

## Chapter 2 – Pragmatic means<sup>1</sup>

Buddha exited his meditation and told Mañjuśrī: “Wisdoms of buddhas are unfathomable. They are difficult to understand and obtain. All monastery and solitary monks cannot understand. Why?”

I had served hundreds of thousands of buddhas and learned countless dharmas. My learning was steadfast, and I was well known. I acquired the unprecedented fathomless dharma and have opportunistically been teaching its incomprehensible meanings. Mañjuśrī! Since I became buddha I have used opportunities, examples, and pragmatic means to lead people away from contentions. Why? Because I had attained all wisdoms and virtues<sup>2</sup>.

Mañjuśrī! My knowledge, virtue, samadhi<sup>3</sup> power and liberation power are all unprecedented and boundless. Mañjuśrī! I am aware of all manners of reasonings and am good at speaking the dharma with soothing tones. Mañjuśrī! In short, I had completely acquired the marvelous dharma<sup>4</sup>.

Mañjuśrī! You don’t need to repeat. Why? Because only buddhas could understand the incomprehensible dharma and know its true form. Its form, nature, sense, action, effect, cause, are always true.”

Then arhat Kauninya and one thousand two hundred arhats and monks, nuns, devotees, all thought “Why the Buddha repeatedly praised pragmatic means and mentioned that the dharma of buddhas is difficult to understand and that monks and arhats, cannot comprehend. He taught us the meaning of liberation and we had succeeded to reach nirvana. But now we are unclear where our dharma is leading.”

Mañjuśrī understood the confusions of others and he himself was also confused. He inquired: “Lord! What brought you to repeatedly praise marvelous, incomprehensible means of buddhas? I have never heard you mentioned them before. Today all of us are confused. Please elaborate. Why did you repeatedly praise marvelous, incomprehensible means?”

Buddha then told Mañjuśrī: “Stop! Don’t talk about it. If I explained all gods and humans will be shocked and suspicious.”

Mañjuśrī insisted: “Lord! Please tell, please tell. Why? In this crowd there are hundred thousand followers who had served past buddhas. They are naturally devoted and bright. If they hear your teaching, maybe they could understand.”

Buddha stopped Mañjuśrī again: “If I explain it all gods, humans and underworlds will be shocked and suspicious. Narcissistic monks will plunge further into sinful depth for their disbelief.”

Mañjuśrī inquired again: “Lord! Please tell, please tell. In this crowd there are hundred thousand followers at my level. They have learned from many buddhas. Such devotees surely respect and benefit from your teaching.”

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<sup>1</sup> practical rather than theoretical ways to achieve an end, v: phương tiện

<sup>2</sup> Buddhist virtue, s: pāramitā, p: pāramī, v: ba la mật

<sup>3</sup> tranquil consciousness came from meditative concentration, s: samadhi, v: thiền định

<sup>4</sup> unprecedented, marvelous Buddhism laws, s: abbhuta-dhamma, v: pháp vị tăng hữ

Buddha then told Mañjuśrī: “You had respectfully requested three times I cannot not explain. Listen well, because of you I will explain.”

At this time five thousand monks, nuns, devotees among the crowd stood up, bowed to him then moved to back of the assembly. Why? Because these are sinful narcissistic monks. They claimed to have achieved dharma liberation while in fact they were not. Buddha stayed silence and did not stop them.

Buddha told Mañjuśrī: “Is there any more bad apple among the bunch? It’s better that those narcissistic monks removed themselves. Listen well. I will explain.”

Mañjuśrī inquired: “Yes Lord, I am listening.”

Buddha said to Mañjuśrī: “Buddhas disseminate marvelous dharma only when the time is right. Flowers bloom only when they are ready. Mañjuśrī! All of you must believe that my words are always true.

Mañjuśrī! Buddhas teach incomprehensible dharma only when the time is right. Why? I used many means, opportunities, examples to spread the dharma. However, it cannot be deducted to make sense. Only buddhas understand them. Why? All buddhas arrived at this world only because of one grandiose reason. Mañjuśrī! Why did buddhas arrive at this world only because of one grandiose reason? Because buddhas want sentient beings to see wisdoms of a buddha to have peace. Because buddhas want to show wisdoms to sentient beings. Because buddhas want sentient beings to understand the wisdoms. Because buddhas want sentient beings to have the wisdoms. Mañjuśrī! That is why buddhas arrived at this world.”

Buddha told Mañjuśrī: “Everything that buddhas had taught bodhisattvas only because of one thing: show them the wisdoms. Mañjuśrī! I only use one Buddha Path<sup>5</sup> to teach the dharma, not two or three<sup>6</sup>. Mañjuśrī! The teachings of all buddhas in ten directions<sup>7</sup> are the same.

Mañjuśrī! In the past, buddhas used myriad means, causes, examples to teach dharmas. Because all dharmas are One Path, sentient beings who learned well achieved the “perfect omniscience of a buddha”<sup>8</sup>.

Mañjuśrī! In the future buddhas will also use myriad means, causes, examples to teach dharmas. Because all dharmas will be One Path, sentient beings who learn well will achieve the perfect omniscience.

Mañjuśrī! At the present in countless worlds of buddhas in ten directions, for the benefits of all beings, buddhas also use myriad means, causes, examples to teach dharmas. Because all dharmas are One Path, sentient beings who learn well achieve the perfect omniscience.

Mañjuśrī! The buddhas only teach bodhisattvas because they want to tell them about the perfect omniscience, to bring the omniscience to them, to help them acquire it.

Mañjuśrī! I am the same. Knowing that sentient beings like greed and ignorance I use myriad means, causes, examples to teach dharmas. Mañjuśrī! All is to help them acquire the perfect omniscience of a buddha.

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<sup>5</sup> One Vehicle/Path, Buddha Path, s: Ekayāna, v: Phật Thừa

<sup>6</sup> three Vehicles/Paths, v: Ba Thừa:

- Arhat Path, s: Śrāvakayāna, v: La Hán Thừa
- Solidary Bodhisattva Path, s: Pratyekabuddhayāna, v: Duyên Giác Thừa
- Bodhisattva Path, s: Bodhisattvayāna, v: Bồ Tát Thừa

<sup>7</sup> ten directions: East, West, South, North, North-East, North-West, South-East, South-West, up, down

<sup>8</sup> highest insight of a buddha, s: sarvajñatā, v: nhất thiết chủng trí

Mañjuśrī! In all worlds of buddhas in ten directions there is no two paths, much less three!

Mañjuśrī! Buddhas appeared in worlds with five degeneracies<sup>9</sup>: cosmic cycle degeneracy, perspective degeneracy, affliction degeneracy, morality degeneracy and longevity degeneracy. That is, Mañjuśrī, in time of cosmic cycle degeneracy sentient beings were dirty, stingy, greedy, reaped bad seeds. Therefore, buddhas used pragmatic means to show One Path as three.

Mañjuśrī! If my pupils claimed themselves as arhats or bodhisattvas but do not listen and learn the laws buddhas taught they are not my students, not arhats, not solitary bodhisattvas. Furthermore, Mañjuśrī! For male and female monks claimed themselves as arhats who think they already earned nirvana and do not determine to seek Buddhahood, they are narcissistic monks. Why? Know that surely there is no such thing as a monk really achieved arhat and does not believe in Buddhahood. Unless when I enter nirvana there is no buddha. Why? After I entered nirvana people who study and understand this text are rare. If they meet another buddha they must stay within this teaching to understand.

Mañjuśrī! All of you should believe and receive my teaching. My words are not untrue. There is no other path, only One Buddha Path.

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<sup>9</sup> five degeneracies, s: 5 pañca kaṣāyāḥ, v: năm trược:

- cosmic cycle degeneracy, s: kalpa-kaṣāya, v: kiếp trược
- perspective degeneracy, s: dṛṣṭi-kaṣāya, v: kiến trược
- affliction degeneracy, s: sattva-kaṣāya, v: phiền não trược
- moral degeneracy, s: sattva-kaṣāya, v: chúng sanh trược
- longevity degeneracy, s: āyuh-kaṣāya, v: mệnh trược