

Key Passages from The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings [6]

“The Parable of the Phantom City” Chapter

The Lotus Sutra Is a Chronicle of the Shared Struggle of Mentor and Disciple Spanning Past, Present, and Future

Lecture presented by Sachie Motohashi
SGI Canada Study Department

Hello and thank you for taking the time to listen to the SGI Canada study podcast for the month of November. My name is Sachie Motohashi.

As we focus this month on District General meetings to commemorate November 18th, some of you may not be holding study meetings this month. Even so, it is worthwhile to continue month to month engaging with the precious encouragement from our mentor, Ikeda Sensei.

We are continuing with the series that highlight the key passages from the Lotus Sutra, and this month will be focusing on the “The Parable of the Phantom City” Chapter.

Ikeda Sensei begins this lecture by quoting the words of Josei Toda: “Genuine disciples of Nichiren Daishonin practice in exact accord with his teachings. If we truly pledge to achieve kosen-rufu and take action toward that end, making the Daishonin’s heart our own, we can, to our great good fortune, carry out the same courageous struggle as he did.” Sensei continues outlining his struggle to complete *The Human Revolution* and clarifying the profoundness and importance of a human revolution in a single life and how the life of President Toda shone as an example.

He says:

In Buddhism, the mentor serves as an example and model for how to live the best possible life. The mentor opens the way and the disciple vows with the mentor to realize kosen-rufu. Mentor and disciple work side by side for this goal and together carry out their human revolution. In that sense, mentor and disciple can also be described as comrades who share deep bonds and strive to demonstrate the boundless

potential people possess and the inherent dignity of life. In addition, the disciple has the mission to carry on the mentor's legacy and realize the mentor's vision.

The section in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* on "The Parable of the Phantom City" chapter of the Lotus Sutra highlights that the mentor-disciple relationship represents a profound karmic bond forged throughout a continuous journey of shared struggle from the infinite last.

Here is the first passage:

Chapter Seven: The Parable of the Phantom City

Seven important points

Point One, concerning "the phantom city" (*kejo*)

. . . In effect, now Nichiren and his followers, people who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, gain enlightenment into the fact that our bodies and minds are the Wonderful Law itself, namely, that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land. The Ten Worlds are all of them phantom cities, and each of these Ten Worlds is a treasure land. . . . In this statement that the phantom city is identical with the treasure land, the single word "identical" is symbolic of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Each moment of life in the phantom city is a moment of life in the treasure land. (OTT, 72)

The story of the Phantom City is one that is applicable in many situations. The story goes as follows:

A party of merchants sets forth on a perilous journey of five hundred *yojanas* to reach a wonderful treasure land. Along the way, they become so exhausted that they want to give up and turn back. Their wise leader, feeling it would be a pity if they should quit and return without the treasure, employs his transcendental powers to create a phantom city and encourages the travellers by offering it as a place they can rest and recuperate.

The merchants rejoice, enter the city, and rest. When the leader sees that they have all recovered, he makes the phantom city disappear and reveals the truth to them. The city was just a mirage—the true treasure land is close at hand, he says, and he urges them to press on.

What we can take from this is this parable is that the phantom city and the treasure land are identical and are not two distinct identities. This may not be obvious at first as when we refer to the story, the phantom city disappears and the journey continues. When we encounter struggles, we are often encouraged to set a goal. Often this goal is linked to significant dates such as March 16, May 3 or November 18. Whenever I have done so, a renewed determination wells up within me and I chant with even more conviction and determination—this is the phantom city. My situation that I am struggling with has not changed, but my inner resolve and conviction is restored, making it possible for me to continue. Similarly, in the parable, when the travellers are tired, the wise leader creates a phantom city, which restores the weary travellers so that they can regain their energy and continue on their journey.

Ikeda Sensei says:

This principle of transforming the phantom city into the treasure land can also be explained in terms of our Buddhist practice. Through the power of the Mystic Law, all of our hardships and struggles in kosen-rufu and in life to realize one goal after another become a brilliant expression of infinitely precious value creation. We can also use all kinds of trials as fuel for our human revolution and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime—turning earthly desires into enlightenment and viewing them as a treasure trove of joyous benefits.

When we transform our challenging situation and create value out of hardship, we contribute to the great flow of kosen-rufu. As stated at the beginning of the lecture, kosen-rufu is not the destination but the flow itself. Where we are and who we are right now contains everything needed to manifest our highest life state as we battle to enact our drama of human revolution.

Currently in my personal life, I have undergone a big transformation in my life. A purchase of a new home and a big career change have caused many sleepless nights filled with questions of whether we did the right thing. It is no coincidence that preparing for

this study podcast comes at a time when I face so much uncertainty. I am reminded by Ikeda Sensei who quotes the words of Mr. Toda:

“As courageous Bodhisattvas of the Earth, we of the Soka Gakkai have chosen to be born in this defiled age. We have appeared in the world to lead all people to enlightenment, to realize kosen-rufu, while overcoming life’s challenges and demonstrating the great benefit of the Gohonzon.”

The next passage illustrates this point:

Point Six, on the words “wipe out the phantom city” in the passage “At that time the leader, knowing that the people have become rested and are no longer fearful or weary, wipes out the phantom city and says to the group, ‘You must go now. The place where the treasure is is close by.’” [LSOC7, 175]

. . . Now, when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are revealing that the phantom city is none other than the treasure land. These mountain valleys and broad plains where we live are all, every one of them, treasure lands of Eternally Tranquil Light. (OTT, 77)

Nichiren emphasizes that the state of Buddhahood is right here and now, not in some other place or time. The grand stage for changing our karma is where we live.

Sensei describes Shakyamuni’s three rounds of preaching for his disciples, referred to as voice-hearers. The significance in this is that the voice-hearers realize that they have always actually been bodhisattvas from the distant past and are eternally striving to fulfill their vow together with their mentor. A well-known passage is from “The Parable of the Phantom City” chapter. It states “Those persons who had heard the Law / dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, / constantly reborn in company with their teachers”. This illustrates the connection of the mentor and disciple extending throughout past, present and future.

After the travellers rest and recuperate in the phantom city, it is revealed that their

journey is not over and they must continue. The Daishonin emphasizes that they will set forth “together” on their journey to at last achieve their great goal of finding the treasure land.

Sensei says:

The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of Bodhisattvas of the Earth united in the shared struggle to actualize the Lotus Sutra’s great vow to lead all people to enlightenment and the cherished wish of Nichiren Daishonin. The mentors and disciples of Soka have been working together for that cause since the time of our founding president.

In this time of constant uncertainty and challenges, let’s continue fighting with strong life force, supporting one another, and never giving up!

If you have any questions, feel free to send them to us at study@sgicanada.org. Thank you for listening!