

**SELECTION FROM THE LOTUS SŪTRA: "THE DAUGHTER OF THE
DRAGON KING"**

Introduction

The *Lotus Sūtra* is the most popular and influential Buddhist scripture in East Asia. It was translated into Chinese in several different versions, the most respected being the translation carried out under the direction of the Indian monk Kumārajīva in 406 CE. The passage below addresses the question of the salvation of women.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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Selection from the Lotus Sūtra:
"The Daughter of the Dragon King"

... At that time Śāriputra said to the dragon girl [the daughter of the Dragon king], "You suppose that in this short time you have been able to attain the unsurpassed way. But this is difficult to believe. Why? Because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel of the Law. How could you attain the unsurpassed *bodhi*? The road to Buddhahood is long and far-stretching. Only after one has spent immeasurable *kalpas* pursuing austerities, accumulating deeds, practicing all kinds of *pāramitās*, can one finally achieve success. Moreover, a woman is subject to the five obstacles. First, she cannot become a Brahma heavenly king. Second, she cannot become the king Śakra. Third, she cannot become a devil king. Fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning sage king. Fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. How then could a woman like you attain Buddhahood so quickly?"

Questions:

1. What assumptions about woman are Śāriputra's objections based on?
2. Are these or similar assumptions found in other religions?

... The girl said, "Employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood. ..."

At that time the members of the assembly all saw the dragon girl in the space of an instant change into a man and carry out all the practices of a bodhisattva, immediately proceeding to

the Spotless World of the south, taking a seat on the jeweled lotus, and attaining impartial and correct enlightenment. ...

Questions:

3. How does the Dragon Girl refute Śāriputra's arguments against her ability to become enlightened quickly?
4. What Buddhist assumptions about the nature of reality is the story based on?
5. Are you satisfied with the way in which the Dragon Girl refutes Śāriputra? Why or why not?

Longer Selection

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Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated questioned Mañjuśrī, saying, "This *sūtra* is very profound, subtle, and wonderful, a treasure among *sūtras*, a rarity in the world. Are there perhaps any living beings who, by earnestly and diligently practicing this *sūtra*, have been able to attain Buddhahood quickly?"

Mañjuśrī replied, "There is the daughter of the dragon king Sāgara, who has just turned eight. Her wisdom has keen roots, and she is good at understanding the root activities and deeds of living beings. She has mastered the *dhāranīs*, has been able to accept and embrace all the storehouse of profound secrets preached by the Buddhas, has entered deep into meditation, thoroughly grasped the doctrines, and in the space of an instant conceived the desire for *bodhi* and reached the level of no regression. Her eloquence knows no hindrance, and she thinks of living beings with compassion as though they were her own children. She is fully endowed with blessings, and when it comes to conceiving in mind and expounding by mouth, she is subtle, wonderful, comprehensive, and great. Kind, compassionate, benevolent, yielding, she is gentle and refined in will, capable of attaining *bodhi*." ...

At that time Śāriputra said to the dragon girl, "You suppose that in this short time you have been able to attain the unsurpassed way. But this is difficult to believe. Why? Because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law. How could you attain the unsurpassed *bodhi*? The road to Buddhahood is long and far-stretching. Only after one has spent immeasurable *kalpas* pursuing austerities, accumulating deeds, practicing all kinds *pāramitās*, can one finally achieve success. Moreover, a woman is subject to the five obstacles.

First, she cannot become a Brahma heavenly king. Second, she cannot become the king Śakra. Third, she cannot become a devil king. Fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning sage king. Fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. How then could a woman like you be able to attain Buddhahood so quickly?"

At that time the dragon girl had a precious jewel worth as much as the thousand-millionfold world, which she presented to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately accepted it. The dragon girl said to Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated and to the venerable one, Śāriputra, "I presented the precious jewel and the World-Honored One accepted it — was that not quickly done?"

They replied, "Very quickly!"

The girl said, "Employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood. It will be even quicker than that!"

At that time the members of the assembly all saw the dragon girl in the space of an instant change into a man and carry out all the practices of a bodhisattva, immediately proceeding to the Spotless World of the south, taking a seat on a jeweled lotus, and attaining impartial and correct enlightenment. With the thirty-two features and the eighty characteristics, he expounded the wonderful Law for all living beings everywhere in the ten directions. ...