

# Reading Response 4

Arden Rasmussen

November 8, 2019

Chapter 3 of *The Lotus Sutra*, is titled “Parable”, and in it the Buddha, uses the parable of a burning house to explain the three paths to enlightenment. The primary vehicle is the bodhisattva vehicle, which leads to complete enlightenment and becoming a Buddha, then there is the sravaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles, which were previously considered lesser than the bodhisattva vehicle.

In the parable, the Buddha describes the tale of a house burning down around three children. In this parable the burning house is intended to represent Samsara, with all of its dangers and issues, and the children represent sentient beings. It is important to note, that without the prompting of the children’s father, they are ignorant of the danger they are in just as sentient beings are ignorant to the dangers of samsara without the Buddhas teachings.

Then even with the Buddhas teachings, warning the children of the dangers of staying in the house, they do not leave. It is not until the father tells the children of the three carts. The father tells the children of three great carts, one is ox drawn, one is deer drawn, and one is goat drawn. These three carts are representative of the three vehicles for enlightenment. He states “If these children are resolute, . . . they can become pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas” (57). These three carts that the Buddha tells the children of, each represent a different vehicle for enlightenment. And different children will be most “excited” by different carts. That is why there is three, as some will be most attentive to the goat cart, others the deer cart, and some the ox cart.

However, as it turns out, there is only three ox carts waiting for the children “There were large white oxen, Healthy and powerful with beautiful bodies, Yoked to the jeweled carts” (55). The ox cart is representative of the bodhisattva vehicle. This extract explains that there is only one true vehicle of the bodhisattva vehicle, and the Buddha later states “I make the bodhisattvas as well as sravakas Board this jeweled vehicle” (57). This makes it clear that all the children of the Buddha (or the father), are all provided the best possible vehicle of the bodhisattva vehicle (or the ox cart).

This parable explains that all of the teachings of the Buddha, including the different vehicles which can

be followed to attain enlightenment has all been a skillful mean to attract people to escape from the burning Samsara. Each vehicle attracts a different type of sentient being, and although there is only one true cart, claiming that there are lesser carts, allows more sentient beings to escape from the burning house, and achieve enlightenment. No matter what path a sentient being follows to achieve enlightenment, they are all actually equal, it is just a means to attract more being to begin along the path. As if there were only the bodhisattva path, many sentient beings may be too intimidated, and so by claiming to have lesser paths, but still leading them on the greater path is the only way to help them escape Samsara.

---

Words: 540