

# On Skillfulness in Ways & Means

(*S. Upāya Kauśalya Parivartaḥ*, *C. Fāngbiàn Pǐn*, *J. Hōben Pon*, 方便品)

**A comprehensive study of the second chapter of The Lotus Sūtra**

Including a full English translation of Zhìyǐ's commentary on this chapter in his  
'Words & Passages of The Lotus Sūtra' (*C. Fāhuá Wénjù*, *J. Hokke Mongu*, 法華文句)

&

And appendixes with translations of other supporting commentaries attributed to  
Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Zhìyǐ & Nichiren

Introductions, translations and footnotes  
By Peter Lunde Johnson

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Dedicated to An Lạc

# Table of Contents

## A general introduction (Pages 1-10)

* On The Lotus Sūtra .....	1-3
* On the two halves of the sūtra; the gateways of meditation on the temporal manifestations and timeless source of enlightenment .....	4
* On the structure of the first half of the sūtra .....	5
* On chapter one, setting up the reason for the teaching in the second chapter .....	6-8
* On the structure of the second chapter of the sūtra .....	9-10

## An English translation of Kumārajīva's version of the second chapter ..... 11-33

## The commentaries about this second chapter (Pages 34-432)

* <i>Zhìyǐ's commentary on the first section of prose in this chapter, From 'The Words &amp; Passages of The Lotus Sūtra' (Pages 34-113):</i>	
* Part #1 - On the meaning of the chapter's title .....	36-70
* Part #2 - The first section of prose; the summary teaching, up to the 'ten aspects' ..	71-96
* Part #3 - On 'the ten aspects' .....	97-113
* <i>Appendixes from other works about 'the ten aspects' (Pages 114-204)</i>	
* An introduction .....	115-118
* <i>Appendix A: Transliteration of a Sanskrit version of this chapter's first section of prose, concluding in five mutually dependent aspects found in the transcendental meaning of all of life's purposes .....</i>	119
* <i>Appendix B: An English translation of the oldest extant Chinese version of this same passage by Dharmarakṣa, concluding in these five aspects .....</i>	120
* <i>Appendix C: An English translation of this passage from The Commentary on The Lotus Sūtra attributed to Vasubandhu, via Bodhiruci's Chinese translation ...</i>	121-122
* <i>Appendix D: An explanation of the five mutually dependent aspects from this Commentary on The Lotus Sūtra, attributed to Vasubandhu, also via Bodhiruci..</i>	123-125
* <i>Appendix E: A passage on realizing the transcendental nature of life's purpose from The Commentary About The Longer Sūtra on the Deliverance of Transcendental Discernment, attributed to Nāgārjuna and translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva; This is said to be Kumārajīva's source for the ten mutually dependent aspects, as found in his translation of this second chapter of The Lotus Sūtra .....</i>	126-137
* <i>Appendix F: A passage from volume 2 of Zhìyǐ's 'Profound Meaning of The Lotus Sūtra' describing these ten mutually dependent aspects in relation to the ten-fold sphere of life's purpose .....</i>	138-163
* <i>Appendix G: A passage from volume 3 of 'The Profound Meaning of The Lotus Sūtra' describing these ten aspects in terms of the twelve mutually dependent conditions that cause the arising of the afflicted nature of sentient existence and the four truths about the nature of life's purpose .....</i>	164-171
* <i>Appendix H: A passage from volume 7 of 'The Profound Meaning of The Lotus Sūtra', with the lotus illustrating these ten aspects as the mutually dependent conditions found in the nature of enlightenment (the Buddha's spiritual life) .....</i>	172-177
* <i>Appendix I: A passage from volume 5 of Zhìyǐ's 'Greatness of Meditation With Introspection &amp; Stillness of Mind' that explains these ten aspects in terms of his ultimate meditation system, the three thousand aspects of life's purpose in a single moment of thought .....</i>	178-204

* <i>Zhiyi's Commentary on the rest of this chapter, From 'The Words &amp; Passages of The Lotus Sūtra' (Pages 205-406)</i>	
* Part #4 - On the words immediately following the listing of 'the ten aspects', serving as a transition between this chapter's two main sections of prose .....	205-234
* Part #5 - Zhiyi's introduction to the elaboration of this teaching, on the different levels of understanding it for those with different capacities .....	235-255
* Part #6 - On the second main section of prose, elaborating on the teaching .....	256-308
* Part #7 - On the last, concluding section of verse, reiterating the meaning found in the second main section of prose .....	309-405
* <i>Commentaries on passages from this chapter from 'The Oral Transmission of the Meaning', said to be given by Nichiren to his disciples and recorded by Nikkō.....</i>	406-432
<b>Footnotes (Pages 433-532)</b>	
* A table of contents for the footnotes .....	434-436
* The footnotes .....	437-532
<b>An index (Pages 533-540)</b>	
* An index of topics .....	533-538
* An index of people cited .....	539-540
<b>Scriptures cited .....</b>	541-542

**Part #4:**

**On the words that serve as a transition  
between this chapter's  
two main sections of prose**

**From Volume 3 of  
The Words & Passages of The Lotus Sūtra**  
(C. Fahuá Wénjù, J. Hokke Mongu, 法華文句)

## Part #4: On the words that serve as a transition between this chapter's two main sections of prose

### An Introduction

This transition between the two main sections of prose in this chapter is in four parts:

- a. First, there are seventeen and a half stanzas of verse reiterating the first section of prose that summarizes the teaching about the dual (provisional and transcendental) knowledge and then concludes with the ten mutually dependent aspects found in all of life's purposes:
  1. The verse begins with four stanzas summoning words about this dual knowledge, first on that of all the Buddhas generally and then on that of the Buddha Śākyamuni specifically. Again, in doing so:
    - a. First there is praising it
    - b. Then there is explaining it and concluding on it.
  2. Next there are one and a half stanzas on this dual knowledge going beyond any words.
    - a. First there is a half a stanza (two lines) on the inconceivable sphere of life's purpose, the object of this dual knowledge that is beyond any words.
    - b. Next there is a half a stanza on grasping the essence of the words.
    - c. Then there is a half a stanza on it being beyond any words, concepts or images.
  3. Then there are ten and a half stanzas on those who are unable to comprehend it (all sentient beings except bodhisattvas with the very strongest power of faith).
  4. Finally, there are one and a half stanzas on those who are able to understand it (the Buddhas).
- b. Next, there are three and a half stanzas introducing the elaboration of this teaching about this dual knowledge of the Buddhas as 'opening up the three (provisional vehicles) and revealing the one (transcendental vehicle)', which is the main teaching in the first half of the sūtra.
- c. Then there is a brief prose passage on Śāriputra's expressions of doubts about the attainment of this dual knowledge and the meaning of 'opening up the three & revealing the one', and how these doubts make this new teaching difficult to believe or understand.
- d. Finally there are Śāriputra's three requests for an elaboration of this new teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one'. These requests are made in both prose and verse. They are each coupled with the Buddha's expressions of reluctance to teach about it any further. The first of these expressions of reluctance was found in the first section of prose (on the summary teaching) while the other two are in this section (on the elaboration). These three requests for an elaboration and expressions of reluctance to do so are said to serve as metaphors for the three different levels of capacity for understanding the teaching about 'opening the three & revealing the one'. These three different levels of understanding (through faith) are a subject which will be elaborated on in chapters two through nine.

## Part #4: On the words that serve as a transition between this chapter's two main sections of prose

### An outline of the sūtra's words on this

#### On the words that serve as a transition between this chapter's two main sections of prose

1. *The verse immediately following the opening prose section in section one* (偈頌): lines 1a-21d
  - a. Reiterating the words in the first prose section (lines 1a-18b)
    1. Verse reiterating the words on the dual knowledge in the first section of prose (頌寄言歎): lines 1a-4d
      - a. Praising the dual knowledge: lines 1a-2d
        1. Praising the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas: lines 1a-1d
          - a. The transcendental knowledge of all the Buddhas (頌諸佛智慧): line 1a
          - b. The provisional knowledge of all the Buddhas (頌諸佛權智): lines 1b-1d
        2. Praising the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni (頌歎釋迦二智): lines 2a-2d
      - b. Explaining and concluding on the dual knowledge: lines 3a-4d
        1. Explaining and concluding on the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas (釋結諸佛智慧): lines 3a-3d
        2. Explaining and concluding on the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni (釋結釋迦智慧): lines 4a-4d
    2. Verse reiterating that which is beyond any words (頌絕言歎): lines 5a-18b
      1. Reiterating the transcendental meaning of the mutually dependent aspects found in all of life's purposes that is beyond any words (頌諸法實相絕言): lines 5a-6b
        - a. The inconceivable object beyond any words (不思議境): lines 5a-5b
        - b. Grasping the essence of the words (取要言): lines 5c-5d
        - c. Saying no more (止不須說): lines 6a-6b
        - d. On those who cannot understand this transcendental meaning of life's purpose (總拏不知能知): lines 6c-15d
          1. All sentient beings (諸餘眾生類): lines 6c-6d
          2. The only exception: bodhisattvas with the very strongest power of faith (菩薩眾信力堅固): lines 7a-7b
          3. Disciples of the Buddha, individually (聲聞乘): lines 7c-8d
          4. All those like Śāriputra, collectively (舍利弗): lines 9a-9d
          5. All the disciples of the Buddha, collectively (諸弟子): lines 10a-11b
          6. All those spiritually awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives, collectively (緣覺乘): lines 11c-13b
          7. All newly inspired bodhisattvas, collectively (新發意菩薩乘): line 15c-15d
          8. Bodhisattvas who never turn back, collectively (不退諸菩薩): lines 16a-16d
      - e. Śākyamuni and all the Buddhas can understand it (說釋迦與佛能知): lines 17a-18b
        1. Who is being addressed: line 17a
        2. The object that is beyond any words: line 17b
        3. It is difficult to understand: line 17c
        4. The path of all the Buddhas is the same: lines 17d-18b
    - b. Verse introducing the teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' (正略開三顯) that shakes up attachments to false beliefs but causes doubts (動執生疑): lines 18c-21d
      1. All the Buddhas reveal the transcendental knowledge (示諸佛顯實): lines 18c-19d
      2. Śākyamuni opens up the three-fold provisional knowledge (示釋迦開三): lines 20a-21d
        - a. The Buddha Śākyamuni explains 'the opening up of the three (vehicles)': lines 20a-20d
        - b. Repudiating any idea that these three vehicles are only deceptive illusions: lines 21a-b
        - c. Establishing the intent behind the teaching of these three vehicles: lines 21c-d

2. *The arising of doubts that lead to Śāriputra's requests for an explanation* (騰疑致請)
  - a. A section of prose describing the doubts (敘疑)
    1. Bringing up the people who have doubts (舉疑人)
    2. The doubtful thoughts themselves (正敘疑念)
      - a. Doubts about the dual knowledge of the Buddha (疑佛二智)
      - b. Doubts about one's own attainment of it (疑自己所得)
  - b. The requests for an elaboration to resolve these doubts (正請決) by Śāriputra and expressions of a reluctance to further elaborate by the Buddha Śākyamuni
    1. (The first expression of a reluctance to further elaborate is found in the first section of prose.)
    2. The first request for an elaboration (第一請)
      - a. The prose portion (長行)
        1. The expressions of doubts
        2. The making of a request for an explanation
      - b. The verse portion reiterating the prose (偈頌): lines 22a-32d
        1. Reiterating doubts about the transcendental knowledge (頌疑實智): lines 22a-22b
        2. Reiterating doubts about the provisional knowledge (頌疑權智): lines 22c-25b
        3. Explaining the doubts among the four groups of followers in the assembly about the three vehicles of spiritual awakening (明三乘四眾疑): lines 25c-28b
        4. Explaining Śāriputra's own doubts (明舍利弗自身疑): lines 28c-29d
        5. Explaining the doubts of the bodhisattvas (明菩薩疑): lines 30a-30d
        6. Explaining the doubts among all the rest of the sentient beings in the assembly (明同伴眾疑請): lines 31a-32d
    3. A section of prose on the second time the Buddha said 'no more' (第二止) (the first time was in the opening prose found in the first section of this chapter.)
    4. The second request for an elaboration about this new teaching (第二請)
      - a. The prose portion (長行)
      - b. The verse portion reiterating the prose (偈頌): lines 33a-33d
    5. The third time the Buddha said 'no more' (第三止)
      - a. The prose portion (長行)
      - b. The verse portion reiterating the prose (偈頌): lines 34a-34d
    6. The third request for an elaboration (第三請)
      - a. The prose portion (長行)
      - b. The verse portion reiterating the prose (偈頌): lines 35a-38d



## Part #4: On the words that serve as a transition between this chapter's two main sections of prose

### The sūtra's words

Desiring to elaborate on the meaning of this, the Blessed One then spoke in verse, saying:

“The heroes who descend into this world are unfathomable. //1a  
The gods in heaven, the humans on earth, // 1b  
And all other kinds of sentient beings // 1c  
Are incapable of comprehending the greatness of these enlightened beings. // 1d

The power, the fearlessness, // 2a  
The emancipated understanding, the mental resolve //2b  
And the other characteristics of the Buddha's purpose //2c  
Cannot possibly be fathomed. // 2d

There have been countless Buddhas // 3a  
Perfectly endowed with practices of the noble path. //3b  
Their very deep and sublime purpose //3c  
Is difficult to know or see. // 3d

Through countless millions of ages // 4a  
Cultivating these practices of the noble path, // 4b  
I have now attained the ultimate fruit at the seat of enlightenment, // 4c  
A perfect endowment with its knowledge and vision. // 4d

Like this, there are the fruits and rewards of that which is great, // 5a  
Its meaning being realized through different inner natures and outer appearances. //5b  
Along with the Buddhas of the ten directions // 5c  
I have been able to understand these things. // 5d

The purpose for this is impossible to express, // 6a  
Transcending any words, terminology or images. // 6b  
There are no sentient beings // 6c  
Who can attain a full understanding of it // 6d

Other than those bodhisattvas // 7a  
Endowed with the very strongest power of faith. // 7b  
There are disciples // 7c  
Who have served the Buddhas, // 7d

Put an end to all of their afflictions //8a  
And abide in their very last lives in this world; // 8b  
Even the powers of these // 8c  
Are unable to comprehend it. // 8d

Even if this world was filled // 9a  
With those like Śāriputra, // 9b  
All deliberating together in an effort to fathom it, // 9c  
They would still be unable to comprehend it. // 9d

Even if the ten directions were filled // 10a  
With those such as Śāriputra // 10b  
Along with all the other disciples of the Buddhas; // 10c  
Filling the lands of the ten directions // 10d

And all deliberating together in an effort to fathom it, // 11a  
They would still be unable to comprehend it. // 11b  
The sharp knowledge of those who have become spiritually awakened to the  
(afflicted) conditions of sentient existence in their own lives, // 11c  
Without any affliction and in their very last lives in this world, // 11d

Even if they filled up all the spheres of the ten directions // 12a  
And were as numerous as the bamboo of the forest // 12b  
And they all came together with a single mind // 12c  
For countless millions of ages, // 12d

Aspiring to deliberate on the knowledge of the Buddhas, // 13a  
They still could not understand the slightest part of it. // 13b  
Bodhisattvas with newly inspired minds // 13c  
And those who have already served a countless number of Buddhas, // 13d

Penetrated the meaning of life's destinies // 14a  
And have been able to teach about its purposes; // 14b  
Even if they were as abundant as the stalks of rice, flax, bamboo and reeds, // 14c  
And filled the lands of the ten directions // 14d

With singleness of mind and subtlety of knowledge // 15a  
For as many ages as there are sands along the River Ganges, // 15b  
All deliberating on it together as one, // 15c  
They would still be unable to fathom the knowledge of the Buddhas. // 15d

Even if these bodhisattvas never turned back // 16a  
Through ages as numerous as the sands along the River Ganges, // 16b  
All deliberating on it together with a single mind, // 16c  
They would still be unable to comprehend it. // 16d

Further addressing Śāriputra, the Buddha then said: // 17a  
Being inconceivable and beyond any affliction // 17b  
There is a very deep and sublime purpose. // 17c  
Having now realized it, // 17d

Alone I understand the transcendental meaning of all of its mutually dependent aspects, // 18a

Along with the Buddhas of the ten directions. // 18b

Śāriputra! You should understand that // 18c

The words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent. // 18d

You should have full faith in this purpose // 19a

That the Buddhas teach about. // 19b

This purpose of the Blessed Ones has existed forever. // 19c

I will now teach the essence of its transcendental nature.” // 19d

Addressing students of the noble path // 20a

And those seeking to awaken to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives,

I have said: // 20b

I will emancipate you from the bonds of suffering // 20c

And you will ultimately attain spiritual freedom.” // 20d

Through the power of the Buddha’s skillful ways and means // 21a

I have proclaimed that there are three vehicles of spiritual awakening // 21b

To guide sentient beings // 21c

And free them from their various attachments.” // 21d

At this time in the great assembly there were twelve hundred students of the noble path. Like Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya, they were all arhats, worthy beings freed from affliction. With them there were also monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who aspired to become such students of the noble path as well as beings spiritually awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives. Each of them then made this thought:

“Why has the Blessed One now so earnestly praised the Buddhas’ distinguished skillfulness in ways & means and why is it said that their deep and sublime purpose is so difficult to understand? Why is it said that their intention is so difficult to comprehend that students of the noble path and those awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives are unable to fathom it? As long as the Buddha taught about there being one kind of emancipation, we thought we had realized it and so attained spiritual freedom. But now we do not understand where this new teaching is going.”

Śāriputra, being aware of his own doubts as well as those in the four-fold assembly, then addressed the Buddha, saying:

“Blessed One! For what reason have you so earnestly praised the Buddha’s distinguished skillfulness in ways and means and said that their very deep and sublime purpose is so difficult to understand? Never before have we heard of such a teaching from the Buddha. Those in the four-fold assembly are now full of doubts. Blessed One, please elaborate on this matter and why have you so earnestly praised it as being so deep, sublime and difficult to understand.”

Wanting to elaborate on this, Śāriputra then spoke in verse, saying:

“Great Noble Blessed One, sun of discernment! // 22a

You have always taught about the transcendental nature of life’s purpose. // 22b

Without being asked, you have now taught about its realization, // 22c

Of its power, its fearlessness and its penetration, // 22d

Its resolve of meditation, its emancipation and the like. // 23a

With all of these being found in the inconceivable nature of life’s purpose // 23b

And realized at the site of enlightenment, // 23c

No one has even been able to ask about this before. // 23d

We have found all this difficult to fathom, //24a

And have even been unable to ask about it. // 24b

Without being asked, you have now told us about it, // 24c

Praising this path you have walked. // 24d

Most sublime indeed is the knowledge and discernment. // 25a

That has been realized by the Buddhas. // 25b

The most worthy beings, those beyond any affliction, // 25c

As well as those who are still seeking spiritual freedom, // 25d

Have all now fallen into networks of doubt. // 26a

Why has the Buddha now taught about this? // 26b

Those seeking a spiritual awakening to the conditions of sentient existence in their  
own lives, //26c

The monks and the nuns, // 26d

The gods, the dragons and the demons, // 27a

The gandharvas and the other spirits of nature, // 27b

Are all now glancing at one another in confusion. // 27c

Looking up to the most blessed of all those with two feet, they ask: // 27d

How can this be so? // 28a

We pray that the Buddha will explain this so that we may understand. // 28b

Among all the students of life’s purpose // 28c

The Buddha has bestowed upon me the highest teaching of all. // 28d

But even with my knowledge // 29a

There is doubt and confusion and I do not fully understand it. // 29b

Is this the ultimate purpose // 29c

Or just another preliminary path to be practiced? // 29d

We disciples were born from the mouth of the Buddha // 30a

With our palms pressed together and looking up with reverence. // 30b

We pray that, through the sublime sound of your voice, // 30c

You will now teach us about this transcendental nature. // 30d

There are gods, dragons and the like // 31a  
As numerous as the sands along the River Ganges. // 31b  
There are bodhisattvas seeking out the Buddha // 31c  
In a great assembly, eighty thousand in number, // 31d

And there are countless millions of nations // 32a  
With kings turning the wheel of life's purpose. // 32b  
All of us have our palms pressed together with reverent hearts, // 32c  
Aspiring to hear about perfect endowment with enlightenment." // 32d

The Buddha then addressed Śāriputra, saying:

"No more, no more! There is no use in explaining this any further. If I did, all those in the worlds of heaven and humanity would be bewildered with doubts."

Then Śāriputra addressed the Buddha again:

"Blessed One, please, we pray that you explain this to us because there are countless hundreds, thousands and millions of sentient beings in this assembly endowed with knowledge, discernment and sharp spiritual capacities who have encountered the Buddhas, heard their teachings and been able to accept them with reverence and faith."

Śāriputra then spoke again in verse to reiterate this:

"Master of life's purpose, most Blessed One! // 33a  
I pray that you will now explain this without delay! // 33b  
In this assembly there are countless sentient beings // 33c  
Who will faithfully accept your words." // 33d

The Buddha then again tried to dissuade Śāriputra, saying:

"If I explain this, all the gods in heaven, humans on earth and titans of ego in this world will be bewildered with doubts, and arrogant monks will fall into a great pit of suffering."

The Blessed One spoke further in verse, saying:

"No more, no more! There is no use in explaining this further. // 34a  
The purpose that I have realized is sublime and unfathomable. // 34b  
Though the arrogant may hear about it, // 34c  
They will most certainly never accept it." // 34d

Once more Śāriputra addressed the Buddha, saying:

"Blessed One! Please, we implore you to explain it! In this assembly there are hundreds, thousands and millions like me who have been influenced and transformed by the Buddhas over past generations. Such people as these will certainly be able to faithfully accept it, and they will abundantly benefit from understanding it during their long night of resting in peace."

Śāriputra then spoke these stanzas of verse to elaborate on what he meant:

"Blessed one, supreme among those on two feet! // 35a  
I pray you teach about the ultimate nature of life's purpose // 35b  
I am a senior disciple of the Buddha. // 35c  
Please further distinguish this for me. // 35d

There are countless others in this assembly // 36a  
Who will be able to faithfully accept it // 36b  
Because, over former generations, // 36c  
The Buddha has taught and spiritually transformed them. // 36d

With palms pressed together and singleness of mind, // 37a  
They all long to receive the words of the Buddha. // 37b  
There are twelve hundred worthy beings (arhats) here // 37c  
Among the others who seek to understand it. // 37d

We pray that for the sake of all of us // 38a  
You will further distinguish this. // 38b  
When we hear about this sublime purpose // 38c  
It will bring great joy to all of us." // 38d

## Part #4: On the words that serve as a transition between this chapter's two main sections of prose

Zhiyi's commentary on the meaning of these words  
From Volume 3 of The Words & Passages of The Lotus Sūtra

### B. The second part of the chapter, that following the first section of prose, is in two parts:

1. Twenty-one stanzas of verse (lines 1a-21d) that immediately follow the first prose section.
2. Prose and seventeen stanzas of verse (lines 22a-38d) about the arising of doubts that lead to requests for an explanation.

Desiring to elaborate on the meaning of this, the Blessed One then spoke in verse, saying:  
爾時世尊欲重宣此義，而說偈言：

#### 1. The verse immediately following this first section of prose is in twenty-one stanzas

and it has two main parts:

- a. First, from 'The heroes who descend into this world are unfathomable ...', there are seventeen & a half stanzas (lines 1a-18b) reiterating the words in the first prose section.
- b. Then, from 'Śāriputra! You should understand that the words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent ...', there are three & a half stanzas (lines 18c-21d) outlining the main teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' that shakes up attachments to false beliefs held by those in the audience and produces uncertainties in their minds.

#### a. *In the first seventeen and a half stanzas reiterating the prose (lines 1a-18b), there are also two parts:*

1. First there are four stanzas of verse (lines 1a-4d) that reiterate that part of the first section of prose on words that summon the dual (provisional and transcendental) knowledge (of life's greater purpose).
2. Afterwards there are thirteen and a half stanzas (lines 5a-18b) reiterating the part in this first section of prose about this dual knowledge that is beyond any words.

The summary teaching in the first section of prose (on 'the dual knowledge') and the elaboration of it in the second section of prose (on 'opening up the three & revealing the one') both have verse following them that reiterate their meaning. The prose and the verse (in these two sections) all complement one another, and together they make the meaning of this teaching easier to reveal. In the first prose section, the dual (provisional & transcendental) knowledge of the Buddha is described two different ways:

- #1 The knowledge of all the Buddhas generally and
- #2 The knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni specifically.

In the verse reiterating it, they are treated the same way as the principle is the same.

1. The first four stanzas of verse (lines 1a-4d) reiterate the summary teaching in the first section of prose about the words that summon the dual (provisional and transcendental) knowledge.

- a. The first two stanzas (lines 1a-2d) reiterate the part of the prose on words that praise the dual knowledge of Buddha Śākyamuni specifically and all the Buddhas generally.
- b. The second two stanzas (lines 3a-4d) reiterate the part of the prose on words that explain and then conclude on the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni specifically and all the Buddhas collectively.



- a. The first two stanzas (lines 1a-2d) praising the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni and all the Buddhas are also in two parts:
1. The first stanza (lines 1a-1d) is praise of the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas.
  2. The second (lines 2a-2d) is praise of the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni.
1. *The first stanza praising the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas is also in two parts:*
- a. First there is one line (1a) that are words of praise for *the transcendental knowledge* of all the Buddhas.

**“The heroes who descend into this world are unfathomable, //1a**  
 世雄不可量, //1a

- \* **The heroes who descend into this world** (S. mahāvīrā loka, 世雄): This reiterates the words of praise in the prose about ‘the knowledge of (all) the Buddhas’ (J. sho buts chi e, 諸佛智慧).
- \* **Unfathomable** (S. aprameya, 不可量) reiterates the words of praise in the prose about this knowledge being ‘very deep and infinitely broad’ (J. jin jin mu ryo, 甚深無量).

- b. The next three lines (1b-1d) are words of praise for *the provisional knowledge* of all the Buddhas.

**The gods in heaven, the humans on earth, // 1b**  
**And all other kinds of sentient beings // 1c**  
**Are incapable of comprehending the greatness of these enlightened beings. // 1d**  
 諸天及世人, 一切眾生類, 無能知佛者。 // 1b-d

There are three points about this first stanza of verse that are different from the prose they reiterate:

- \* Before, in speaking about ‘*the knowledge* (the purpose known) *of all the Buddhas* (the people knowing it)’ in the prose section, both the humanity of subjective person (puruṣa, 人) and objective nature of the purpose (dharma, 法) were brought up. Now, in this verse reiterating it, there is only bringing up praise in personal terms, describing people with this beautiful purpose as **heroes**.
- \* In the prose, the person and the purpose were distinguished from one another. Now, by only generally referring to the people who are endowed with this purpose as heroes, the person and the purpose are combined by this single term.
- \* In the prose, it said that ‘students of life’s purpose (śrāvakas, 聲聞) and those only spiritually awakened in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 緣覺) are all unable to comprehend it’ (J. issai shomon hyakushibutsu sho funō chi, 一切聲聞辟支佛所不能知). Now, in reiterating this, the verse more broadly says **all other kinds of sentient beings are incapable of comprehending the greatness of these enlightened beings**.



b. *The second stanza here praises the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni:*

**The power, the fearlessness, // 2a**

**The emancipated understanding, the mental resolve //2b**

**And the other characteristics of the Buddha's purpose //2c**

**Cannot possibly be fathomed. // 2d**

佛力無所畏、 解脫諸三昧, // 2a-b

及佛諸餘法, 無能測量者。 // 2c-d

- \* **The Buddha** here reiterates the prose that said 'since I have attained enlightenment and descended into this world' (J. go jū jōbutsu irai, 吾從成佛已來), which is *praise for the transcendental knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni*.
- \* **The power, the fearlessness** here reiterates the prose's praise of the merits and virtues of the Buddha and so is praise for *the provisional knowledge of Śākyamuni* (in terms of the Buddha's own practice).
- \* **The other characteristics of the Buddha's purpose** is praise for *the provisional knowledge of Śākyamuni* in terms of the influence of others, which supports and complements the Buddha's transcendental knowledge. This reiterates the praise for what the prose previously called 'explaining its different causes and conditions with various kinds of illustrations' (J. shuju innen shuju hiyu, 種種因緣, 種種譬喻)

b. *Beginning with 'There have been countless Buddhas ...', there are two stanzas (lines 3a-4d) that reiterate the prose that explains and concludes about the dual knowledge of both the Buddha Śākyamuni and all the Buddhas collectively.* This is also in two parts:

1. From 'There have been countless Buddhas ...', there is one stanza (lines 3a-3d) reiterating the prose that explains and concludes on the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas.
  2. From 'For countless millions of ages, having traveled along this path, I have attained ...', there is one stanza (lines 4a-4d) reiterating the prose that explains and concludes on the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni.
1. *First there is one stanza reiterating the prose that explains and concludes about the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas:*

**There have been countless Buddhas // 3a**

**Perfectly endowed with practices of the noble path. //3b**

**Their very deep and sublime purpose //3c**

**Has been difficult to know or see. // 3d**

本從無數佛, 具足行諸道, //3a-b

甚深微妙法, 難見難可了。 // 3c-d

- \* The first two lines (3a-b) saying **there have been countless Buddhas perfectly endowed with the practice of the noble path** reiterate the prose's *explanation of the transcendental knowledge of all the Buddhas* that said 'the Buddhas have been intimately close to countless hundreds, thousands & millions of enlightened beings, fulfilling their endlessly different purposes.' (J. buts-zō shin gon, hyaku zen man oku mu shu sho butsu, jin gyō sho butsu, mu ryō dō hō, 佛曾親近百千萬億無數諸佛, 盡行諸佛, 無量道法).

- \* The next line (3c) saying **their very deep and sublime purpose** reiterates the prose's *conclusion on the transcendental knowledge of all the Buddhas* about 'having realized a very deep purpose that has never been known' (J. jōju jinjin mizō u hō, 成就甚深未曾有法).
- \* The last line (3d) saying it **has been difficult to know or see** reiterates the prose's *conclusion on the provisional knowledge of all the Buddhas* about 'they have followed every opportunity to teach of it to those with prejudices that have made it difficult to understand.' (J. zuiji shosetsu ishu range, 隨宜所說, 意趣難解).

2. Then there is one stanza reiterating the prose that explains and concludes on the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni:

Through countless millions of ages // 4a  
 Cultivating the practices of the noble path, // 4b  
 I have now attained the ultimate fruit at the seat of enlightenment, // 4c  
 A perfect endowment with its knowledge and vision. // 4d  
 於無量億劫, 行此諸道已, // 4a-b  
 道場得成果, 我已悉知見。 // 4c-d

- \* The first two lines (4a-b), **through countless millions of ages cultivating the practices of the noble path**, reiterate the words of prose *explaining the dual knowledge of Śākyamuni* that speak about being 'perfectly endowed with the ways & means of delivering the knowledge & vision of enlightenment' (J. hōben chicken haramitsu kai i gusoku, 方便知見波羅蜜皆已具足). These first two lines bring this up in terms of *the cause* of this perfect endowment.
- \* The next line (4c) saying **I have now attained the ultimate fruit at the seat of enlightenment** (line 4c)<sup>14a</sup> bring it up in terms of *its effect*.
- \* The last line (4d) speaking of **a perfect endowment with its knowledge and vision** reiterates the prose's *conclusion about the dual knowledge of Śākyamuni* that says 'the knowledge and vision of The One Who Has Descended Into This World is broad and great, deep and far-reaching' (J. nyorai chicken kōdai jinnon, 如來知見, 廣大深遠).

There are those who interpret this somewhat differently, saying that these first four stanzas reiterate the prose about the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas generally and the Buddha Śākyamuni specifically in six parts as follows:

- The first line of the first stanza (1a) saying **the heroes who descend into this world are unfathomable** combines praise for the dual knowledge of both all the Buddhas generally and Śākyamuni specifically.
- The last three lines of the first stanza (1b-d) saying **the gods in heaven, the humans on earth and all other kinds of sentient beings cannot understand (the greatness of) these enlightened beings** reiterate the part on those with the (lack of) capacity (to attain this knowledge).
- The second stanza (lines 2a-2d) saying **the power, the fearlessness, the emancipated understanding, the mental resolve and the other characteristics of the Buddha's purpose cannot possibly be fathomed** reiterates the explanation of the dual knowledge of the Buddha Śākyamuni specifically.

- d. The third stanza (lines 3a-d) says **there have been countless Buddhas perfectly endowed with the practices of the noble path. Their very deep and sublime purpose is difficult to know or see.** This reiterates the explanation of the dual knowledge of all the Buddhas collectively.
  - e. The first half of the fourth stanza (lines 4a-b) saying **through countless millions of ages with these practices of the noble path** reiterates practice of the cause.
  - f. The last two lines of the fourth stanza (lines 4c-d) saying **I have now attained the ultimate fruit at the seat of enlightenment, a perfect endowment with knowledge and vision** reiterates attainment of the effect.
2. From 'Like this, there are the fruits and rewards of that which is great ...', there are thirteen and a half stanzas (lines 5a-18b) reiterating the prose about the dual knowledge that is 'beyond any words'. The words on this are in five parts:
- a. From 'Like this, there are the fruits and rewards of that which is great ...', there is a half a stanza (lines 5a-b) on *the inconceivable object that is beyond any words*.
  - b. In saying 'Along with the Buddhas of the ten directions, I have been able to understand these things', there is a half a stanza (lines 5c-d) on *grasping the essence of the words*.
  - c. In saying 'The purpose for this is impossible to express, being beyond any words or concepts', there is a half a stanza (lines 6a-b) on *saying no more*.
  - d. From 'there are no sentient beings that can attain a full understanding of it', there are ten and a half stanzas (lines 6c-16d) on *those who are not able to understand it* (this is a reference to all sentient beings, with one exception - bodhisattvas with the very strongest power of faith).
  - e. From 'Further addressing Śāriputra, the Buddha then said ... alone I understand the transcendental meaning of its mutually dependent aspects, along with the Buddhas of the ten directions', there are one and a half stanzas (lines 17-18b) on *those who are able to understand it* (the Buddhas)
- a. *First, there is a half a stanza on the inconceivable object beyond any words:*

**Like this, there are the fruits and rewards of that which is great, // 5a**  
**Its meaning being realized through different inner natures and outer appearances. // 5b**  
 如是大果報, 種種性相義, // 5a-b

This is a reiteration of the inconceivable object of meditation that is described (as the ten mutually dependent aspects) at the close the first prose section. However, in bringing up the beginning (the inner natures & outer appearances), the end (the fruits & rewards) and (by implication) all the aspects in between, it summarizes that which may be understood, the meanings and terms of the (ten mutually dependent) aspects that are 'perfectly consistent' (J. kikyō tō, 究竟等). With these being the various aspects of 'that which is great', it is just as explained in The Profound Meaning of The Lotus Sūtra (C. Fāhuá Xuányì, J. Hokke Gengi, 法華玄義) (and translated in Appendix F).

- b. *Next, there is a half a stanza on grasping the essence of the words:*

**Along with the Buddhas of the ten directions // 5c**  
**I have been able to understand these things. // 5d**  
 我及十方佛, 乃能知是事。 // 5c-d

This reiterates the words of the prose that say 'to grasp the essence of these words, the Buddha has perfectly realized all of the infinite, boundless purposes of life

that have never been known (J. shuyō gonshi, muryō muhen mizō u hō, buts-shitsu jōju, 取要言之，無量無邊未曾有法，佛悉成就).

c. *Then there is a half a stanza on saying no more:*

**The purpose for this is impossible to express, // 6a**

**Transcending any words, terminology or images. // 6b**

是法不可示， 言辭相寂滅， // 6a-b

This reiterates the prose saying ‘No more, Śāriputra, there is no use in explaining this any further.’ (J. shi sharihotsu, fu shu bu setsu, 止，舍利弗！不須復說). There is no one place where the transcendental meaning of the mutually dependent aspects found in all of life’s purposes (J. shohō jissō, 諸法實相) can be pointed to, as it completely transcends the way of words, terminology and (mental) images.

d. *Next, from ‘there are no sentient beings that can attain a full understanding of it’, there are ten and a half stanzas (lines 6c-16d) on those who are not able to understand it.* Because the prose speaks of those ‘unable to comprehend it’ (J. funo chi, 不能知), it then says ‘no more Śāriputra, there is no use in explaining this any further’ (J. shi sharihotsu, fu shu bu setsu, 止舍利弗，不須復說). The words on this are in eight parts:

1. In saying ‘There are no sentient beings who can attain a full understanding of it’, there is a half a stanza (lines 6c-d) *generally on those unable to penetrate it.*
2. In saying ‘Other than those bodhisattvas endowed with the very strongest power of faith’, there is a half a stanza (lines 7a-b) on *the one exception.*
3. From ‘Those disciples who have served the Buddhas, put an end to all of their afflictions ...’, there are one & a half stanzas (lines 7c-8d) about *those on the two lesser vehicles of spiritual awakening being unable to understand it.*
4. From ‘Even if this world was filled with those like Śāriputra ...’, there is one stanza (lines 9a-d) on *Śāriputra being unable to understand it.*
5. From ‘Even if the ten directions were filled ... with all the other disciples of the Buddhas ...’, there are one & a half stanzas (lines 10a-11b) on *all the Buddha’s great disciples being unable to understand it.*
6. From ‘The sharp knowledge of those ... without any affliction and in their very last lives in this world ...’, there are two stanzas (lines 11c-13b) on *those who have awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives being unable to understand it.*
7. From ‘Bodhisattvas with newly inspired minds and those who have already served a countless number of Buddhas ...’, there are two & a half stanzas (lines 13c-15d) on *bodhisattvas generally being unable to understand it.*
8. From ‘Even if there were bodhisattvas who never turned back through ages as numerous as the sands along the River Ganges ...’, there is one stanza (lines 16a-d) on *bodhisattvas who never turn back being unable to understand it.*

1. *First there is a half a stanza generally on those unable to penetrate it.*

**There are no sentient beings // 6c**

**Who can attain a full understanding of it // 6d**

諸餘眾生類， 無有能得解， // 6c-d

This first half a stanza is generally a reference to those unable to penetrate it through the seven skillful ways and means.<sup>21</sup>

2. *Next, there is a half a stanza on the one exception.*

**Other than those bodhisattvas // 7a**

**Endowed with the very strongest power of faith. // 7b**

除諸菩薩眾、 信力堅固者。 // 7a-b

This is about those who are able to penetrate it through the ten attitudes of faith<sup>39</sup> found in the perfect doctrine.<sup>12</sup> It is because of this that the sūtra here speaks about **the very strongest power of faith**. The prose explained that ultimately only the Buddha understands it, but in this reiteration of it there is the first citing of the mutual interaction between faith and understanding.

3. *Then there are one and a half stanzas about those on the two lesser vehicles being unable to understand it.*

**There are disciples // 7c**

**Who have served the Buddhas, // 7d**

**Put an end to all of their afflictions // 8a**

**And abide in their very last lives in this world; // 8b**

**Even the powers of these // 8c**

**Are unable to comprehend it. // 8d**

諸佛弟子眾， 曾供養諸佛， // 7c-d

一切漏已盡， 住是最後身， // 8a-b

如是諸人等， 其力所不堪。 // 8c-d

4. *Then, there is one stanza on Śāriputra being unable to understand it.*

**Even if this world was filled // 9a**

**With those like Śāriputra, // 9b**

**All deliberating together in an effort to fathom it, // 9c**

**They would still be unable to comprehend it. // 9d**

假使滿世間， 皆如舍利弗， // 9a-b

盡思共度量， 不能測佛智。 // 9c-d

5. *Then there are one and a half stanzas on all the Buddha's great disciples being unable to understand it.*

**Even if the ten directions were filled // 10a**

**With those such as Śāriputra // 10b**

**Along with all the other disciples of the Buddhas; // 10c**

**Filling the lands of the ten directions // 10d**

**And all deliberating together in an effort to fathom it, // 11a**

**They would still be unable to comprehend it. // 11b**

正使滿十方， 皆如舍利弗， // 10a-b

及餘諸弟子， 亦滿十方刹， // 10c-d

盡思共度量， 亦復不能知。 // 11a-b

6. *Then, there are two stanzas on those who have awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 辟支佛) being unable to understand it.*

**The sharp knowledge of those who have become spiritually awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives, // 11c**

**Without any affliction and in their very last lives in this world, // 11d**

**Even if they filled up all the spheres of the ten directions // 12a**

**And were as numerous as the bamboo of the forest // 12b**

**And they all came together with a single mind // 12c**

**For countless millions of ages, // 12d**

**Aspiring to deliberate on the knowledge of the Buddhas, // 13a**

**They still could not understand the slightest part of it. // 13b**

辟支佛利智， 無漏最後身， // 11c-d

亦滿十方界， 其數如竹林， // 12a-b

斯等共一心， 於億無量劫， // 12c-d

欲思佛實智， 莫能知少分。 // 13a-b

7. *Next, there are two and a half stanzas on bodhisattvas being unable to understand it.*

**Bodhisattvas with newly inspired minds // 13c**

**And those who have already served a countless number of Buddhas, // 13d**

**Penetrated the meaning of life's destinies // 14a**

**And have been able to teach about its purposes; // 14b**

**Even if they were as abundant as the stalks of rice, flax, bamboo and reeds, // 14c**

**And filled the lands of the ten directions // 14d**

**With singleness of mind and subtlety of knowledge // 15a**

**For as many ages as there are sands along the River Ganges, // 15b**

**All deliberating on it together as one, // 15c**

**They would still be unable to fathom the knowledge of the Buddhas. // 15d**

新發意菩薩， 供養無數佛， // 13c-d

了達諸義趣， 又能善說法， // 14a-b

如稻麻竹葦， 充滿十方刹， // 14c-d

一心以妙智， 於恒河沙劫， // 15a-b

咸皆共思量， 不能知佛智。 // 15c-d

This brings up bodhisattvas who have inspired their minds but have not yet fully penetrated that which is beyond any words. Some say this includes bodhisattvas who have practiced the six kinds of spiritual deliverance (ṣaḍ pāramitā, 六度)<sup>43</sup> for a countless number of ages (asaṃkhyeya kalpas, 阿僧祇劫)<sup>77</sup> but still have not yet severed their afflictions and so are said to have only 'inspired their minds'. Some say this includes those among humanity and the heavens of meditation who practice these six kinds of deliverance. However, in saying specifically that they inspire their minds, their intent is really meant to be more general.



8. Finally, one stanza on bodhisattvas who never turn back being unable to understand it.

**Even if these bodhisattvas never turned back // 16a**

**Through ages as numerous as the sands along the River Ganges, // 16b**

**All deliberating on it together with a single mind, // 16c**

**They would still be unable to comprehend it. // 16d**

不退諸菩薩， 其數如恒沙， // 16a-b

一心共思求， 亦復不能知。 // 16c-d

This is about bodhisattvas who never turn back (avaivartika, 不退) in their resolve even being unable to understand this. This includes:

- \* Bodhisattvas who never turn back in their practice of the general doctrine<sup>12</sup> (common to all three vehicles of spiritual awakening) who have severed their inner afflictions but do not yet fully understand the principles of the distinguished doctrine (about also severing the afflictions of others)
- \* Bodhisattvas who never turn back in their (thirty levels<sup>23A-C</sup> of) practice in the distinguished doctrine<sup>12</sup> but have not yet penetrated the (ten) levels<sup>23D</sup> of grounding (abhūmi praviṣṭa 地前) in the transcendental nature of life's purpose also do not fully understand it.

e. Beginning with 'Again addressing Śāriputra, the Buddha said ...' there are one and a half stanzas (lines 17a-18b) on the Buddha being able to understand it. This reiterates the previous prose about the Buddha understanding the ultimate nature of life's purpose that is difficult to understand' (J. nange shi hō, 難解之法) and the inconceivable object of meditation that is the transcendental meaning of the mutually dependent aspects found in all of life's purposes (J. shohō jissō, 諸法實相). This is in four parts:

1. One line (17a) on who is being addressed
2. One line (17b) on the object that is beyond any words
3. One line (17c) on it being difficult to understand
4. Three lines (17d-18b) on the path of all the Buddhas being the same

1. First there is one line about who is being addressed:

**Further addressing Śāriputra, the Buddha then said: // 17a**

又告舍利弗： // 17a

2. Next, there is one line on the object that is beyond any words:

**Being inconceivable and beyond any affliction // 17b**

【無漏不思議， // 17b

This reiterates the prose's conclusion on the essential nature that is beyond words, bringing up the object of the Buddha's dual knowledge that is spoken of no more.

3. Then there is one line on it being difficult to comprehend:

**There is a very deep and sublime purpose. // 17c**

甚深微妙法， // 17c

This reiterates that which the prose calls ‘ultimate nature of life’s purpose that is difficult to understand’ (J. nange shi hō, 難解之法).

4. *Finally there are three lines on the path of all the Buddhas being the same:*

Having now realized it, // 17d

Alone I understand the transcendental meaning of all of its mutually dependent aspects, // 18a

Along with the Buddhas of the ten directions. // 18b

我今已具得, // 17d

唯我知是相, 十方佛亦然。 // 18a-b

This reiterates the prose that says ‘the Buddha has realized ... (that which) can only be fathomed between the Buddhas’ (J. buts-sho jōju ... yui butsu yo butsu naino kujin, 佛所成就 ... 唯佛與佛, 乃能究盡). Because this explains that the path of all the Buddhas is everywhere the same, it says **alone I understand the transcendental meaning of its aspects, along with Buddhas of the ten directions.**

In explaining that which is inconceivable, just as a magical gem that grants any wish (cintāmaṇi, 如意珠)<sup>72</sup> is without the slightest flaw and is able to rain down a host of treasures, the transcendental meaning of the mutually dependent aspects found in all of life’s purposes (J. shohō jissō, 諸法實相) neither arises nor perishes but is able to produce a transcendental discernment (prajñā, 般若) of the nature of life’s most sublime purpose.

And in interpreting the one & a half stanzas (lines 17a-18b), beginning with the passage ‘Further addressing Śāriputra, the Buddha then said: Being inconceivable and beyond any affliction ...’ in terms of the source & manifestation of enlightenment, one the four kinds of interpretation (四種解釋)<sup>76</sup> of the sūtra’s text explained at the beginning of this ‘Words & Passages of The Lotus Sūtra (C. Fahuá Wénjù, J. Hokke Mongu, 法華文句):

1. The term **beyond any affliction** in line 17b refers to the source in terms of the ten spheres of life’s purpose. In the ten spheres of life’s purpose and their ten mutually dependent aspects, there is the unafflicted nature the dialectical principle that is found in all ordinary and noble purposes, all three truths and the knowledge that is both provisional and transcendental.
2. The term **inconceivable** in line 17b is about being both opened up into many and integrated into one. This is a reference to the source in terms of that which is provisional yet transcendental, transcendental and yet provisional. In being like this, its nature is said to be inconceivable.
3. The term **very deep and sublime purpose** in line 17c refers to the source in terms of the objective sphere of enlightenment. This may be understood.
4. The passage **alone I understand the transcendental meaning of all its mutually dependent aspects** in line 18a refers to its source in terms of (the Buddha’s) own spiritual standing (subjective capacity as a person). This also may be understood.



- b. Next, from ‘Śāriputra! You should understand that the words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent ...’ there are three and a half stanzas (lines #18c-21d) that summarize the main teaching about ‘opening up the three & revealing the one’, shaking up the attachments to false beliefs held by those and producing doubts about it. This is in two parts:

1. First, from ‘Śāriputra! You should understand that the words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent ...’, there are one and a half stanzas (lines 18c-19d) about the transcendental knowledge revealed by all the Buddhas
2. Then, from ‘Addressing students of the noble path and those seeking to awaken to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives ...’, there are two stanzas (lines #18c-19d) on opening up the three kinds of provisional knowledge taught by the Buddha Śākyamuni.

These (two kinds of knowledge) are explained as being mutually dependent on one another.

1. First, there are one and a half stanzas on the transcendental knowledge revealed by all the Buddhas:

Śāriputra! You should understand that // 18c  
 The words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent. // 18d  
 You should have full faith in this purpose // 19a  
 That the Buddhas teach about. // 19b  
 This purpose of the Blessed Ones has existed forever. // 19c  
 I will now teach the essence of its transcendental nature.” // 19d  
 舍利弗當知， 諸佛語無異， // 18c-18d  
 於佛所說法， 當生大信力， // 19a-19b  
 世尊法久後， 要當說真實。】 // 19c-19d

- \* Line 18d saying **The words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent** explains that all the different manifestations of the Buddhist path are ultimately the same.
- \* The next pair of lines (19a-b) saying **You should have full faith in this purpose that the Buddhas teach about** is encouragement to have faith.
- \* The last two lines (10c-d) saying **This purpose of the Blessed Ones has existed forever. I will now teach the essence of its transcendental nature** reveal the transcendental nature of this true purpose.

Through shaking up attachments (to false beliefs about this transcendental nature) that have existed since long ago in those who have had doubts about it, there has been the overcoming of the devil<sup>99</sup> and the attainment of enlightenment through hearing the sūtra, the (timeless) words of the Buddha. The Buddha encouraged those in this audience to have faith in his words. Through faith in them, what doubt was there that could not be overcome? To guard against the doubts that arise from those who malign the transcendental nature of life’s purpose, it is necessary to encourage faith.

2. Then, beginning with the words ‘Addressing students of the noble path (śrāvakas, 聲聞) and those seeking to awaken to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 緣覺)’, there are two stanzas (20a-21d) on the Buddha Śākyamuni opening up the three kinds of provisional knowledge. This is in three parts:
  - a. First there is one stanza (lines 20a-20d) explaining ‘the opening up of the three’ by the Buddha Śākyamuni.
  - b. The next two lines (21a-b) further deliberates on this, repudiating any idea that these three vehicles only being deceptive illusions.
  - c. Finally, there is a half a stanza (lines 21c-d) establishing the intent behind teaching these three vehicles.

- a. *First there is one stanza explaining ‘the opening up of the three’ by the Buddha Śākyamuni:*

Addressing students of the noble path // 20a

And those seeking to awaken to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives,

I have said: // 20b

“I will emancipate you from the bonds of suffering // 20c

And you will ultimately attain spiritual freedom.” // 20d

告諸聲聞眾， 及求緣覺乘： // 20a-b

『我令脫苦縛， 速得涅槃者。』 // 20c-d

In explaining the errors of those on the two lesser vehicles, line 20d of the sūtra speaks about **ultimately attaining spiritual freedom** (nirvāṇa, 涅槃). In the two lines (20c-d) **I will emancipate you from the bonds of suffering and you will ultimately attain spiritual freedom**, there is a comparison of the lesser vehicle of attaining freedom from affliction to the six kinds of spiritual deliverance (ṣaḍ pāramitā, 六度)<sup>43</sup> found on the greater vehicle of the bodhisattva teaching. How is this to be understood? Through cultivating the six kinds of deliverance there is (like on the lesser vehicle) avoidance of the attachments found in the four (lower) spiritual destinies, but at first there is still not the ability to enter into transcendental knowledge of life’s purpose. After going through the three countless rounds of ages in cultivation (trīṇy asaṃkhyeya kalpāni, 三阿僧祇劫)<sup>81</sup> there will eventually be the ultimate attainment of spiritual freedom, but it is still a distant, long-term goal. Because the practice of the six kinds of deliverance begins with the deliverance of others, the verse says **I will emancipate you from the bonds of suffering**. However, because there are still (obstacles of cognitive dissonance<sup>80</sup> in) attachments to (the attainment of) non-affliction, the verse only says they will *ultimately* attain spiritual freedom, inferring that this stanza is about the vehicle of the six kinds of deliverance.

- b. *The next two lines further deliberate on this, repudiating any idea that these three vehicles are only deceptive illusions.*

Through the power of the Buddha’s skillful ways and means // 21a

I have proclaimed that there are three vehicles of spiritual awakening // 21b

佛以方便力， 示以三乘教， // 21a-b

If these three are not to explicitly reveal the nature of enlightenment, what are they for? One should not get stuck on whether there the two vehicles or three vehicles. This half a stanza repudiates any idea the three vehicles are only deceptive illusions.

- c. *Then there is a half a stanza establishing the intent of these three vehicles.*

To guide sentient beings // 21c

And free them from their various attachments.” // 21d

眾生處處著， 引之令得出。』 // 21c-d

This explains that the provisional methods guide one to become free from suffering. They are not the transcendental nature itself, only gateways to penetrating it through the use of skillful ways and means.

2. *Next, from 'At this time in the great assembly there were ...' there is a section of prose with seventeen stanzas of verse (lines 22a-38d) on the arising of doubts that lead to requests for further explanation:*

Upon hearing that the three vehicles of spiritual awakening are deceptive illusions and only the one universal vehicle is true, there was a stirring up of attachments to false beliefs and the arising of doubts. The words on this are in two parts.

- a. A description of the doubts
  - b. Requests for a resolution of these doubts
- 
- a. The description of these doubts is also in two parts
    1. The people who have had these doubts
    2. The doubts themselves
  1. The people who have had these doubts

**At this time in the great assembly there were twelve hundred students of the noble path. Like Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya, they were all arhats, worthy beings freed from affliction. With them there were also monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who aspired to become such students of the noble path as well as beings spiritually awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives.**

爾時大眾中，有諸聲聞漏盡阿羅漢，阿若憍陳如等千二百人，及發聲聞、辟支佛心比丘、比丘尼、優婆塞、優婆夷，各作是念：

First there is a description of twelve hundred kinds of doubters and then there is the grouping of four different assemblies of doubters.

- \* First and foremost, in repudiating the three vehicles of provisional knowledge as just being the skillful use of ways and means, only the doubts of those attached to the partialities of the two lesser vehicles were being brought up and described.
- \* In a subsequent explanation of doubters (in lines 31c-d of verse), it will be said that eighty thousand bodhisattvas seeking enlightenment also had doubts, so it is understood all those on the three vehicles of spiritual awakening have doubts. However, in this passage, only the partialities of those on the two lesser vehicles of spiritual awakening are explicitly brought up.

2. Beginning with 'each of them made this thought ...', there is a description of the doubts themselves, which is also in two parts:
  - a. Doubts about the dual knowledge of the Buddha
  - b. Doubts about their own attainment of this dual knowledge

**Each of them then made this thought:**

各作是念：

- a. *First there are the doubts about the dual knowledge of the Buddha:*

**“Why has the Blessed One now so earnestly praised the Buddhas’ distinguished skillfulness in ways & means and why is it said that their deep and sublime purpose is so difficult to understand? Why is it said that their intention is so difficult to comprehend that students of the noble path and those awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives are unable to fathom it?”**

「今者、世尊何故慇懃稱歎方便 而作是言：『佛所得法甚深難解，有所言說意趣難知，一切 聲聞、辟支佛所不能及。』」

- \* In asking **Why has the Blessed One now so earnestly praised the Buddhas' distinguished skillfulness in ways & means?**, there is a general expression of doubt about this teaching on the dual (provisional and transcendental) nature of the Buddha's knowledge.
- \* In saying **Why is it said that their deep and sublime purpose is so difficult to understand?**, there is the expression of doubts about the transcendental knowledge.
- \* In saying **Why is it said that their intention is so difficult to comprehend that students of the noble path and those awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives are unable to fathom it?**, there is an expression of doubts about the provisional knowledge.
- \* Before, in hearing the words of verse that said **the words of the Buddhas are never inconsistent** (line 18d) and **I will now teach the essence of its transcendental nature** (line 19d), there was the arising of further doubts. How is this so? For a long time, the Buddha taught that the knowledge and discernment attained through the three vehicles of spiritual awakening was the same realization and they were not distinguished differently, but rather it was a matter of whether or not one had completely learned about them or not. Now there is suddenly praise for a dual knowledge of The One Who Has Descended Into This World (Tathāgata, 如來) that does not include these three vehicles, and because of this there are doubts about it.

b. *Then there are doubts about their own ability to understand this dual knowledge:*

**As long as the Buddha taught about there being one kind of emancipation, we thought we had realized it and so attained spiritual freedom. But now we do not understand where this new teaching is going.**

佛說一解脫義，我等亦得此法到於涅槃，而今不知是義所趣。」

This was doubt about their own ability to grasp it. The three vehicles proceed from the essence of the transcendental nature. They thought they too were cultivating the dialectical principle to attain spiritual freedom. However, now the Buddha suddenly spoke about the three vehicles only being a skillful use of ways & means, and that they had not yet understood what the transcendental knowledge really was. Because of this, Śāriputra said they did not understand the track on which this teaching was going. In repudiating reliance on these three tracks as just an illusion, there was the raising of doubts and uncertainties.

b. Requests for a resolution of these doubts:

The words on this are in the form of three requests from Śāriputra to teach more about 'opening the three & revealing the one' and two further expressions of reluctance to do so by the Buddha because more words about it would be to no avail. When including the first time the Buddha declined to speak about it anymore, found in the first section of prose, altogether there are three requests to elaborate on it and three expressions of reluctance to do so. On this, the Master Fáyáo (法瑤)<sup>2</sup> and the Master Dàoshēng (道生)<sup>2</sup>

at the Monastery of the Dragon's Light (Lóngguāng Sì, 龍光寺) both said that:

1. The first expression of reluctance to teach about it any further by the Buddha (in the first section of prose) was because the depth of the dialectical principle is so difficult to comprehend in words.
2. The first request to elaborate on it (including the eleven stanzas of verse found in lines 22a-32d) was about the identity of those seeking certainty about it.
3. The second expression of reluctance to teach about it any further (including the stanza of verse in lines 33a-d) was because the Buddha did not want to just raise more doubts among those with insufficient faith.
4. The second request to teach about it (including the verse found in lines 34a-d) was about seeking certainty about it through (a logical, intellectual) understanding.
5. The third, final expression of reluctance to teach about it any further was to prevent any maligning of this teaching by those with a lesser capacity that would cause them to fall into an evil path.
6. The third, final request to teach about it (including the four stanzas of verse found in lines 35a-38d) was about seeking to benefit those with the sharpest capacity.

Now, the master (Zhìyǐ) says that, because the Buddha understood beforehand that there were three cycles of teachings about this (三周說法) to be revealed in The Lotus Sūtra (in chapters two through nine) that would benefit those with different levels of capacity for understanding it, there were these occasions for declining to speak further of it.

These levels of teaching about it are:

1. Teaching of the purpose (dharma deśanā,, 法說周) for 'opening up the three & revealing the one' in chapter 2 for the disciple of the highest capacity (Śāriputra).
  2. Teaching of metaphors (aupamya, 譬喻周), parables that illustrate the different means of awakening to the meaning of 'opening up the three & revealing the one', for those with an intermediate capacity. This was about the teachings found in chapters 3-6 that would awaken Mahā Maudgalyāyana, Mahā Kāśyapa, Kātyāyana & Subhūti.
  3. Teaching of the mutually dependent relationships (hetu pratyaya, 因緣周) in the transmissions between the Buddha & his disciples in the past, present & future, for those of lesser capacity. This was on the teachings found in chapters 7-9 that would awaken Pūrṇa, Ānanda, Rāhula and many others (as well as the prophecies of enlightenment in chapters 11-12).
1. *(The first expression of reluctance to teach further about it in words is in the first section of prose saying 'no more, there is no use in explaining it any further' and was made because the dialectical principle is so hard to comprehend, and the teaching about the purpose for 'opening the three & revealing the one' is only understood fully by those with the highest capacity).*
  2. *The first request (about the identity of those seeking this certainty), there are two parts: A prose section and eleven stanzas of verse (lines 22a-32d) reiterating it.*
    - a. *The prose section is in two parts.*

1. First there are the expressions of doubts.

Śāriputra, being aware of his own doubts as well as those in the four-fold assembly, then addressed the Buddha, saying:

**"Blessed One! For what reason have you so earnestly praised the Buddhas' distinguished skillfulness in ways and means and said that their very deep and sublime purpose is so difficult to understand? Never before have we heard of such a teaching from the Buddha. Those in the four-fold assembly are now full of doubts."**

爾時舍利弗知四眾心疑，自亦未了，而白佛言：

「世尊！何因何緣慙慙稱歎諸佛第一方便、甚深微妙、難解之法？我自昔來，未曾從佛聞如是說；今者四眾咸皆有疑。」



2. Then there is the making of a request for an explanation.

**Blessed One, please elaborate on this matter and why have you so earnestly praised it as being so deep, sublime and difficult to understand.”**

唯願世尊敷演斯事。世尊何故慙慙稱歎甚深微妙難解之法？

The expressions of doubt were specifically about the nature of the dual (provisional and transcendental) knowledge. After making this first request, there would then be the subsequent requests.

**Wanting to elaborate on this, Śāriputra then spoke in verse, saying:**

爾時舍利弗欲重宣此義，而說偈言：

- b. *The verse section that follows this request consists of eleven stanzas (lines 22a-32d) and is in six parts:*
  1. First, from ‘Great Noble Blessed One, sun of discernment! ...’, there is a half a stanza (lines 22a-b) *reiterating doubts about the transcendental knowledge.*
  2. Next from ‘Without being asked, you have taught about its realization, ...’, there are three stanzas (lines 22c-25b) *reiterating doubts about the provisional knowledge.*
  3. Then, from ‘The most worthy beings, beyond any affliction, and those still seeking spiritual freedom ...’, there are three stanzas (lines 25c-28b) *explaining the doubts among those in the four-fold assembly who are on the three vehicles of spiritual awakening.*
  4. Then, from ‘Among all the students of life’s purpose the Buddha has bestowed upon me the highest teaching of all’, there are one and a half stanzas (lines 28c-29d), *explaining the doubts of Śāriputra.*
  5. Next, from ‘We disciples were born from the mouth of the Buddha, ...’, there is one stanza (lines 30a-d) *explaining the doubts of all the Buddha’s disciples.*
  6. Finally, from ‘There are gods, dragons and the like as numerous as the sands along the River Ganges ...’, there are two stanzas (lines 31a-32d) *expressing these shared doubts and requesting an explanation for the sake of all sentient beings.*
1. First there is a half a stanza reiterating doubts about the transcendental knowledge.

**“Great Noble Blessed One, sun of discernment! // 22a**

**You have always taught about the transcendental nature of life’s purpose. // 22b**

「慧日大聖尊，久乃說是法， // 22a-b

2. Next, there are three stanzas reiterating doubts about the provisional knowledge.

**Without being asked, you have now taught about its realization, // 22c**

**Of its power, its fearlessness and its penetration, // 22d**

**Its resolve of meditation, its emancipation and the like. // 23a**

**With all of these being found in the inconceivable nature of life’s purpose // 23b**

**Realized at the site of enlightenment. // 23c**

**No one has even been able to ask about this before. // 23d**

**We have found all this difficult to fathom, //24a**

**And have even been unable to ask about it. // 24b**

**Without being asked, you have now told us about it, // 24c**

Praising this path you have walked. // 24d  
 Most sublime indeed is the knowledge and discernment. // 25a  
 That has been realized by the Buddhas. // 25b  
 自說得如是， 力無畏三昧、 // 22c-d  
 禪定解脫等， 不可思議法。 // 23a-b  
 道場所得法， 無能發問者； // 23c-d  
 我意難可測， 亦無能問者。 // 24a-b  
 無問而自說， 稱歎所行道， // 24c-d  
 智慧甚微妙， 諸佛之所得。 // 25a-b

3. Then there are three stanzas explaining the doubts among those in the four-fold assembly who are on the three vehicles of spiritual awakening.

The most worthy beings, those beyond any affliction, // 25c  
 And those who are still seeking spiritual freedom, // 25d  
 Have all now fallen into networks of doubt. // 26a  
 Why has the Buddha now taught about this? // 26b  
 Those seeking a spiritual awakening to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives, //26c  
 The monks and the nuns, // 26d  
 The gods, the dragons and the demons, // 27a  
 The gandharvas and the other spirits of nature, // 27b  
 Are all now glancing at one another in confusion. // 27c  
 Looking up to the most blessed of all those with two feet, they ask: // 27d  
 How can this be so? // 28a  
 We pray that the Buddha will explain this so that we may understand. // 28b  
 無漏諸羅漢， 及求涅槃者， // 25c-d  
 今皆墮疑網， 佛何故說是？ // 26a-b  
 其求緣覺者， 比丘比丘尼， // 26c-d  
 諸天龍鬼神， 及乾闥婆等， // 27a-b  
 相視懷猶豫， 瞻仰兩足尊， // 27c-d  
 是事為云何， 願佛為解說。 // 28a-b

The first line (25c) is about the most worthy beings (arhats, 阿羅漢) while the last two stanzas (26c-28b) includes those awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 緣覺) **and those who** in the meantime **are still seeking spiritual freedom**. This latter one refers to bodhisattvas who are practicing the six kinds of spiritual deliverance. How can we know this to be so? Before, in line 20d, the Buddha said of them ‘you will ultimately attain spiritual freedom’. In saying **and those who are still seeking spiritual freedom**, it is also including bodhisattvas, those who not only seek their own spiritual freedom but are also seeking that of others as well. This is the way that bodhisattvas are distinguished from those who are limited to the two lesser vehicles of spiritual awakening.

4. Then there are one and a half stanzas explaining the doubts of Śāriputra.

Among all the students of life's purpose // 28c  
The Buddha has bestowed upon me the highest teaching of all. // 28d  
But even with my knowledge // 29a  
There is doubt and confusion and I do not fully understand it. // 29b  
Is this the ultimate purpose // 29c  
Or just another preliminary path to be practiced? // 29d  
於諸聲聞眾， 佛說我第一。 // 28c-d  
我今自於智， 疑惑不能了， // 29a-b  
為是究竟法？ 為是所行道？ // 29c-d

5. Next, there is one stanza explaining the doubts of all the Buddha's disciples.

We disciples were born from the mouth of the Buddha // 30a  
With our palms pressed together and looking up with reverence. // 30b  
We pray that, through the sublime sound of your voice, // 30c  
You will now teach us about this transcendental nature. // 30d  
佛口所生子， 合掌瞻仰待， // 30a-b  
願出微妙音， 時為如實說。 // 30c-d

6. Finally, there are two stanzas that generally express the shared doubts of all and requesting an explanation for the sake of all sentient beings.

There are gods, dragons and the like // 31a  
As numerous as the sands along the River Ganges, // 31b  
There are bodhisattvas seeking out the Buddha // 31c  
In this great assembly, eighty thousand in number, // 31d  
And there are countless millions of nations // 32a  
With kings turning the wheel of life's purpose. // 32b  
All of us have our palms pressed together with reverent hearts, // 32c  
Aspiring to hear about perfect endowment with enlightenment." // 32d  
諸天龍神等， 其數如恒沙， // 31a-b  
求佛諸菩薩， 大數有八萬， // 31c-d  
又諸萬億國， 轉輪聖王至， // 32a-b  
合掌以敬心， 欲聞具足道。 ] // 32c-d

Through this prose and verse, one may examine and deliberate on the meaning here, just like the verse that reiterated the first section of prose before. Because of this, it is not necessary to explain it any further. Going forward, we will just summarize the meaning and not trouble with parsing or interpreting the words on it.

Next, beginning with 'The Buddha then addressed Śāriputra, saying ...' there will be a second and third expression of reluctance by the Buddha to teach any further about this in words as well as a second and third request from Śāriputra to dispel doubts about this teaching by elaborating on it, as described in the words that follow.



3. *The Buddha's second expression of reluctance to teach further about it (said to be made because the Buddha did not want to just raise more doubts among those with insufficient faith, and because an illustration of the teaching about 'opening the three & revealing the one' can only be understood by the those with a higher or intermediate capacity for it).*

The Buddha then addressed Śāriputra, saying:

"No more, no more! There is no use in explaining this any further. If I did, all those in the worlds of heaven and humanity would be bewildered with doubts."

爾時佛告舍利弗：

「止，止！不須復說。若說是事，一切世間諸天及人皆當驚疑。」

4. *The second request for an elaboration (said to be seeking a certainty about it through a logical, intellectual understanding).*

Then Śāriputra addressed the Buddha again:

"Blessed One, please, we pray that you explain this to us because there are countless hundreds, thousands and millions of sentient beings in this assembly endowed with knowledge, discernment and sharp spiritual capacities who have encountered the Buddhas, heard their teachings and been able to accept them with reverence and faith."

Śāriputra then spoke again in verse to reiterate this:

"Master of life's purpose, most Blessed One! // 33a

I pray that you will now explain this without delay! // 33b

In this assembly there are countless sentient beings // 33c

Who will faithfully accept your words." // 33d

舍利弗重白佛言：

「世尊，唯願說之，唯願說之！所以者何？是會無數百千萬億阿僧祇眾生，曾見諸佛，諸根猛利，智慧明了，聞佛所說，則能敬信。」

爾時舍利弗欲重宣此義，而說偈言：

「法王無上尊，唯說願勿慮。 // 33a-b

是會無量眾，有能敬信者。」 // 33c-d

5. *The Buddha's third and final expression of reluctance to teach further about it (said to be made #1 to prevent any maligning of this teaching by those with a lack of capacity for faith that would cause them to fall into an evil path & #2 because a teaching about the application of 'opening the three & revealing the one' between the Buddha and sentient beings can only be understood by those with some capacity for it (whether higher, intermediate or lower):*

The Buddha then again tried to dissuade Śāriputra, saying:

"If I explain this, all the gods in heaven, humans on earth and titans of ego in this world will be bewildered with doubts, and arrogant monks will fall into a great pit of suffering."

The Blessed One spoke further in verse, saying:

"No more, no more! There is no use in explaining this further. // 34a

The purpose that I have realized is sublime and unfathomable. // 34b

Though the arrogant may hear about it, // 34c

They will most certainly never listen to it with the reverence of faith." // 34d

佛復止舍利弗：

「若說是事，一切世間天、人、阿修羅皆當驚疑，增上慢比丘將墜於大坑。」

爾時世尊重說偈言：

「止止不須說， 我法妙難思。 // 34a-b  
諸增上慢者， 聞必不敬信。」 // 34c-d

6. *The third and final request for an elaboration (said to be made to benefit those with the sharpest capacity):*

Once more Śāriputra addressed the Buddha, saying:

“Blessed One! Please, we implore you to explain it! In this assembly there are hundreds, thousands and millions like me who have been influenced and transformed by the Buddhas over past generations. Such people as these will certainly be able to faithfully accept it, and they will abundantly benefit from understanding it during their long night of resting in peace.”

Śāriputra then spoke these stanzas of verse to elaborate on what he meant:

“Blessed one, supreme among those on two feet! // 35a  
I pray you teach about the ultimate nature of life’s purpose // 35b  
I am a senior disciple of the Buddha. // 35c  
Please further distinguish this for me. // 35d  
There are countless others in this assembly // 36a  
Who will be able to faithfully accept it // 36b  
Because, over former generations, // 36c  
The Buddha has taught and spiritually transformed them. // 36d  
With palms pressed together and singleness of mind, // 37a  
They all long to receive the words of the Buddha. // 37b  
There are twelve hundred worthy beings (arhats) here // 37c  
Among the others who seek to understand it. // 37d  
We pray that for the sake of all of us // 38a  
You will further distinguish this. // 38b  
When we hear about this sublime purpose // 38c  
It will bring great joy to all of us.” // 38d

爾時舍利弗重白佛言：

「世尊！唯願說之，唯願說之！今此會中，如我等比百千萬億，世世已曾從佛受化。如此人等，必能敬信，長夜安隱，多所饒益。」

爾時舍利弗欲重宣此義，而說偈言：

「無上兩足尊， 願說第一法， // 35a-b  
我為佛長子， 唯垂分別說。 // 35c-d  
是會無量眾， 能敬信此法， // 36a-b  
佛已曾世世， 教化如是等， // 36c-d  
皆一心合掌， 欲聽受佛語。 // 37a-b  
我等千二百， 及餘求佛者， // 37c-d  
願為此眾故， 唯垂分別說。 // 38a-b  
是等聞此法， 則生大歡喜。」 // 38c-d