

Lotus Sutra's Life Span of the Tathagata

Since I attained Buddhahood, the number of kalpas that have passed is incalculable hundreds, thousands, myriads, and billions of long eons. Constantly I have voiced the Dharma, teaching countless millions of living beings, so that they entered the Buddha Way; all this for immeasurable kalpas.

In order to liberate all beings, as skillful means I appear to have entered nirvana; yet truly I am not extinct, ever dwelling here to voice the Dharma. I forever abide in this world, but use my powers of spiritual penetration so that confused living beings, though nearby, fail to see me. All those viewing me as extinct everywhere venerate my relics; all harbor feelings of yearning, and arouse adoring hearts. When beings have become sincerely faithful, honest and upright, with gentle intention, wholeheartedly wishing to behold the Buddha, not begrudging their own bodily lives, then I and the assembled sangha appear together on sacred Vulture Peak. Then I tell the living beings that in this world I abide without end, by the power of expedient means, appearing to be extinct, or not.

Other lands contain living beings, reverent with faith aspiring; among them as well, I give voice to supreme Dharma. You who do not hear this only suppose I am passed into extinction. I behold the living beings, drowning in the sea of suffering. Hence I do not reveal myself, but set them all to yearning, till when their hearts are filled with longing, I then emerge and proclaim the Dharma. With such pervasive spiritual power, for uncountable kalpas I abide on sacred Vulture Peak, and every other dwelling place.

When living beings see the kalpa's end, with all consumed in a great blaze, my domain stays serene and calm, ever filled with human and heavenly beings, gardens and groves, pavilions and palaces, adorned with every kind of gem, and jeweled trees lush with flowers and fruit, where living beings delight and play. The heavenly beings beat celestial drums, ever making pleasing music,

showering white mandarava flowers over Buddha and the great assembly. My pure land is not destroyed, yet all view it as ravaged by fire, so that fear and distress pervade everywhere.

The beings vexed with their offenses, caused by their unwholesome karma, through vast rounds of kalpas, hear not the name of the Three Treasures. But those who practice virtuous deeds, are gentle, upright, and sincere, these all see that I exist, abiding here, proclaiming Dharma. At times for the sake of that assembly, I describe Buddha's life span as immeasurable; for those who after great lengths see the Buddha, I explain how rarely Buddha is encountered. Such is the power of my wisdom, with beams of insight shining beyond measure; this life span of countless kalpas was gained from long-cultivated practice. You who are possessed of wisdom, in regards to this, entertain no doubts; cast them off, forever ended, for Buddha's words are true, not false.

Like the good physician who with skillful means, in order to cure his delirious children, although truly alive spreads word he is dead yet cannot be charged with falsehood, I too, as parent of the world, savior of all suffering and afflicted, for the sake of confused, worldly people, although truly living, am thought to be extinct. If due to always seeing me, their hearts become selfish and arrogant, dissolute and set on the five desires, they would fall into evil destinies. I always know which living beings practice the Way, and which do not; in accord with what their salvation requires, I give voice to the various teachings, ever making this my thought: how can I cause the living beings to enter into the unsurpassed way and promptly embody Buddha?