

# 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

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**Part #5:**

**Zhìyǐ's introduction to the elaboration about  
'opening up the three & revealing the one'**

**On the different levels of this teaching for those  
with different capacities for understanding it**

**From Volume 4 of  
The Words & Passages of The Lotus Sūtra  
(C. Fahuá Wénjù, J. Hokke Mongu, 法華文句)**

## Part #5: Zhìyǐ's introduction to the elaboration - on the different levels of this teaching for those with different capacities for understanding it

### An Introduction

Before continuing with a line-by-line commentary of the text in this second chapter, Zhìyǐ provides an introduction to this teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' that is the subject of the first half of this sūtra. In this introduction, Zhìyǐ offers an explanation of the three levels in this teaching, made for those with different capacities for understanding it (the subject of chapters 2 - 9):

- #1 On the (timeless) purpose for the teaching (dharma deśanā, 法說周) about 'opening up the three & revealing the one': This begins in chapter two and concludes early in chapter three On the Parable of the Burning House, with the assembly's rejoicing about the prophecy of enlightenment for Śāriputra, his disciple with the greatest capacity for understanding it.
- #2 On metaphors, parables that illustrate the meaning of this teaching (aupamya, 譬喻周): This begins early in chapter three with the telling of the parable about the burning house and concludes at the end of chapter six On Bestowing Prophecies of Enlightenment. This was addressed to the disciples Subhūti, Mahā Kātyāyana, Mahā Kāśyapa & Mahā Maudgalyāyana, the students with an intermediate capacity for understanding this teaching.
- #3 On the mutually dependent causes & conditions (hetu pratyaya, 因緣周) of 'opening the three & revealing the one' in the transmission of enlightenment between the Buddha & his disciples (teachers & students) through past lineages and future prophecies of enlightenment over space (the ten directions) and time (the past, present & future): This is found from chapter seven On the Parable of the Magic Fortress to the end of chapter nine On Bestowing Prophecies on Trainees and Adepts, and was addressed to the students with a lower capacity for understanding this teaching.

In terms of the title of the sūtra:

- #1 The sublime purpose (Myōhō, 妙法) refers to the (timeless) purpose for this teaching (法說周),
  - #2 The lotus blossom (Renge, 蓮華) refers to the illustration of this purpose (譬喻周) &
  - #3 The sūtra (Kyō, 經) refers to the causes & conditions in the transmission of this purpose (因緣周).
- In the sūtra, these three levels of this teaching will each be explained in four parts:

- a. The teaching itself (正法)
- b. Disciples being led to an understanding of it in accordance with their capacity (領解)
- c. Stories about their realizations (述成) through acceptance with faith and the elimination of doubt
- d. Prophecies of enlightenment (授記) for those who attain this realization.

Before explaining the text in the next prose section of this chapter, Zhìyǐ's commentary here first describes the nature of these three different cycles of teachings and the different capacities for understanding them. These descriptions are made in ten different ways:

1. Whether this teaching about 'opening the three & revealing the one' should be regarded generally as one or distinguished as three (because of these three different levels in its understanding)
2. Whether or not this teaching was made specifically for students of life's purpose (śrāvakas, 聲聞)
3. Whether (emotional and cognitive) confusion about it is strong or weak
4. Whether or not there is a capacity to transform the spiritual foundation (āśraya parāvṛtti, 轉依) of the consciousness (vijñāna, 識) of sentient beings into transcendental knowledge (jñāna, 智)
5. Whether or not there is the capacity for spiritually awakening (bodhi, 悟) to the (afflicted) conditions of sentient existence
6. Whether or not there is a propensity for a detached, intellectual understanding (vimukti, 解脫) of this teaching
7. Whether or not there is attainment of a prophecy of enlightenment (vyākaraṇa, 得記)
8. Whether spiritual awakening is deep or shallow
9. Whether the benefits attained (upakāra, 利益) are provisional or transcendental
10. Whether there is a need to wait for a right time or opportunity (samaya apekṣā, 待時) to teach of it

## Part #5: Zhìyǐ's introduction to the elaboration about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' - on the different levels of this teaching for those with different capacities for understanding it

The text of Zhìyǐ's commentary on this from the beginning of volume four in  
The Words & Passages of The Lotus Sūtra

Beginning with **At this time the Blessed One addressed Śāriputra, saying 'You have made three earnest requests that I elaborate on this teaching. How can I not do so?'**, there is an elaboration on the different levels of capacity for understanding the teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one'. In all, there are more than seven and a half chapters on this (from here early in chapter two through the end of chapter nine). The words on it are in three parts, known as 'the three cycles of teachings' (三周):

- #1 For those with the highest capacity there are direct teachings about the (timeless) purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one' (dharma deśanā, 法說周).
- #2 For those with an intermediate capacity there are teachings about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' through metaphors, parables that illustrate it (aupamyā, 譬說周).
- #3 For those with a lesser capacity there are teachings explaining the mutually dependent causes & conditions (hetu pratyaya, 因緣周) of 'opening up the three & revealing the one' through the transmission of enlightenment between Buddhas (as teachers) & sentient beings (as students) in the form of past lineages and future prophecies (over space and time).

These are also said to be understood in terms of:

- #1 Its essential principle (理), the dialectical principle of the noble path
- #2 The work that needs to be done (事), the circumstances of sentient existence at hand
- #3 Applications of this principle through the work of putting it into actual practice (行).

In The Longer Version of the Sūtra on the Deliverance of Transcendental Discernment (Mahā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, 摩訶般若波羅蜜多經), this is explained as 'the three levels of capacity' (trīṇi indriyāṇi, 三根) that are found in the recipients of the teaching (those with higher, intermediate & lower capacities for it). Now the three cycles on this teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' will be further explained in ten ways:

1. Whether this teaching is regarded generally as one or distinguished as three (because of these three different levels in its understanding)
2. Whether or not this teaching was just made for students of life's purpose (śrāvakas, 聲聞)
3. Whether confusions about it are strong or weak
4. Whether or not there is the capacity (indriya, 根) for transforming the spiritual foundation (āśraya parāvṛtti, 轉依) found in the consciousness (vijñāna, 識) of sentient beings and turning it into transcendental knowledge (jñāna, 智) of life's purpose.
5. Whether or not there is the capacity for spiritual awakening (bodhi, 悟)
6. Whether or not there is a propensity for an intellectual understanding of it (vimukti, 解脫)
7. Whether or not there is attainment of a prophecy of enlightenment (vyākaraṇa, 得記)
8. Whether spiritual awakening is deep or shallow
9. Whether the benefits attained (upakāra, 利益) are provisional or transcendental
10. Whether or not there is a need to wait for the right time or opportunity (samayāpekṣā, 待時) to teach of it

1. On whether the teaching is regarded generally as one or distinguished as three (有通有別):

- a. Chapter two and the beginning of chapter three are specifically on the first cycle of *teachings about the purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one'*, but generally it is endowed with all three cycles. For example:
- \* In the second chapter On Skillfulness in Ways & Means, this teaching is said to be:  
"As rare as the blossoming of udumbara flower which appears only once (every three thousand years)".  
This is *teaching about it through the making of an illustration*.
  - \* And lines 66c-67b of verse in this chapter say:  
"If I encountered sentient beings  
And only taught them about the ultimate end of the path to enlightenment,  
(Those without knowledge of its purpose would have distress and disorder.  
Confused and perplexed, they would not accept this teaching with faith)."  
This is *on the mutually dependent causes & conditions (of 'opening the three & revealing the one' in the transmission of enlightenment between the Buddha & sentient beings)*.
- b. The rest of the third chapter and up to the end of the sixth is specifically about the second, intermediate cycle of *teachings about 'opening up the three & revealing the one' through metaphors, parables that illustrate it*, but this part is also generally endowed with all three cycles of teachings. For example:
- \* In the third chapter On the Parable of the Burning House, it is said:  
"Before, did I not speak about ... all of these (provisional) teachings (really being) made just to spiritually transform bodhisattvas?"  
And in the conclusion about the illustration of these three provisional teachings just being made for the sake of one vehicle of enlightenment there is *teaching about the purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one'*.
  - \* The third chapter On the Parable of the Burning House also says:  
"There have been twenty million Buddhas in the past. We all taught you for the sake of this (one) supreme path of awakening. (Because you have followed our instructions during this long night in the darkness of ignorance and we have led and guided you through the skillful use of ways and means, you have now been spiritually reborn through the transcendental nature of our purpose.)"  
This is *a teaching about the mutually dependent causes & conditions (of 'opening the three & revealing the one' in the transmission of enlightenment between the Buddhas and sentient beings) in the past*. If one reasons these words belong to the cycle of teachings about its timeless purpose, one should also consider the words in the verse of this same third chapter that say:  
"(At this time the master of the house  
Was just outside its front door,  
And heard a person say:  
'Your children,  
While playing their games,  
Entered into this (burning) house.  
Being young and unaware of the danger,  
Their minds have just been focused on their amusements.')  
Hearing this, the master was alarmed  
And entered into the burning house  
To save them from the danger of the fire."  
This is also *on the mutually dependent causes & conditions (of 'opening up the three & revealing the one' in transmitting enlightenment between the Buddha & sentient beings)*.



- c. The seventh through the ninth chapter are specifically on the last cycle of *teachings about the mutually dependent causes & conditions of ‘opening the three & revealing the one’ in the transmission of enlightenment between the Buddha and sentient beings over space and time*, but they too are generally endowed with all three cycles of these teachings. For example:
- \* In the seventh chapter On the Magic Fortress, it says:  
 ‘When those in the assembly enter into nirvāṇa, they will penetrate the knowledge of the Buddhas if their minds are pure (of affliction).’  
 This is a *teaching about the timeless purpose for opening up the three & revealing the one*.
  - \* This seventh chapter also says:  
 “They have a single guide (that leads them to and then beyond the magic fortress).’  
 This is *teaching about it through the making of an illustration*.

And so, in making these three cycles of teachings, whether distinguishing them as different from one another or summarizing them generally as one, or seeing one as the main teaching and the other two as auxiliary teachings, it is desirable to make the words and terms about them as concise as possible, with each of these three rounds of teachings being seen as distinguishable from one another but all in accordance with the same basic intent.

Question: With regards to these three cycles of teachings being in accordance with the three different levels of personal capacity (found in the recipients of them), should each cycle of teachings be regarded as generally endowed with all three cycles of teachings or should each of the teachings be regarded as being distinctly made for those with these three different levels of capacity?

Answer: There is no problem in adapting the teaching about the timeless purpose for ‘opening up the three & revealing the one’ for those of higher, intermediate or lower capacities. This can also be said about the other two cycles of teachings primarily made for those with intermediate or lower levels of capacity. Whether it is viewed as a main teaching supported by two auxiliary teachings or a summary teaching with elaborations, the teaching about the timeless purpose for ‘opening up the three & revealing the one’ was *primarily* made for people with a higher capacity. The other two cycles of teachings are also like this in being *primarily* made for those of intermediate and lower capacities.

## 2. On whether or not the teaching about ‘opening the three & revealing the one’ was just made for students of life’s purpose (śrāvakas, 聲聞), also called ‘trainees’ (śaikṣas, 有學):

- \* Fǎyún, (法雲, 467-529) at the Monastery ‘House of Light’ (Guāngzhái Sì, 光宅寺)<sup>2</sup> determined that the practices of students (śrāvakas, 聲聞) are transcendental. If it is said that they are not transcendental, why would it ever be said that there was a purpose for provisional practices to exist?
- \* Zhìzàng (智藏, 458–522) at the Monastery ‘Revealing Virtue’ (Kāishàn Sì, 開善寺)<sup>2</sup> understood the practices of students to not be transcendental, citing The Sūtra on the Lion’s Roar of Princess Śrīmālā (Śrīmālā Devī Siṃha Nāda Sūtra (勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經) which says ‘the reality of transcendence (nirodha satya, 滅諦)<sup>44</sup> goes beyond any object, so the first action of those on the three provisional vehicles is to get beyond any delusions about the transcendental nature of their purpose.’ Even in the external beliefs of ordinary beings, it can be theoretically understood that there is but one transcendental vehicle of spiritual awakening, so why have attachments to the lesser fruits of realization to be attained by distinguishing the two lesser vehicles?

This sūtra explains that there is a transcendental nature of provisional knowledge, but the two schools cited above had biased attachments about this that contradicted this sūtra and didn't convey its true meaning (that is in accordance with the dialectical principle):

- a. If it is determined that *the provisional knowledge is transcendental*, why does the sūtra speak about the transcendental knowledge not being for these students (śrāvakas, 聲聞) and only spiritually transforming bodhisattvas?
- b. If it is determined that *the provisional knowledge is not transcendental*, who is it who penetrates its illusory nature upon entering into the magic fortress?<sup>9d</sup>
- c. If this illusory nature of the three (different vehicles) may also be understood, how can *this provisional knowledge then draw sentient beings to the transcendental knowledge*?
  1. If one speaks about the provisional knowledge existing in order to draw them to the transcendental knowledge, there should be perfect enlightenment attained through the teachings found in the doctrine on the three baskets,<sup>12</sup> and the provisional knowledge attained through these teachings should be enough to draw them into this perfect enlightenment.
  2. If one speaks about the provisional knowledge not being transcendental and only resulting in a provisional kind of enlightenment, what is the purpose of allowing there to be such an incorrect knowledge for students that is provisional but not transcendental?

With none of these being a correct understanding, there is still a knowledge that severs the inner sphere of affliction that is said to be transcendental yet also provisional. Where is this enlightenment that severs the inner sphere of affliction yet is a provisional enlightenment that ultimately leads to perfect universal enlightenment? Now it is explained that one must not have biased attachments about whether this knowledge is provisional or transcendental, whether (as illustrated in the fourth chapter of this sūtra) it is from the point of view of the transcendental knowledge of the elder who observed that the stranger was his own son and not just a hired worker only there to serve his needs, or the weak capacity of the poor young man who regarded himself merely as a hired worker needing to earn his reward entirely through his own (provisional) efforts and not an heir to the rich man's fortune.<sup>9b</sup>

\* The Discourse on The Lotus Sūtra attributed to Vasubandhu spoke of there being four kinds of students of life's purpose:

1. Those who are stuck on the lesser vehicle
  2. Those who are arrogant
  3. Those who are still flinching, not yet fully facing that which is great
  4. Those who respond by spiritually transforming (fellow) sentient beings
- The first two are not yet mature enough and so are not bestowed with a prophecy of their own enlightenment while the last two are bestowed with such a prophecy.

\* When depending on the Master's Zhiyi's explanation of The Lotus Sūtra, it should be understood that there are five kinds of students of life's purpose (śrāvakas, 聲聞):

1. Those who forever train on the lesser vehicle: Upon becoming mature enough in this world, they hear the doctrine about the lesser vehicle that is focused on attaining one's own freedom from affliction and realizing its (four) fruits.<sup>51</sup> This is the same as those described in Vasubandhu's Discourse as *students stuck on the lesser vehicle*.
2. Bodhisattvas who have accrued merit through cultivating the noble path over many ages: This refers to those who lose interest in the rounds of life and death in this world over time but are still turning away from a greater sense of life's purpose and still focused on a purpose that is small (their own freedom from affliction). The Longer Version of the Sūtra on the Deliverance of Transcendental Discernment calls this 'distinguishing differences in the capacity for virtue'. The Buddha also taught about

- the realizations on this path being a lesser but parallel doctrine, focused only on the fruits attained through severing attachments to affliction. However, by being attached to the fruits from these teachings, there is in effect a turning away from life's greater purpose, an escape from one's greater responsibility in this world. Although one may not yet be forever free from habitual attachments to the short-sighted characteristics of the lesser vehicle, upon becoming free from afflictions it is easier for them to awaken to the transcendental nature of life's purpose through understanding its dialectical principle. This is like the teaching in Vasubandhu's Discourse about *students who are still flinching, not yet fully facing the greater awakening*.
3. Those appearing to be students of life's purpose on the outside while concealing their greater inner virtues: Buddhas & bodhisattvas induce others this way to accept and enter the greater path. This is like the teaching in Vasubandhu's Discourse about *those who spiritually transform sentient beings by making them attain the lesser vehicle of freedom from affliction*.
  4. Those not yet attaining real spiritual transformation but reasoning that they have: When students see that both transcendental and provisional knowledge are able to provide release from the sufferings of life & death (saṃsāra, 生死), there is rejoicing and contact with spiritual freedom (nirvāṇa, 涅槃) as well as the cultivation of moral commitment (śīla, 戒), mental resolve (samādhi, 定) and transcendental discernment of purpose (prajñā, 慧). There are some students who attain a weak level of realization resembling this resolve and discernment that does not yet constitute the real (transcendental) fruits of spiritual transformation, yet they claim to have attained it when they have not really done so. These are what Vasubandhu's Discourse called *arrogant students*.
  5. Students of the greater vehicle make all sentient beings hear about the transcendental knowledge of life's purpose through hearing the voice of the Buddha.
    - \* If, through attachments to provisional knowledge, one is still focused on lesser purposes and turning away from the greater awakening, one is said to still be a student on the lesser vehicle of the noble path.
    - \* If one gets beyond the ashes of detachment from long abiding in the magic fortress through the dialectical principle of the greater vehicle, one proceeds to the treasure trove of the greater vehicle at the conclusion of the noble path.<sup>9d</sup>

With transcendental knowledge really being like this, it follows that it is not just provisional and so not just for students on the lesser vehicle. Those who are arrogant have not yet entered into this level of standing and are without this transcendental knowledge. Because they do not help in the spiritual transformation of fellow sentient beings, they are also really without the provisional knowledge. If one grasps this idea and is without this indifference, how can there be any argument about it? And with regards to there being the existence or non-existence of 'students' of the greater vehicle:

    - \* If one's provisional knowledge spiritually transforms fellow sentient beings by only revealing lesser purposes on the outside while still concealing the virtues of the greater vehicle on the inside, one will not be helping to produce more students of the greater vehicle.
    - \* If through one's own practice one inspires a manifestation of life's greater purpose and reveals its source (the transcendental vow of the Buddha's spiritual life working through one's own life), it follows that there will be the producing of more students of the greater vehicle.

Now we open up the true intent behind the purpose for ‘opening up the three & revealing the one’. For students who are still focused on a lesser vehicle or still turning away from the greater vehicle to become students of the greater vehicle, they must be able to *spiritually transform fellow sentient beings* through the establishment of their own practice. If one grasps this, one will penetrate the idea of the existence or non-existence of ‘students’ of the greater vehicle.

### 3. On whether (emotional & cognitive) confusions about it are strong or weak (惑有厚薄):

The Master Fǎyáo (法瑤)<sup>2</sup> said:

“Those with the three different capacities attain the fruits of spiritual awakening after attaining an enduring observation of the transcendental nature of life’s purpose that neither arises nor perishes and goes beyond their own lives in this world (anutpattika dharma kṣānti, 無生法忍).<sup>79</sup> Through the dialectical principle that neither arises nor perishes, there is a sense of unity that appears in their meditations. In relating to the distinctions found in the first three doctrines,<sup>12</sup> there are inevitable differences about them causing confusions (the obstacles of emotional disturbance & cognitive dissonance)<sup>80</sup> that obscure this unity of principle. With these doctrines being distinguished in three different ways, how can there be a knowledge of the principle underlying them that is ever one and the same? This leads to confusion about there being such a unity of principle in these three different doctrines. With the principle ever one and the same, how can it be separated into different doctrines? In going back and forth between the unity of the principle and the different distinctions of the doctrines, there is a cognitive dissonance between the principle and the doctrines.

- \* To clear up confusions between the principle and the doctrines in the feelings of those with a *higher capacity*, there is an awakening in accord with their feelings upon hearing *the teaching about the (timeless) purpose for opening up the three & revealing the one*.
- \* To clear up the confusions between the principle and the doctrines in the feelings of those with a *lower capacity*, there is awakening upon hearing the teaching about *the causes & conditions of transmitting this purpose over space & time through the past lineages and future prophecies between teachers (Buddhas) and students (disciples)*, without citing the three different vehicles. Because this corrects their attachments about what they have heard about there being three separate doctrines, it can be understood.
- \* For those with an *intermediate capacity* who are stuck between these two extremes and have not awakened upon hearing the teaching about its true purpose, there is *the teaching of illustrations* as a means for them to comprehend it (intuitively).”

Now we say that the correct explanation about the teaching on these three different kinds of capacity is not really like this explanation by Fǎyáo. Why do people really go back and forth between the unifying principle and the different doctrines?

- a. If one goes back and settles on a lesser vehicle teaching, the cognitive dissonance between the principle and doctrine will be based on doubts and confusions that have not yet been resolved, and one will still not have even begun to attain the fruits that come from severing attachments to this lesser vehicle.
- b. If one goes back and settles on the greater vehicle, the cognitive dissonance between the principle and the doctrine will be based on the greater vehicle being somehow completely detached from a lesser vehicle. Why would one speak of there being any lesser vehicle at all to have gone back and forth about?
- c. Whether the greater vehicle is confused with a lesser vehicle or a lesser vehicle is confused with the greater vehicle, how does one suddenly go back and forth about the

kinds of skillful means that have never before been dismissed, such as (for example) observing the inhalation and exhalation of the breath (prior to entry into meditation)? In going back and forth between the unifying principle and the different doctrines like this, there has been the arising of doubts and attachments. If one has had these doubts and attachments, they will be resolved upon hearing and comprehending the teaching about 'opening up the three & revealing the one'. How could there still be these concerns and the arousing of these doubts after hearing this explanation? And so, because of the doubts they cause, these three understandings that keep going back and forth are no longer used.

Now we will discuss spiritual capacities being sharp or dull. In generally discussing the capacities of those on the greater vehicle (mahāyāna, 大乘), there are confusions about them being strong or weak. In terms of distinguishing these capacities and confusions, it can more specifically be said that there are four variables:

- a. Confusions are light and capacities are sharp
  - b. Confusions are heavy but capacities are sharp
  - c. Confusions are light but capacities are dull
  - d. Confusions are heavy and capacities are dull
- a. If confusions are light and capacities are sharp, one will awaken upon first hearing the teaching about the timeless purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one'.
  - b. If confusions are heavy but capacities are sharp, this awakening will dawn upon hearing the second cycle of teachings that illustrate this purpose.
  - c. If confusions are light but capacities are dull, there will be an awakening about this upon hearing the third cycle of teachings explaining the mutually dependent causes & conditions that exist between the Buddha (as the teacher) and sentient beings (as the students) in the transmission of enlightenment over space and time.
  - d. If confusions are heavy and capacities are dull, one will be unable to awaken after hearing these three cycles of teachings. In this case, the Buddha 'speaks no more', as the conditions of attachment to confusions are too numerous.

Some may regard the first two categories above with sharp capacities to be the same as that previously described 'having a higher capacity' while others regard the second and third as being intermediate and lower capacities, respectively. And these three cycles of teachings eliminate the three layers of ignorance (三重無明) that shroud and prevent one from abiding in the dialectical principle of the middle way:

- a. When there is *the first, teaching about the timeless purpose for opening up the three & revealing the one*, people with a higher capacity eliminate all three layers of ignorance, open up the Buddha's knowledge and vision, enter into ranks of the bodhisattvas and attain a prophecy of their enlightenment, all at the same time. Those with an intermediate capacity sever two layers of ignorance while those with a lower capacity only sever one.
- b. Next, when there is *the teaching about it though the making of illustrations*, those with an intermediate capacity sever and eliminate the third layer of ignorance, open up the Buddha's knowledge and vision, enter into the rank of the bodhisattvas and attain a prophecy of their enlightenment. Those with a lower capacity make progress by eliminating the second layer of ignorance.
- c. Then, when there is *the teaching about the mutually dependent causes & conditions between the Buddha (as the teacher) and sentient beings (as the disciples)*, those with a lower capacity sever and eliminate the third layer of ignorance, open up the Buddha's knowledge and vision and enter into the ranks of the bodhisattvas.

This can be seen as being analogous to the sixteen sequential states of mind<sup>90</sup> penetrated through meditation on the four truths on the lesser vehicle of spiritual awakening. There is



not yet said to be a full attainment of the first fruit of spiritual awakening as a stream-enterer (srotāpanna, 須陀洹)<sup>51</sup> until all sixteen have been fully realized. Only then is there said to be attainment of this first fruit.

**4. On whether or not there is the capacity (indriya, 根) for transforming the spiritual foundation (āśraya parāvṛtti, 轉依) found in the consciousness (vijñāna, 識) of sentient beings and turning it into transcendental knowledge (jñāna, 智):**

Long ago it was said:

- \* When those with a higher capacity first hear *the teaching on the timeless purpose for opening up the three & revealing the one*, there is a spiritual awakening. When those with an intermediate capacity hear of it, they become like those with a higher capacity. When those with a lower capacity hear of it, they become like those with an intermediate capacity.
- \* Upon hearing *the teaching of an illustration about it*, those who first had an intermediate capacity and then a higher capacity now attain this spiritual awakening, while those who first had a lower capacity (then an intermediate one) now attain a higher one.
- \* Finally, upon hearing *a teaching about the mutually dependent causes & conditions between the Buddha and his disciples*, those who had first possessed a lower capacity but by now had become the same as those with a higher capacity then attained spiritual awakening.'

Now we must refute the above misunderstanding:

If they were already transformed from lower into higher capacities like this, by the time they reached the teaching about the mutually dependent causes and conditions between teacher and disciple, they should have all already attained a higher capacity. With them all equally having such a sharp capacity, how could one any longer speak of the third cycle of teachings on the mutually dependent causes & conditions between teacher and disciple being for those with a dull capacity (since none were left)? Whether they were all said to have already been transformed to a higher capacity or attained spiritual awakening, or whether they were said to still have a dull capacity, it follows that this explanation about the transformation of spiritual capacity through these three cycles of teachings would not make any sense.

For example, it is said that Śāriputra attained spiritual transformation after hearing the first, timeless teaching while Mahā Maudgalyāyana only did so after hearing the second cycle of teachings through metaphors. If they both then equally had sharp capacities, it follows there should no longer be any difference in their capacities. If they were still said to have relatively sharp or dull capacities, this explanation of the transformation of their spiritual capacities would not make any sense. The minds and spiritual capacities of sentient beings are not fixed or static. Upon encountering evil conditions, sharp capacities are turned dull while, on encountering virtuous conditions, dull capacities are turned sharp. Upon encountering the Buddha and hearing about the nature of life's purpose in the past:

- \* Both lower and intermediate capacities turned into higher ones upon hearing *the teaching about the timeless purpose for opening up the three & revealing the one*, and then there was the attainment of spiritual awakening.
- \* Lower capacities were transformed into intermediate capacities upon hearing *a teaching that illustrates this purpose*, and there was then the attainment of a (detached, logical and intellectual) understanding about it.
- \* For those with a lower capacity who were still not spiritually transformed, *all three cycles of teachings* had to be completed.

Like this, there is an explanation of the capacities for spiritual transformation that is not the same as that made long ago. This can be compared to three different kinds of axes being used to cut down a tree. The sharp axe fells it in a single blow, the intermediate one does so

in two and the dull one in three. The meaning of sharp and dull capacities is not lost in this explanation, but the place where the tree is severed is always the same.

Question: Upon first abiding on the bodhisattva path, do those with these three capacities still have the differences of being sharp and dull, or not?

Answer: The essential nature of transcendental cultivation on the noble path (bhāvanā mārga, 修道) is revealed through the overcoming of these differences.

Question: If this is so, upon first abiding on it and attaining a higher spiritual capacity, would further cultivation of it result in any differences of capacity?

Answer: When people are of equal standing, they are no longer ahead or behind one another. Would one rather there were still such differences between them after their capacities are blended through the essential nature of transcendental cultivation?

#### 5. On whether or not there is capacity for spiritual awakening (bodhi, 根):

Question: In the sūtras, there is much said about bodhisattvas having a higher capacity, those awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence (pratyaya buddhas, 緣覺) having an intermediate capacity and students of the noble path (śrāvakas, 聲聞) having a lower capacity. If bodhisattvas are said to have a higher capacity for awakening to the transcendental nature of life's purpose through the teaching on the timeless purpose for opening the three & revealing the one, at the same time should not those awakened to the conditions of sentient existence attain this higher awakening through illustrations of it and students of the noble path do so through teachings about the mutually dependent causes and conditions of transmission between the Buddha and sentient beings?

Answer: In fact, in a cursory analysis of these three capacities in this sūtra, the meaning of those attaining a higher spiritual awakening to it and those attaining a (detached, logical and intellectual) understanding of it are in fact somewhat ambiguous. In this part of the sūtra about the three cycles of teachings, only students of the noble path are explicitly mentioned as attaining this understanding about the meaning of 'opening the three & revealing the one', not those spiritually awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives. Those awakened to these conditions are also not mentioned per se as 'those with an intermediate capacity'. Before, it was said that the Buddha only appeared in the world among students of life's purpose (śrāvakas, 聲聞), adapting to their capacities so they could attain enlightenment, without any mention of those awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives. However, because the request for the teaching made by Śāriputra in the verse of this chapter cites 'monks, nuns and those seeking an awakening to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives', there is recognition that these beings were indeed among those in the four groups of the assembly (the audience).

Question: At the beginning of the tenth chapter On the Teacher of Life's Purpose, it says:

“(In this assembly you see) ... monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, those seeking to be students of the noble path and those seeking to be spiritually awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives ... “

How then can one attain an understanding that beings only awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives were not among those in the assembly seeking to be awakened to this higher teaching?

Answer: Long ago it was said:

“Bodhisattvas have a higher capacity for awakening to the nature of life's greater purpose, but they certainly do not all have a sharp capacity for a detached, logical and intellectual understanding of it. But since they have a higher capacity for this

spiritual awakening, their attachments to lesser purposes are said to be easier to overcome. The source of their natural endowment is found in their seeking of enlightenment to a greater purpose. In only having attachments to seeking the short-term fruits of the magic fortress<sup>9d</sup> (as described in the seventh chapter of the sūtra) that was said to be three hundred yojanas away,<sup>81</sup> it was easier for them to awaken from their doubts. Bodhisattvas with the three different levels of capacity all similarly attain an awakening to the transcendental nature of life's purpose through understanding the teaching about the true purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one'.

- \* Those with a higher capacity do so through just hearing the summary teaching about it (in the beginning of the second chapter),
- \* Those with an intermediate capacity do so through the first elaboration on it (through the second section of prose in this chapter), and
- \* Those with a lower capacity do so like Śāriputra (upon hearing the full elaboration of this timeless teaching in the second chapter)."

Now, in discussing bodhisattvas generally, it is said that only they arouse a full inspiration of life's greater purpose. Is it necessary that they have a sharp capacity (for the provisional knowledge) at the same time? With Śāriputra just having a little of the capacity for inspiring life's greater purpose, how was it that he was the first in the sūtra to grasp the first cycle of teachings about the purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one' and awaken to this transcendental knowledge, and why do chapters (ten through fourteen) on propagation of this sublime nature of life's purpose and chapter sixteen On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World (only) speak about bodhisattvas gradually inspiring the awakened mind (bodhi citta utpāda, 發菩提心) and attaining an enduring observation of the nature of life's purpose that neither arises nor perishes and transcends their lives in this world (anutpattika dharma kṣānti, 無生法忍)? Before this was explained as follows:

"The awakening to the teaching on the spiritual life of enlightenment (dharma kāya, 法身) in the sixteenth chapter On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World increased as there was a lessening of attachments to life in this world."

Now we speak of it not just being like this. At the beginning of the seventeenth chapter of this sūtra On Distinguishing Its Merits & Virtues, it is said that, upon hearing the sixteenth chapter On Measuring the Life, six hundred eighty billion sentient beings (immediately) attained this enduring observation of the nature of life's purpose that neither arises nor perishes which transcended their lives in this world. With these people only first attaining this enduring observation then, one should understand that, prior to this chapter On Measuring the Life, there was not yet the teaching about the (the original vow found in the) transcendental nature of the Buddha's (three-fold) spiritual life (dharma kāya, 法身) (as the source of enlightenment). And so one should understand that the bodhisattvas' attainment of this spiritual awakening could not possibly be set at the beginning of the first cycle of timeless teachings about 'opening the three & revealing the one' (found in the second chapter) (and its emphasis on a capacity for provisional knowledge).

Question: With bodhisattvas' attainment of spiritual awakening (to life's greater purpose) being a theme that pervades the entire sūtra from beginning to end, should not the attainment of an awakening (to this transcendental knowledge) by those on the two lesser vehicles also be found in the latter part of the sūtra?



Answer: In the three cycles of teachings (found in this first half of the sūtra, particularly as described in chapter four On Understanding With Faith<sup>9b</sup>), the relationship between the Buddha and bodhisattvas is likened to the divine connection between father & child. It follows that all of those on the two lesser vehicles who attain this later realization (found in the sixteenth chapter) are similarly said to be awakened as bodhisattvas.

**6. On whether or not there is propensity for attainment of a detached, logical and intellectual understanding (vimukti, 解脫) of ‘opening the three & revealing the one’:**

Question: If all those on the three vehicles had the same kind of spiritual awakening, why (in this sūtra) do we see students of the path (śrāvakas, 聲聞) attaining a detached, intellectual understanding of it but not those on the two other vehicles?

Answer: Now this is explained:

- \* Those who are spiritually awakened without a Buddha appearing in this world are said to attain this awakening by themselves (pratyeka buddhas, 獨覺).
- \* Those who hear the Buddha teach about the twelve mutually dependent conditions that cause the afflicted nature of sentient existence (pratītya samutpāda, 緣起)<sup>45</sup> are said to attain a spiritual awakening about it in their own lives (pratyaya buddhas, 緣覺).
- \* Those who have entered into the ranks of the students of the noble path (śrāvakas, 聲聞), attain a detached, intellectual (discursive) understanding of this spiritual awakening. Even if they have not distinguished it entirely, its main intent is possible for them to see.
- \* Śāriputra, Kāśyapa & others acquired a full capacity for this intermediate vehicle (of spiritual awakening) and so combined the student’s understanding of life’s purpose with an inner awakening to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence, without any problem in distinguishing between them.
- \* And among the four groups that were found in the assembly of the sūtra (monks, nuns, laymen & laywomen), those who inspired minds awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence were not all the same. On them, the fourth chapter On Understanding With Faith says:

“The rich man secretly dispatched two (different kinds of) people to fetch and bring the poor man back.”<sup>9b</sup>

This is the meaning here. Bodhisattvas do not need to have this intellectual understanding of life’s purpose, and the doctrine for students (śrāvakas, 聲聞) does not fully explain the attainment of perfect enlightenment. Now, this sūtra opens up the road of returning to that which is great. Because they fear their own understandings are mistaken in negotiating their own relationship with the Buddha, these students felt the need to make detached, intellectual understandings about enlightenment. The bodhisattvas are not like this and so do not need to have such understandings. And there are three further ideas about this:

- a. The bodhisattva’s original intent is to seek enlightenment to life’s *greater* purpose. They may have different attachments but these are relatively light and, in the end, they are devoted to retaining enlightenment without having to worry about whether or not they are attaining it. Now, in hearing the three cycles of these teachings on ‘opening up the three & revealing the one’, they only observe them directly with transcendental discernment, without needing to have intellectual understandings about them.
- b. Bodhisattvas awaken to that which is great, and here & there may need words to explain it, but those on the two lesser vehicles are only beginning to attain an understanding of it through the doctrine about ‘opening the three & revealing the one’. In the transmission of this teaching, bodhisattvas only seek a summary understanding of its essence. Most of the literature on the doctrine of the lesser vehicles came from India and other foreign

sources west of China. There are less Chinese written sources about this and they are comparatively brief.

- c. The standing of the bodhisattva's practice is deeper and more transcendental, but those who are just starting out do not have any pretensions about intellectually understanding it all. In the sixteenth chapter On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World, the Bodhisattva Maitreya had a general understanding of the teaching that began with attaining an enduring observation of the transcendental nature of life's purpose that neither arises nor perishes and goes beyond one's life in this world (anupattika dharma kṣānti, 無生法忍) and concluded in it being realized in each and every other life. It followed that there was a perfect understanding of the teaching. What further use was there in seeking out an intellectual understanding of it all?

**7. On whether or not there is attainment of a prophecy of enlightenment (vyākaraṇa, 得記):**

Question: If all those on the three vehicles attain the same understanding, why do we see the students (śrāvakas, 聲聞) receiving prophecies of enlightenment in this sūtra but not the bodhisattvas or those spiritually awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 緣覺)?

Answer: There are also three explanations of this:

- a. Long ago it was explained that those who enter into the standing of the two lesser vehicles are not able to inspire a mind awakened to life's greater purpose. How could they have possibly received a prophecy of their enlightenment? Now, in this sūtra, having awakened to that which is great and rejoiced in such a distinguished determination, they receive a prophecy about the very time (kalpa, 劫) and place (deśa, 國) it will occur. Bodhisattvas inspire a mind awakened to life's greater purpose and seek enlightenment through a practice that will fulfill it, and so do not rejoice hastily in the seeking of enlightenment and are not in an undue hurry about receiving a prophecy about attaining it. And before this sūtra there were teachings here and there about the bestowing of prophecies of enlightenment on bodhisattvas. There have always been such teachings about the transmission of the Buddha's purpose, as explained before.
- b. Bodhisattvas have also had prophecies of enlightenment distinguished (in this sūtra). Did not Devadatta (調達 or 提婆達多) and the Dragon Girl (Nāga Kanyā, 龍女) also receive such prophecies in chapter twelve? And in chapter ten On the Teacher of Life's Purpose says:  
 "I hereby predict the following about all those who seek to become students of life's purpose, beings spiritually awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives and bodhisattvas entering the path to enlightenment: If any one of them hears even a single verse or passage of this Lotus Sūtra in the presence of a Buddha and then accepts and rejoices in it even for a single moment, they will attain the supreme enlightenment."  
 How can it be said that they did not attain prophecies of future enlightenment?
- c. From long ago it was said that those on the two lesser vehicles had not yet attained the eight signs<sup>82</sup> associated with a prophecy of enlightenment or prediction of a time and place for such an enlightenment. Bodhisattvas attained such prophecies in other sūtras, so there was no need to further discuss it in their case. Having received short term prophecies (about their own enlightenment), bodhisattva did not rejoice hastily in them. Rather they rejoiced in the longer-term prophecy about the ultimately sublime enlightenment (anuttarā saṃyak saṃbodhi, 妙覺)<sup>103</sup> (of all sentient beings).

And so in chapter sixteen On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World, first there is the enlightenment that comes from the inspiration of the mind in one's own life and, when that is concluded and its sublime cause has been fulfilled, there is sudden bestowal of the ultimate fruit of enlightenment that is totally perfect. This is the bestowal of a prophecy of enlightenment in terms of the transcendental nature of the Buddha's spiritual life (dharma kāya vyākaraṇa, 授法身記莚). How can one say that this is not a prophecy of enlightenment?

Question: If those on a lesser vehicle awaken to that which is great, they should receive a similar bestowal of a prophecy about enlightenment to the transcendental nature of the Buddha's spiritual life. Why do they attain a prophecy of one with the eight signs of enlightenment in this world?<sup>82</sup>

Answer: These eight signs (aṣṭa buddha kārya, 八相成道) are found in the prophecy of a Buddha's spiritual life that appears in this world in response to its needs (nirmāṇa kāya, 應身). Having attained the prophecy of such an appearance in this world, one must know that it has a source, which is the transcendental nature of the spiritual life (dharma kāya, 法身). In desiring to know and hear about the future conditions for the combining of the source and the manifestation, there is the bestowal of a prophecy about the appearance of a Buddha in this world. And if those on the two lesser vehicles of spiritual awakening hear the sixteenth chapter On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World, there will be the same lessening of attachment to life in this world and attainment of a prophecy about enlightenment to this transcendental nature of the Buddha's spiritual life.

#### 8. On whether spiritual awakening is shallow or deep:

- \* Upon *first entering into a realization (of the greater vehicle of spiritual awakening)* (prior to the teachings of The Lotus Sūtra), there was a general dispelling of ignorance and a more refined seeking of enlightenment that illuminated its darkness.
- \* On hearing the first cycle of *teachings about the purpose* for 'opening up the three & revealing the one' (in chapter two of The Lotus Sūtra), there was further entry into the transcendental discernment (prajñā, 慧) of the Buddha's purpose.
- \* How can there not be even more light upon also hearing the second cycle of teachings that are *illustrations of this purpose* (in chapters three through six)?
- \* And upon hearing the third cycle explaining *the mutually dependent causes and conditions* that exist between the Buddha (as the teacher) and sentient beings (as the disciples) over time and space (in chapters seven through nine), knowledge of the principle is advanced even further.
- \* Upon also hearing the sixteenth chapter *On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World*, it became most deeply fulfilled.

Just as one who hears more and more about the transcendental nature of life's purpose becomes ever more spiritually awakened than before, this way the relative strength or weakness of this awakening may be understood.

#### 9. On whether or not the benefits attained (upakāra, 權) are provisional or transcendental:

There are those who say that the real benefits are attained through the transcendental practice while a provisional practice is primarily a reflection or echo of it that serves as a guide leading the way but itself does not provide these transcendental benefits. Now we explain that this is not really the way it is. If one penetrates the sixteenth chapter On Measuring the Life of The One Who Has Descended Into This World, provisional and

transcendental knowledge both provide the benefits completely. As one further advances along the path, there is a more lofty purpose, less attachment to life in this world and a more complete fulfillment of its ultimate realization (bhūta koṭi, 圓際極). In there only being enlightenment in one life at a time, how can the benefits not be provisional? Beginning as reflections and echoes that combine together to help ripen the transcendental practice, subsequently there are teachings about the ultimate fruit that is based on the illumination of one's own path. On this, words of the fourth chapter On Understanding With Faith says:

"The rich man's revenues and investments had spread everywhere to other nations."  
Through investments in others there is the attainment of benefits for oneself. Through the guidance of provisional knowledge there is the attainment of the benefits from the transcendental practice. With the influence of merit returning back to one's own provisional knowledge there is again the attainment of yet more benefits. And so from a single sound the sublime nature of life's purpose is propagated and taught, with all sentient beings attaining an understanding in accordance with their own capacity. What need was there (for the students of life's purpose) to wait for the teaching that is found in the chapter On Measuring the Life? And so through our own aspiration to attain a spiritual awakening to this pure and transcendent nature of life's purpose, there is our own attainment of benefits.

**10. On whether or not there is a need to wait for the right time and opportunity (待時不待時):**

- \* Those who were not spiritually awakened before hearing the teaching of The Lotus Sūtra but were awakened after hearing it were said to be 'waiting for the right time'.
- \* Those who already understood before this teaching was made were said to not be waiting for the right time.

How can this be so? The Buddha had two kinds of teachings, revealed ones and secret ones.

- \* When there were the revealed teachings before The Lotus Sūtra, those on the two lesser vehicles were not yet awakened to the essential nature of the greater path and needed to ripen their understanding of The Lotus Sūtra through tasting the five different flavors<sup>6</sup> of the doctrines about the nature of life's purpose. And so the lines 50a-50d of verse in this second chapter say:

"I did not speak about this before  
Because the right occasion had never arrived.  
Now it is the proper time  
To teach definitively about this greater vehicle."

This was about 'waiting for the right time'.

- \* When there were the secret teachings, disciples did not need to wait until they possessed all of the five flavors of doctrine<sup>6</sup> to understand the teaching of The Lotus Sūtra. With the secret being penetrated beforehand, there was no waiting for the right time. This is on the teaching of the greater vehicle being neither with or without a right time.

And so when this doctrine of the greater vehicle is taught in terms of the three cycles of teachings and the gateways into the manifestation and source of enlightenment, there is also the matter of whether or not there is the need to wait for a right time to teach about it. The idea here is that, whether or not there is a before and after in terms of awakening and entering into the knowledge and vision of enlightenment, it is timeless.

Question: Is there a kind of capacity (indriya gotra, 根性) that does not respond to either the secret or the revealed teachings, and will those without them then lose their only opportunity to understand it and so never attain this awakening?

Answer: Some sūtras speak about those who lose their opportunity for enlightenment, but not this one. Although there are people who do not awaken as a result of these secret

and revealed teachings, and although their thoughts about deliverance may arise or perish, when they get to hear this sūtra in their own land, they will not lose their opportunity. They are just waiting for the right time in their own land.

Question: Did the five thousand who arose and left right before the Buddha spoke lose their opportunity to become spiritually awakened?

Answer: These people would attain their benefits from the sūtra at some point after The One Who Has Descended Into This World has perished from this world.

Question: In Śāriputra's three requests for the Buddha to teach about 'opening the three & revealing the one' for the four groups of the assembly with the three different levels of capacity, can it be said that:

- \* His first request was for the first cycle of direct teachings about the purpose for 'opening up the three & revealing the one'.
- \* His second request was for the cycle of teachings that illustrate this purpose for those with an intermediate capacity, and
- \* His third request was for the teaching explaining the mutually dependent causes and conditions between the Buddha and sentient beings for those with a lower capacity.

Through these three requests, was he speaking to the Buddha specifically about teaching these three different cycles of teachings for these three different kinds of people?

Answer: The words of these three requests were not really that pat. The requests and the teachings were both really more general. Only those with a higher capacity and sharp knowledge attained an awakening upon hearing the teaching about the timeless purpose for 'opening the three & revealing the one'. Those in this assembly with an intermediate capacity awakened upon hearing illustrations about it while those with a lower capacity only did so after hearing the third cycle of teachings. You should understand the requests and teachings were in accord with their meaning rather than just literally in terms of the words.

Question: The circumstances and the purposes that existed for former lives have already passed. Are not the phenomena of sentient existence found in the present really the starting point to illustrate the future?

Answer: The sūtra is without words about this, but its meaning can be deduced as follows: After first inducing the three vehicles of spiritual awakening, there is ultimately a return to the one vehicle, with the three being directed towards this one and so its realization being in the future. In bringing up the phenomena that are the circumstances of sentient existence, there are illustrations of life's purpose. After these illustrations of it, there is the present moment that is here and now. To divine the pattern for what will come later, one looks back at that which has come before in the past causes and conditions for enlightenment. One should better frame it like this.

Question: In the past, the obstacles from the five kinds of corruption were great. These are analyzed through the tetralemma,<sup>5</sup> as explained before. There are people with obstacles (of cognitive dissonance) that have been caused by nihilistic beliefs (uccheda dṛṣṭi, 斷見) (based on the view that life ends forever upon entering nirvāṇa) being combined with a fundamental ignorance about the transcendental nature of life's purpose as something with a permanent existence (śāśvata dṛṣṭi, 常見). On this, The Discourse on The Lotus Sūtra attributed to Vasubandhu says:

"There are people who have overcome emotional disturbances but are still tainted with the conceit of misunderstandings about the universal vehicle and the transcendental nature of the Buddha's spiritual life (dharma kāya, 法身) as something with an eternal existence."



If people are broadly grounded in the transcendental nature of life's purpose and do not cling to the 'existence' of spiritual freedom (nirvāṇa, 涅槃) (as something separate from the existential reality of life and death) but have not yet heard this teaching about 'opening the three & revealing the one', then the ignorance (of skillful means to reveal this) would be their only obstacle. With this being so, is their ignorance about the transcendental nature of life's purpose dispelled before or after they heard these three cycles of teachings (about these skillful ways and means)?

- \* If it is only dispelled when they hear these teachings, would the obstacle not be found in a fundamental ignorance of the transcendental nature?
- \* If they are able to dispel this ignorance before hearing this teaching, would not the obstacle just be one of cognitive dissonance?

Which of these is right?

Answer: Others established these different interpretations but now they are penetrated.

It can be likened to how lighting a lamp extinguishes darkness. It is impossible to be certain whether the light and darkness come before or after one another. Although they do not really come before or after one another (since they are timeless), it is certain that darkness (ignorance) is an obstacle to illumination (spiritual awakening).

Question: The Sūtra on the Lion's Roar of the Princess Śrī Mālā (Śrī Mālā Devi Siṃha Nāda Sūtra, 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經) says:

"From one's very first practice on the three vehicles, one is not completely unaware of the nature of life's purpose, and from this intellectual understanding there is knowledge that one will attain spiritual awakening."

Chapter fourteen of The Sūtra on the Moral Commitment of the Layman (Upāsaka Śīla Sūtra, 優婆塞戒經) says:

"From the two lesser vehicles one intellectually understands that one will attain a spiritual awakening (bodhi, 菩提), but also maintains attachments to the fruits of this lesser vehicle."

And chapter thirteen of this Sūtra on the Moral Commitment of the Layman also says:

"Intellectually understanding the nature of life's purpose is relatively easy while putting it into actual practice is more difficult. Although one may theoretically understand the universal vehicle of spiritual awakening, there remain attachments to the fruits of becoming a truly worthy being (arhat, 羅漢)."

Both of these other sūtras speak about having an understanding of spiritual awakening.

Why does this sūtra now speak of those with these three different capacities still not understanding it, and about first having doubts and then awakening afterwards.

What is the meaning of this?

Answer: This sūtra also speaks about understanding (in contrast to spiritual awakening).

In the second chapter On Skillfulness in Ways & Means it says:

"It is because there is no monk who becomes a truly worthy being without faith in the Buddha's purpose, except for one (with faith in this sūtra) who appears in the world after the Buddhas have perished from it and there is no longer any Buddha present in it ... But if and when such people should meet another Buddha, they will immediately understand that Buddha's purpose for appearing in their world."

Overall, there are three ideas in this.

1. First it explains the knowledge that has an intellectual understanding about the nature of life's purpose (知).
2. Then it explains the knowledge with this understanding not being full (不知).
3. Finally, it explains the dedicated, faithful knowledge (adhimukti, 歸知) that is

never without a full understanding of it.

On this not being full, in this chapter Śāriputra said:

“Now we do not understand where this new teaching is going.”

And at the time of the Buddha of Great Penetrating Knowledge (Mahā Abhijñā Jñāna Abhibhū, 大通智勝) (in chapter seven On the Magic Fortress), many of the students of the noble path bore doubts and confusions. Upon seeing the Buddha and hearing the teachings about the transcendental nature of life’s purpose, they still had doubts and did not understand it. How could those who never saw the Buddha or heard this teaching suddenly arrive at an understanding of it? If people just cling to the words (about provisional and transcendental knowledge), they will be in contradiction to each other and there will be an increase in contention and argument. Of what benefit is this for the realization of the noble path? When this happens, they should discuss it no more. Students of life’s purpose may or may not be able to intellectually understand becoming noble, but they cannot become well versed in the sphere of enlightenment this way. The Lotus Sūtra examines all of this clearly.

Past actions (pūrva karma, 初業) can be understood from the perspective of the three vehicles of spiritual awakening in two ways:

- \* When there are consequences that arise from actions of the distant past (ādi karmika, 久遠為初業) and there is an understanding of them from the (perspective of the) greater vehicle teachings, it follows there will be no ignorance of their purpose.
  - \* When there are lapses from clinging to attachments in the present, even if one studies the lesser vehicle teachings with the cultivation of introspection through mindfulness of the subjective spheres (smṛty upasthāna, 念處), there will not be an understanding of the consequences that have arisen from actions in the distant past.
- This is the meaning of this. There can be an intellectual understanding of past actions through provisional knowledge but it will not necessarily be transcendental. If one speaks of those with sharp capacities intellectually understanding this but those with dull capacities not being able to do so, this can be examined by the tetralemma:
- \* Whether capacities are sharp or dull, there is that about the transcendental nature which provisional knowledge cannot (intellectually) understand.
  - \* Whether they are sharp or dull, there is that about the transcendental nature which provisional knowledge can understand.
  - \* Whether they are sharp or dull, there is that about the transcendental nature which provisional knowledge can understand upon hearing about it and that which it cannot understand without hearing about it.
  - \* Whether they are sharp or dull, there is that about the transcendental nature which provisional knowledge neither understands nor is without understanding.

Now, in understanding this from the perspective of the perfect doctrine of The Lotus Sūtra, we do not maintain this analysis. In holding that only those with provisional knowledge can have this complete intellectual understanding of the inner mind (that is timeless) and those with a transcendental practice have not fully entered into that which is great, one is without this intellectual understanding. The meaning of this should be self-evident.

Question: Those who are spiritually awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence (pratyaya buddhas, 緣覺) appear when there is no Buddha in the world.

How do they acquire these three cycles of teachings?

Answer: On this, The Commentary on The Longer Sūtra About the Deliverance of

Transcendental Discernment (Mahā Prajñā Pāramitā Upadeśa, 大智度論) says:

“To distinguish between those only awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 獨覺) and those awakened to these conditions generally (pratyaya buddhas, 緣覺), the former appear when there is no Buddha in the world while the latter vow to be reborn in a world when and where there will be one.”

The Sūtra on the Great Garland of Universal Enlightenment (Mahā Vaipulya Buddha Avataṃsaka Sūtra, 大方廣佛華嚴經): says:

“Bodhisattvas descend from the heaven of grace (tuṣita devaloka, 兜率天),<sup>47d</sup> emitting its radiance. Upon spiritually awakening, they renounce attachments to their lives in this world while transforming those who are not yet awakened.”

The Longer Version of the Sūtra on the Deliverance of Transcendental Discernment (Mahā Prajñā Pāramitā Sūtra, 摩訶般若波羅蜜多經) speaks of them being like comets (descending from the sky). On this, Nāgārjuna’s Discourse on the Dialectical Principle of the Middle Way (Mūla Madhyamaka Kārikā, 中論) says:

“Those spiritually awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence who appear in this world after the Buddha’s demise are only enlightened by themselves. Vowing to be reborn when there is a Buddha in this world, they begin by attaining the first fruit of spiritual awakening as a stream-enterer<sup>51</sup> but, to attain complete enlightenment, they must still fulfill fourteen more levels of spiritual rebirth:<sup>51</sup>

- \* Those who meet a Buddha become truly worthy beings (arhats, 羅漢).
- \* Those who do not meet a Buddha only become awakened to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 獨覺).

Those who have met a Buddha neither renounce life nor are swayed by its temptations. Vowing to see the Buddha, the second & third fruits follow this way.<sup>51</sup>”

And there are those who spiritually awaken to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence in groups (vargacārī pratyaya buddhas, 部行緣覺) in a world without a Buddha. They have masters who teach and spiritually transform their followers. There should therefore be two kinds of beings awakened to the conditions of sentient existence:

- \* If a Buddha leaves this world without leaving a legacy made of words and letters, sentient beings (of the future) will be left with a duller capacity for spiritual awakening. There will only be ‘unicorns’ (or rhinoceroses, khaḍga viṣāṇa, 麟角), those who are only awakened in their own lives (pratyeka buddhas, 獨覺), and they will not teach others about the nature of life’s (greater) purpose. This refers to those without a group practice.
- \* Those with a group practice (varga cārin, 部行) will be able to teach others about the nature of life’s greater purpose and have a transformational influence on those awakening to the afflicted conditions of sentient existence (pratyaya buddhas, 緣覺). Those with an opportunity to experience this will manifest the life of a being awakened to these conditions.

From this explanation, the reason for finding those only awakened to the conditions of sentient existence in their own lives among those seated in the assembly hearing the three cycles of teachings about ‘opening the three & revealing the one’ in this sūtra may now be properly understood.



## On the first cycle of teachings: The purpose for ‘opening the three & revealing the one’

The second and third cycles of teachings will be treated in later chapters, and so are outside the scope of this book.

### The words on this first cycle are in five parts:

1. Starting with the words “The Blessed One then spoke to Śāriputra, saying: “You have made three earnest requests that I elaborate on this teaching. How can I not do so?” to the end of this second chapter, there is the main explanation of the timeless purpose for ‘opening the three & revealing the one’ (正法).
2. From the first section of prose in the third chapter to the end of the first section of verse in the third chapter, there is a part on how Śāriputra was guided to an understanding of this with faith (領解).
3. Starting with the second section of prose in the third chapter saying “At that time the Buddha said to Śāriputra: “I will now reveal to you before the great assembly of gods and human beings” to the words that say “Now, because I want you to remember the path that you practiced according to your original vow in the past, I will explain to these students the teaching about the greater vehicle called The Lotus Sūtra, the treasured lore of the Buddhas which was made for the bodhisattva,” there is a part on the Buddha telling of Śāriputra’s realization (述成).
4. Starting with the words of prose in this third chapter that say “Śāriputra! In the future, after an unimaginably countless number of ages, you will have paid homage to thousands, millions and billions of Buddhas, carried out their true purpose and mastered the path practiced by the bodhisattvas, and you will become a Buddha named ‘Light of the Lotus’ (Padma Prabha, 華光)”, and ending with the ensuing portion of verse reiterating it that says “the very best of humanity, the one who is foremost and incomparable, will be none other than yourself. You should rejoice upon hearing this!”, there is a part on the Buddha’s bestowal of a prophecy of enlightenment on Śāriputra (授記).
5. Starting with the prose saying “At that time the four-fold assembly of monks, nuns, laymen, & laywomen, along with the great gathering of devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kimnaras, and mahoragas,<sup>101</sup> all saw Śāriputra receive his prediction of perfect enlightenment in the presence of the Buddha” and ending with the next section of verse that reiterates it, saying “Merit has arisen from actions we have committed in the past as well as the actions we have made in this present life, and merit has also been acquired through encountering the Buddha: may it all now be dedicated and turned over to (the greater purpose found on) the path to enlightenment”, there is a part on the rejoicing of the audience, the four-fold assembly (四眾歡喜).

Since this work only covers chapter two, only point one of the five above are covered in this book.