



# NBAA Gongyo Ceremony

**English Version**

Containing:

## The Lotus Sutra

Expedient Means &  
The Life Span of the Thus Come One





## NBAA Gongyo Ceremony

**Nichiren Buddhist Association of America**  
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This book contains two chapters of the Lotus Sutra,  
“Expedient Means” and “The Life Span of the Thus Come  
One,” translated by Burton Watson, as well as some of the  
explanations of the terms from the glossary of his book.

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which produces a sense of inner serenity. (Watson)

**Shariputra** – One of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples, known as foremost in wisdom. The third chapter of the Lotus Sutra predicts that he will become a Buddha named Flower Glow. (Watson)

**threefold world** - The world of desire, the world of form, and the world of formlessness. The realms inhabited by unenlightened beings who transmigrate within the six paths. Beings in the world of desire are ruled by various desires. Those in the world of form have material form but no desires. Those in the world of formlessness are free from both desire and form. (Watson)

**Thus Come One** – One of the ten epithets for a Buddha. (Watson)

**Three Treasures** – The three things that all Buddhists are enjoined to serve and revere, namely, the Buddha, the Law or Dharma, and the Sangha or Order. (Watson)

**udumbara** – A type of plant said to bloom only once in three thousand years. Used in Buddhist literature to symbolize the rarity of encountering a Buddha. (Watson)

**voice-hearers** – Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples. Those who listen to his preaching and strive to attain enlightenment. Also called voice-hearer disciples. (Watson)

**World Honored One** – One of the ten epithets for a Buddha. (Watson)

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## What is Gongyo?

Gongyo means "assiduous practice." It's the auxiliary practice of reciting portions of sutras. It's done for the purpose of strengthening the cognitive directing of our Buddhist practice. The main practice is chanting Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. Many Nichiren Buddhists generally perform gongyo in the morning and evening, that is, twice per day. You may not have time to recite portions of the sutra twice per day, once in a day, or even once per week. But each and every recitation of gongyo you do provides an unparalleled opportunity for you to practice Buddhism better, more effectively, and to actualize Buddhahood within your life. Seize this opportunity as often as possible.

In Nichiren Buddhism, we recite the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters of the Lotus Sutra, chapters 2 and 16, when we perform gongyo. You will find those chapters within the pages of this book.

## Myoho Renge Kyo

In this book, the titles of the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" chapters are preceded by Myoho Renge Kyo. What's the reason for that? Myoho Renge Kyo is the title of the Lotus Sutra in Sino-Japanese, the language Nichiren used. When we recite gongyo, we announce what we're about to recite prior to reciting it. This includes the name of the text and the chapter.

## How to Perform the Ceremony

Ring the bell 3 times to signal that you're about to chant 3 times slowly.  
 Chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo 3 times slowly.  
 Chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo as long as desired. At least 30 minutes is recommended.  
 To signal that the chanting is coming to a stop, when you're done chanting, ring the bell 5 times, once on each syllable of the last Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo .  
 Then ring the bell 3 times.  
 Chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo 3 times slowly.  
 Say "Myoho Renge Kyo Chapter 2 Expedient Means" to announce the recitation of the "Expedient Means" chapter.  
 Recite the "Expedient Means" chapter.  
 Ring the bell 7 times in-between chapters.  
 Say "Myoho Renge Kyo Chapter 16 The Life Span of the Thus Come One."  
 Recite the "Life Span" chapter.  
 When you've finished reciting the "Life Span" chapter, begin chanting Namu-myoho-enge-kyo while simultaneously ringing the bell. Ring the bell 5 times, once on each syllable of Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo in order to indicate the speed of the chant.  
 Chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo as long as desired. At least 30 minutes is recommended.  
 When you're done chanting, ring the bell 5 times to signal that the chanting is coming to a stop.  
 Ring the bell 3 times.  
 Chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo 3 times slowly.

**Mandarava flower** – A red, mythical flower that signals the occurrence of an auspicious event involving a Buddha.

**ayuta** – A numerical unit, defined differently in different texts but clearly indicating an extremely large number. (Watson)

**nirvana** – A state of attainment described in early Buddhist teachings. There are two meanings of nirvana. The nirvana of remainder refers to the ongoing life of a person who has achieved the state. The nirvana of no remainder refers to what happens when a person who has achieved the state passes away. The nirvana of remainder is when one frees oneself from attachment and thereby suffering. The nirvana of no remainder is when a person frees themselves from the cycle of birth and death or reincarnation.

**outflows** – From early Buddhism, it means illusions, impurities and desires that prevent one from attaining nirvana

**paramita** – One of the six paramitas. These were six practices required of Mahayana bodhisattvas in order to attain Buddhahood. The Sanskrit word paramita means "perfection" or "having reached the other shore," that is, having crossed over from the shore of delusion to that of enlightenment. The six practices are: 1) almsgiving 2) keeping the precepts 3) forbearance 4) assiduousness 5) meditation and 6) wisdom. (Watson)

**pratyekabuddha** – A stage of attainment for cause-awakened ones, or the condition of Realization of the Ten Worlds. It's a goal of Hinayana Buddhism, a limited and selfish achievement that is devoid of concern about the enlightenment of others.

**saha world** – Our present world, which is full of sufferings to be endured. The Sanskrit word saha means "endurance." (Watson)

**Samadhi** – A state of intense concentration of the mind,

## Glossary

**annutara-samyak-sambodhi** – Supreme unsurpassed enlightenment.

**arhat** – The highest stage of attainment for voice-hearers, or the condition of Learning of the Ten Worlds. Nichiren Buddhism urges practitioners to reject the goal of arhatship and strive instead for the unsurpassed enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra.

**asamkhyā** – An ancient Indian numerical unit, indicating an uncountably large number. (Watson)

**asura** – A class of contentious demons in Indian mythology who fight continually with the god Indra. In Buddhism, the asuras constitute one of the eight kinds of nonhuman beings who protect Buddhism. (Watson)

**avivartika** – A stage of attainment for bodhisattvas in which the practitioner will never again backslide in their progression toward Buddhahood.

**Holy Eagle Peak** – The place where Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have taught. Every Buddha is said to preach from his Pure Land, a peaceful and wondrous place where one can be instructed by that Buddha until enlightenment is reached. It's also another way of describing the enlightenment taught by that Buddha. It's also known as Vulture Peak.

**kalpa** – An extremely long period of time. (Watson)

**Law** – A religious text or a body of divine commandments. In the Lotus Sutra, it refers to the Law contained in the Lotus Sutra. In Nichiren Buddhism more generally, it refers to Namu-myoho-enge-kyo.

**Maitreya** – A bodhisattva who speaks on behalf of the other bodhisattvas in the assembly.

## Varying the Ceremony

If you don't have time to recite the entirety of both chapters, you may chant and recite only one chapter or simply chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo without reciting any portions of the sutra. If you do recite portions of the sutra, it's advisable to spend at least as much time chanting Namu-myoho-enge-kyo as you spend reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra.

## The Proper Attitude

Gongyo should be performed with an attitude of respect and determination. We should sit up straight, speak clearly, use a resolute tone of voice, and project our voices with strong volume, not shouting nor mumbling.

To get the most benefit from the practice of gongyo, it's important to exert effort at concentrating on what is being said. This applies to both reciting the sutra and to chanting Namu-myoho-enge-kyo. It's natural to sometimes lose concentration, but we should try our best to stay focused as much as possible.

## Why Does NBAA Recommend Reciting These Two Chapters?

Nichiren argued that these were the two most important chapters in the whole of Shakyamuni's teachings. We encourage people to study further to understand Nichiren's argument. However, for the purposes of this book, it should be simply understood that Nichiren prescribed the recitation of these two chapters of the Lotus Sutra to his disciples.

"For your regular recitation, I recommend that you practice

reading the prose sections of the 'Expedient Means' and 'Life Span' chapters."

~ Nichiren, Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, "The Recitation of the 'Expedient Means' and 'Life Span' Chapters," p 71

"I have written out the prose section of the 'Expedient Means' chapter for you. You should recite it together with the verse portion of the 'Life Span' chapter, which I sent you earlier. "

~ Nichiren, Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, "Reply to the Lay Priest Soya," p 486

## Understanding the "Expedient Means" Chapter

The "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains to us that, for the first time in his life, after teaching for 40 years, Shakyamuni was going to finally teach the highest, truest and most powerfully effective teaching of his lifetime. He then had to explain why he hadn't taught the truth before and why he instead taught things that were less than the highest teaching. In this chapter, he explains that his audience had not been ready to hear the highest truth, so he employed expedient means designed to develop the capacity of his disciples to the point of being able to understand the deepest truth.

The Lotus Sutra is known as the single vehicle teaching, the teaching that leads all living beings to Buddhahood. In the text, he mentions two or three other vehicles, which he says "are not the truth." The two vehicles are the teachings of Learning and Realization of the Ten Worlds (or voice-hearer and pratyekabuddha in the text). The third vehicle refers to the teachings of bodhisattva.

His previous teachings of the three vehicles lead to results



to gain entry into the unsurpassed way  
and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?

that are not the highest kind of enlightenment possible. Only the single vehicle teaching described in the Lotus Sutra leads to unsurpassed Buddhahood.

Although Shakyamuni used his earlier teachings to prepare his disciples for the true teaching, we don't need to do that ourselves, nor should we. In the Lotus Sutra, his contemporary disciples vowed to propagate the Lotus Sutra teachings in the future ages following his death. But Shakyamuni turned them down. He didn't think they were prepared to properly teach this sutra in the future, so he assigned the task to bodhisattvas he conjured from beneath the earth, called the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. These bodhisattvas were specially trained in this particular teaching, in the single vehicle path. It was these bodhisattvas who were tasked with spreading this teaching, and this teaching alone, in the future ages, which means now. Shakyamuni meant for this to be the teaching spread during this time period, not his prior teachings.

The logic follows that now that the truth has been revealed, it wouldn't be proper to go back to a lesser teaching. To subscribe to a lesser philosophy when a greater philosophy is available would be analogous to returning to using an abacus after calculators had been invented.

There are many other notable points in the "Expedient Means" chapter as well. One of the most radical points made in the chapter is the exposition of the Ten Factors, upon which the theory of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life — the crux of Nichiren Buddhism and what distinguishes it from other forms of Buddhism — is partly based. Here are the Ten Factors described by Shakyamuni: "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."

The second most important point made by the "Expedient Means" chapter, which also helped form the basis of the theory of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life, is that Buddhahood is a condition of life, as opposed to a person born as a Buddha, and that this condition is an inherent potential within all living beings.

Another critical point made in this chapter is an argument that Buddhahood is a condition in which one's whole being exists for the sake of teaching others "this Law" or the single vehicle teaching described in the Lotus Sutra. In several places he says things like this: "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.... 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." When our Buddha nature emerges, and we see how spectacular Buddhahood is, out of compassion for living beings, the desire to encourage every living being on the planet to develop this condition within themselves overwhelms us and becomes our primary mission in life. At the same time, acting on this mission further strengthens the condition of Buddhahood within. So if we're ever at a point in our practice where we feel like we're stagnating, this is something we can stop and consider: How much effort are we exerting to help other people attain Buddhahood?

There's one more important message in the "Expedient Means" chapter we'd like to point out. It says, "Shariputra, you should know that at the start I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction

At times for this multitude  
I describe the Buddha's life span as  
immeasurable,  
and to those who see the Buddha only after a  
long time  
I explain how difficult it is to meet the Buddha.  
Such is the power of my wisdom  
that its sagacious beams shine without measure.  
This life span of countless kalpas  
I gained as the result of lengthy practice.  
You who are possessed of wisdom,  
entertain no doubts on this point!  
Cast them off, end them forever,  
for the Buddha's words are true, not false.  
He is like a skilled physician  
who uses an expedient means to cure his  
deranged sons.  
Though in fact alive, he gives out word he is  
dead,  
yet no one can say he speaks falsely.  
I am the father of this world,  
saving those who suffer and are afflicted.  
Because of the befuddlement of ordinary  
people,  
though I live, I give out word I have entered  
extinction.  
For if they see me constantly,  
arrogance and selfishness arise in their minds.  
Abandoning restraint, they give themselves up to  
the five desires  
and fall into the evil paths of existence.  
Always I am aware of which living beings  
practice the way, and which do not,  
and in response to their needs for salvation  
I preach various doctrines for them.  
At all times I think to myself:  
How can I cause living beings

so you suppose that I enter extinction.  
When I look at living beings  
I see them drowned in a sea of suffering;  
therefore I do not show myself,  
causing them to thirst for me.  
Then when their minds are filled with yearning,  
at last I appear and preach the Law for them.  
Such are my transcendental powers.  
For asamkhyā kalpas  
constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak  
and in various other places.  
When living beings witness the end of a kalpa  
and all is consumed in a great fire,  
this, my land, remains safe and tranquil,  
constantly filled with heavenly and human  
beings.  
The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves  
are adorned with various kinds of gems.  
Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit  
where living beings enjoy themselves at ease.  
The gods strike heavenly drums,  
constantly making many kinds of music.  
Mandarava blossoms rain down,  
scattering over the Buddha and the great  
assembly.  
My pure land is not destroyed,  
yet the multitude see it as consumed in fire,  
with anxiety, fear and other sufferings  
filling it everywhere.  
These living beings with their various offenses,  
through causes arising from their evil actions,  
spend asamkhyā kalpas  
without hearing the name of the Three Treasures.  
But those who practice meritorious ways,  
who are gentle, peaceful, honest and upright,  
all of them will see me  
here in person, preaching the Law.

between us, and what I long ago hoped for has now been fulfilled." With this sutra, Shakyamuni fulfills his vow to teach a philosophy that leads all living beings to a condition of Buddhahood equal to his own, without any distinction from his. In other words, this condition of Buddhahood he teaches through the Lotus Sutra, once achieved, will be equal to his own. Once we see Buddhahood in our own lives, we should never consider ourselves inferior to Shakyamuni or any other Buddha. Ironically, the belief that we're inferior inhibits our ability to do exactly what we need to do to be an equal of Shakyamuni, which is to dedicate our lives to encouraging others and teaching them how to attain enlightenment.

## Understanding the "Life Span" Chapter

The important thing to understand when reading this chapter is that Shakyamuni is speaking not as his transitory, physical human self but as the greater self that is his Buddha nature, and ours as well. When he speaks of himself in this chapter, it should be understood that he speaks on behalf of each of our Buddha natures. When we read this chapter, we should see it as if our own Buddha nature is speaking, that we are saying these words, rather than just the man Shakyamuni.

From this perspective, he explains that the Buddha nature inherent within us all is eternal and never dies or disappears, though it might seem so from the unenlightened perspective.

There are a couple of important lines from the chapter that Nichiren based his Buddhist practice upon, and so should we all.

He again reiterated at the close of the "Life Span" chapter a point he had made in the "Expedient Means" chapter, which was that the purpose of a Buddha's existence is to lead all living beings to Buddhahood. Speaking on behalf of the Buddha nature within us all, he says, "At all times I think to

myself: How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha? "

Another important passage tells us that when we have developed the compassion and courage to offer our lives for Buddhism, to practice with a no-matter-what-should-happen spirit, that is the precise moment when the condition of Buddhahood appears within us, the point at which we become Buddhas. "When living beings have become truly faithful, honest and upright, gentle in intent, single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives, then I and the assembly of monks appear together on Holy Eagle Peak."

converting  
 countless millions of living beings,  
 causing them to enter the Buddha way,  
 all this for immeasurable kalpas.  
 In order to save living beings,  
 as an expedient means I appear to enter  
 nirvana  
 but in truth I do not pass into extinction.  
 I am always here, preaching the Law.  
 I am always here,  
 but through my transcendental powers  
 I make it so that living beings in their  
 befuddlement  
 do not see me even when close by.  
 When the multitude see that I have passed into  
 extinction,  
 far and wide they offer alms to my relics.  
 All harbor thoughts of yearning  
 and in their minds thirst to gaze at me.  
 When living beings have become truly faithful,  
 honest and upright, gentle in intent,  
 single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha,  
 not hesitating even if it costs them their lives,  
 then I and the assembly of monks  
 appear together on Holy Eagle Peak.  
 At that time I tell the living beings  
 that I am always here, never entering extinction,  
 but that because of the power of an expedient  
 means  
 at times I appear to be extinct, at other times  
 not,  
 and that if there are living beings in other lands  
 who are reverent and sincere in their wish to  
 believe,  
 then among them too  
 I will preach the unsurpassed Law.  
 But you have not heard of this,

I am now old and worn out, and the time of my death has come. I will leave this good medicine here. You should take it and not worry that it will not cure you.' Having given these instructions, he then goes off to another land, where he sends a messenger home to announce, 'Your father is dead.'

"At that time the children, hearing that their father has deserted them and died, are filled with great grief and consternation and think to themselves: If our father were alive he would have pity on us and see that we are protected. But now he has abandoned us and died in some other country far away. We are shelterless orphans with no one to rely on!

"Constantly harboring such feelings of grief, they at last come to their senses and realize that the medicine is in fact excellent in color and fragrance and flavor, and so they take it and are healed of all the effects of the poison. The father, hearing that his children are all cured, immediately returns home and appears to them all once more.

"Good men, what is your opinion? Can anyone say that this skilled physician is guilty of lying?"

"No, World-Honored One."

The Buddha said: "It is the same with me. It has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayuta and asamkhyas kalpas since I attained Buddhahood. But for the sake of living beings I employ the power of expedient means and say that I am about to pass into extinction. In view of the circumstances, however, no one can say that I have been guilty of lies or falsehoods."

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

Since I attained Buddhahood  
the number of kalpas that have passed  
is an immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten  
thousands,  
millions, trillions, asamkhyas.  
Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching,

## Myoho Renge Kyo

### Chapter 2

### 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 their attachments. Why is this? Because the Thus Come One is fully possessed of 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 can 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."

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

The hero of the world is unfathomable.  
 Among heavenly beings or the people of the  
     world,  
 among all living beings,  
 none can understand the Buddha.  
 The Buddha's power, fearlessness,  
 emancipation and samadhis  
 and the Buddha's other attributes  
 no one can reckon or fathom.  
 Earlier, under the guidance of countless Buddhas  
 he fully acquired and practiced various ways,  
 profound, subtle and wonderful doctrines  
 that are hard to see and hard to understand.  
 For immeasurable millions of kalpas  
 he has been practicing these ways  
 until in the place of practice he achieved the  
     goal.  
 I have already come to see and know  
     completely  
 this great goal and recompense,  
 the meaning of these various natures and  
     characteristics.  
 I and the other Buddhas of the ten directions  
 can now understand these things.  
 This Law cannot be described,

medicines to effectively cure all kinds of diseases. He has many sons, perhaps ten, twenty, or even a hundred. He goes off to some other land far away to see about a certain affair. After he has gone, the children drink some kind of poison that makes them distraught with pain and they fall writhing to the ground.

"At that time the father returns to his home and finds that his children have drunk poison. Some are completely out of their minds, while others are not. Seeing their father from far off, all are overjoyed and kneel down and entreat him, saying: 'How fine that you have returned safely. We were stupid and by mistake drank some poison. We beg you to cure us and let us live out our lives!'

"The father, seeing his children suffering like this, follows various prescriptions. Gathering fine medicinal herbs that meet all the requirements of color, fragrance and flavor, he grinds, sifts and mixes them together. Giving a dose of these to his children, he tells them: 'This is a highly effective medicine, meeting all the requirements of color, fragrance and flavor. Take it and you will quickly be relieved of your sufferings and will be free of all illness.'

"Those children who have not lost their senses can see that this is good medicine, outstanding in both color and fragrance, so they take it immediately and are completely cured of their sickness. Those who are out of their minds are equally delighted to see their father return and beg him to cure their sickness, but when they are given the medicine, they refuse to take it. Why? Because the poison has penetrated deeply and their minds no longer function as before. So although the medicine is of excellent color and fragrance, they do not perceive it as good.

"The father thinks to himself: My poor children! Because of the poison in them, their minds are completely befuddled. Although they are happy to see me and ask me to cure them, they refuse to take this excellent medicine. I must now resort to some expedient means to induce them to take the medicine. So he says to them: 'You should know that

extinction. Good men, originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed. Now, however, although in fact I do not actually enter extinction, I announce that I am going to adopt the course of extinction. This is an expedient means which the Thus Come One uses to teach and convert living beings.

"Why do I do this? Because if the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, those persons with shallow virtue will fail to plant good roots but, living in poverty and lowliness, will become attached to the five desires and be caught in the net of deluded thoughts and imaginings. If they see that the Thus Come One is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will grow arrogant and selfish, or become discouraged and neglectful. They will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind.

"Therefore as an expedient means the Thus Come One says: 'Monks, you should know that it is a rare thing to live at a time when one of the Buddhas appears in the world.' Why does he do this? Because persons of shallow virtue may pass immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas with some of them chancing to see a Buddha and others never seeing one at all. For this reason I say to them: 'Monks, the Thus Come One is hard to get to see.' When living beings hear these words, they are certain to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha. In their minds they will harbor a longing and will thirst to gaze upon the Buddha, and then they will work to plant good roots. Therefore the Thus Come One, though in truth he does not enter extinction, speaks of passing into extinction.

"Good men, the Buddhas and Thus Come Ones all preach a Law such as this. They act in order to save living beings, so what they do is true and not false.

"Suppose, for example, that there is a skilled physician who is wise and understanding and knows how to compound

words fall silent before it.

Among the other kinds of living beings there are none who can comprehend it, except the many bodhisattvas who are firm in the power of faith.

The many disciples of the Buddhas in the past have given offerings to the Buddhas, have already cut off all outflows and now are dwelling in their last incarnation.

But even such persons as they have not the power needed.

Even if the whole world were filled with men like Shariputra, though they exhausted their thoughts and pooled their capacities, they could not fathom the Buddha's knowledge.

Even if ten directions were all filled with men like Shariputra or like the other disciples, though they filled the lands in the ten directions and exhausted their thoughts and pooled their capacities,

still they could not understand it.

If pratyekabuddhas, acute in understanding, without outflows, in their last incarnation, should fill the worlds in the ten directions, as numerous as bamboos in a grove, though they should join together with one mind for a million or for countless kalpas, hoping to conceive of the Buddha's true wisdom, they could not understand the smallest part of it. If bodhisattvas newly embarked on their course should give offerings to numberless Buddhas, completely mastering the intent of the various doctrines

and also able to preach the Law effectively, like so many rice and hemp plants, bamboos or

reeds,  
 filling the lands in the ten directions,  
 with a single mind, with their wonderful  
 knowledge,  
 for kalpas numerous as Ganges sands  
 should all together pool their thoughts and  
 capacities,  
 they could not understand the Buddha's  
 knowledge.  
 If bodhisattvas who never regress,  
 their number like Ganges sands,  
 with a single mind should join in pondering and  
 seeking,  
 they could not understand it either.  
 I also announce to you, Shariputra,  
 that this profound, subtle and wonderful Law  
 without outflows, incomprehensible,  
 I have now attained in full.  
 Only I understand its characteristics,  
 and the Buddhas of the ten directions do  
 likewise.  
 Shariputra, you should know  
 that the words of the various Buddhas never  
 differ.  
 Toward the Law preached by the Buddhas  
 you must cultivate a great power of faith.  
 The World-Honored One has long expounded his  
 doctrines  
 and now must reveal the truth.  
 I announce this to the assembly of voice-hearers  
 and to those who seek the vehicle of the  
 pratyekabuddha:  
 I have enabled people to escape the bonds of  
 suffering  
 and to attain nirvana.  
 The Buddha, through the power of expedient  
 means,

make my appearance I say that I am about to enter nirvana,  
 and also employ different expedient means to preach the  
 subtle and wonderful Law, thus causing living beings to  
 awaken joyful minds.

"Good men, the Thus Come One observes how  
 among living beings there are those who delight in a little  
 Law, meager in virtue and heavy with defilement. For such  
 persons I describe how in my youth I left my household and  
 attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. But in truth the time  
 since I attained Buddhahood is extremely long, as I have told  
 you. It is simply that I use this expedient means to teach and  
 convert living beings and cause them to enter the Buddha  
 way. That is why I speak in this manner.

"Good men, the scriptures expounded by the Thus  
 Come One are all for the purpose of saving and  
 emancipating living beings. Sometimes I speak of myself,  
 sometimes of others; sometimes I present myself, sometimes  
 others; sometimes I show my own actions, sometimes those of  
 others. All that I preach is true and not false.

"Why do I do this? The Thus Come One perceives the  
 true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no  
 ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this  
 world and later entering extinction. It is neither substantial nor  
 empty, neither consistent nor diverse. Nor is it what those who  
 dwell in the threefold world perceive it to be. All such things  
 the Thus Come One sees clearly and without error.

"Because living beings have different natures,  
 different desires, different actions, and different ways of  
 thinking and making distinctions, and because I want to  
 enable them to put down good roots, I employ a variety of  
 causes and conditions, similes, parables, and phrases and  
 preach different doctrines. This, the Buddha's work, I have  
 never for a moment neglected.

"Thus, since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely  
 long period of time has passed. My life span is an  
 immeasurable number of asamkhya kalpas, and during that  
 time I have constantly abided here without ever entering



he drops a particle of dust. He continues eastward in this way until he has finished dropping all the particles. Good men, what is your opinion? Can the total number of all these worlds be imagined or calculated?"

The bodhisattva Maitreya and the others said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, these worlds are immeasurable, boundless—one cannot calculate their number, nor does the mind have the power to encompass them. Even all the voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas with their wisdom free of outflows could not imagine or understand how many there are. Although we abide in the stage of avivartika, we cannot comprehend such a matter. World-Honored One, these worlds are immeasurable and boundless."

At that time the Buddha said to the multitude of great bodhisattvas: "Good men, now I will state this to you clearly. Suppose all these worlds, whether they received a particle of dust or not, are once more reduced to dust. Let one particle represent one kalpa. The time that has passed since I attained Buddhahood surpasses this by a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhyas kalpas.

"Ever since then I have been constantly in this saha world, preaching the Law, teaching and converting. And elsewhere I have led and benefited living beings in hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas and asamkhyas of lands.

"Good men, during that time I have spoken about the Buddha Burning Torch and others, and described how they entered nirvana. All this I employed as an expedient means to make distinctions.

"Good men, if there are living beings who come to me, I employ my Buddha eye to observe their faith and to see if their other faculties are keen or dull, and then depending upon how receptive they are to salvation, I appear in different places and preach to them under different names, and describe the length of time during which my teachings will be effective. Sometimes when I

has shown them the teachings of the three vehicles,  
prying living beings loose from this or that attachment  
and allowing them to attain release.

At that time among the great assembly there were voice-hearers, arhats whose outflows had come to an end, Ajnata Kaundinya and the others, twelve hundred persons. And there were monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who had conceived a desire to become voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas. Each of these had this thought: Now for what reason does the World-Honored One so earnestly praise expedient means and state that the Law attained by the Buddha is profound and difficult to understand, that it is very difficult to comprehend the meaning of the words he preaches, that not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas can do so? If the Buddha preaches but one doctrine of emancipation, then we too should be able to attain this Law and reach the state of nirvana. We cannot follow the gist of what he is saying now.

At that time Shariputra understood the doubts that were in the minds of the four kinds of believers, and he himself had not fully comprehended. So he addressed the Buddha, saying, "World-Honored One, what causes and conditions lead you to earnestly praise expedient means, the foremost device of the Buddhas, the profound, subtle and wonderful Law that is difficult to understand? From times past I have never heard this kind of preaching from the Buddha. Now the four kinds of believers all have doubts. We beg that the World-Honored One will expound this matter. For what reason does the World-Honored One earnestly praise this Law that is profound, subtle and wonderful, difficult to understand?"

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Sun of wisdom, great sage and venerable one,  
 at long last you preach this Law.  
 You yourself declare you have attained  
 power, fearlessness, samadhis,  
 concentration, emancipation, and these other  
 attributes,  
 and the Law that is beyond comprehension.  
 This Law attained in the place of practice  
 no one is capable of questioning you about.  
 "My intention is hard to fathom,  
 and no one can question me."  
 No one questions, yet you yourself preach,  
 praising the path you walk on.  
 Your wisdom is very subtle and wonderful,  
 that which all the Buddhas attain.  
 The arhats who are without outflows  
 and those who seek nirvana  
 now have all fallen into the net of doubt,  
 wondering for what reason the Buddha  
 preaches this.  
 Those who seek to become pratyekabuddhas,  
 monks and nuns,  
 heavenly beings, dragons and spirits,  
 along with the gandharvas and others,  
 look at one another, filled with perplexity,  
 gazing upward at the most honored of two-  
 legged beings.  
 What is the meaning of all this?  
 I beg the Buddha to explain it for us.  
 Among the assembly of voice-hearers  
 the Buddha has said I am foremost,  
 yet now I lack the wisdom  
 to solve these doubts and perplexities.  
 Have I in fact grasped the ultimate Law,  
 or am I still on the path of practice?  
 The sons born from the Buddha's mouth  
 press palms together, gaze upward and wait.

## Myoho Renge Kyo

### Chapter 16

## The Life Span of the Thus Come One

At that time the Buddha spoke to the bodhisattvas and all the great assembly: "Good men, you must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One." And again he said to the great assembly: "You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One." And once more he said to the great assembly: "You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One."

At that time the bodhisattvas and the great assembly, with Maitreya as their leader, pressed their palms together and addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-Honored One, we beg you to explain. We will believe and accept the Buddha's words." They spoke in this manner three times, and then said once more: "We beg you to explain it. We will believe and accept the Buddha's words."

At that time the World-Honored One, seeing that the bodhisattvas repeated their request three times and more, spoke to them, saying: "You must listen carefully and hear of the Thus Come One's secret and his transcendental powers. In all the worlds the heavenly and human beings and asuras all believe that the present Shakyamuni Buddha, after leaving the palace of the Shakyas, seated himself in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya and there attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. But good men, it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood.

"Suppose a person were to take five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya thousand-millionfold worlds and grind them to dust. Then, moving eastward, each time he passes five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya worlds

We beg you to put forth subtle and wonderful  
sounds  
and at this time explain to us how it really is.  
The heavenly beings, dragons, spirits, and the  
others,  
their numbers like Ganges sands,  
the bodhisattvas seeking to be Buddhas  
in a great force of eighty thousand,  
as well as the wheel-turning sage kings  
come from ten thousands of millions of lands,  
all press their palms and with reverent minds  
wish to hear the teaching of perfect  
endowment.

At that time the Buddha addressed Shariputra,  
saying, "Stop, stop! There is no need to speak further. If I  
speak of this matter, then the heavenly and human beings  
throughout the worlds will all be astonished and doubtful."

Shariputra once more spoke to the Buddha, saying,  
"World-Honored One, we beg you to preach! We beg you to  
preach! What is the reason? Because this assembly of  
countless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of  
asamkhyas of living beings in the past have seen the  
Buddhas; their faculties are vigorous and acute and their  
wisdom is bright. If they hear the Buddha preach, they will be  
capable of reverent belief."

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning  
once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Dharma King, none more highly honored,  
speak, we beg you, without reserve!  
In this assembly of numberless beings  
are those capable of reverent belief.

The Buddha repeated, "Stop, Shariputra! If I speak of  
this matter, the heavenly and human beings and asuras  
throughout the worlds will all be astonished and doubtful. The

monks who are overbearingly arrogant will fall into a great pit."

At that time the World-Honored One repeated what he had said in verse form:

Stop, stop, no need to speak!  
My Law is wonderful and difficult to ponder.  
Those who are overbearingly arrogant  
when they hear it will never show reverent belief.

At that time Shariputra once more spoke to the Buddha, saying, "World-Honored One, we beg you to preach! We beg you to preach! In this assembly at present the persons like myself number in the hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions. In age after age we have already attended the Buddhas and received instruction. People of this kind are certain to be capable of reverent belief. Throughout the long night they will gain peace and rest and will enjoy many benefits."

At that time Shariputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

Supremely honored among two-legged beings,  
we beg you to preach this foremost Law.  
I who am regarded as the Buddha's eldest son  
ask you to favor us by preaching distinctions.  
The countless members of this assembly  
are capable of according reverent belief to this  
Law.  
The Buddhas have already in age after age  
taught and converted them in this manner.  
All with a single mind and palms pressed  
together  
desire to hear and receive the Buddha's words.  
I and the other twelve hundred of our group,  
as well as the others who seek to become

who have determined to seek the Buddha way,  
then for the sake of such as these  
one should widely praise the way of the single  
vehicle.

Shariputra, you should understand this.  
The Law of the Buddhas is like this.  
Employing ten thousand, a million expedient  
means,

they accord with what is appropriate in  
preaching the Law.

Those who are not versed in the matter  
cannot fully comprehend this.

But you and the others already know  
how the Buddhas, the teachers of the world,  
accord with what is appropriate in employing  
expedient means.

You will have no more doubts or perplexities  
but, your minds filled with great joy,  
will know that you yourselves will attain  
Buddhahood.

and a person capable of listening to this Law,  
 such a person is likewise rare.  
 It is like the udumbara flower  
 which all the world loves and delights in,  
 which heavenly and human beings look on as  
     something rare,  
 but which appears only once in many many  
     ages.  
 If a person hears this Law, delights and praises it,  
 even if he utters just one word,  
 then he has made offerings  
 to all the Buddhas of the three existences.  
 But a person like this is very rarely found,  
 rarer than the udumbara flower.  
 You should have no doubts.  
 I, being king of the doctrines,  
 make this announcement to the entire great  
     assembly.  
 I employ only the single vehicle way  
 to teach and convert the bodhisattvas,  
 I have no voice-hearer disciples.  
 You, Shariputra,  
 and the voice-hearers and bodhisattvas,  
 you should understand that this wonderful Law  
 is the secret crux of the Buddhas.  
 In this evil world of the five impurities  
 those who merely delight in and are attached to  
     the desires,  
 living beings such as this  
 in the end will never seek the Buddha way.  
 When evil persons in ages to come  
 hear the Buddha preach the single vehicle,  
 they will be confused, will not believe or accept  
     it,  
 will reject the Law and fall into the evil paths.  
 But when there are those with a sense of shame,  
     persons of purity

Buddhas,  
 beg that for the sake of this assembly  
 you will favor us by preaching distinctions.  
 When we hear this Law  
 we will be filled with great joy.

At that time the World-Honored One said to  
 Shariputra, "Three times you have stated your earnest  
 request. How can I do other than preach? Now you must  
 listen attentively and carefully ponder. For your sake I will now  
 analyze and explain the matter."

When he had spoken these words, there were some  
 five thousand monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen in the  
 assembly who immediately rose from their seats, bowed to  
 the Buddha, and withdrew. What was the reason for this?  
 These persons had roots of guilt that were deep and  
 manifold, and in addition they were overbearingly arrogant.  
 What they had not attained they supposed they had  
 attained, what they had not understood they supposed they  
 had understood. And because they had this failing, they did  
 not remain where they were.

The World-Honored One was silent and did not try to  
 detain them.

At this time the Buddha said to Shariputra, "Now this  
 assembly of mine is free of branches and leaves, made up  
 solely of the steadfast and truthful. Shariputra, it is well that  
 these persons of overbearing arrogance have withdrawn.  
 Now listen carefully and I will preach for you."

Shariputra said, "So be it, World-Honored One. We are  
 eager to listen!"

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

Buddha,  
every one with a respectful and reverent mind,  
all coming to the place of the Buddha,  
persons who in the past had listened to other  
Buddhas  
and heard the Law preached through expedient  
means.

Immediately the thought came to me  
that the reason the Thus Come One has  
appeared

is so he may preach the Buddha wisdom.

Now is precisely the time to do so.

Shariputra, you should understand  
that persons of dull capacity and small wisdom,  
who are attached to appearances, proud and  
overbearing,

are incapable of believing in this Law.

Now I, joyful and fearless,

in the midst of the bodhisattvas,  
honestly discarding expedient means,  
will preach only the unsurpassed way.

When the bodhisattvas hear this Law,  
they will be released from all entanglements of  
doubt.

The twelve hundred arhats,

they too will all attain Buddhahood.

Following the same fashion that the Buddhas of  
the three existences

employ in preaching the Law,

I now will do likewise,

preaching a Law that is without distinctions.

The times when the Buddhas appear in the world  
are far apart and difficult to encounter.

And even when they appear in the world  
it is difficult for them to preach this Law.

Throughout incalculable, innumerable kalpas  
it is rare that one may hear this Law,

People of small wisdom delight in a small Law,  
 unable to believe that they themselves could  
 become Buddhas.  
 Therefore we employ expedient means,  
 making distinctions and preaching various goals.  
 But though we preach the three vehicles,  
 we do it merely in order to teach the  
 bodhisattvas."  
 Shariputra, you should understand this.  
 When I heard these saintly lions  
 and their deep, pure, subtle, wonderful sounds,  
 I rejoiced, crying "Hail to the Buddhas!"  
 Then I thought to myself,  
 I have come into this impure and evil world,  
 and as these Buddhas have preached,  
 I too must follow that example in my actions.  
 After I had thought of the matter in this way,  
 I set out at once for Varanasi.  
 The marks of tranquil extinction borne by all  
 phenomena  
 cannot be explained in words,  
 and therefore I used the power of expedient  
 means  
 to preach to the five ascetics.  
 This I termed turning the wheel of the Law,  
 and also with regard to "the sound of nirvana,"  
 and "arhat," "Dharma" and "Samgha,"  
 I used these terms to indicate distinctions.  
 "From infinite kalpas in the past  
 I have extolled and taught the Law of nirvana,  
 ending the long sufferings of birth and death."  
 This is how I customarily preached.  
 Shariputra, you should know this.  
 When I looked at the Buddha sons,  
 I saw incalculable thousands, ten thousands,  
 millions  
 who had determined to seek the way of the

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, in the worlds of the ten directions, there  
 are not two vehicles, much less three! Shariputra, the  
 Buddhas appear in evil worlds of five impurities. These are the

so-called impurity of the age, impurity of desire, impurity of living beings, impurity of view, and impurity of life span.

"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 have already 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 annuttara-samyak-sambodhi, then you should understand that such as these are all persons of overbearing arrogance. Why do I say this? Because if there 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."

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

the Four Heavenly Kings who guard the world,  
and the heavenly king Great Freedom,  
in company with the other heavenly beings  
and their hundreds and thousands and ten  
thousands of followers,  
reverently pressed their palms together and  
bowed,  
begging me to turn the wheel of the Law.  
Immediately I thought to myself  
that if I merely praised the Buddha vehicle,  
then the living beings, sunk in their suffering,  
would be incapable of believing in this Law.  
And because they rejected the Law and failed  
to believe in it,  
they would fall into the three evil paths.  
It would be better if I did not preach the Law  
but quickly entered into nirvana.  
Then my thoughts turned to the Buddhas of the  
past  
and the power of expedient means they had  
employed,  
and I thought that the way I had now attained  
should likewise be preached as three vehicles.  
When I thought in this manner,  
the Buddhas of the ten directions all appeared  
and with brahma sounds comforted and  
instructed me.  
"Well done, Shakyamuni!" they said.  
"Foremost leader and teacher,  
you have attained the unsurpassed Law.  
But following the example of all other Buddhas,  
you will employ the power of expedient means.  
We too have all attained  
the most wonderful, the foremost Law,  
but for the sake of living beings  
we make distinctions and preach the three  
vehicles.



doctrines,  
 causing all living beings to attain joy and  
 gladness.  
 Shariputra, you should understand  
 that I view things through the Buddha eye,  
 I see the living beings in the six paths,  
 how poor and distressed they are, without merit  
 or wisdom,  
 how they enter the perilous road of birth and  
 death,  
 their sufferings continuing with never a break,  
 how deeply they are attached to the five  
 desires,  
 like a yak enamoured of its tail,  
 blinding themselves with greed and infatuation,  
 their vision so impaired they can see nothing.  
 They do not seek the Buddha, with his great  
 might,  
 or the Law that can end their sufferings,  
 but enter deeply into erroneous views,  
 hoping to shed suffering through greater  
 suffering.  
 For the sake of these living beings  
 I summon up a mind of great compassion.  
 When I first sat in the place of practice  
 and gazed at the tree and walked around it,  
 for the space of three times seven days  
 I pondered the matter in this way.  
 The wisdom I have attained, I thought,  
 is subtle, wonderful, the foremost.  
 But living beings, dull in capacity,  
 are addicted to pleasure and blinded by  
 stupidity.  
 With persons such as this,  
 what can I say, how can I save them?  
 At that time the Brahma kings,  
 along with the heavenly king Shakra,

There are monks and nuns  
 who behave with overbearing arrogance,  
 laymen full of self-esteem,  
 laywomen who are lacking in faith.  
 Among the four kinds of believers, the likes of  
 these  
 number five thousand.  
 They fail to see their own errors,  
 are heedless and remiss with regard to the  
 precepts,  
 clinging to their shortcomings, unwilling to  
 change.  
 But these persons of small wisdom have already  
 left;  
 the chaff among this assembly  
 has departed in the face of the Buddha's  
 authority.  
 These persons were of paltry merit and virtue,  
 incapable of receiving this Law.  
 This assembly is now free of branches and leaves,  
 made up only of those steadfast and truthful.  
 Shariputra, listen carefully,  
 for the Law which the Buddhas have attained,  
 through the power of countless expedient means  
 they preach for the benefit of living beings.  
 The thoughts that are in the minds of living  
 beings,  
 the different types of paths they follow,  
 their various desires and natures,  
 the good and bad deeds they have done in  
 previous existences --  
 all these the Buddha takes cognizance of,  
 and then he employs causes, similes and  
 parables,  
 words that embody the power of expedient  
 means,

in order to gladden and please them all.  
 Sometimes he preaches sutras,  
 verses, stories of the previous lives of disciples,  
 stories of the previous lives of the Buddha, of  
 unheard-of things.  
 At other times he preaches regarding causes  
 and conditions,  
 uses similes, parables, passages of poetry  
 or discourses.  
 For those of dull capacities who delight in a little  
 Law,  
 who greedily cling to birth and death,  
 who, despite the innumerable Buddhas,  
 fail to practice the profound and wonderful way  
 but are perplexed and confused by a host of  
 troubles —  
 for these I preach nirvana.  
 I devise these expedient means  
 and so cause them to enter into the Buddha  
 wisdom.  
 Up to now I have never told you  
 that you were certain to attain the Buddha way.  
 The reason I never preached in that manner  
 was that the time to preach so had not yet  
 come.  
 But now is the very time  
 when I must decisively preach the Great Vehicle.  
 I use these nine devices,  
 adapting them to the living beings when I  
 preach,  
 my basic aim being to lead them into the Great  
 Vehicle,  
 and that is why I preach this sutra.  
 There are sons of the Buddha whose minds are  
 pure,  
 who are gentle and of acute capacities,  
 who under innumerable Buddhas

expedient means.  
 The presently existing Buddhas of the ten  
 directions,  
 whom heavenly and human beings make  
 offerings to,  
 who in number are like Ganges sands,  
 they have appeared in the world  
 in order to bring peace and comfort to living  
 beings,  
 and they too preach the Law in this way.  
 They understand the foremost truth of tranquil  
 extinction  
 and therefore employ the power of expedient  
 means,  
 and though they point out various different  
 paths,  
 in truth they do so for the sake of the Buddha  
 vehicle.  
 They understand the actions of living beings,  
 the thoughts that lie deep in their minds,  
 the deeds they have carried out in the past,  
 their desires, their nature, the power of their  
 exertions,  
 and whether their capacities are acute or dull,  
 and so they employ various causes and  
 conditions,  
 similes, parables, and other words and phrases,  
 adapting what expedient means are suitable to  
 their preaching.  
 Now I too am like this;  
 in order to bring peace and comfort to living  
 beings  
 I employ various different doctrines  
 to disseminate the Buddha way.  
 Through the power of my wisdom  
 I know the nature and desires of living beings  
 and through expedient means I preach these

The World-Honored Ones of the future,  
 whose numbers will be incalculable,  
 these Thus Come Ones  
 will also employ expedient means to preach the  
     Law,  
 and all these Thus Come Ones  
 through countless expedient means  
 will save and bring release to living beings  
 so that they enter the Buddha's wisdom which is  
     free of outflows.  
 If there are those who hear the Law,  
 then not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood.  
 The original vow of the Buddhas  
 was that the Buddha way, which they  
     themselves practice,  
 should be shared universally among living beings  
 so that they too may attain this same way.  
 The Buddhas of future ages,  
 although they preach hundreds, thousands,  
     millions,  
 a countless number of doctrines,  
 in truth do so for the sake of the single vehicle.  
 The Buddhas, most honored of two-legged  
     beings,  
 know that phenomena have no constantly fixed  
     nature,  
 that the seeds of Buddhahood sprout through  
     causation,  
 and for this reason they preach the single  
     vehicle.  
 But that these phenomena are part of an  
     abiding Law,  
 that the characteristics of the world are  
     constantly abiding --  
 this they have come to know in the place of  
     practice,  
 and as leaders and teachers they preach

have practiced the profound and wonderful  
     way.  
 For these sons of the Buddha  
 I preach this sutra of the Great Vehicle.  
 And I predict that these persons  
 in a future existence will attain the Buddha way.  
 Because deep in their minds they think of the  
     Buddha  
 and practice and uphold the pure precepts,  
 they are assured they will attain Buddhahood,  
 and hearing this, their whole bodies are filled  
     with great joy.  
 The Buddha knows their minds and their  
     practices  
 and therefore preaches for them the Great  
     Vehicle.  
 When the voice-hearers and bodhisattvas  
 hear this Law that I preach,  
 as soon as they have heard one verse  
 they will all without doubt be certain of attaining  
     Buddhahood.  
 In the Buddha lands of the ten directions  
 there is only the Law of the one vehicle,  
 there are not two, there are not three,  
 except when the Buddha preaches so as an  
     expedient means,  
 merely employing provisional names and terms  
 in order to conduct and guide living beings  
 and preach to them the Buddha wisdom.  
 The Buddhas appear in the world  
 solely for this one reason, which is true;  
 the other two are not the truth.  
 Never do they use a lesser vehicle  
 to save living beings and ferry them across.  
 The Buddha himself dwells in this Great Vehicle,  
 and adorned with the power of meditation and  
     wisdom

that go with the Law he has attained,  
 he uses it to save living beings.  
 He himself testifies to the unsurpassed way,  
 the Great Vehicle, the Law in which all things are  
 equal.  
 If I used a lesser vehicle  
 to convert even one person,  
 I would be guilty of stinginess and greed,  
 but such a thing would be impossible.  
 If a person will believe and take refuge in the  
 Buddha,  
 the Thus Come One will never deceive him,  
 nor will he ever show greed or jealousy,  
 for he has rooted out evil from among the  
 phenomena.  
 Therefore throughout the ten directions  
 the Buddha alone is without fear.  
 I adorn my body with the special characteristics  
 and shine my light upon the world.  
 I am honored by numberless multitudes  
 and for them I preach the emblem of the reality  
 of things.  
 Shariputra, you should know  
 that at the start I took a vow,  
 hoping to make all persons  
 equal to me, without any distinction between us,  
 and what I long ago hoped for  
 has now been fulfilled.  
 I have converted all living beings  
 and caused them all to enter the Buddha way.  
 If when I encounter living beings  
 I were in all cases to teach them the Buddha  
 way,  
 those without wisdom would become confused  
 and in their bewilderment would fail to accept  
 my teachings.  
 I know that such living beings

or if they should employ persons to make music,  
 striking drums or blowing horns or conch shells,  
 playing pipes, flutes, zithers, harps,  
 balloon guitars, cymbals and gongs,  
 and if these many kinds of wonderful notes  
 are intended wholly as an offering;  
 or if one with a joyful mind  
 sings a song in praise of the Buddha's virtue,  
 even if it is just one small note,  
 then all who do these things have attained the  
 Buddha way.  
 If someone with a confused and distracted mind  
 should take even one flower  
 and offer it to a painted image,  
 in time he would come to see countless  
 Buddhas.  
 Or if a person should bow or perform obeisance,  
 or should merely press his palms together,  
 or even should raise a single hand,  
 or give no more than a slight nod of the head,  
 and if this were done in offering to an image,  
 then in time he would come to see countless  
 Buddhas.  
 And if he himself attains the unsurpassed way  
 and spreads salvation abroad to countless  
 multitudes,  
 he will enter the nirvana of no remainder  
 as a fire dies out when the firewood is exhausted.  
 If persons with confused and distracted minds  
 should enter a memorial tower  
 and once exclaim, "Hail to the Buddha!"  
 then all have attained the Buddha way.  
 If from past Buddhas  
 when they were in the world or after their  
 extinction,  
 there should be those who heard this Law,  
 then all have attained the Buddha way.

fashion and set up images,  
 carving them with many distinguishing  
 characteristics,  
 then all have attained the Buddha way.  
 Or if they make things out of the seven kinds of  
 gems,  
 of copper, red or white copper,  
 pewter, lead, tin,  
 iron, wood, or clay,  
 or use cloth soaked in lacquer or resin  
 to adorn and fashion Buddha images,  
 then persons such as these  
 have all attained the Buddha way.  
 If they employ pigments to paint Buddha  
 images,  
 endowing them with the characteristics of  
 hundredfold merit,  
 if they make them themselves or have others  
 make them,  
 then all have attained the Buddha way.  
 Even if little boys in play  
 should use a piece of grass or wood or a brush,  
 or perhaps a fingernail  
 to draw an image of the Buddha,  
 such persons as these  
 bit by bit will pile up merit  
 and will become fully endowed with a mind of  
 great compassion;  
 they all have attained the Buddha way.  
 Merely by converting the bodhisattvas  
 they bring salvation and release to numberless  
 multitudes.  
 And if persons, in the presence of such memorial  
 towers,  
 such jeweled images and painted images,  
 should with reverent minds make offerings  
 of flowers, incense, banners or canopies,

have never in the past cultivated good roots  
 but have stubbornly clung to the five desires,  
 and their folly and craving have given rise to  
 affliction.  
 Their desires are the cause  
 whereby they fall into the three evil paths,  
 revolving wheel-like through the six realms of  
 existence  
 and undergoing every sort of suffering and pain.  
 Having received a tiny form in the womb,  
 in existence after existence they constantly grow  
 to maturity.  
 Persons of meager virtue and small merit,  
 they are troubled and beset by manifold  
 sufferings.  
 They stray into the dense forest of mistaken  
 views,  
 debating as to what exists and what does not,  
 and in the end cling to such views,  
 embracing all sixty-two of them.  
 They are profoundly committed to false and  
 empty doctrines,  
 holding firmly to them, unable to set them aside.  
 Arrogant and puffed up with self-importance,  
 fawning and devious, insincere in mind,  
 for a thousand, ten thousand, a million kalpas  
 they will not hear the Buddha's name,  
 nor will they hear the correct Law --  
 such people are difficult to save.  
 For these reasons, Shariputra,  
 I have for their sake established expedient  
 means,  
 preaching the way that ends all suffering,  
 and showing them nirvana.  
 But although I preach nirvana,  
 this is not a true extinction.  
 All phenomena from the very first

have of themselves constantly borne the marks  
 of tranquil extinction.  
 Once the sons of the Buddha have carried out  
 this path,  
 then in a future existence they will be able to  
 become Buddhas.  
 I have employed the power of expedient means  
 to unfold and demonstrate this doctrine of three  
 vehicles,  
 but the World-Honored Ones, every one of them,  
 all preach the single vehicle way.  
 Now before this great assembly  
 I must clear away all doubts and perplexities.  
 There is no discrepancy in the words of the  
 Buddhas,  
 there is only the one vehicle, not two.  
 For numberless kalpas in the past  
 countless Buddhas who have now entered  
 extinction,  
 a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million types  
 in numbers incapable of calculation --  
 such World-Honored Ones,  
 using different types of causes, similes, and  
 parables,  
 the power of countless expedient means,  
 have expounded the characteristics of  
 teachings.  
 These World-Honored Ones  
 have all preached the doctrine of the single  
 vehicle,  
 converting countless living beings  
 and causing them to enter the Buddha way.  
 And these great sage lords,  
 knowing what is desired deep in the minds  
 of the heavenly and human beings and the  
 other living things  
 throughout all the worlds,

have employed still other expedient means  
 to help illuminate the highest truth.  
 If there are living beings  
 who have encountered these past Buddhas,  
 and if they have listened to their Law, presented  
 alms,  
 or kept the precepts, shown forbearance,  
 been assiduous, practiced meditation and  
 wisdom, and so forth,  
 cultivating various kinds of merit and virtue,  
 then persons such as these  
 all have attained the Buddha way.  
 After the Buddhas have passed into extinction,  
 if persons are of good and gentle mind,  
 then living beings such as these  
 have all attained the Buddha way.  
 After the Buddhas have passed into extinction,  
 if persons make offerings to the relics,  
 raising ten thousand or a million kinds of towers,  
 using gold, silver and crystal,  
 seashell and agate,  
 carnelian, lapis lazuli, pearls  
 to purify and adorn them extensively,  
 in this way erecting towers;  
 or if they raise up stone mortuary temples  
 or those of sandalwood or aloes,  
 hovenia or other kinds of timber,  
 or of brick, tile, clay or earth;  
 if in the midst of the broad fields  
 they pile up earth to make a mortuary temple for  
 the Buddhas,  
 or even if little boys at play  
 should collect sand to make a Buddha tower,  
 then persons such as these  
 have all attained the Buddha way.  
 If there are persons who for the sake of the  
 Buddha