

7 Expedient Means Are Words of Wisdom for Raising People Up

Shari-hotsu. Go ju jo-buttsu irai. Shuju innen. Shuju hiyu. Ko en gonkyo. Mu shu hoben. Indo shujo. Ryo ri sho jaku.

“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. (LS2, 24)

HERE, Shakyamuni is elaborating on the immediately preceding passage, where he says, “He [a Buddha] has realized the Law that is profound and never known before, and preaches it in accordance with what is appropriate [to the capacities of the people], yet his intention is difficult to understand.”

Shakyamuni had earlier discussed the “wisdom of the Buddhas.” In this passage, by contrast, he reveals this wisdom as he has gathered it up in himself.

“Ever since I attained Buddhahood” refers to the period from when Shakyamuni attained enlightenment until he taught the Lotus Sutra, during which time he expounded various provisional sutras. Shakyamuni then clarifies the distinctive character of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. He says that before teaching the Lotus Sutra he had employed “various causes” (explaining why things are the way they are) and “various similes” in widely expounding his teaching; and that these teachings were “expedient means” (*hoben*) for guiding people to the truth and freeing them from their various attachments.

The Expedient Means of the Pre-Lotus Sutra Teachings

AN expedient means is a means or a device that the Buddha, out of compassion, employs to help people attain enlightenment. From the outset, Shakyamuni’s ultimate purpose lay in enabling all people to attain Buddhahood; but he did not reveal this in the provisional sutras. He reveals it for the first time in the Lotus Sutra.

The purpose of the provisional sutras is to enable people to part with various attachments. People differ in terms of the types of attachments or “fettters” they possess. Therefore, Shakyamuni expounded a variety of teachings, employing various causes and similes that matched the capacities of specific people.

These teachings were all no more than “means” for drawing people toward the “end” of attaining Buddhahood. In this sense, the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings are regarded as expedient means.

Still, the expedient teachings expounded before the Lotus Sutra also arose from the Buddha’s compassion. Shakyamuni strove to respond to the different capacities of people, to select teachings that precisely matched their needs, and to satisfy everyone. He was waging a struggle of compassion and wisdom.

“What is this person seeking?” “How should I instruct this person to ensure that

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he or she will not deviate from the correct path?" He deeply considered the case of each individual, and gave instruction with an earnest "must-win" spirit.

Though we may speak of "the people" in the aggregate, they are not an abstract, homogeneous multitude; they are not a colorless mass. "How can the heart of this person before me be opened?" "How can I reinvigorate this specific individual?" This is the spirit of Buddhism. When speaking to a large number of people, only if we have the attitude of addressing each individual can we offer "living words" that reverberate in the hearts of many.

Since attaining the Way, Shak-yamuni thoroughly devoted himself to expounding the Law for the sake of individuals. Because his words and phrases were uttered for individuals and with their happiness in mind, the Law imbued the life of one person after another. Because he waged such a struggle, he sent people's hearts a fresh breeze, dispelling the dark clouds of doubt and anxiety and causing the sun of hope and happiness to rise. Because he regarded the individual with such warmth, people from all walks of life—young and old, men and women—gathered with joy and enthusiasm to hear Shakyamuni expound his teachings.

Shakyamuni preached the expedient teachings because he sympathized with the people, whose lives were steeped in illusion and suffering. He was impelled by the desire to somehow help them. This led him to consider, "By what means can I save them from suffering?" "How might I liberate them from illusion?" In other words, expedients arose from his desire to help people; his compassion gave birth to wisdom.

Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree, aroused a spirit of great mercy and determined to save all people from suffering. At that time, the Buddhas of the ten directions appeared and urged Shakyamuni on, saying: "Following the example of all other Buddhas, you will employ the power of expedient means. We too ... make distinctions and preach the three vehicles" (LS2, 43). Thereupon Shakyamuni, preparatory to expounding the Law "never known before" to which he had become enlightened, began to expound the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings using the power of expedient means.

Expedient means are expressions of wisdom serving to raise people up. Shakyamuni, armed with words of compassion and wisdom, thus resolutely took the first step on the difficult journey to expound the Law for the salvation of all people. And so he raised the curtain on Buddhism, which sends out a message of happiness to all humankind.

The 'Secret and Mystic Expedient' of the Lotus Sutra

AS I have already mentioned, the "expedient means" to which this passage refers are the expedient means of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. These are not to be confused with the expedient means indicated by the title of the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Profound significance is attached to the expedient means of the Lotus Sutra.

T'ien-t'ai identifies three types of expedient means: "functional-teaching

expedients," "truth-gateway expedients" and the "secret and mystic expedient." The first two correspond to the expedient means of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. The secret and mystic expedient corresponds to the expedient means of the Lotus Sutra, the expedient means of the "Expedient Means" chapter.

Functional-teaching expedients (*hoyu hoben*) are the various teachings expounded according to the differing capacities of the people. Through the function (*yu*) of these teachings (*ho*) Shakyamuni brought benefit to people of various capacities.

Truth-gateway expedients (*notsu hoben*) are teachings that represent the gateway for entering the truth. To follow these teachings is termed *notsu*, because through them people are led to the truth.

These expedients of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings serve to guide people to the wisdom of the Buddha; they are "means" for directing people until they have reached the Lotus Sutra. And, as Shakyamuni indicates when he says "honestly discarding expedient means," (LS2, 44) the expedients of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings should be discarded once the Lotus Sutra has been expounded.

Shakyamuni Dared To Express the Truth in Words

BY contrast, the expedient of the Lotus Sutra is not an expedient that ought to be discarded; it is the teaching of the truth. At the same time, however, it is still always just an expedient. Although the second chapter explains the truth, it is titled not "Truth" but "Expedient Means." Herein lies the profound significance of the secret and mystic expedient (*himyo hoben*).

In the opening of "Expedient Means," we are told that the wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable, and difficult for all voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas* to comprehend. It is the ultimate teaching that defies expression through words and so cannot be explained.

However, unless the wisdom of all Buddhas is expressed, all people will forever remain shut away in darkness. For this reason, the Buddha ventures to put it into words.

Compared with the inexpressible truth, the words the Buddha uses to expound it are an expedient. At the same time, however, it is a fact that through these words people can be saved. The words of the Lotus Sutra that the Buddha, out of his compassion, expounded "according with his own mind" for all people, constitute the secret and mystic expedient; more than simply a means, the words are an expedient at one with the Buddha's wisdom.

Regarding the words of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin says things like: "Its words are the reality of life" (MW-1, 3); "Each of the 69,384 characters of the Lotus Sutra is a Buddha" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 971); and "When you cast your eyes upon the words of the Lotus Sutra, you should consider that you are beholding the living body of the Buddha Shakyamuni" (MW-5, 147). The Daishonin thus repeatedly emphasizes the oneness of the Buddha's wisdom and the words whereby it is expressed.

In a sense, it could be said that the expedients of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings

and the expedient of the Lotus Sutra are entirely opposite in their directionality. The Japanese term *hoben* (expedient means) originally derives from the Sanskrit *upaya*, meaning “approach.” The pre-Lotus Sutra teachings enable people to move away from illusion and approach enlightenment. The direction, in other words, is toward the wisdom of the Buddhas. This is the direction of the functional-teaching expedients and the truth-gateway expedients. These expedients are no longer of any use once we arrive at the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

In the Lotus Sutra, by contrast, Shakyamuni explains and articulates the wisdom of the Buddhas—to the world and in a manner according with his own mind. The directionality of this expedient is thus that of the Buddha approaching the world of human beings. This is the secret and mystic expedient.

Through the power of the Lotus Sutra, pre-Lotus Sutra teachings take on importance as partial expressions of the truth. They are said to be “revealed and unified” in the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Revealing the Power of the Mystic Law Through Our Struggles

THE wisdom of the Buddhas revealed in the “Expedient Means” chapter is the “true entity of all phenomena.” Put another way, it is the truth that all living beings are Buddhas.

The “secret” of the secret and mystic expedient is that this truth can only be understood between Buddhas. It is called “mystic” because it is difficult for people to comprehend. The teaching that awakens people to the truth that all living beings are Buddhas is the secret and mystic expedient.

This is exemplified in the parable of the gem in the robe related in “Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples” (Gohyaku Deshi Juki), the eighth chapter of the Lotus Sutra: A man is given a priceless gem by a close friend, who sews it into the lining of his robe while he drowns in a drunken stupor. Not realizing he possesses the gem, the man suffers hardships and is always in want. Much later he meets the friend again, and only then does he discover that all along he has had the gem of great value.

The man’s friend (the Buddha) knew that the man possessed the gem in his robe (the world of Buddhahood in his life), even though the man (representing the beings of the nine worlds) failed to realize it.

An ordinary human being is a Buddha. This is difficult to understand. Unless we believe we possess the Buddha nature, it will remain forever “secret.” However, once we recognize it, it is no longer “secret,” and our “mystic” powers appear.

The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, said: “That we are merely ordinary, unenlightened beings is the secret and mystic expedient. The truth is that we are Buddhas.” To realize this truth is to understand the secret and mystic expedient.

Although we are Buddhas, we are born as common mortals. This is so that, through doing our human revolution and showing proof of the Mystic Law, we can accomplish *kosen-rufu*. If we had everything, including good health and

riches, from the outset, then other people could not understand the power of the Mystic Law. Therefore, we try to reveal it to them through our struggles as common mortals. This is the secret and mystic expedient.

Victory in Life Through Victory in Faith

IN a word, all of us who believe in the Gohonzon, the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law, and who are struggling amid the reality of the nine worlds exemplify the secret and mystic expedient.

As long as we always live based on the Gohonzon, then any and all sufferings become expedient means for us to strengthen and deepen the world of Buddhahood in our lives. Sufferings and joys and everything that happens to us become expedient means for us to reveal the power of the Mystic Law.

It is said that life is like a drama. Whether in the world of business, education, the home or wherever, each person acts out a drama. This “role” is itself an expedient means; but should the “actor” abandon this role, he or she will be at a loss for a mission. When acting out our respective roles, we manifest our own inner truth most fully.

Daily life equals faith. And the world of Buddhahood appears nowhere except wedded to the stage of the reality of the nine worlds. Let us enact the drama of human revolution on the stage of our lives.

From misery to happiness, from disappointment to hope, from fate to mission, from suffering to eternal joy—the driving force that makes these dynamic transformations possible is the Mystic Law, is faith. □

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