

## A Possibility for Accommodating Ideological Diversity

. . . There is not just one method for entering the Way, the causes conditions for enlightenment being many. and] the goal of the myriad religious practices is the same.



- - - Mujū Ichien, *Shasekishū* 沙石集, 1279-1283)



**Q: On what grounds can Mujū make such a claim?**

A: On the fundamental Mahāyāna principle of Skillful Means (*hōben*, *fang pien*; *upāya*) expressed most forceably in the *Lotus Sutra*.

**Q: So he is just another cultural relativist who thinks one ideological position is just as good as another?**

A: Absolutely not. He has definite opinions about what is right for himself; but he sees no need to impose his beliefs on others.

**Q: But how can he not insist that he alone understands what is really "True," and that those who disagree cannot be tolerated?**

A: Because his Truth "surpasseth understanding" and cannot only be suggested obliquely through anthropomorphic myths and allegories, like fingers pointing at the moon.

**Q: So what does that have to do with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

A: At this very moment the Three Great Monotheisms in the West, each of which has a vision of its One-and-Only-True Belief, are on a nuclear collision course. If this does not concern you, then read no further. If it does, then the *Lotus Sutra* and some other considerations about the uses and limits of language and human reasoning may be of interest. For starters. . .

The *Lotus Sutra*, or simply, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (Myohorengekyo, Hokkekyo). The translation into Chinese (T. 262) of the Sanskrit *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra* by Kumarajiva in C.E. 406 has been the preeminent scripture in the Mahayana Buddhism of East Asia, both for its doctrinal position and for providing a rich imagery, largely through its 8 parables, for literature and the pictorial arts and architecture of China, Korea, and Japan. It consists of twenty-eight chapters (*-bon*) in eight "scrolls" (or "fascicles," *-kan*). The scriptural foundation for the Tendai and Nichiren sects, the *Lotus Sutra* was widely respected the Shingon, Zen (especially the Rinza school), and the "Six Nara Sects" of early Japanese Buddhism.

The message of the *Lotus Sutra* is that all sentient beings have the potential for attaining Buddhahood, but conceptual illusion prevents them from realizing that this is their essential nature. So, out of compassion, the Buddha(s) employs many devices (Skillful Means/Expedients; *hōben*) accommodated to their specific needs, to assist them in seeing through this illusion.

. . . The Real being truly indeterminate, it is, however, possible to utilize any means appropriate to the person in particular circumstances for leading him to the ultimate truth. There is no limit to the number and nature of the doctrinal devices that may be employed to realize this end. The only consideration is that the device must be suited to the spiritual temperament and needs of the beings, like the medicine to the malady. This is the celebrated doctrine of Upaya-kausalya (excellence in the choice of methods). Buddha is compared to a skilled physician who adjusts his remedies conforming to the nature and intensity of the disease of the patients; he does not, like a quack, prescribe one remedy for all. To one suffering from dogmatic belief in substance (*atman*) he may prescribe the non-atman (*nairatmya*) doctrine as a corrective, and for the skeptic and the materialist he may prescribe as an antidote, the reality of the self and the continuance of Karma and its result. To the spiritually advanced man, he teaches that there is neither self nor the states. According to the nature of the malady to be cured the appropriate teaching could be used. (Adapted from Murti 1960, pp. 246-47.)

Although provisional teachings are not only possible but necessary, there is, in fact, only One Vehicle (*ichijō; ekayana*); and for this reason the *Lotus* is sometimes called the *Ichijokyo*, Sutra of the One Vehicle. It is important to note, however, that the term does not describe an *exclusive dogmatic formulation* that is taken to be correct while others are false. The ultimate religious experience is beyond the reach of rational definition; and although the *Lotus Sutra* may be viewed the the best possible expression of the Buddha's teaching, other scriptures (and other words, rituals, myths, metaphors, etc.) can be embraced as expressing at least a partial truth. The *One Vehicle* refers to a single experiential goal to be reached through a variety of conceptual formulations and exercises, but ultimately transcending the word-games of rationality. This notion, not political expediency, is the basis of Tendai's proverbial tolerance. (Adapted from Minor, Odagiri, Morrell 1985, Pp. 385-388.)

### Lotus Sutra

Hokkekyō 法華經



Myōhōrengkyō 妙法蓮華經

*Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*

Chinese translation (T. 262) of the Sanskrit *Saddharma-pundarīka-sūtra*  
by Kumārajīva, C.E.406

Since Kumārajīva (or some later editor or printer) divided the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the original Sanskrit version into two separate chapters and rearranged the numbering of the last seven or chapters, it is impossible to line up the chapters of the Sanskrit and Chinese versions in two parallel columns. Moreover, Kumārajīva's Chinese version, the standard in East Asian Buddhism, reflects an East Asian rather than an Indian mindset. This is one of the major defining scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the extent to which it may or may not diverge from some earlier Sanskrit text may have some historical interest, but it is not a religious problem -- as, say, the historical authenticity of the early accounts in the New Testament might be for a Christian. Briefly, the approach is mythological rather than historical. For all

practical purposes, Kumārajīva's Chinese version of the *Lotus Sutra* is the word of the Buddha as it is heard by Chinese, Korea, Japanese, Mongolian, and Tibetan Buddhists. Kern's translation of the *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra* from Sanskrit (1884, 1909) may provide some interesting historical comparisons, but it is not to be confused with the translations from Kumārajīva's Chinese version.

The following table of contents includes an indication [K] of parallel items. Symbols also show the Four Important Chapters (*shiyōbon*) according to Tendai (T) -- 2, 14, 16, 25 --and according to the Nichiren Sect (N)-- 2, 16, 21, 26. The eight scrolls/fascicles (*kan*) are indicated by Roman numerals in parentheses preceding the chapter numbers.

Fasc.	Ch.	Japanese Title	English Title	Parables / Episode	Sect	Kern
I	1.	<i>Johon</i> 序品	<b>Introduction</b>			[K1]
I	2.	<i>Hōbenbon</i> 方便品	<b>Expedient Devices</b>		(T, N)	[K2]
II	3.	<i>Hiyubon</i> 譬喩品	<b>Parable</b>	<b>Parable of the Burning House</b> ( <i>katakuyu</i> 火宅喩)		[K3]
II	4.	<i>Shingebon</i> 信解品	<b>Belief and Understanding</b>	<b>Parable of the Prodigal Son</b> ( <i>gūshiyu</i> 子窮喩)		[K4]
III	5.	<i>Yakusōyubon</i> 藥草喩品	<b>Medicinal Herbs</b>	<b>Parable of the Medicinal Herbs</b> ( <i>yakusōyu</i> 藥草喩)		[K5]
III	6.	<i>Jukibon</i> 授記品	<b>Bestowal of Prophecy</b>			[K6]
III	7.	<i>Kejōyuhon</i> 化城喩品	<b>Parable of the Conjured City</b>	<b>Parable of the Magic City</b> ( <i>kejōyu</i> 化城喩)		[K7]
IV	8.	<i>Gobyakudeshi Jukibon</i> 五百弟子授記品	<b>Receipt of Prophecy by Five Hundred Disciples</b>	<b>Parable of the Hidden Jewel</b> ( <i>eshuyu</i> 衣珠喩)		[K8]
IV	9.	<i>Jugaku Mugaku Ninkihon</i> 授學無學人記品	<b>Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adepts</b>			[K9]
IV	10.	<i>Hosshihon</i> 法師品	<b>Preachers of Dharma</b>			[K10]
IV	11.	<i>Kenhōtōhon</i> 見寶塔品	<b>Apparition of the Jeweled Stūpa</b>			[K11a]
V	12.	<i>Daibadattahon</i> 提婆達多品	<b>Devadatta</b>	<b>Episode: Daughter of the Dragon King</b>		[K11b]

V	13.	<i>Kanjihon</i> 勸持品	<b>Fortitude</b>			[K12]
V	14.	<i>Anrakugyohon</i> 安樂行品	<b>Comfortable Conduct</b>	<b>Parable of the Topknot Pearl</b> ( <i>keishuyu</i> 髻珠喻)	(T)	[K13]
V	15.	<i>Jūjiyujutsuhon</i> 從地涌出品	<b>Welling Up Out of the Earth</b>			[K14]
VI	16.	<i>Nyoraijiryohon</i> 如來壽量品	<b>The Life-span of the Thus Come One</b>	<b>Parable of the Physician</b> ( <i>ishiyu</i> 医子喻)	(T, N)	[K15]
VI	17.	<i>Fumbetsukudokuhon</i> 分別功德品	<b>Discrimination of Merits</b>			[K16]
VI	18.	<i>Zuikikudokuhon</i> 隨喜功德品	<b>The Merits of Appropriate Joy</b>			[K17]
VI	19.	<i>Hosshikudokuhon</i> 法師功德品	<b>The Merits of the Dharma Preacher</b>			[K18]
VII	20.	<i>Jōfukyō Bosatsuhon</i> 常不輕菩薩品	<b>The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging</b>			[K19]
VII	21.	<i>Nyoraijinrikihon</i> 如來神力品	<b>The Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One</b>		(N)	[K20]
VII	22.	<i>Zokuruihon</i> 囑累品	<b>Entrustment</b>			[K27]
VII	23.	<i>Yakuobosatsu Honjihon</i> 藥王菩薩本地品	<b>The Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King</b>			[K22]
VII	24.	<i>Myōonbosatsuhon</i> 妙音菩薩品	<b>The Bodhisattva Fine Sound</b>			[K23]
VIII	25.	<i>Kanzeonbosatsu Fumonbon</i> 觀世音菩薩普門品	<b>The Gateway to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva He Who Observes the Sounds of the World</b>	= <i>Kannogyō</i> (觀音經)	(T)	[K24]
VIII	26.	<i>Daranihon</i> 陀羅尼品	<b>Dhāraṇi</b>		(N)	[K21]
VIII	27.	<i>Myōshōgon'ō Honjihon</i> 妙莊嚴王本事品	<b>The Former Affairs of the King Fine Adornment</b>			[K25]
VIII	28.	<i>Fugenbosatsu Kambotsuhon</i> 普賢菩薩勸發品	<b>The Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universally Worthy</b>			[K26]



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