

Foreword

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WE had thought to learn from the lessons of the twentieth century, called by many “The Century of Conflict”, and looked forward to the new “Century of Hope” that would bring an end to suffering and tragedy. Such, at least, were the fervent longings of many of us as we greeted the arrival of the twenty-first century. Instead, terrorist strikes brought with them shock and increased anxiety.

Fear over the worldwide economic recession and the spread of terrorist activities, along with the negative aspects of economic globalization that feed such ills and the threat posed by dire poverty, suppression of human rights, and ethnic, racial and religious confrontation—the twenty-first century appears to present even greater and more complex problems than the century that preceded it, ranging from environmental worries to out-and-out warfare.

The process of economic globalization, which seems to sweep over us like an angry wave, can hardly be regarded as conducive to the happiness of the human race as a whole. As the world evolves into a single gigantic area of economic competition, it is only natural to expect that the losers in such competition will likewise assume world-size proportions. Indeed, many nations, regions and peoples, far from losing out in the process of economic competition, will not even have the wherewithal required to participate in such a process. The crises and malaise brought about by such a situation will doubtless rouse nationalistic responses in some quarters, though such responses can do nothing to solve the problems that call them forth.

Globalization, affecting as it does so many dimensions and areas of our lives, from those related to economic concerns, communications or the exchange of information to those of moral values and way of life, of course brings with it much that is advantageous. But in so far as it tends

to destroy local economies and cultures and to force all into a single mould, it has negative facets that cannot be denied. The most important problem posed by the process of globalization is how to overcome these negative factors.

The key to the surmounting of these negative aspects of globalization lies not in nationalism, it seems to me, but in cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism, as pointed out by Professor Martha Nussbaum of the University of Chicago means loving others while recognizing their differences. It transcends differences of race and nationality, and makes no attempt to displace other cultures. On the contrary, true cosmopolitanism encourages the growth of cultural diversity, and as it becomes increasingly active, provides a motive force for creativity.

In this sense, the Lotus Sutra is a text deeply imbued with the spirit of cosmopolitanism. The chapter of the sutra entitled “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” describes a most interesting individual known as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. He is called this because whatever persons he happens to encounter, he bows to them and speaks words of praise, saying, “I would never dare disparage you, because you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” Here is a true cosmopolitan, someone who sees beyond differences. Whatever the background of the persons he confronts, he makes no distinction, but proceeds to declare that they and all people are capable of attaining Buddhahood.

A unifying quality that does not negate or wipe our diversity—that is what is needed now. And because the Lotus Sutra embodies such a quality, it has been embraced by the diverse cultures of eastern Asia and has enjoyed the widest popularity among them. Its influence has not been confined to the area of religion, but has provided the soil from which have sprung literary masterpieces such as *The Tale of Genji* and many other outstanding works of art.

To encounter “others”, those who differ from ourselves, and at such a time to be wholly free of prejudicial attitudes or feelings of contempt—this is the true, the ideal kind of encounter exemplified by “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter. As we look at the history of humankind since the establishment of our present-day system of modern states, how often have encounters with “others” failed to live up to such standards? Instead, all attention has been directed to the distinction between others and ourselves, and at times has even led to attempts, tragic and totally unjustifiable though they are, to “cleanse” one group from the very presences of “others”.

The kind of cosmopolitanism envisioned by “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter of the Lotus Sutra represents a path beset by great

hardship and trial. Those who embrace its ideal of absolute non-violence must be prepared to face all kinds of physical and verbal assault. And they cannot expect those who wield power to listen to their message. Elsewhere in the Lotus Sutra, the opponents of such cosmopolitanism are described as “who will claim they are practising the true way, despising and looking down on all humankind.” (“Encouraging Devotion” chapter) Those who adhere to the cosmopolitan approach have great respect for humanity and look on all living beings as worthy of the highest honour. Their enemies, on the other hand, as the Lotus Sutra points out, “despise all humankind”.

And in the same chapter, these enemies of cosmopolitanism are depicted as “greedy for profit and support”. In their search for gain, they look down on others and make use of them for their own ends. But if the process of globalization that we see advancing today should single out one particular culture or economic system and label it as “just” or “correct”, and, in order to further its own interests, should reject all others as “unjust” or “false”, that would serve only to unbalance the entire process. This is precisely the kind of error that the words of the Lotus Sutra are warning us against.

In another chapter of the Lotus Sutra, entitled “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs”, the Buddha describes the various plants, trees and medicinal herbs that grow in the world, the big plants, middle-size plants, little plants, the big trees and little trees that flourish there. And he tells how dense clouds spread across the sky, covering the whole earth and pouring down rain on it. Though the plants and trees differ in species, the rain falls on all of them equally. But though the same rain falls on all, the plants do not receive it all in the same fashion, but each, according to its individual nature, takes what it needs and produces its own particular flower and fruit.

Thus, through this lovely parable of the trees and the rain, the Buddha expresses in literary terms both the diversity of living beings and the equality of the Buddha’s compassion. It is not that living beings lack diversity, but simply that the Buddha does not discriminate between one type or another. Rather he honours their differences and, setting aside all prejudicial inclinations, seeks to nourish each individual nature.

And it is because the Buddhist religion embodies this spirit of wisdom and compassion that it is capable, I believe, of acting as an avenue for dialogue between differing cultures, religions, and value systems. Thus, in “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” chapter, the Buddha declares:

I look upon all things
 as being universally equal,
 I have no mind to favour this or that,
 to love one or hate another.
 I am without greed or attachment
 and without limitation or hindrance.
 At all times, for all things
 I preach the Law equally;
 as I would for a single person,
 that same way I do for numerous persons.

In the sutra on “Loving-kindness” of the *Suttanipāta* (*The Group of Discourses*), an early Buddhist text written in Pali, we find the following verses:

147. <26> whichever are seen or unseen, whichever live far or near,
 whether they already exist or are going to be, let all creatures be
 happy-minded.

148. One man should not humiliate another; one should not despise
 anyone anywhere. One should not wish another misery because of
 anger or from the notion of repugnance.

149. Just as a mother would protect with her life her own son, her
 only son, so one should cultivate an unbounded mind towards all
 beings.

(*The Group of Discourses*, vol. II, p. 17, The Pali Text Society,
 Oxford 1995. Revised translation by K. R. Norman.)

The Buddha’s compassion, as these passages from the sutra on “Loving-kindness” and “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” and “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” chapters of the Lotus Sutra illustrate, transcends all differences and distinctions and extends to all beings. It reaches not only those beings within sight, but those unseen as well, for all beings whatsoever are “children of the Buddha”.

It embodies a great act of memory, an act that invests the way one ordinarily view “others”, those who differ from oneself, with a new spiritual power. And, as the words of “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” chapter make clear, this compassion aims to relieve the immediate sufferings to each individual person. As the Buddha says:

I preach the Law equally;
 as I would for a single person,
 that same way I do for numerous persons.

If someone falls down before our very eyes, then regardless of what our religion, our race or cultural background may be, we will make an attempt to help the person. This is the impelling reality of the situation, and it is from this reality that compassion springs.

Behind the sufferings of each individual lie various factors related to the culture and society in which that person lives. The Lotus Sutra, while never for a moment departing from the realities of the situation, nevertheless attempts to show how all persons, regardless of who they are, can achieve the state of Buddhahood. It manifests a concrete love of humanity by pointing out a splendid path to that goal.

The Lotus Sutra, which has been called “the king of the sutras”, like the beneficent rain described in “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” chapter, has spread the rain of tolerance and compassion over the lands of Asia, helping to bring forth many varieties of cultural flowering in these areas. As we enter a new century, it is my sincere hope that this teaching, which seeks to nourish diversity, will come to enrich the world as a whole.

I recall with great pleasure the visit I made to the University of Cambridge in 1972, when I was welcomed by Dr Michael Loewe, dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, and had a friendly talk with him there. After that, we had dinner at the nearby University Arms Hotel, where we exchanged views on the Cambridge tradition, discussing the university’s methods of education and questions concerning the relationship between religion and education, and learning in general.

When I visited Great Britain again in 1991, I had the pleasure of meeting with Sir Fred Hoyle, astronomer and Honorary Fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge, and Dr Nalin Chandra Wickramasinghe, professor in the University of Wales, Cardiff, and discussing with them matters pertaining to life and the universe.

Cambridge University Library, with its eight hundred year history of eminence in the world of learning, is now contributing to the Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series by publishing these manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra from its collection, an addition that I am confident will add greatly to the scholastic value of the series.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Deputy Librarian D. J. Hall, Craig Jamieson, keeper of Sanskrit manuscripts, and all the others of Cambridge University Library who helped to make this publication possible.

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