

From the Lotus Sutra, Chapter Five, The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs

The Buddha, the Dharma-king,  
Smashing ideas of being,  
Appears in this world.

According to the needs of all beings,  
He teaches the Dharma in varied ways.

The Buddha teaches people  
According to their strengths,  
With various explanations  
To bring them to helpful views.

The Buddha is like a great cloud  
Rising above the [parched] world,  
Covering everything everywhere.

A beneficent cloud full of moisture,  
Bringing gladness and ease to all,  
Where flashes of lightning shine and glint,  
And the voice of thunder vibrates afar.

The [hot] sun's rays are veiled,  
And the earth is cooled;  
The cloud lowers and spreads  
As if it might be caught and gathered.

[Then] its rain everywhere equally  
Descends on all sides,  
Streaming and pouring without stint,  
Enriching all the land.

On mountains, by rivers, in steep valleys,  
In hidden places, there grow  
The plants, trees, and herbs.

Trees, big or small,  
The shoots of all the ripening grain,  
Sugar cane and grapevine,

All these are fertilized by the rain,  
And abundantly enriched.  
The dry ground is all soaked,  
And herbs and trees flourish together.

From the same water which issued from that cloud,  
Plants, trees, thickets and forests,  
According to their need, receive moisture.

All the [plants],  
Each according to its scale,  
Can grow and develop.

Roots, stalks, branches, and leaves,  
Blossoms and fruits in their brilliant colors,  
By the pouring of the one rain,  
All become fresh and glossy.

Just as their forms and capacities  
Are some great and some small,  
So the enriching [rain], though one and the same,  
Enables each to flourish.

The Buddha is like this.  
He appears in the world,  
Like a great [monsoon]-cloud

Universally covering all things;

And having appeared in the world,  
He, for the sake of all living beings,  
Teaches in varying ways  
The reality of all things.

The great World-honored One  
To human and heavenly beings,  
And to all the other beings,  
Declares this:

“I am the Tathagata,  
Honored by people;  
I appear in the world  
Just like a great rain cloud,  
To pour enrichment on all parched living beings,

“To free them all from suffering  
And so attain the joy of peace,  
Joy in this world,  
And the joy of nirvana.

“Humans and heavenly beings and all!  
Give me your full attention,  
Gather around  
And behold the Buddha.

“For the hosts of the living  
I teach the Dharma, pure as sweet dew:  
The Dharma with one taste  
Of freedom and nirvana.

“With one wonderful voice  
I explain this meaning,  
Constantly taking the great way  
As my subject.

“I look upon all [living beings]  
Everywhere [with] equal [eyes],  
Without favoring anyone,  
With no mind of {partiality or aversion} love or hate.

“I have no preferences  
Nor limitations [or partiality];  
At all times to all [beings]  
I teach the Dharma equally;

“As I would to one person,  
So [I teach] to all.  
Constantly I proclaim the Dharma,  
Never occupied with anything else.

“Going or coming, sitting or standing,  
I never weary or get downhearted,  
Pouring it abundantly upon the world,  
Like the rain, enriching everywhere.

“Eminent and humble, high and low,  
Those who keep the precepts and those who break them,  
Those of admirable character  
And those of imperfect character,

“With right views or wrong views,  
Quick-witted and dull-witted,  
[With] equal [mind] I rain the rain of the Dharma,  
Neglecting no one.”

So the Buddha's unbiased teaching  
Is {just} like the one rain.

[But] beings, according to their capacities,  
Receive it differently,  
Just as the plants and trees  
Each take a varying supply.

The Buddha by this [image]  
Skillfully reveals [his methods],  
And with various expressions  
He proclaims the one single Dharma,

The one essential Dharma,  
To be practiced according to ability,  
Just as those thickets, forests, herbs, and trees,  
True to their type, grow lush and beautiful.

Just so,  
Practicing it step-by-step,  
All can gain the fruit of the way.

The Dharma taught by the Buddha is like this.  
It is just like a great cloud  
Which with the same kind of rain  
Enriches humans like blossoms,  
So that each will bear fruit.

The way in which you all walk  
Is the Bodhisattva-way;  
By gradually practicing and learning,  
You will all become Buddhas.

Based on the translations by Kato et al and Reeves, abridged and adapted by Ratnaprabha.