

Publication Ceremony of the *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from Cambridge University Library (Add. 1682 and Add. 1683), Facsimile Edition*

Message

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ALLOW me to extend my warmest greetings and felicitations on the holding of this lecture presentation, which commemorates the publication of the facsimile edition of the *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from Cambridge University Library (Add. 1682 and Add. 1683)*, an 800-year institution standing at the pinnacle of human knowledge and learning.

It is indeed a great joy and honour to know that this lecture is being held here, at this Library so steeped in history and verdure. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to every member of its administration for graciously providing the presentation's venue, and to the individuals whose generous support led to its holding today.

I have the fondest memories of my visit to the University of Cambridge in 1972, when I was welcomed by Dr. Michael Loewe, Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, and had the privilege of speaking with him there. We later shared dinner at the nearby University Arms Hotel, where we exchanged views on the illustrious Cambridge tradition, the ideals of higher education, the relationship of religion and education, and learning in general.

On my second visit to the United Kingdom in 1991, I met with Sir Fred Hoyle, astronomer and Honorary Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Dr. Nalin Chandra Wickramasinghe, professor at the University of Wales, Cardiff. Their insight into the mysteries of life and the cosmos remain equally memorable and inspiring.

Preserved in the Cambridge University Library collection and made available to the public are a number of the world's most valued writings, including many Sanskrit texts found in Nepal in the 1870s by Daniel Wright, and later by Cecil Bendall. The texts reproduced in *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from Cambridge University Library (Add.*

1682 and Add. 1683) are among the oldest of the Nepalese-Tibetan manuscripts in the Library's collection and are of vital importance for textual studies of the Lotus Sutra.

I wish to thank Librarian P. K. Fox, Deputy Librarian D. J. Hall and others associated with the University Library, for without the tireless and timely contributions they provided over the course of its publication, this facsimile edition would have never seen the light of day. I also wish to acknowledge the Library's Photography Department, for its outstanding work in producing the splendid colour photographs of the manuscripts, and to express my appreciation to everyone involved in making this project such a success.

Soka Gakkai International undertook the effort to make available the facsimile editions and romanized versions of Lotus Sutra manuscripts in the hope that these would serve the needs of scholars of Buddhism throughout the world. Since 1997, five volumes of four manuscripts have been published. The first in the series was *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collection, Facsimile Edition and Romanized Text*, with the second being *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4–21), Facsimile Edition and Romanized Text 1*. This was followed by *Fragments of a Manuscript of the Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra from Khādaliq*, with *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from Cambridge University Library (Add. 1682 and Add. 1683), Facsimile Edition* representing the fourth in the series.

The facsimile edition of the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts from the collection of Cambridge University Library will without question lend further confidence in and utility to the academic value of our Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series.

The fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, known as the "The Parables of the Medicinal Herbs," includes the apologue, "Three kinds of medicinal herbs and two kinds of trees." In it, the Buddha describes the various plants, trees and medicinal herbs of the world, each unique in name, shape and characteristic. The sky then darkens as dense clouds blanket the world, and a downpour ensues. It nourishes the vegetation, falling on every plant and tree equally. Yet each takes in the rain from the heavens in its own way, according to its nature and variety.

The Sutra reads, "Though all these plants and trees grow in the same earth and are moistened by the same rain, each has its differences and particulars."

By embracing the impartial blessings of the earth and rain, the trees and plants are able to flourish, allowing their unique qualities and individuality to bloom. The blessings signify the impartial teachings and

Law of the Buddha; the flora, the diversity of living beings. This biodiversity is also synonymous with the racial and cultural diversity of humankind, blessed by the immutable benevolence of a life-sustaining cosmos, the endowments of nature upon which the survival of our species depends.

The parable thus depicts a central ideal and lesson of the Lotus Sutra—the need to build a “culture of peace” in which all civilizations and peoples may live and flourish in harmony.

The Lotus Sutra has been described as “the king of sutras.” As with the life-sustaining rain in the Medicinal Herbs Chapter, the sutra has nurtured in the lives of millions in Asia the spirit of co-existence—with nature, among cultures and peoples—and served over the millennia to bring about a flowering of diverse cultures in the region.

Modern civilization is founded on scientific and technological progress and the ramifications of its market economy, vast communications networks and materialistic values continue to impact every culture, people and religion on this planet. Although it has its merits, the great tide of globalism exacts sacrifices as well. It corrupts time-honoured values and enforces conformity. It aggravates the disparity between the rich and poor.

Among the most prominent perils of globalism is its proclivity to dilute and reverse the wisdom for community that human beings have refined over the ages, from our capacity to co-exist with nature to our inclination to live in peace alongside those of diverse origins and religious beliefs. At its worst, globalism undermines the very foundations of cultures and our respective ways of life.

I have long believed that the Lotus Sutra encapsulates the quintessential insight of the East, and that its message of harmonious co-existence is both timeless and universal. It is my abiding hope that this lecture and the Cambridge manuscripts will serve as an opportunity to broaden the understanding of the Lotus Sutra, especially in this age wracked by division and strife in which we live.

Allow me to close my words of appreciation with a passage from the poem, “Rainbow,” composed by the celebrated nature poet from Cambridge, William Wordsworth, whom I have admired since the days of my youth:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,

So be it when I shall grow old
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man:
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

Thank you very much.

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