

MESSAGE IN THE LOTUS SUTRA

A GIFT OF PEACE AND HARMONY FOR HUMANITY (Part 1)

- PEMA RINCHEN -



The Lotus Sutra 《妙法莲花经》 is also known as the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* in Sanskrit; which means “Sutra of the Correct Law like White Lotus”, “Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma” or “Sutra of the Sublime Dharma”. Regardless of the difference in terminologies, the title has a consistent and unyielding definition and meaning to it – it is regarded as the Wonderful Law (妙法) and is abbreviated to “*The Lotus Sutra*”. Recently, an exhibition titled, “The Lotus Sutra – A Message of Peace and Harmonious Coexistence” was held at The Arts House from 1-25 October 2017.

The Institute of Oriental Philosophy curated this *Lotus Sutra* exhibition and on display were rare manuscripts, reproductions of relics that included photographs, illustrations and more than 100 pieces of precious artefacts of over two thousand years old. The exquisite replicas of the cave paintings of the Mogao cave in Dunhuang, China was also one of the key highlights.



Singapore is the 16th country to host the exhibition and Daisaku Ikeda, Founder of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy and President of the Soka Gakkai International shared, “To help foster understanding between civilisations of the East and West, I would like to examine the characteristics of the *Lotus Sutra* under 3 head(ings):

1. The Coexistence of All Forms of Life
2. The Search for the Eternal
3. The Movement to Create Peace

Of all Buddhist teachings, the *Lotus Sutra* has been the most widely disseminated and has captured the imagination of the populace, proof of the scripture’s deep and encompassing religious significance and the force and simplicity with which it is set forth.

Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, sought out a vast “internal universe” within his own self and, in doing so, surmounted his inner self and expanded it until it became one with the greater universe, the life force of the universe, which he understood as the Dharma or Law of Life.

When Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, his wisdom and compassion were directed towards the salvation of the people. This became embodied in the many Buddhist scriptures that adorn the history of the religion. Among these, the *Lotus Sutra* in particular represents an attempt to express and embody the Dharma to which Shakyamuni himself awakened, and it has been conspicuously embraced by the people of the East.”



The transmission of Buddhism was not something that should be taken for granted as its evolution and propagation did not happen as a matter of course. Without the people who protected the Buddhist teachings over the span of time in history, we may not have the blessings today to have the opportunity to learn about the Buddha's teachings. Their dedication, commitment and unwavering duty to protect and spread Buddhism meant that they had to overcome various hardships, sometimes even at the cost of their lives.

History of the Transmission of the Lotus Sutra

In this section of the exhibition, the birth of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the spread of Buddhism throughout India, the dialogue between the East and the West, the establishment of the Lotus Sutra and the fusion between Eastern and Western civilizations were traced and showcased. Artefacts, replicas and other objects related to King Ashoka, the birth of Mahayana scriptures, and the creation of the Buddha images gave insights to the historical origin and development of the *Lotus Sutra*.



Guided tours were conducted in both Chinese and English and there were family-friendly activities such as lotus origami folding to engage young children and the elderly alike.



The Basic Concepts of the Lotus Sutra

The *Lotus Sutra* is one of the early Mahayana texts and it expounds the teaching that all living beings have the potential to attain Buddhahood (one Buddha vehicle), and relates scenes where Shariputra and other disciples of the Buddha are given prophecies of their future enlightenment.



Characteristics of the Lotus Sutra

Lotus: The white lotus (pundarika), which grows out of the mud and blossoms in purity, is included in the title, *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* and serves as a metaphor for the Wonderful Law.

Buddhahood: Shakyamuni Buddha reveals that he originally attained enlightenment in the far distant past and he also declares that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are his direct disciples, who will carry out the mission of propagating the *Lotus Sutra* after his death.

Faith: One of the characteristics of the *Lotus Sutra* is that it emphasises faith in the sutra itself. This may be due to hitherto orally transmitted teachings being put down in written form. The appearance of numerous popular Bodhisattvas attests to the benefits obtained from having faith in this scripture.