful one—he was you,  
 and the Dharma teacher Wonderfully Bright—  
 that was the person who is now I myself.  
 I saw how the Buddha Torch Bright (Sun Moon Bright)  
 earlier manifested an auspicious portent like this.  
 And so I know that now this present Buddha  
 is about to preach the Lotus Sutra.  
 The signs now are like those of the earlier auspicious  
 portent,  
 this is an expedient means (upāya) used by the Buddhas.  
 Now when the Buddha emits this beam of brightness  
 he is helping to reveal the meaning of the true entity of  
 phenomena.  
 Human beings now will come to know it.  
 Let us press our palms together and wait with a single  
 mind.  
 The Buddha will rain down the rain of the Law  
 to fully satisfy all seekers of the way.  
 You who seek the three vehicles,  
 if you have doubts and regrets,  
 the Buddha will resolve them for you,  
 bringing them to an end so that nothing remains.

\* \* \*

[In this selection from the second chapter, the Buddha explains  
 to Shariputra the meaning of expedient means (upāya).]

## Chapter Two Expedient Means

At that time the World-Honored One calmly arose from  
 his samadhi and addressed Shariputra, saying: "The  
 wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and  
 immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to  
 understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the  
 voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend  
 it.

"What is the reason for this? A Buddha has personally  
 attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million,

a countless number of Buddhas and has fully carried out an immeasurable number of religious practices. He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known. He has realized the Law that is profound and never known before, and preaches it in accordance with what is appropriate, yet his intention is difficult to understand.

"Shariputra, ever since I attained Buddhahood I have through various causes and various similes widely expounded my teachings and have used countless expedient means to guide living beings and cause them to renounce attachments. Why is this? Because the Thus Come One is fully possessed by both expedient means and the paramita of wisdom.

"Shariputra, the wisdom of the Thus Come One is expansive and profound. He has immeasurable [mercy], unlimited [eloquence], power, fearlessness, concentration, emancipation, and samadhis, and has deeply entered the boundless and awakened to the Law never before attained.

"Shariputra, the Thus Come One knows how to make various kinds of distinctions and to expound the teachings skillfully. His words are soft and gentle and delight the hearts of the assembly.

"Shariputra, to sum it up: the Buddha has fully realized the Law that is limitless, boundless, never attained before.

"But stop, Shariputra, I will say no more. Why? Because what the Buddha has achieved is the rarest and most difficult-to-understand Law. The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, inherent cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end." . . .

*[After further questioning from Shariputra, the Buddha goes on to explain further this notion of the skillful or expedient means of the Dharma.]*

The Buddha said to Shariputra, "A wonderful Law such as this is preached by the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, at certain times. But like the blooming of the udumbara, such times come very seldom. Shariputra, you and the others must believe me. The words that the Buddhas preach are not empty or false.

"Shariputra, the Buddhas preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, but the meaning is difficult to understand. Why is this? Because we employ

countless expedient means, discussing causes and conditions and using words of simile and parable to expound the teachings. This Law is not something that can be understood through pondering or analysis. Only those who are Buddhas can understand it. Why is this? Because the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone. Shariputra, what does it mean to say that the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world for one great reason alone?

"The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, to allow them to attain purity. That is why they appear in the world. They wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to cause living beings to awaken to the Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. Shariputra, this is the one great reason for which the Buddhas appear in the world."

The Buddha said to Shariputra, "The Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the Bodhisattvas. All the things they do are at all times done for this one purpose. They simply wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings and enlighten them to it.

"Shariputra, the Thus Come Ones have only a single Buddha vehicle which they employ in order to preach the Law to living beings. They do not have any other vehicle a second one or a third one. Shariputra, the Law preached by all the Buddhas of the ten directions is the same as this.

"Shariputra, the Buddhas of the past used countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines are all for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. These living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, are all eventually able to attain wisdom embracing all species.

Shariputra, when the Buddhas of the future make their appearance in the world, they too will use countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines will all be for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. And these living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, will all eventually be able to attain wisdom embracing all species.

"Shariputra, the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, who exist at present in the countless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, and millions of Buddha lands in the ten directions, benefit and bring peace and happiness to living beings in large measure, these Buddhas too use countless numbers of expedient means, various causes and conditions, and words of simile and parable in order to expound the doctrines for the sake of living beings. These doctrines are all for the sake of the one Buddha vehicle. And these living beings, by listening to the doctrines of the Buddhas, are all eventually able to attain wisdom embracing all species.

"Shariputra, these Buddhas simply teach and convert the Bodhisattvas. They do it because they wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings. They do it because they wish to use the Buddha wisdom to enlighten living beings. They do it because they wish to cause living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom.

"Shariputra, I too will now do the same, I know that living beings have various desires. Attachments that are deeply implanted in their minds. Taking cognizance of this basic nature of theirs, I will therefore use various causes and conditions, words of simile and parable, and the power of expedient means and expound the Law for them. Shariputra, I do this so that all of them may attain the one Buddha vehicle and wisdom embracing all species.

"Shariputra, when the age is impure and the times are chaotic, then the defilements of living beings are grave, they are greedy and jealous and put down roots that are not good. Because of this, the Buddhas, utilizing the power of expedient means, apply distinctions to the one Buddha vehicle and preach as though it were three.

"Shariputra, if any of my disciples should claim to be an arhat or a pratyekabuddha and yet does not heed or understand that the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the bodhisattvas, then he is no disciple of mine, he is no arhat or pratyekabuddha.

"Again, Shariputra, if there should be monks or nuns who claim that they already have attained the status of arhat, that this is their last incarnation, that they have reached the final nirvana, and that therefore they have no further intention of seeking anuttara-samyaksambodhi, then you should understand that such as these are all persons of overbearing arrogance. Why do I say this? Because if they are monks who have truly attained the status of arhat, then it would be unthinkable that they should fail to believe this Law. The only exception would be in a time after the Buddha had passed away, when

there was no Buddha present in the world. Why is this? Because after the Buddha has passed away it will be difficult to find anyone who can embrace, recite, and understand the meaning of sutras such as this. But if persons at that time encounter another Buddha, then they will attain decisive understanding with regard to this Law.

"Shariputra, you and the others should with a single mind believe and accept the words of the Buddha. The words of the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, are not empty or false. There is no other vehicle, there is only the one Buddha vehicle.

\* \* \*

*[In this selection from the third chapter, the Buddha tells the story about a father trying to save his three sons from a burning house. Knowing his sons well, and knowing what toys they like to play with, he uses three different toys, goat-carts, deer-carts and ox-carts, in order to lure the children from the burning house. The burning house is obviously a simile for samsara and the goat-carts, deer-carts and ox-carts are similes for the three vehicles of the Dharma. While the Buddha may have employed the teaching of three vehicles, as expedient means of meeting different needs, there is really only one, the 'Great Vehicle' (ekayāna).]*

### Chapter Three Simile and Parable

At that time Shariputra said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, now I have no mere doubts or regrets. In person I have received from the Buddha this prophecy that I will attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. These twelve hundred persons here whose minds are free—in the past they remained at the level of learning, and the Buddha constantly taught and converted them, saying, 'My Law can free you from birth, old age, sickness and death and enable you at last to achieve nirvana.' These persons, some of whom were still learning and some who had completed their learning, each believed that, because he had shed his views of 'self,' and also his views of 'existing' and 'not existing,' he had attained nirvana. But now from the World-Honored One they hear what they had never heard before, and all have fallen into doubt and perplexity.

"Very well, World-Honored One. I beg that for the sake of the four kinds of believers you will explain the causes and conditions and make it possible for them to shed their doubts and regrets."

At that time the Buddha said so Shariputra, "Did I not tell you earlier that when the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, cite various causes and conditions and use similes, parables, and other expressions, employing expedient means to preach the Law, it is all for the sake of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi? Whatever is preached is all for the sake of converting the bodhisattvas.

"Moreover, Shariputra, I too will now make use of similes and parables to further clarify this doctrine. For through similes and parables those who are wise can obtain understanding.

"Shariputra, suppose that in a certain town in a certain country there was a very rich man. He was far along in years and his wealth was beyond measure. He had many fields, houses and menservants. His own house was big and rambling, but it had only one gate. A great many people—a hundred, two hundred, perhaps as many as five hundred—lived in the house. The halls and rooms were old and decaying, the walls crumbling, the pillars rotten at their base, and the beams and rafters crooked and aslant.

"At that time a fire suddenly broke out on all sides, spreading through the rooms of the house. The sons of the rich man, ten, twenty perhaps thirty, were inside the house. When the rich man saw the huge flames leaping up on every side, he was greatly alarmed and fearful and thought to himself, I can escape to safety through the flaming gate, but my sons are inside the burning house enjoying themselves and playing games, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. The fire is closing in on them, suffering and pain threaten them, yet their minds have no sense of loathing or peril and they do not think of trying to escape!

"Shariputra, this rich man thought to himself, I have strength in my body and arms. I can wrap them in a robe or place them on a bench and carry them out of the house. And then again he thought, this house has only one gate, and moreover it is narrow and small.

My sons are very young, they have no understanding, and they love their games, being so engrossed in them that they are likely to be burned in the fire. I must explain to them why I am fearful and alarmed. The house is already in flames and I must get them out quickly and not let them be burned up in the fire!

"Having thought in this way, he followed his plan and called to all his sons, saying, 'You must come out at once!' But though the father was moved by pity and gave good words of instruction, the sons were absorbed in their

games and unwilling to heed them. They had no alarm, no fright, and in the end no mind to leave the house. Moreover, they did not understand what the fire was, what the house was, what the danger was. They merely raced about this way and that in play and looked at their father without heeding him.

"At that time the rich man had this thought: the house is already in flames from this huge fire. If I and my sons do not get out at once, we are certain to be burned. I must now invent some expedient means that will make it possible for the children to escape harm.

"The father understood his sons and knew what various toys and curious objects each child customarily liked and what would delight them. And so he said to them, 'The kind of playthings you like are rare and hard to find. If you do not take them when you can, you will surely regret it later. For example, things like these goat-carts, deer-carts and ox-carts. They are outside the gate now where you can play with them. So you must come out of this burning house at once. Then whatever you want, I will give them all to you!'

"At that time, when the sons heard their father telling them about these rare playthings, because such things were just what they had wanted, each felt emboldened in heart and, pushing and shoving one another, they all came wildly dashing out of the burning house.

"At that time the rich man, seeing that his sons had gotten out safely and all were seated on the open ground at the crossroads and were no longer in danger, was greatly relieved and his mind danced for joy. At that time each of the sons said to his father, "the playthings you promised us earlier, the goat-carts and deer-carts and ox-carts—please give them to us now!"

"Shariputra, at that time the rich man gave to each of his sons a large carriage of uniform size and quality. The carriages were tall and spacious and adorned with numerous jewels. A railing ran all around them and bells hung from all four sides. A canopy was stretched over the top, which was also decorated with an assortment of precious jewels. Ropes of jewels twined around, a fringe of flowers hung down, and layers of cushions were spread inside, on which were placed vermilion pillows. Each carriage was drawn by a white ox, pure and clean in hide, handsome in form and of great strength, capable of pulling the carriage smoothly and properly at a pace fast as the wind. In addition, there were many grooms and servants to attend and guard the carriage.

"What was the reason for this? This rich man's wealth was limitless and he had many kinds of storehouses that

were all filled and overflowing. And he thought to himself, "There is no end to my possessions. It would not be right if I were to give my sons small carriages of inferior make. These little boys are all my sons and I love them without partiality. I have countless numbers of large carriages adorned with seven kinds of gems. I should be fair-minded and give one to each of my sons. I should not show any discrimination. Why? Because even if I distributed these possessions of mine to every person in the whole country I would still not exhaust them, much less could I do so by giving them to my sons!

"At that time each of the sons mounted his large carriage, gaining something he had never had before, something he had originally never expected. Shariputra, what do you think of this? When this rich man impartially handed out to his sons these big carriages adorned with rare jewels, was he guilty of falsehood or not?"

Shariputra said, "No, World-Honored One. This rich man simply made it possible for his sons to escape the peril of fire and preserve their lives. He did not commit a falsehood. Why do I say this? Because if they were able to preserve their lives, then they had already obtained a plaything of sorts. And how much more so when, through an expedient means, they are rescued from that burning house! World-Honored One, even if the rich man had not given them the tiniest carriage, he would still not be guilty of falsehood. Why? Because this rich man had earlier made up his mind that he would employ an expedient means to cause his sons to escape. Using a device of this kind was no act of falsehood. How much less so, then, when the rich man knew that his wealth was limitless and he intended to enrich and benefit his sons by giving each of them a large carriage."

The Buddha said to Shariputra, "Very good, very good. It is just as you have said. And Shariputra, the Thus Come One is like this. That is, he is a father to all the world. His fears, cares and anxieties, ignorance and misunderstanding, have long come to an end, leaving no residue. He has fully succeeded in acquiring measureless insight, power and freedom from fear and gaining great supernatural powers and the power of wisdom. He is endowed with expedient means and the paramita of wisdom, his great pity and great compassion are constant and unflagging; at all times he seeks what is good and will bring benefit to all.

He is born into the threefold world, a burning house, rotten and old. In order to save living beings from the fires of birth, old age, sickness and death, care suffering,

stupidity, misunderstanding, and the three poisons; to teach and convert them and enable them to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

"He sees living beings seared and consumed by birth, old age, sickness and death, care and suffering, sees them undergo many kinds of pain because of their greed and attachment and striving they undergo numerous pains in their present existence, and later they undergo the pain of being reborn in hell or as beasts or hungry spirits. Even if they are reborn in the heavenly realm or the realm of human beings, they undergo the pain of poverty and want, the pain of parting from loved ones, the pain of encountering those they detest—all these many different kinds of pain.

"Yet living beings drowned in the midst of all this, delight and amuse themselves, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. They feel no sense of loathing and make no attempt to escape. In this burning house which is the threefold world, they race about to east and west, and though they encounter great pain, they are not distressed by it.

Shariputra, when the Buddha sees this, then he thinks to himself, I am the father of living beings and I should rescue them from their sufferings and give them the joy of the measureless and boundless Buddha wisdom so that they may find their enjoyment in that.

"Shariputra, the Thus Come One also has this thought: if I should merely employ supernatural powers and the power of wisdom; if I should set aside expedient means and for the sake of living beings should praise the Thus Come One's insight, power and freedom from fear, then living beings would not be able to gain salvation. Why? Because these living beings have not yet escaped from birth, old age, sickness, death, care and suffering, but are consumed by flames in the burning house that is the threefold world. How could they be able to understand the Buddha's wisdom?

"Shariputra, that rich man, though he had strength in his body and arms, did not use it. He merely employed a carefully contrived expedient means and thus was able to rescue his sons from the peril of the burning house, and afterward gave each of them a large carriage adorned with rare jewels. And the Thus Come One does the same. Though he possesses power and freedom from fear, he does not use these. He merely employs wisdom and expedient means to rescue living beings from the burning house of the threefold world, expounding to them the three vehicles, the vehicle of the voice-hearer, that of pratyekabuddha, and that of the Buddha.

"He says to them, 'You must not be content to stay in this burning house of the threefold world! Do not be greedy for its coarse and shoddy forms, sounds, scents, tastes and sensations! If you become attached to them and learn to love them, you will be burned up! You must come out of this threefold world at once so that you can acquire the three vehicles, the vehicles of the voice-hearer, the pratyekabuddha and the Buddha. I promise you now that you will get them, and that promise will never prove false. You have only to apply yourselves with diligent effort!'"

"The Thus Come One employs this expedient means to lure living beings into action. And then he says to them, 'You should understand that these doctrines of the three vehicles are all praised by the sages. They are free, without entanglements, leaving nothing further to depend upon or seek. Mount these three vehicles, gain roots that are without outflows, gain powers, awareness, the way, meditation, emancipation, samadhis, and then enjoy yourselves. You will gain the delight of immeasurable peace and safety.'

"Shariputra, if there are living beings who are inwardly wise in nature, and who attend the Buddha, the World-Honored One, hear the Law, believe and accept it, and put forth diligent effort, desiring to escape quickly from the threefold world and seeking to attain nirvana, they shall be called [those who ride] the vehicle of the voice hearer.

They are like those sons who left the burning house in the hope of acquiring goat-carts.

"If there are living beings who attend the Buddha, the World-Honored One, hear the Law, believe and accept it, and put forth diligent effort, seeking wisdom that comes of itself, taking solitary delight in goodness and tranquility, and profoundly understanding the causes and conditions of all phenomena, they shall be called [those who ride] the vehicle of the pratyekabuddha. They are like the sons who left the burning house in the hope of acquiring deer-carts.

"If there are living beings who attend the Buddha, the World-Honored One, hear the Law, believe and accept it, and put forth diligent effort, seeking comprehensive wisdom, the insight of the Thus Come One, powers and freedom from fear, who pity and comfort countless living beings, bring benefit to heavenly and human beings, and save them all, they shall be called [those who ride] the Great Vehicle. Because the bodhisattvas seek this vehicle, they are called mahasattvas. They are like the sons who left the burning house in the hope of acquiring ox-carts.

"Shariputra, that rich man, seeing that his sons had all gotten out of the burning house safely and were no longer threatened, recalled that his wealth was immeasurable and presented each of his sons with a large carriage. And the Thus Come One does likewise. He is the father of all living beings. When he sees that countless thousands of millions of living beings, through the gateway of the Buddha's teaching, can escape the pains of the threefold world, the fearful and perilous road, and gain the delights of nirvana, the Thus Come One at that time has this thought: I possess measureless, boundless wisdom, power, fearlessness, the storehouse of the Law of the Buddhas. These living beings are all my sons. I will give the Great Vehicle to all of them equally so that there will not be those who gain extinction by themselves, but that all may do so through the extinction of the Thus Come One.

"To all the living beings who have escaped from the threefold world he then gives the delightful gifts of the meditation, emancipation, and so forth, of the Buddhas. All these are uniform in characteristics, uniform in type, praised by the sages, capable of producing pure, wonderful, supreme delight.

"Shariputra, that rich man first used three types of carriages to entice his sons, but later he gave them just the large carriage adorned with jewels, the safest, most comfortable kind of all. Despite this, that rich man was not guilty of falsehood. The Thus Come One does the same, and he is without falsehood. First he preaches the three vehicles to attract and guide living beings, but later he employs just the Great Vehicle to save them. Why? The Thus Come One possesses measureless wisdom, power, freedom from fear, the storehouse of the Law. He is capable of giving to all living beings the Law of the Great Vehicle. But not all of them are capable of receiving it.

"Shariputra, for this reason you should understand that the Buddhas employ the power of expedient means. And because they do so, they make distinctions in the one Buddha vehicle and preach it as three." . . .

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[In this chapter the famous parable of the medicinal herbs is used to explain the notion of 'expedient means' (upāya). Just as there are many different medicinal herbs from a multitude of different plants to treat all the various sicknesses of human beings, the Buddha's teachings, or Dharma, takes many forms to treat each individual according to his or her needs.]

#### Chapter Five:

##### *The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs*

At that time the World-Honored One said to Mahakashyapa and the other major disciples: "Excellent, excellent, Kashyapa. You have given an excellent description of the true blessings of the Thus Come One. It is just as you have said. The Thus Come One indeed has immeasurable, boundless, asamkhyas of blessings, and though you and the others were to spend immeasurable millions of kalpas in the effort, you could never finish describing them.

"Kashyapa, you should understand this. The Thus Come One is king of the doctrines. In what he preaches, there is nothing that is vain. With regard to all the various doctrines, he employs wisdom as an expedient means (upāya) in expounding them. Therefore the doctrines that he expounds all extends to the point where there is comprehensive wisdom. The Thus Come One observes and understands the end to which all doctrines tend. And he also understands the workings of the deepest mind of all living beings, penetrating them completely and without hindrance. And with regard to the doctrines he is thoroughly enlightened, and he reveals to living beings the totality of wisdom.

"Kashyapa, it is like the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and the medicinal herbs, widely ranging in variety, each with its own name and hue, that grow in the hills and streams, the valleys and different soils of the thousand-millionfold world. Dense clouds spread over them, covering the entire thousand-millionfold world and in one moment saturating it all. The moisture penetrates to all the plants, trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs equally, to their big roots, big stems, big limbs and big leaves. Each of the trees, big and small, depending upon whether it is superior, middling or inferior in nature, receives its allotment. The rain falling from one blanket of clouds accords with each particular species and nature, causing it to sprout and mature, to blossom and bear fruit. Though all these plants and trees grow in the same earth and moistened by the same rain, each has its differences and particulars.

"Kashyapa, you should understand that the Thus Come One is like this. He appears in the world like a great cloud rising up. With a loud voice he penetrates to all the heavenly and human beings and the asuras of the entire world, like a great cloud spreading over the thousand-millionfold lands. And in the midst of the great assembly, he addresses these words, saying: " I am the Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. Those who have not yet crossed over I will cause to cross over, those not yet freed I will free, those not yet at rest I will put to rest, those not yet in nirvana I will cause to attain nirvana. Of this existence and future existences I understand the true circumstances. I am one who knows all things, sees all things, understands the way, opens up the way, preaches the way. You heavenly and human beings, asuras and others, you must all come here so that I may let you hear the Dharma!"

"At that time living beings of countless thousands, ten thousands, millions of species come to the place where the Buddha is, to listen to the Dharma. The Thus Come One then observes whether they are diligent in their efforts or lazy. And in accordance with each is capable of hearing, he preaches the Law for them in an immeasurable variety of ways so that all of them are delighted and are able to gain excellent benefits there-from.

"Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences, when they will receive joy through the way and again be able to hear the Law. And having heard the Law, they will escape from obstacles and hindrances, and with regard to the various doctrines will be able to exercise their powers to the fullest, so that gradually they can enter into the way. It is like the rain falling from that great cloud upon all the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs. Each, depending upon its species and nature, receives its full share of moistening and is enabled to sprout and grow.

"The Law preached by the Thus Come One is of one form, one flavor, namely, the form of emancipation, the form of separation, the form of extinction, which in the end comes down to a wisdom embracing all species. When the living beings hear the law of the Thus Come One, though they may embrace, read and recite it, and

practice it as it dictates, they themselves do not realize or understand the blessings they are gaining thereby. Why is this? Because only the Thus Come One understands the species, the form, the substance, the nature of these living beings, he knows what things they dwell on, what things they ponder, that things they practice. He knows what Law they dwell on, what Law they ponder, what Law they practice, through what Law they attain what Law.

"Living beings exist in a variety of environments, but only the Thus Come One sees the true circumstances and fully understands them without hindrance. It is like those plants and trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs which do not themselves know whether they are superior, middling or inferior in nature. But the Thus Come One knows that this is the Law of one form, one flavor, namely, the form of emancipation, the form of separation, the form of extinction, the form of ultimate nirvana, of constant tranquility and emptiness. The Buddha understands all this. But because he can see the desires that are in the minds of living beings, he guides and protects them, and for this reason does not immediately preach to them the wisdom that embraces all species.

"You and the others, Kashyapa, have done a very rare thing, for you can understand how the Thus Come One preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, you can have faith in it, you can accept it. Why do I say this? Because the fact that the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate is hard to comprehend, hard to understand."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The Dharma King, destroyer of being,  
when he appears in the world  
accords with the desires of living beings,  
preaching the Law in a variety of ways.  
The Thus Come One, worthy of honor and reverence,  
is profound and far-reaching in wisdom.  
For long he remained silent regarding the essential,  
in no hurry to speak at once.  
If those who are wise hear of it  
they can believe and understand it,  
but those without wisdom will have doubts and regrets  
and for all time will remain in error.  
For this reason, Kashyapa,  
he adjusts to the person to gain a correct view.  
Kashyapa, you should understand

that it is like a great cloud  
that rises up in the world  
and covers it all over.

This beneficent cloud is laden with moisture,  
the lightening gleams and flashes,  
and the sound of thunder reverberates afar,  
causing the multitude to rejoice.  
The sun's rays are veiled and hidden,  
a clear coolness comes over the land;  
masses of darkness descend and spread—  
you can almost touch them.  
The rain falls everywhere,  
coming down on all four sides,  
its flow and saturation are measureless,  
reaching to every area of the earth,  
to the ravines and valleys of the mountains and streams,  
to the remote and secluded places where grow  
plants, bushes, medicinal herbs,  
trees large and small,  
a hundred grains, rice seedlings,  
sugar cane, grape vines.  
The rain moistens them all,  
none ails to receive its full share,  
the parched ground is everywhere watered,  
herbs and trees alike grow lush.  
What falls from the cloud  
is water of a single flavor,  
but the plants and trees, thickets and groves,  
each accept the moisture that is appropriate to its portion.  
All the various trees,  
whether superior, middling or inferior,  
take that is fitting for large or small  
and each is enabled to sprout and grow.  
Root, stem, limb, leaf,  
the glow and hue of flower and fruit—  
one rain extends to them  
and all are able to become fresh and glossy,  
whether their allotment  
of substance, form and nature is large or small,  
the moistening they receive is one,  
but each grows and flourishes in its own way.

The Buddha is like this  
when he appears in the world,  
comparable to a great cloud  
that covers all things everywhere,  
Having appeared in the world,  
for the sake of living beings

he makes distinctions in expounding  
the truth regarding phenomena.  
The great sage, the World-Honored One,  
to heavenly and human beings,  
in the midst of all beings,  
pronounces these words:  
I am the Thus Come One,  
most honored of two-legged beings.  
I appear in the world  
like a great cloud  
that showers moisture upon  
all the dry and withered living beings,  
so that all are able to escape suffering,  
gain the joy of peace and security,  
the joys of this world  
and the joy of nirvana.  
All you heavenly and human beings of this assembly,  
listen carefully and with one mind!  
All of you should gather around  
and observe the one of unexcelled honor.  
A am the World-Honored One,  
none can rival me.  
In order to bring peace and security to living beings  
I have appeared in the world  
and for the sake of this great assembly  
I preach the sweet dew of the pure Law.  
This Law is of a single flavor,  
that of emancipation, nirvana.  
With a single wonderful sound  
I expound and unfold its meaning;  
constantly for the sake of the Great Vehicle  
I create causes and conditions.

I look upon all things  
as being universally equal,  
I have no mind to favor this or that,  
to love one or hate another.  
I am without greed or attachment  
and without limitation or hindrance.  
At all times, for all things  
I preach the Law equally;  
as I would for a single person,  
that same way I do for numerous persons,  
constantly I expound and preach the Law,  
never have I done anything else,  
coming, going, sitting, standing,  
never to the end growing weary or disheartened.  
I bring fullness and satisfaction to the world,  
like rain that spreads its moisture everywhere,

Eminent and lowly, superior and inferior,  
observers of precepts, violators of precepts,  
those fully endowed with proper demeanor,  
those not fully endowed,  
those of correct views, of erroneous views,  
of keen capacity, of dull capacity—  
I cause the Dharma rain on all equally,  
never lax or neglectful.  
When all the various living beings  
hear my Law,  
they receive it according to their power,  
dwelling in their different environments.  
Some inhabit the realm of human and heavenly beings,  
of wheel-turning sage kings,  
Shakra, Brahma are the other kings—  
these are the inferior medicinal herbs.  
Some understand the Law of no outflows,  
are able to attain nirvana,  
to acquire the six transcendental powers  
and gain in particular the three understandings,  
or live alone in mountain forests,  
constantly practicing meditation  
and gaining the enlightenment of pratyekabuddhas—  
these are the middling medicinal herbs.  
Still others seek the place of the World-Honored One,  
convinced that they can become Buddhas,  
putting forth diligent effort and practicing meditation—  
these are the superior medicinal herbs.  
Again there are sons of the Buddha  
who devote their minds solely to the Buddha way,  
constantly practicing mercy and compassion,  
knowing that they themselves will attain Buddhahood,  
certain of it and never doubting—  
these I call small trees.  
Those who abide in peace in their transcendental powers,  
turning the wheel of non-regression,  
saving innumerable millions  
of hundreds of thousands of living beings—  
bodhisattvas such as these  
I call large trees.  
The equality of the Buddha's preaching  
is like a rain of a single flavor,  
but depending upon the nature of the living being,  
the way in which it is received is not uniform,  
just as the various plants and trees  
each receive the moisture in a different manner.  
The Buddha employs this parable  
as an excellent means to open up and reveal the matter,  
using various kinds of words and phrases

and expounding the single Law,  
 but in terms of the Buddha wisdom  
 this is no more than one drop of the ocean.  
 I rain down the Dharma rain,  
 filling the whole world,  
 and this single-flavored Dharma  
 is practiced by each according to the individual's power.  
 It is like those thickets and groves,  
 medicinal herbs and trees  
 which, according to whether they are large or small,  
 bit by bit grow lush and beautiful.

The Law of the Buddhas  
 is constantly of a single flavor,  
 causing the many worlds  
 to attain full satisfaction everywhere;  
 by practicing gradually and stage by stage,  
 all beings can gain the fruits of the way.  
 The voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas  
 inhabit the mountain forests,  
 dwelling in their final existence,  
 hearing the Law and gaining its fruits—  
 we may call them medicinal herbs  
 that grow and mature each in its own way,  
 if there are Bodhisattvas  
 who are steadfast and firm in wisdom,  
 who fully comprehend the threefold world  
 and seek the supreme vehicle,  
 these we call the small trees  
 that achieve growth and maturity.  
 Again there are those who dwell in meditation,  
 who have gained the strength of transcendental powers,  
 have heard of the emptiness of all phenomena,  
 greatly rejoice in it in their minds  
 and emit countless rays of light  
 to save living beings—  
 these we call large trees  
 that have gained growth and maturity  
 In this way, Kashyapa,  
 the Law preached by the Buddha  
 is comparable to a great cloud  
 which, with a single-flavored rain,  
 moistens human flowers  
 so that each is able to bear fruit.  
 Kashyapa, you should understand  
 that through various causes and conditions,  
 various kinds of simile and parable,  
 I open up and reveal the Buddha way.  
 This is an expedient means I employ

and the same is true of the other Buddhas.

Now for you and the others  
 I preach the utmost truth:  
 none in the Multitude of voice-hearers  
 has entered the stage of extinction.  
 What you are practicing  
 is the bodhisattva way,  
 and as you gradually advance in practice and learning  
 you are all certain to attain Buddhahood.

\* \* \*

*[In this final selection, the Buddha tells the story about one of his previous lives when he was a king and a seer named Devadatta introduced him to the great Law (Dharma), which now is expounded in the Lotus Sūtra. Later when asked whether there has been anyone who achieved enlightenment through the practice of this sūtra, the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī tells a story of an eight-year old girl who achieved enlightenment in an instant through the Lotus Sūtra. This idea that enlightenment can be obtained by anyone, even an eight-year old girl, in an instant would become a major theme of East-Asian Buddhism]*

## Chapter Twelve Devadatta

At that time the Buddha addressed the bodhisattvas, the heavenly and human beings, and the four kinds of believers saying: "Immeasurable kalpas in the past, I sought the Lotus Sutra without ever flagging. During those many kalpas, I constantly appeared as the ruler of a kingdom who made a vow to seek the unsurpassed bodhi. His mind never wavered or turned aside, and in his desire to fulfill the six paramitas he diligently distributed alms, never stinting in heart, whether the gift was elephants or horses, the seven rare articles, countries, cities, wife, children, maidservants, or his own head, eyes, marrow and brain, his own flesh and limbs. He did not begrudge even his own being and life. At that period the human life span was immeasurably long. But for the sake of the Law this king abandoned his kingdom and throne, delegated the government to the crown prince, sounded drums and sent out proclamations, seeking the Law in four directions and saying, 'Who can expound the Great Vehicle for me? To the end of my life I will be his provider and servant!'

"At that time there was a seer who came to the king and said, "I have a Great Vehicle text called the Sutra of the Wonderful Law. If you will never disobey me, I will expound it for you."

"When the king heard these words of the seer, he danced for joy. At once he accompanied the seer, providing him with whatever he needed, picking fruit, drawing water, gathering firewood, setting out meals, even offering his own body as a couch and seat, never stinting in body or mind. He served the seer in this manner for a thousand years, all for the sake of the Law, working diligently acting as a provider and seeing to it that the seer lacked for nothing."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

I recall those departed kalpas of the past  
when in order to seek the great Law,  
though I was the ruler of a worldly kingdom,  
I was not greedy to satisfy the five desires  
but instead struck the bell, crying in four quarters,  
"Who possesses the great Law?  
If he will explain and preach it for me  
I will be his slave and servant!"  
At that time there was a seer named Asita  
who came and announced to this great King,  
"I have a subtle and wonderful Law,  
rarely known in this world.  
If you will undertake religious practice  
I will expound it for you."  
When the king heard the seer's words  
his heart was filled with great joy.  
Immediately he accompanied the seer,  
providing him with whatever he needed,  
gathering firewood, fruit and wild rice,  
presenting them at appropriate times with respect and  
reverence.  
Because the wonderful Law was then his thoughts  
he never flagged in body or mind.  
For the sake of living beings everywhere  
he diligently sought the great Law,  
taking no heed for himself  
or for the gratification of the five desires.  
Therefore the ruler of a great kingdom  
through diligent seeking was able to acquire this Law  
and eventually to attain Buddhahood,  
as I will now explain to you.

The Buddha said to his monks: "The king at that time was I myself, and this seer was the man who is now Devadatta. All because Devadatta was a good friend to me, I was able to become fully endowed with this six paramitas, pity, compassion, joy, and indifference, with the thirty-two features, the eighty characteristics, the purple-tinged golden color, the ten powers, the four kinds of fearlessness, the four methods of winning people, the eighteen unshared properties, and the transcendental powers and the power of the way. The fact that I have attained impartial and correct enlightenment and can save living beings on a broad scale is all due to Devadatta who was a good friend."

Then the Buddha said to the four kinds of believers: "Devadatta, after immeasurable kalpas have past, will attain Buddhahood. He will be called Heavenly King Thus Come One, worthy of offerings of right and universal knowledge, perfect parity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, on itself worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. This world will be called Heavenly Way, and at the same time Heavenly King Buddha will abide in the world for twenty medium kalpas, broadly preaching the Wonderful Law for the sake of living beings. Living beings numerous as Ganges sands will attain the fruit of arhatship. Immeasurable numbers of living beings will conceive that desire to become pratyekabuddhas, living beings numerous as Ganges sands will conceive a desire for the unsurpassed way, will gain that truth of birthless-ness, and will never regress. After Heavenly King Buddha enters parinirvana, his Correct Law will endure in the world for twenty medium kalpas. The relics from his whole body will be housed in a tower built of the seven treasures, sixty yojanas in height and forty yojanas in width and depth. All the heavenly and human beings will take assorted flowers, powdered incense, incense for burning, paste incense, clothing, necklaces, steamers and banners, jeweled canopies, music and songs of praise that offer them with obeisance to the wonderful seven- jeweled tower. Immeasurable numbers of living beings will attain the fruits of arhatship, numerous living beings will become enlightened as pratyekabuddhas, and unimaginable numbers of living beings will conceive a desire for bodhi and will in reach the level of no regression."

The Buddha said to the monks: "In future ages if there are good men or good women who, on hearing the Devadatta Chapter of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful

Law, believe and revere it with pure hearts and harbor no doubts or perplexities, they will never fall into hell or the realm of hungry spirits or of beasts, but will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and in the place where they are born they will constantly hear this sutra. If they are born among human or heavenly beings, they will enjoy exceedingly wonderful delights, and if they are born in the presence of the Buddha, they will be born by transformation from lotus flowers."

At that time there was a bodhisattva who was among the followers of Many Treasures World-Honored One from the lower region and whose name was Wisdom Accumulated. He said to Many Treasures Buddha, "Shall we return to our homeland?"

Shakyamuni Buddha said to Wisdom Accumulated, 'good man, wait a little while. There is a bodhisattva named Manjushri here whom you should see. Debate and discuss the wonderful Law with him, and then you may return to your homeland.'

At that time Manjushri was seated on a thousand-petaled lotus blossom big as a carriage wheel, and the bodhisattvas who had come with them were also seated on jeweled lotus blossoms. Manjushri had emerged in a natural manner from the palace of the dragon king Sagara in the great ocean and was suspended in the air. Proceeding to Holy Eagle Peak, he descended from the lotus blossom and, having entered the presence of the Buddhas, bowed his head and paid obeisance to the feet of the two World-Honored Ones. When he had concluded these gestures of respect, he went to where Wisdom Accumulated was and exchanged greetings with him, and retired then retired and sat at one side.

Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated questioned Manjushri, saying, "When you went to the palace of the dragon king, how many living beings did you convert?"

Manjushri replied, "The number is immeasurable, incapable of calculation. The mouth cannot express it, the mind cannot have fathom it. Wait a moment and there will be proof."

Before he had finished speaking, countless bodhisattvas seated on jeweled lotus blossoms emerged from the Ocean proceeded to Holy Eagle Peak, where they remained suspended in the air. These bodhisattvas all had been converted and saved by Manjushri. They had carried out all the bodhisattva practices and discussed and expounded the six paramitas with one another. Those who had originally been voice-hearers

expounded the practices of the voice-hearer when they were in the air, but now all were practicing the Great Vehicle principle of emptiness.

Manjushri said to Wisdom Accumulated, "The work of teaching and converting carried out that in the ocean was as you can see."

At that time Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated recited these verses of praise:

Of great wisdom and virtue, brave and stalwart,  
you have converted and saved immeasurable beings.  
Now those in this great assembly,  
as well as I myself, have all seen them.  
You expound the principle of the true entity,  
open up the Law of the single vehicle,  
broadly guiding the many beings,  
causing them quickly to attain bodhi.

Manjushri said, "When I was in the ocean I constantly expounded the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law alone."

Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated questioned Manjushri, saying, "This sutra is a profound, subtle and wonderful, a treasure among sutras, a rarity in the world. Are there perhaps any living beings who, by earnestly and diligently practicing this sutra, have been able to attain Buddhahood quickly?"

Manjushri replied, "There is the daughter of the dragon king Sagara, who was just turned eight. Her wisdom has keen roots and she is good at the understanding the root activities and of living beings. She has mastered the dharanis, has been able to accept and embrace all the store house of profound secrets preached by the Buddhas, has entered deep into meditation, thoroughly grasping the doctrines, and in the space of an instant conceived the desire for bodhi and reached the level of no regression. Her eloquence knows no hindrance, and she thinks of living beings with compassion as though they were her own children. She is fully endowed with blessings, and when it comes to conceiving in mind and expounding by mouth, she is subtle, wonderful, comprehensive and great. Kind, compassionate, benevolent, yielding, she is gentle and refined in will, capable of attaining bodhi."

Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated said, "When I observe Shakyamuni Thus Come One, I see that for immeasurable kalpas he carried out harsh and difficult practices, accumulated merit, piling up virtue, seeking the way to the bodhisattva without ever resting. I observe

that throughout the thousand-million fold world there is not a single spot tiny as a mustard seed where this bodhisattva failed to sacrifice body and life the sake of living beings. Only after he had done that was he able to complete the bodhi way. I cannot believe that this girl in the space of the instant could actually achieve correct enlightenment."

Before his words had come to an end, the dragon king's daughter suddenly appeared before the Buddha, bowed her head in obeisance, and then retired to one side, reciting these verses of praise:

He profoundly understands the signs of guilt and good fortune  
and illuminates the ten directions everywhere.  
His subtle, wonderful pure Dharma body  
is endowed with the thirty-two features;  
the eighty characteristics  
adorn his Dharma body.  
Heavenly and human beings gaze up in awe,  
dragons and spirits all pay honor and respect;  
among all living beings,  
none who do not hold him in reverence.  
And having heard his teachings, I have attained bodhi—  
the Buddha alone can bear witness to this.  
I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle  
to rescue living beings from suffering.

At that time Shariputra said to the dragon girl, "You suppose that in this short time you have been able to attain the unsurpassed way. But this is difficult to believe. Why? Because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law. How could you attain the unsurpassed bodhi? The road to Buddhahood is long and far-reaching. Only after one has spent immeasurable kalpas pursuing austerities, accumulating deeds, practicing all kinds of paramitas, can one finally achieve success. Moreover, a woman is subject to the five obstacles. First, she cannot become a Brahma heavenly king. Second, she cannot become the king Shakra. Third, she cannot become a devil king. Fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning sage king. Fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. How then could a woman like you be able to attain Buddhahood so quickly?"

At that time the dragon girl had a precious jewel worth as much as the thousand-million-fold world which she presented to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately accepted it. The dragon girl said to Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated to the venerable one, Shariputra, "I

presented the precious jewel and the World-Honored One accepted it— was that not quickly done?"

They replied, "Very quickly!"

The girl said, "employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood. It shall be even quicker than that!"

At that time the members of the assembly all saw the dragon girl in the space of an instant change into a man and carry out all the practices of a bodhisattva, immediately proceeding to the Spotless World of the south, taking a seat on a jeweled lotus, and attaining impartial and correct enlightenment. With the thirty-two features and the eighty characteristics, he expounded the wonderful Law for all living beings everywhere in the ten directions.

At that time in the saha world to a the bodhisattvas, voice-hearers, gods, dragons and others of the eight kinds of guardians, human and non-human beings all from a distance saw the dragon girl become a Buddha and preach the law to all the human and heavenly beings in the assembly at that time. Their hearts were filled with great joy and all from a distance paid reverent obeisance. Immeasurable living beings, hearing the Law, understood it and were able to reach the level of no regression. Immeasurable living beings received prophecies that they would gain the away. The Spotless World quaked and trembled in six different ways. Three thousand living beings of the saha world remained on the level of no regression. Three thousand living beings conceived a desire for bodhi and received prophecies of enlightenment. Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated, Shariputra and all the other members of the assembly silently believed an accepted these things.

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All selections taken from Burton Watson, trans. *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).