

THE BRIDGE

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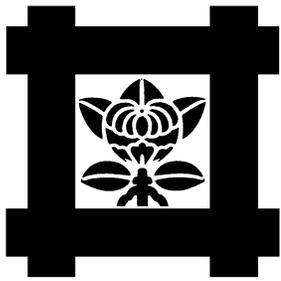
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David Robinson • Rita Rouse
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THE WORLD OF THE ODAIMOKU – PART 4

The Lotus Flower is a symbol of the Buddha's teaching.

Article by
Rev. Junichi Nakamura
Illustration by
Hiroshige Katsu

PURE WHITE LOTUS FLOWER BLOOMS IN STANDING WATER

The lotus flower is a symbol of the Buddha's teaching. Many buddhas and bodhisattvas are represented standing or sitting on a lotus flower. Have you ever wondered why? I have also wondered about this. Let's take a look at the lotus flower in Buddhism.

The lotus flower originally comes from India, just like Buddhism. In ancient times, the lotus was brought to China on the Silk Road, and from China was carried to Japan. Lotus leaves are round and have long stems. In summertime, a long stem grows topped with a large flower. After the flower falls, the flower pod enlarges into the shape of a beehive with seeds inside the pod's chambers. In late fall, the lotus root grows fat and is often used as an ingredient in Asian food.

In the springtime, lotus flowers bloom in the moat of a castle in my town. Seeing the buds, I think, "Lotus flowers are pretty, but the Buddha wouldn't be comfort-



able if he sat on one." However, the lotus flower seat that appears in the sutras is actually a water lily. Water lilies bloom flat on the surface of the water in the morning and then close in the evening, so the Buddha could comfortably rest on it, at least during the daytime!

Do you know what color lotus flower the Buddha sat on? According to the encyclopedia, lotus flowers can be one of several different colors such as red, blue, yellow, or white. When I see the Buddha's statue enshrined in the temple's main hall, I can't tell what color the lotus flower is. One day when I was considering what color the flower should be, something clicked in my mind. I remembered that the Lotus Sutra's original title in Sanskrit is *Saddharmapundarika-sutra*. *Saddharma* means "right teaching," *pundarika* means "white lotus flower," and *sutra* means "Buddhist scripture." In Sanskrit, *pundarika* does not mean just any lotus flower, but specifically the white lotus. So the seat for buddhas and bodhisattvas should be a white lotus, since all the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha are contained in the Lotus Sutra.

Lotus flowers bloom in ponds and swamps. Usually, they bloom in standing water, often in muddy water. Sakyamuni Buddha compared muddy water to people's earthly desires. Despite the muddy water in which they grow, lotus flowers are pure white. In the same way, the Buddha's teachings arise within the "muddiness" of this world. That is why the lotus flower symbolizes the Buddha's teaching.



In chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Maitreya says,

They (Sakyamuni Buddha's students) have studied the Way of Bodhisattvas well. They are not defiled by worldliness Just as the lotus-flower Is not defiled by water. (Murano, p. 239)

Although we live in this world, we are not defiled by its evils. We should transform our earthly desires, which are considered evil, into good energy and bloom flowers of valuable life. Practitioners of the Lotus Sutra should seek a better life without being defiled by worldly evils.

MESSAGE TO THE FUTURE

I think people want to be good. No one wants to be evil. However, people can become evil because they do not have the wisdom to control their desires. That wisdom is expounded by Sakyamuni Buddha in the Lotus Sutra, which is compared to the white lotus flower.

Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra says,

Good men or women in the future who hear this Chapter of Devadatta of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma with faithful respect caused by their pure minds, and have no doubts [about this chapter], will not fall into hell or the region of hungry spirits or the region of animals. They will be reborn before the Buddhas of the worlds of the ten quarters. (Murano, p. 198)

The word "future" in this paragraph made me realize that Sakyamuni Buddha is sending a message to those of us living now, in the time after he taught the Lotus Sutra.

The following sentence also interests me: "When they are reborn before the Buddhas, they will appear in lotus-flowers." (Murano, p. 198)

The word translated as "appear" is *keshō* (化生) in Japanese. *Keshō* is one of the four modes of birth described by ancient Indian philosophy. If you would like to know more about these four modes, please see the explanation in the note. I am particularly interested in one of the definitions of *Keshō* in the dictionary: "*Keshō* is rebirth created by one's own karma (deeds) from the past."

Indian people believed that one's present existence is a result of one's karma from the past and one's future will be dictated by the one's present karma. Looking at these definitions, I begin to understand the meaning of *Keshō*.

In contrast to the idea of karma as deeds, Sakyamuni Buddha taught that if one believes in his words – generating the karma of faith – one can be reborn from a lotus flower.

The lotus flower is, of course, a white lotus flower. White symbolizes purity. The last part of chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra describes the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king. She believed in the Lotus Sutra and attained Buddhahood in the Spotless World. Having a pure and

spotless mind, just like we are born with, is necessary for enlightenment.

Of course, the white lotus flower was also very important to Nichiren Shōnin himself, so important that his name, Nichiren, means "sun white lotus."

Nichiren Shōnin said about the origin of his name,

In this world nothing is brighter than the sun and the moon, nothing is more noble than the lotus flower. As the Lotus Sutra is like the sun and the moon and the lotus flower, it is called the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma. I, Nichiren, am also like the sun and the moon and the lotus flower." (Letter to the Wife of Shijō Kingo)

Nichiren Shōnin read the Lotus Sutra with a mind as pure as the Dragon princess'.

Nichiren Shōnin also said, "There is a path to attain Buddhahood without leaving desires." (Letter to Shijō Kingo)

When I read these words of Nichiren Shōnin, I remember the Buddha's wish entrusted in the white lotus flower, given to us in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma.

NOTE:

Kumārajīva:

He was born to Indian father who had lineage of Indian royal family and mother who was a sister of a king of Kuccha. Kumārajīva entered priesthood at seven. First he studied Hinayana and later studied Mahayana. When Fu Chien conquered Kuccha in 384, Kumārajīva was held as a captive in China for 18 years. He went to Chang-an in 401 and was treated as a state master. For the rest of life, he translated Buddhist texts, amounting to 35 sutras and discourses in more than 300 fascicles, including Maha-prajna-paramita-sutra, the Lotus Sutra, the Amida Sutra, the Great Wisdom Discourse and so forth.

Shishō:

According to ancient Indian philosophy, living beings are born in one of four ways.

- 1) taishō (胎生) - birth from the mother's womb, such as human beings and mammals.
- 2) ranshō (卵生) - birth from an egg, such as birds and fishes.
- 3) shishshō (湿生) - birth from moisture. Mosquitoes or frogs were once believed to be born in this way.

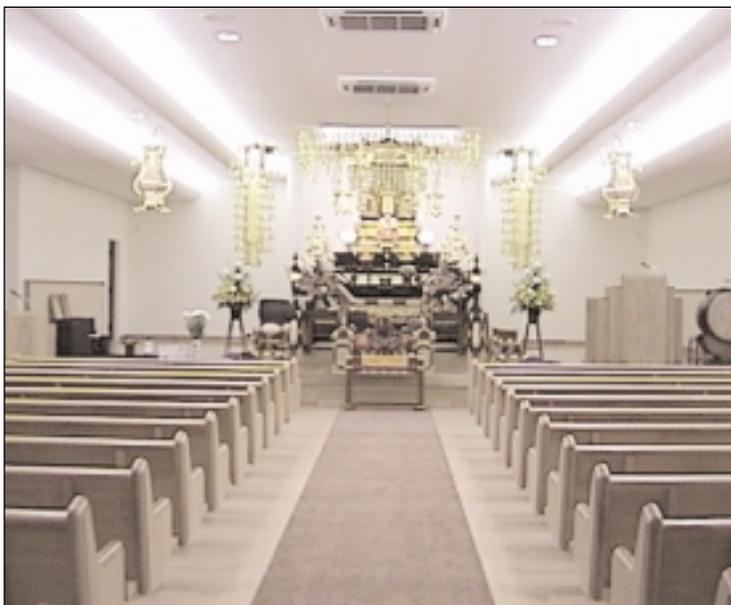
- 4) keshō (化生) - metamorphosis. Sudden birth from nothing, such as heavenly beings.



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii celebrates 100th Anniversary



Outside view of new main hall of Hawaii Nichiren Shu Betsuin



Inside view of the new hall

Dear Members and Friends

The Nichiren Mission of Hawaii takes pleasure in inviting you to the Dedication Service for our New Hondo in conjunction with the commemorative services and activities celebrating the 750th Anniversary of the Establishment of Nichiren Buddhism and the 100th Anniversary of Nichiren Buddhism in Hawaii. These activities and services will take place on June 21 and 22, 2003. Please note that the Archbishop of the Nichiren Shu Order will be officiating a formal service and we expect more than 1,000 guests from Japan and others to join us in the celebrations.

We ask you to mark your calendars and participate in these celebrations since they are once-in-a-lifetime events.

The ceremonies will be magnificent. The highlight of these activities will be the Formal Service officiated by the Archbishop Nichiko Fujii on Saturday, June 21, 2003 at 2:00 p.m.

Due to the number of attendees and the limited capacity of the New Hondo, we plan multiple services. The services begin on Saturday, June 21st, at 10:00 am with the Opening Ceremony for the New Main Hall. At 2:00 p.m. that same day, the 750th Anniversary and 100th Anniversary Formal Commemorative Service will be officiated by Archbishop Fujii. This will be the only service officiated by the Archbishop who is the spiritual head of our Nichiren Shu Order. That same Saturday night, the Celebration Banquet will be held from 6:00 pm at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel ballroom. We strongly recommend that you attend this banquet since it is the only event where both American members, and guests from Japan and others will be gathering at one venue. We anticipate 1,500 people and the Archbishop will be attending this event. The dinner cost for this banquet will be \$75.00 per person.

On Sunday, June 22nd, there will be three commemorative services at 10:00 a.m., 12:00 noon and 2:00 pm. If you are unable to attend the Formal Service on Saturday, I hope you make an effort to attend any one of these services.

On Monday, June 23rd, we will be traveling to the Island of Hawaii where we will hold a dedication ceremony for the 100th Anniversary Monument at the original Kapapala Temple established by Rev. Takagi in the early 1900's. We will be organizing a tour group. The cost is estimated to be \$200 including the round trip to Hilo and ground transportation on the Island of Hawaii. Other events that are being planned: Memorial Service at Punchbowl National Cemetery on June 20th, public propagation activities during the day at the Ala Moana Shopping Center on June 22nd and a World Peace Parade at Waikiki on June 22nd. The Parade will feature giant mando lanterns brought from Japan. *(continued on page 4)*

DOCHO CEREMONY

Shami Ryushin Matt Miller

This April, I had the opportunity to travel to Japan with my teacher, Rev. Michael Ryuoh Faulconer of the Nichiren Buddhist Temple of Portland, OR, along with two other of his disciples, my “brother” and “sister,” Philip Sorenson and Linda Caine-Barrett. The main purpose of our journey was to take vows as shami at the beginning of the month. A *shami* is a person who has taken vows, promising to learn how to be a Buddhist minister. If our training is successful and our teacher thinks we are ready, within about five years we all hope to take the final step, *shingyō dōjō*, at the end of which we will be ordained as ministers.



Three Shamis visit Kuonji Temple. (from left) Shamis Myokei Cane-Barette, Ryushin Miller, and Ryunin Sorensen.

We were all also lucky enough to be invited to the ceremonies celebrating the conclusion of the 750th anniversary of Nichiren Shōnin’s declaration of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo near the end of the month. This gave us plenty of time during the middle of April to visit many important temples and sites from the life of

Nichiren Shōnin and his disciples. It also gave us a chance to experience the life of Buddhist ministers in Japan, since during most of our stay we stayed as guests at a community temple in suburban Japan.

On April 3rd, we arrived at Seichōji, the temple where Nichiren Shōnin himself did his earliest training, became a shami, and finally was ordained as a priest. Seichoji is also the place that, on April 28, 1253, Nichiren Shōnin climbed to the top of the mountain and, for the first time,

chanted Namu Myoho Renge Kyo to the rising sun, thus founding Nichiren Shu Buddhism. After our first night of training and lectures, we all climbed the same slope and greeted the rising sun with a brief service and our own Odaimoku. We then returned to Seichōji to participate in the service in which we took our vows to become shami.

As moving and inspiring as chanting to the rising sun at the same place that Nichiren Shōnin first proclaimed Namu Myoho Renge Kyo was, I must admit that I was not inspired by the service at the temple below – not only was I too nervous to fully appreciate the service, but everything was done in Japanese and I did not understand what was being said or what I was saying. Also, it seemed to be very similar to our tokudo ceremony – which was very special to me – at which we first took vows to become the students of our teacher, Rev. Faulconer.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii celebrates 100th Anniversary

JUNE

20 (Fri)	1:00 p.m.	World Peace Prayer at Punchbowl and Ehime Maru at Kakaako Park
21 (Sat)	10:00 a.m.	Opening Ceremony at Betsuin
	2:00 p.m.	Formal Commemorative Ceremony at Betsuin
	6:00 p.m.	Celebration Banquet at the Sheraton Waikiki Ballroom
22 (Sun)	10:00 a.m.	Celebration Service at Betsuin
	11:00 a.m.	Propagation Activity at Ala Moana Shopping Center
	12:00 noon	Celebration Service at Betsuin
	1:00 p.m.	Ala Moana Propagation Activity at Ala Moana Shopping Center
	2:00 p.m.	Celebration Service at Betsuin
	6:30 p.m.	World Peace Parade on Kalakaua Ave., Waikiki
23 (Mon)	1:00 p.m.	100th Anniversary Service at Kapapala Temple

It is our spiritual duty to have Nichiren Buddhism recognized in our community and we can spread the teaching of the Lotus Sutra through these events. I would like to ask you to participate in these events since these are momentous occasions for our Betsuin and the missions in Hawaii.

In Gassho,

Eric Kawatani
President,
Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

The significance of our ceremony at Seichoji finally hit me a week later at a completely different temple many miles from where the ceremony itself took place. One of the temples that we visited during our stay was Ankokuronji in Kamakura. This temple is built on the site of Nichiren Shōnin's residence in Kamakura; it is the place where he lived when he preached on the streets of the capital, when he wrote the Rishso Ankoku Ron, and where his hut was burned down when he suffered the Matsubagayatsu Persecution. We arrived there at the end of a rainy and difficult day. After some minutes, the head minis-

ter of the temple was kind enough to invite us to see the cave in which Nichiren Shōnin had written the Rishso Ankoku Ron. Fronted by a small temple building, one walks back a tunnel about 10 yards in length to reach the actual cave itself, in which a statue of Nichiren Shōnin is enshrined. When we knelt in front of the altar, I began to truly realize the difficulties that Nichiren Shōnin had faced and the hardships and training he had overcome to spread the Dharma for bringing peace to the world. His times were harder than ours, and he overcame much more than I would ever have to, yet I was still awestruck and wondered if

I could be strong enough and giving enough to even overcome the easier obstacles that I face. I wept then with a sense of my own weakness and uncertainty, and I am still unsure that I have what it takes, but I will continue to try to develop myself with the guidance of Rev. Faulconer. I pray that he can find the necessary compassion and strength within me.

At the end of our trip, we were again lucky to be asked to participate in the main hall at Kuonji during the ceremony to complete the 750th anniversary of the founding of Nichiren Shu. Again, the ceremony was entirely in Japanese, so I did not understand any of the speeches or special prayers. However, despite my lack of understanding, I was struck by the power of the Archbishop's voice. The typical qualities of power – volume, resonance, clarity, or depth of tone – would be difficult to attribute to his voice. However, there is a power of compassion, faith, and feeling that lives so strongly in his voice that I did not need to understand a single word that he said to feel that power. This time I felt the importance of the ceremony without needing to understand the words.

We had many other moving experiences during our visits to other important places and in meeting the other international participants in the concluding ceremony. I could also tell much more about the experiences and places I have described here, but space is limited. Let me conclude by expressing my deepest thanks and admiration to all of our extremely generous and thoughtful hosts and guides in Japan, the Overseas department at Nichiren Shu headquarters, and of course to our teacher Rev. Faulconer.



Three Shamis from America in the front row attend a seminar.

● Awakening to the Lotus

- Introducing Nichiren Shu Buddhism
\$10.00 donation

One of the most important and widely practiced forms of Japanese Buddhism, Nichiren Shu is also one of the least known outside of Japan. The few books available in the West are either college-level texts or direct translations of works that assume some prior knowledge of this uniquely Japanese school of Buddhism.

Awakening to the Lotus finally explains Nichiren Shu in terms that everyone from the most basic beginner to those with previous experience of Nichiren Buddhist schools can understand. Examining the foundation, the teaching, the practice, and the beliefs of Nichiren Shu, this book can serve both as a handbook for those just beginning to practice Buddhism and as an information



resource for those who simply want to learn more about this fascinating school.

Beginning with the basics of general Buddhism, Awakening to the Lotus quickly focuses in on the specific doctrines and teachings of Nichiren Shu. Ceremonies, special events, personal practice, the Lotus Sutra, and the teachings of the founder of the school, Nichiren Shōnin, are all covered fully in easy to understand language.

● Liturgy of Nichiren Shu

- English pocket service book
\$6.00 donation

Services in the Nichiren Shu tradition may take on several forms from extremely simple to very ornate. At home, we practice on a daily basis, usually in the morning and in the evening. These services can include reciting several chapters of the Lotus Sutra to just chanting of Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. Here we have laid out a simple service including Shodaigyo meditation (meditation of chanting Odaimoku).

● Nichiren-Sama

Picture-card Video \$10.00 donation

The picture-card video, "Nichiren-Sama" shows you the complete life of Nichiren Shōnin. This video is enjoyable not only for children but even adults. 1 hr 45 min.

The Lotus Sutra for children

by Rev. Koke Matsumoto • Translated by Rev. Shokai Kanai

(The book was written for grandparents and parents to read to their children. The content is very deep but easy for all to understand.)

THE PRINCE IS SAKYAMUNI BUDDHA (VOLUME 1)

~ Chapter 1 ~

BIRTH OF THE PRINCE

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom called Sakya in India. The King was gentle and brave, and the people of the kingdom loved him very much. The Queen was very beautiful and kind. Of course, the people loved her as much as their king.

The King's name was Shuddhodana and the Queen's name was Maya. They did not have any children. For a very long time, the couple and their people wished to have a prince. Every day they prayed to their highest God Brahmadeva; "Please Brahmadeva, may we be blessed with a child!" The King wished to have a wise and brave son, while the Queen wished to have a graceful and meek child.

One night, the Queen had a strange dream in which she saw a white elephant entering into her womb through the right side of her chest. Queen Maya was going to have a baby! As the delivery day approached, she tried to return her parents' home for the baby's birth.

It was April 8. After a long rainy season, flowers were blooming everywhere. Queen Maya and her servants took a rest in the beautiful Lumibini Garden on their way to her hometown. Suddenly, she felt the baby coming! Everyone was in a panic because the Queen hadn't reached her parents' home. She did not worry, but smiled instead. Sweet nectar rained upon them. Queen Maya reached out her right arm to try to pick one of the beautiful

sweet tea flowers. At that time, a baby like a shining jewel was born from her right underarm. Her attendants were surprised with the wondrous sight and fixed their eyes on the baby.

Surprise! The cute and solemn baby stood up, raising his right hand to point towards Heaven and lowering his left hand to point at the Earth. He walked seven

steps and declared with a clear voice, "From heaven to the earth I am alone the most honored one."

Of course, everyone was surprised because babies were supposed to be born with a cry. However, this baby of the King and Queen had said "From heaven to the earth I am alone the most honored one!" Actually, there was another phrase after that. I will tell you secretly. "From Heaven to the Earth I am alone the Most Honored One. The triple worlds (the worlds of those who have feeling, those who do not have feeling, and those in spiritual realm) are full of suffering, but I am alone able to be free from these sufferings." This means that the Buddha is the most respectable person from the heaven to the earth. It is true because the people on this land are full of worries, and only the Buddha saves us all from agony.

The falling nectar of raindrops changed to red and white lotus flower petals. The rain clouds disappeared, and a ray of sun shined down on the infant. It looked like the baby came from the Buddha's Pure Land. Everybody was so impressed with these mysteries. All people of the kingdom rejoiced with the birth of the prince. The King and the Queen were so happy with the birth of their princely heir.

~ Chapter 2 ~

A GREAT PREDICTION OF HERMIT ASHITA

A hermit named Ashita, who lived in the mountains not far away, noticed a radiance about the heaven and earth. He mumbled to himself, "Something very important has happened! A Prince must have been born in the kingdom. I will go there immediately and see him." He descended from the mountains in a hurry to visit the King and Queen at Kapilavastu Castle.

"Congratulations King Shuddhodana and Queen Maya for the birth of a princely heir!" The hermit



saw the baby and predicted, “This prince will be a mighty King to rule the entire country. He will be the number one King in the world. However, if he denounces princehood and becomes a monk, he will become a Buddha to save people around the world.”

The King and the people of the kingdom were pleased to hear this prophecy. Queen Maya, however, seemed worried. Her eyes filled with tears while watching the newborn baby. Why didn't she rejoice in the famous hermit Ashita's prediction that the Prince will be a great King and rule the world? Why could she not stop the tears? It was very strange.

~ Chapter 3 ~
A SAD SEPARATION

No wonder! Even though she loved him very much, Queen Maya had to be separated from her newborn baby. She could devote her affection on her lovely son for only one week. The Queen suddenly died on April 15, a week after the birth of the prince. How sad she had to be separated from the newborn baby!

The infant was named Siddhartha, which means “every wish fulfilled.” Queen Maya's younger sister, Mahaprajapati, became the child's foster mother and brought him up with loving care.

Siddhartha's father and foster mother raised the princely heir with lots of affection. He grew into a healthy boy. The Prince began his lessons in reading, writing and military arts. There was no one that could exceed him. He was wise and kind to everyone, so his friends and servants loved and adored him. He seemed to be happy and free to do anything. Actually, Prince Siddhartha had a spiritual wound. Once in a while, he felt lonesome and his eyes were suddenly wet.



Reader's Voice — My Memory of Mount Minobu

Etsuko Dohi

Reading an article in the last issue of the Bridge reawakened my memories of Mount Minobu. I used to live in Fujinomiya near Mount Minobu. Every April, my whole family visited Mount Minobu to participate in a my parents' memorial service. In his article, Mr. Petorov talked about the view from the Minobu Line train on the way from Fuji City to Mount Minobu. The view of Mount Fuji from the Fuji River is so gorgeous; I remember how, for many years, I enjoyed seeing different views of the mountain in all four seasons.

I remember having box lunches under the cherry trees at Kuonji Temple. The pretty color of the cherry flowers, the limber branches swaying in the wind and scattering petals: these scenes are printed in my memory. When we visited the temple in May, azaleas were blooming with warm welcome. Many of my memories remain

at Kuonji Temple, and when I read the article, I recalled my late parents.

When I visited Mount Minobu for the first time 30 years ago, I was bringing my father's memorial tablet to Kuonji Temple. At the time, I was living in Osaka, so I stayed at a branch temple. Although I don't remember which building it was, the voices of ministers chanting the sutra echoed through the building. I still remember the solemn service. When I got married, I moved to Fujinomiya, much closer to Mount Minobu than Osaka. Every year during Ohigan and Obon, I took my mother to Kuonji Temple. She chanted the Lotus Sutra in front of my father's memorial tablet as I stood to the side with my palms together. I clearly remember my mother chanting the sutra morning and evening for the family's ancestors. She passed away in front of the family altar, with her palms together in the same gesture of reverence that she made for so many years. Since I live in

America, far from Japan, I sometimes feel regret for leaving my mother alone near the end of her life and for occasionally forgetting my parents' memorial days. Because of this, it was very meaningful for me to read the article about visiting Mount Minobu in the Bridge. Thank you.

