

The Soteriological Mandate of Non-Contempt: Analyzing the Third Peaceful Practice in Chapter Fourteen of the *Lotus Sūtra*

I. Introduction: The Mandate for Peaceful Propagation in the Latter Day of the Law

The teachings enshrined within the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*) present a demanding yet indispensable ethical and mental framework for its preservation and propagation in the ultimate age of decline. Chapter 14, titled "Peaceful Practices" (*An-le Hsing*), provides a foundational guide for Bodhisattvas-mahāsattvas who undertake this mission. The passage under analysis is situated within a critical eschatological context, explicitly addressing the conduct required in the "latter days after [my extinction] when the teachings are about to be destroyed" (Query). This period is doctrinally known as the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappō*).¹

The Eschatological Imperative of *Mappō*

The *Mappō* period is fundamentally defined by the decline of spiritual vitality and the prevalence of conflict. Classical Buddhist thought characterizes this age, which is said to last for ten thousand years, as an "age of quarrels and disputes," where practitioners "disregard the precepts and feud constantly among themselves," leading to the obscuration and loss of Shakyamuni's teachings.¹ Historically, this concept gained traction in ages marked by persecution and confusion, such as the period following the Buddhist suppression of 574,

when doctrines focused on easier methods of salvation, like the invocation of Amida Buddha (Pure Land) or the establishment of unique systems like the Three Stages (San-chieh-chiao).²

In contrast, the *Lotus Sūtra* does not abandon this age but positions its complete teaching as the definitive solution that must be propagated during this time.¹ The profound importance of Chapter 14 lies in setting forth the conditions necessary for the successful survival and spread of the supreme doctrine under these adverse circumstances. It must be propagated by those who can achieve inner fortitude and peace (

An-le).³

Mañjuśrī's Inquiry and the Necessity of the Peaceful Practices

The structure of Chapter 14 begins with Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva asking the Buddha what kind of attitude is necessary to preach the *Lotus Sūtra* effectively to a disturbed world.³ The subsequent reply, the four sets of peaceful practices, outlines a holistic approach to conduct and mentality designed to ensure the Bodhisattva preaches with a peace of mind, mitigating both internal temptation (spiritual arrogance) and external persecution.³

It is understood that the path to peaceful exposition requires a radical transformation of the internal landscape. The age is afflicted by contention, and the teachings are about to perish precisely because of that contention.¹ The peaceful practices are, therefore, not merely secondary ethics but the

functional prerequisite for the *Lotus Sūtra*'s efficacy in a degenerate age. Eliminating the seeds of internal contempt, which is the focus of the third practice, transforms the very environment of conflict into a field for joyful exposition.⁴ This strategic inversion turns the inherent conflict of

Mappō into a testing ground for the Bodhisattva's spiritual stability.

Locating the Third Practice: Defining the Scope of Mind-Discipline

T'ien-t'ai (538–597) categorized the Buddha's instructions in this chapter into four sets: practices concerning physical conduct, verbal conduct, mental attitude, and the pledge of great compassion.⁵ The third set of practices focuses entirely on the purification of the

Mental Attitude, or the Mind peaceful practices.³ It addresses the deep-seated emotional and psychological contaminants that undermine the Bodhisattva's mission.

II. Contextual Analysis: The Purification of the Mind

The four peaceful practices address the totality of a Bodhisattva's presence, systematically moving inward from external environment to internal motivation.⁶ While the first set mandates self-control and physical detachment, and the second requires careful, non-disrespectful discourse³, the third practice delves into the subtlest and most dangerous hindrances: the hidden afflictions of the mind.

The Third Practice: The Cultivation of the Non-Contemptuous Mind

The third practice focuses on eradicating the inner seeds of arrogance and insincerity. The Bodhisattva "must not harbor a mind marked by jealousy, fawning or deceit".⁷ This emphasis on sincerity is crucial, preventing hypocrisy and ensuring that the practitioner's external actions are rooted in genuine spiritual commitment.³

The core instruction, however, is the mandate of non-contempt toward fellow aspirants on the Buddha Way. The Bodhisattva must "not be contemptuous of or revile those who study the Buddha way or seek out their shortcomings".⁷

The textual passage specifies a critical prohibition: one must not hinder the practice of others by telling them that they are lazy and can never become enlightened.³ This specific instruction targets

spiritual arrogance (*Mano-māna*). When a practitioner criticizes others' efforts or denies their potential, they are engaging in a highly destructive form of judgment that directly violates the *Lotus Sūtra*'s fundamental premise of universal and inherent Buddhahood (the shared true nature) (Query).

The Danger of Spiritual Pride

Scholarly commentary, particularly in the Tiantai and Nichiren traditions, highlights that the true obstacle addressed here is not external persecution but the temptation arising from the "inner heart".³ The act of criticism functions as a psychological mechanism to elevate the critic's perceived spiritual status. By declaring others "lazy" or "unfit" (Query), the critic attempts to validate their own superior progress.

This external criticism serves as a direct manifestation of a practitioner’s own doctrinal uncertainty. If a practitioner truly possesses unshakeable conviction in the universality of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s teachings, they would not need to disparage others to validate their own path. The tendency to condemn others' perceived laziness or inefficiency demonstrates a deep-seated uncertainty concerning the absolute power of the Dharma itself, or their own worthiness to preach it. The criticism is thus interpreted as a symptom of the critic’s own underlying spiritual immaturity.

Furthermore, judging fellow seekers based on their current, relative stage of practice fundamentally relies on an expedient view of capability. To criticize someone's potential contradicts the absolute teaching of the One Vehicle (Ekayāna), which promises Supreme Perfect Enlightenment to all.⁸ By upholding non-contempt, the Bodhisattva maintains doctrinal purity, teaching based solely on the principle of the

equality of potential.³

The systemic relationship between the four practices demonstrates the centrality of the third practice:

The Four Sets of Peaceful Practices (Lotus Sūtra, Chapter 14)

Practice Set	Focus Area	Core Requirement	Doctrinal Link
First Set (Body/Conduct)	Physical Location & Behavior	Self-control, detachment, meekness, and correct viewing of phenomena. ³	Understanding the characteristics of phenomena.
Second Set (Verbal)	Speech/Discourse	Avoidance of harsh language; understanding the emptiness	The "empty nothingness without intrinsic nature" of all

		of phenomena (<i>Śūnyatā</i>); conversational caution. ⁴	phenomena. ⁴	
Third Set (Mind)	Mental Attitude	Cultivating non-jealousy, sincerity, mercy, non-contempt, and avoiding pride. ³		Universal Buddha-nature and absence of spiritual arrogance.
Fourth Set (Vows/Pledge)	Compassion and Vow	Cultivating great compassion; viewing Buddhas as fathers and Bodhisattvas as teachers. ⁴	The great teachers of the Dharma (Bodhisattvas in the ten directions). ⁴	

III. The Doctrinal Basis of Non-Contempt: Universal Buddha-Nature

The command to practice non-contempt is rooted in the essential doctrinal message of the *Lotus Sūtra*: the affirmation of the universal Buddha-nature (*Tathāgatagarbha*). The text asserts that treating others with "disrespect, contempt, or arrogance" ⁸ violates the fundamental equality of all living beings who share the same inherent capacity for Buddhahood (Query).

Tathāgatagarbha and the Principle of Equality

The entire structure of the *Lotus Sūtra* is predicated on the doctrine that all beings, regardless of their current actions or perceived capabilities, "will surely become Buddhas!"⁸

Contemptuous judgment—especially declaring that someone "can never become enlightened"—directly undermines the One Vehicle (Ekayāna), which unites all paths toward this Supreme Perfect Enlightenment.⁸ The result of such doctrinal contradiction is the creation of conflict, as the passage forewarns (Query).

The antidote to such arrogance is the cultivation of internal virtues, specifically mercy and sympathy. The Mind peaceful practices require the practitioner to "bring mercy to everyone" and "agree with the suffering of sentient beings".³ This empathetic stance culminates in the demand to

"Preach with Equality".³ Equality in preaching means respecting the listener's inherent nature above their current level of understanding or adherence, aligning the practice with the compassion Bodhisattvas show "out of compassion for all living beings".⁴

Non-Contempt as an Ethical Realization of *Śūnyatā*

The ethical dimension of non-contempt is inextricably linked to the wisdom attained by the practitioner, which is promised to be "like the shining of the sun".⁹ In the second set of peaceful practices, the Bodhisattva is instructed to see the ultimate reality, viewing phenomena as "empty nothingness without intrinsic nature".⁴ This realization of emptiness (

śūnyatā) means recognizing that all entities, including individuals, are empty of a fixed, permanent self and are arising only by causation.⁴

The third practice, in demanding non-contempt, becomes the ethical equivalent of realizing *śūnyatā* concerning beings. Contempt relies on a dualistic judgment (lazy/diligent, worthy/unworthy), treating the current, temporary state of the individual as permanently fixed.³ By eliminating this dualistic moral judgment, the Bodhisattva acknowledges the ultimate reality (the truth of the reality of all things)¹⁰, allowing the mind to stabilize and move toward profound wisdom. Non-contempt is thus the necessary behavioral confirmation of having grasped the non-dual truth of the Dharma.

IV. The Exemplar: Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful

The supreme practical illustration of the third peaceful practice is provided in Chapter 20 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, where the Buddha relates his own past life as Bodhisattva Never

Disrespectful (*Sadāparibhūta*). The Buddha relates this story without being solicited by his disciples, underscoring the extraordinary importance of this practice of profound reverence.⁸

Practice, Persecution, and Patience

Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful, living in the era of King of Majestic Voices Buddha, dedicated himself not to reciting scriptures but to meeting people and offering "deep reverence".⁸ His consistent affirmation was: "'I have deep reverence for you and I will never treat you with disrespect, contempt, or arrogance. Why? Because all of you are practicing the bodhisattva way and will surely become Buddhas!'"⁸

This profound affirmation of universal potential generated intense resistance from "unkind people" who perceived the prophecy as an arrogant taunt. Never Disrespectful was met with verbal abuse and physical assault.⁸ To escape the beating, he would run away, yet he continued to shout his message of reverence.¹¹ This required immense "steadfastness in patience and endurance"⁴, confirming that the practice of non-contempt in a degenerate age is by no means an easy path.³

While Chapter 14 promises spiritual protection and physical immunity—stating that "Swords and staves will not touch him"⁹—the experience of Never Disrespectful highlights that this protection is primarily

spiritual invulnerability. The physical suffering he endured, while maintaining reverence, was not a defeat but a necessary cost to establish karmic connections (*kechien*) with his persecutors.⁸ By enduring the suffering without abandoning his vow, the Bodhisattva successfully transformed the physical persecution into a

mystical cause for his antagonist's eventual salvation, guaranteeing that the suffering would yield spiritual profit.⁸

The Ultimate Salvation of the Scorners

The merits derived from Never Disrespectful's unshakeable reverence were twofold. First, he received the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* and achieved the purification of his six senses, enabling him to expound the Law persuasively.⁸ Second, the karmic consequences for his scorners were dire: they were reborn in realms of suffering for a thousand kalpas, deprived of

the chance to hear the Dharma.⁸

However, the compassion inherent in the *Lotus Sūtra* dictated their ultimate fate. As soon as their offenses were purified, they were reborn in the time of Shakyamuni Buddha (Never Disrespectful's later incarnation) and were finally led to Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. This confirmed the absolute truth of the Bodhisattva's original prophecy, even for those who violently rejected it.⁸ The history of Never Disrespectful thus validates the Mind peaceful practice as the perfect expression of the Bodhisattva ideal.

The Practice of Never Disrespectful and the Third Peaceful Practice

Dimension	Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful (Chapter 20)	Third Peaceful Practice (Chapter 14)
Core Action/Cause	Bowing and declaring, "I will never treat you with disrespect... all of you will surely become Buddhas!". ⁸	Not despising those who practice the Dharma or hindering their practice by telling them they can never become enlightened. ³
Internal Hindrance Overcome	Constant spirit of reverence despite physical assault and verbal abuse. ⁸	Overcoming jealousy, fawning, and the "pride of your heart". ³
Doctrinal Basis	Unshakeable belief in the universal and inherent Buddha-nature. ⁸	Recognition that contempt "goes against the true nature we all share" (Query).
Resultant Merit	Purification of the six senses; gained divine powers; salvation of persecutors. ⁸	Ability to expound the Dharma "without disturbance"; gaining good friends; great multitude will receive the Sūtra. ⁹

V. The Spiritual and Practical Significance of Adherence

The promises outlined by the Buddha for practicing the third set of peaceful practices provide a powerful confirmation of the efficacy of a pure mind in the age of *Mappō*. Adherence guarantees practical success in the transmission of the Dharma and profound spiritual rewards.

Expounding the Dharma Without Disturbance

The foremost reward is the ability to "expound the Dharma without disturbance" (Query). In an era characterized by contentious disputes and doctrinal chaos ¹, this undisturbed state is vital. It is achieved because the Bodhisattva has abandoned "minds of arrogance," ensuring their preaching is fluent, persuasive, and supported by a purified internal state.⁴

The purity of the mind, achieved through non-contempt, serves as the essential **locus of authenticity** for the entire set of peaceful practices. If the mind harbors jealousy or deceit (the objects of the third practice) ⁷, then the careful words prescribed by the second practice become flattery, and the controlled conduct of the first practice becomes superficial ethical adherence. Purity of mind validates all external actions.

The Cultivation of "Good Friends" and the Great Multitude

The practice of reverence fosters positive relationships, which are critical for the survival of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The practitioner "will be able to have good friends when he reads and recites this sūtra" (Query). This contrasts sharply with the isolation of those who maintain spiritual pride.

The act of non-contempt—recognizing the inherent Buddhahood in others—is not a passive ethical stance but an active, creative process. It establishes positive karmic connections by planting "the Buddha's seeds" in every acquaintance and encounter.⁸ By treating others as future Buddhas, the Bodhisattva creates the very conditions necessary for the Sūtra's propagation. This reverence acts as a

self-fulfilling prophecy, guaranteeing that a "great multitude will come to him, hear and receive this sūtra from him, keep it after hearing it, recite it after keeping it, expound it after reciting it, copy it or cause others to copy it" (Query). The reverence of the preacher ensures

reverence for the teaching itself.

Protection and Wisdom

Adherence to the peaceful practices brings profound spiritual and, metaphorically, physical protection. The Bodhisattva will be able to "stroll about without fear, like the lion king".⁹ This refers to the psychological freedom and lack of spiritual anxiety stemming from internal purity.³ Furthermore, heavenly beings will protect the practitioner day and night because of the Dharma.⁴ If revilers "speak ill of and revile him, their mouths will be closed and stopped up" ⁹, indicating karmic or divine intervention that silences opposition and upholds the dignity of the Dharma.

Accompanying this protection is the reward of wisdom, which "will be like the shining of the sun".⁹ This wisdom allows the Bodhisattva to skillfully and joyfully communicate the teachings.⁴ Even in their sleep, they experience auspicious visions, seeing Thus Come Ones (Buddhas) preaching the Law and multitudes of beings paying them service.⁹ This signifies that the practitioner is continuously immersed in the true reality of the Dharma, even subconsciously.

The final significance is the successful transmission of the *Wonderful Dharma*. The multitude, guided by the non-contemptuous Bodhisattva, engages in five crucial acts necessary for preserving the Sūtra in a decadent age: receiving, keeping, reciting, expounding, and copying (Query). Thus, the internal practice of non-contempt ensures the longevity and continuation of the teaching throughout the Latter Day of the Law.

VI. Conclusion

The analysis of the third peaceful practice in Chapter 14 of the *Lotus Sūtra* reveals a profound mandate for mental purification, acting as the indispensable foundation for successful propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.

The command not to despise others or discourage their potential for enlightenment is not merely a moral injunction; it is a direct expression of the doctrinal cornerstone of the *Lotus Sūtra*: the absolute universality of the Buddha-nature (Query). To hold contempt is to harbor spiritual pride and deny the One Vehicle, thereby guaranteeing internal and external conflict

(Query).

The practices are strategically designed as an ethical inversion of the age of disputes (*Mappō*).¹ By eradicating inner arrogance, jealousy, and deceit⁷, the Bodhisattva achieves the inner peace necessary to expound the Dharma without disturbance (Query). The exemplary life of Bodhisattva Never Disrespectful provides practical proof that unwavering reverence, maintained even under severe duress, creates the necessary karmic relationships (good friends and the great multitude)⁸ that guarantee the transmission of the

Wonderful Dharma and the eventual salvation of all beings, including those who initially scorn the path. The third peaceful practice is thus the linchpin that secures the continuity of the ultimate teaching throughout the long ages of spiritual decay.

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