

Suzuki-roshi
C16ET, Fall, 1968 : Lotus Sutra, #12
Tassajara

[transcription checked, edited by Brian F.]

~

This sutra is divided into two parts. The first part is called "shakumon". ["The first half of the Saddharma-pundarika Sutra in which Shakyamuni Buddha does not reveal his eternal nature, but appears as a being bound by the limitations of time and space."] In this part we should understand the oneness of the duality. We should understand that the aspect of being and the aspect of nonbeing, the objective and subjective aspects, and Buddha and sentient beings are one, not different. This sutra puts emphasis more on forms, rather than emptiness. For this reason, this section is about how we understand absolute reality in terms of the differentiated objective world and how should live Buddha' life, which is one.

The second part is about how we should appreciate Buddha as a source of our life. ["Hommon: The section on the original Buddha which is the latter half of the Saddharma-pundarika Sutra. In this section the eternal nature of Buddha is revealed."] Through our life we should appreciate Dharmakaya Buddha. When we appreciate Dharmakaya Buddha, it means the Sambhogakaya Buddha. So the first part is way upward, and the second part is way downward: starting with an appreciation of Buddha Nature, we should find out the meaning of our life. We have various problems in our life in terms of dualities: good and bad, life and death, and it is a good device of Buddha to show us the oneness of good and bad, right and wrong, the subjective world and the objective world. So in this sense, Buddhism is through and through Dharma structure: oneness and duality, upward and downward.

The first part of the sutra is also dualistic: subjectivity and objectivity, Buddha and sentient beings, the First Principle and the Second Principle, oneness of the First Principle and the Second Principle. In this way we will understand what our life is from two viewpoints. When we understand our life from two viewpoints, we call it, "things as it is", "shoho-jisso". ["Shoho-jisso: The real state of all dharmas. All things are truth by themselves. The variety of phenomenal things expresses the real universal and eternal truth."] The first part is about "shoho-jisso" or things as it is, and the second part is about the eternal Buddha, or Buddha as an eternal life in which we are included. So to live in this world means to appreciate Buddha's eternal life, which continues forever.

And this is the trikaya. Sambhogakaya Buddha is a bridge to the Dharmakaya Buddha and the Nirmanakaya Buddha. If we have just Nirmanakaya Buddha and Dharmakaya Buddha, the phenomenal world and the truth or absolute world, or the Form Body and the Dharma Body, we cannot accept the teaching. So Sambhogakaya Buddha is very important.

As I explained, the understanding of Buddha as Sambhogakaya Buddha appeared for the first time after Buddha passed away. And Sambhogakaya Buddha itself is Dharmakaya Buddha. So Sambhogakaya Buddha is the Buddha we actually experience. And when we experienced Sambhogakaya Buddha in contrast to the historical Buddha, we had the idea of Dharmakaya Buddha. So Dharmakaya Buddha is more an idea of truth than a concrete idea. So that which is important is Sambhogakaya Buddha. Sambhogakaya Buddha is closely related to our practice, to our everyday life. This idea of Sambhogakaya Buddha originated from the idea of "how", how Buddha attained enlightenment, how he acquired that kind of result of boundless merits and virtue and wisdom. That is, actually Sambhogakaya Buddha. When we have Sambhogakaya Buddha and Nirmanakaya Buddha, we have the idea of Dharmakaya Buddha.

In China there was a kind of dispute or discussion about the trikaya. If we analyze or open the Nirmanakaya Buddha in two, we will have the idea of the Sambhogakaya Buddha and the Nirmanakaya Buddha. When we think about the historical Buddha, he is also Sambhogakaya Buddha or the Devoted Body, by his practice. And we contrast those two with the Dharmakaya Buddha. That is one idea. Another idea is to open the Dharmakaya Buddha into the Sambhogakaya Buddha and Dharmakaya Buddha, and to contrast that with the Nirmanakaya Buddha. So one way is to analyze Nirmanakaya Buddha into two: the Sambhogakaya Buddha and Nirmanakaya Buddha, and up here we have the Dharmakaya Buddha. And the other way is to analyze the Dharmakaya Buddha into two, to contrast with the Nirmanakaya Buddha. I think it is more appropriate to analyze the Nirmanakaya Buddha into the Nirmanakaya Buddha and Sambhogakaya Buddha, and then the Dharmakaya Buddha is always up here, as the unconditioned one. So there is no need to discuss the Dharmakaya Buddha; the important thing is to discuss what the Nirmanakaya Buddha and Sambhogakaya Buddha are.

If you have just the two ideas of Dharmakaya and Nirmanakaya Buddha, it is just philosophy, it has nothing to do with our everyday life. If you understand Buddhism in that way, it is meaningless, so-called "naturalism": "Whatever you do is Buddha's activity, so there is no need to practice zazen or study this kind of teaching." We can understand that, but we are not satisfied with that kind of dry philosophy which has nothing to do with our actual life where we have various problems. It's true that whatever it is and whatever we do, our life is based on the truth, so there should not be anything to worry about. But even so, we actually have problems. Why do we have problems? Only when we reflect on ourselves does the idea of Sambhogakaya Buddha become important.

When Buddha was still with us, he was both Nirmanakaya Buddha and Sambhogakaya Buddha. We could accept what he said as a Dharmakaya Buddha and what he did as a Nirmanakaya Buddha, so he was Sambhogakaya Buddha. He had both sides. He was not just our friend, he had some quality. That quality is the quality acquired by practice. Do you understand?

Among our friends, some may be very intelligent and some not so intelligent. But sometimes, even though someone is intelligent, he will not be accepted by you as a good friend or good person. People sometimes will not respect him, even though he is intelligent. And even though someone is not so intelligent or clever, sometimes people may respect him. There is some quality in our personality. We have inherited personality and personality acquired by the effort to be more human-like. That kind of effort gives us some quality which is different from the quality you have before you practice our way. Do you understand?

Even though someone practices zazen his whole life, a stupid person is always stupid, he cannot be intelligent. Do you understand? If you say, "If you practice zazen, in two years you will be a bright, intelligent person and you will be successful in business," that is not true. Even though you practice zazen for ten years, a stupid one, forgetful one is always forgetful, like me. It is not possible for me not to forget anything. But what you do acquire by practice is some quite different quality. That is the quality as a Sambhogakaya Buddha, the quality which will be acquired by right practice, by right thinking, by right view, by unselfish practice, by unselfish understanding of the world, seeing things as it is and accepting things as it is. To accept things as it is means to observe things from two sides. Usually we observe things from only one side. To accept things as it is means to observe things from both sides. It is not possible for us to accept things from both sides unless we practice our way. Only when you practice zazen, when you train your activity, can you see things as it is from both sides, without being caught by a one-sided viewpoint. That is selflessness.

The more intelligent someone is, the more he will be caught by his own viewpoint. And he is wise enough to insist on his viewpoint, ignoring the other viewpoint. So that is why sometimes the intelligent one cannot help people so much, while the dull, stupid one can help people a lot. Sambhogakaya Buddha has this kind of quality. For this reason, we put more emphasis on Sambhogakaya Buddha.

Buddhists found out why Buddha was so great after his death. The point we should remember is that when they missed Buddha, they found out the true Buddha. When they found out how miserable they were when they lost Buddha, in other words, when they could not be satisfied with themselves, and when they needed some help, they found the Sambhogakaya Buddha. There must have been many people who were almost as intelligent as Buddha, but they missed Buddha, and they found out why he was so great. He is not a religious hero or saint who has some supernatural power. Buddha had some other quality, to be able to understand how difficult it is for human beings to see things as it is and to have the life of selflessness. He could understand people. That kind of quality is only possible to acquire through experience, not by thinking. It is not a matter of profound or lofty or beautiful teaching, but a rather of sympathy

or compassion, which is acquired by actual experience of life. That is Sambhogakaya Buddha, and that is the actual Buddha we have.

So this sutra is the sutra of "shoho-jisso" or "things as it is", our life as it is. And it is that sutra which gives us a good example of how we appreciate our life which is universal to every being. This is the structure of this sutra. So it is the sutra for people in suffering and for people who appreciate suffering as our practice. For the people who are suffering, this sutra will be salvation, and for the people who appreciate our life, this sutra will give a firm background for the appreciation or joy of life. Just to enjoy our life is not our way. We cannot enjoy our life in its true sense without any background. When our life is firmly established in perfect background, we can enjoy our life, because there is no fear of losing.

We studied the sixteen bodhisattvas, and this morning, someone asked about them. I don't know all of them, but at least some of them were already known as historical characters. Bharadvaga looks like the leader of the sixteen layman bodhisattvas. We count sixteen laymen Buddhists during Buddha's time, but there must have been more. I think those were the most eminent ones because of Bharadvaga's wonderful character. It is said that there were six big cities, and those laymen were the most influential people in those cities. Bharadvaga was their leader, and we know who was in which city. Ratnakara was from the city of Bishari [Sanskrit: Vaisali]. Naradatta was from the city of Varanasi [Japanese: Haranasi]. Susarthavaha was from the city of Sravasti.

The Chinese rendering of their names suggests what kind of people they were. The Chinese rendering for Ratnakara is "Treasurer" or "Accumulating Treasure Bodhisattva" or "Treasure Dealer". So he must have been the wealthy bodhisattva of Vaisali. The Chinese rendering of Susarthavaha is "Leader". He was the leader of a group of merchants. At that time, as you know, there were many people who went to other cities or countries to get merchandise or treasures by caravan. He must have been the leader of those merchants. Some people say he was the same person who donated the Jeta Garden [Skt. Jetavananathapindarama; Jap. Gijugikkodoku-on] to Buddha. I told you about him already [see lecture C12]. Buddha's disciple Sudatta found out that a beautiful garden he wanted to give to Buddha was owned by the wealthy leader of a caravan. He asked the leader to give it, but he refused, saying, "If you pave my land with coins, I will give it to you." Sudatta was also wealthy, so he started to pave his land with coins. So the merchant said, "Okay, okay. I will give it to Buddha." It looks like this bodhisattva was the same person as Susarthavaha. Most of the sixteen lay bodhisattvas appear later in this sutra, but some don't.

Do you have one question? Hai.

Q: Roshi, what does "Vairochana" mean?

R: Vairochana is the Dharmakaya Buddha and is characterized by sunlight, which is universal. Light has no form. Vairochana is the personified Buddha of the Law or Dharma or unconditional absolute being. So he is Sambhogakaya as well as Dharmakaya. As we observe him as a teacher or as a buddha, he is Sambhogakaya.

Reformatted 9-18-2014. Original file: <http://www.cuke.com/pdf-2013/srl/other-srl/sr-lotus-sutra-12-1968.pdf>
