

## **SYLLABUS: GTU/INSTITUTE OF BUDDHIST STUDIES -Spring, 2013**

Instructor: Taigen Dan Leighton

Title: **Readings in Mahayana Texts: Lotus Sutra**

Course number: HR-8317 [Online course]

**Course Description:** This online course will feature textual study of selected chapters from the Lotus Sutra, a central scripture in Chinese Buddhism, and even more pivotal in Japan. Through colorful parables and shifting visionary viewpoints, the Lotus Sutra elaborates and expresses such key East Asian Buddhist themes as the subtle workings of skillful means; the Diversity of spiritual needs and approaches and their unity in the One Vehicle; the mystical pervasion of awakening beings in both space and time; and the centrality of faith to Buddhist awakening. In addition to examining the meaning of the sutra's teachings and their relevance to modern spiritual concerns, we will also consider the sutra's widespread influence on East Asian philosophy, art, and literature, and commentaries on the sutra by some key East Asian Buddhist figures, as well as by contemporary scholars.

Prerequisites: Some Introductory course in Buddhism, including the Mahayana.

Course format: Online Discussion.

Evaluation method: final term paper, midterm exam, participation in online discussion.  
20 students maximum.

### **Texts:**

**Required:** [R] = Reserved in GTU Library

Reeves, Gene, trans. *The Lotus Sutra*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. 2008. [R]

Note: It is required during the course to read the entire *Lotus Sutra*, including the opening *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*, and the closing *Sutra of Contemplation of the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage Bodhisattva*. However, class discussions will focus on close readings of particular chapters, as indicated in the syllabus.

Teiser, Stephen and Jacqueline Stone, ed. *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. [R]

Leighton, Taigen, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). [R]

### **Optional, but Highly Recommended:**

Reeves, Gene, *The Stories of the Lotus Sutra*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010. [R]

Reeves, Gene, ed. *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2002. [R]

Hurvitz, Leon, trans. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*. New York: Columbia University Press, revised edition, 2009. [R]

Note: Lotus Sutra References in the Teiser/ Stone anthology (required) are keyed to this translation.

Tanabe, George J., Jr., and Willa Jane Tanabe, eds. *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989. [R]

Note: Two chapters of this work are required (see weeks 9 and 11), and those are attached in Moodle for those weeks.

Leighton, Taigen. *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003.

Note: Two chapters of this work are required (see weeks 12 and 14), and those are attached in Moodle for those weeks. [R]

**There are also Additional Commentaries from the Instructor or others included for each week, some written, some audio, also listed in the syllabus below. These will consist of articles or Dharma talks by the instructor or others, available Online or via Moodle, directly or indirectly relating to assigned reading from or about the Lotus Sutra.**

Additional context for each week's readings and discussion will be presented in the opening of weekly discussions.

Additional Research Bibliography [OPTIONAL] is at end of syllabus.

## **Weekly Topics and Assignments:**

### **1. Week of February 4**

Overview and Introduction to the Lotus Sutra.

The audio commentary by Gene Reeves presents an overview of the sutra narrative and teachings, including comments on many later sections of the text, and you may wish to listen to it again toward the end of the course.

Assignment:

Opening Sutra; L.S. chapters 1 & 2 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 1-102.

Additional Commentary:

Gene Reeves audio, "The Lotus Sutra Heart"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20090824DT\\_ADZG\\_the\\_lotus\\_sutra\\_heart.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20090824DT_ADZG_the_lotus_sutra_heart.mp3)>

## **2. Week of Feb. 11**

Skillful Means; Parables of Burning House and Prodigal Son.

Assignment:

Chap. 3 & 4 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 103-157.

Stephen Teiser and Jacqueline Stone, "Interpreting the Lotus Sutra," pp. 1-61; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton audio: "Lotus Sutra parables on skillful means"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org.s3.amazonaws.com/20090809DT\\_ADZG\\_lotus\\_sutra\\_parables\\_on\\_skillful\\_means.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org.s3.amazonaws.com/20090809DT_ADZG_lotus_sutra_parables_on_skillful_means.mp3)>

## **3. Week of Feb. 18**

More on Skillful Means; Parables of the Plants in the Dharma Rain and the Fantastic City.

Assignment:

Chap. 5 & 7 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 159-168, 179-206.

Additional Commentary:

Carl Bielefeldt- "Expedient devices, the One Vehicle, and the Life Span of the Buddha," pp. 62-82; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

## **4. Week of Feb. 25**

The Arrival of the Treasure Stupa; Dharma Teachers

Assignment:

Chap. 10 & 11 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 225-246.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton audio: "Lotus Sutra Stupa in Mid-air"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20090810DT\\_ADZG\\_lotus\\_sutra\\_stupa\\_on\\_mid-air.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20090810DT_ADZG_lotus_sutra_stupa_on_mid-air.mp3)>

Gene Reeves audio: "All are Teachers in the Dharma Flower Sutra"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20120813DT\\_ADZG\\_all\\_are\\_teachers.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20120813DT_ADZG_all_are_teachers.mp3)>

## 5. Week of March 4

The curious self-reflexive, self-referential aspect of the Lotus Sutra; Assurance of Becoming a Buddha and Encouragement to Uphold the Sutra

Assignment:

Chap. 6 & 13 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 169-178, 255-260.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton article, "The Lotus Sutra as a Source for Dōgen's Discourse Style," pp. 195-217; in Richard Payne and Taigen Dan Leighton, *Discourse and Ideology in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, London: Routledge, 2006.

An early version is available at:

<[http://www.ancientdragon.org/dharma/articles/lotus\\_sutra\\_and\\_dogen](http://www.ancientdragon.org/dharma/articles/lotus_sutra_and_dogen)>

Especially relevant are the article's sections: The Self-Referential Lotus; The Self-Reflexive as a Skillful Mode; and Dōgen's Use of the Fantastic.

Note: Much of the material in this article is incorporated in Chapter 2 of Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time*, pp. 13-40; which can be read alternatively.

## 6. Week of March 11

Devadatta and the Dragon King's Daughter, Safe and Easy Practices

Assignment:

Chap. 12 & 14 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 247-253, 261-277.

Jan Nattier- "Gender and Hierarchy in the Lotus Sutra", pp. 83-106; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton audio: "The Dragon girl's enlightenment"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org.s3.amazonaws.com/20090823DT\\_ADZG\\_lotus\\_sutra\\_and\\_the\\_dragon\\_girl.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org.s3.amazonaws.com/20090823DT_ADZG_lotus_sutra_and_the_dragon_girl.mp3)>

## 7. Week of March 18

The Underground Bodhisattvas and the Buddha's Inconceivable Life Span

Assignment:

Chap. 15 & 16 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 279-299.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton audio: "Lotus Sutra Underground Bodhisattvas and Buddha's life-span"  
<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org.s3.amazonaws.com/20090817DT\\_ADZG\\_lotus\\_sutra\\_underground\\_bodhisattvas.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org.s3.amazonaws.com/20090817DT_ADZG_lotus_sutra_underground_bodhisattvas.mp3)>

**[NOTE: March 25-31 is GTU Spring Recess]**

## 8. Week of April 1

Implications and Interpretations of the Buddha's vast Life Span: Survey of East Asian figures' interpretations and its application by Dōgen.

Assignment:

Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time*, pp. 4-8, 41-98, 101-104, 108-109, 115-116.

Jacqueline Stone- "Realizing This World as the Buddha Land", excerpt, pp. 209-218; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton audio: "The Worldview of Dōgen and the Lotus Sutra":  
<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20070519DT\\_ADZG\\_zen\\_and\\_lotus\\_sutra.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20070519DT_ADZG_zen_and_lotus_sutra.mp3)>

## 9. Week of April 8

Blessings/ Structure of the Lotus Sutra: The claims made in the sutra for those who understand and convey the teaching of the Buddha's life span; and how chapters 15 and 16 have been understood in East Asia as initiating a second phase of the sutra.

Assignment:

Chap. 17 & 18 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 301-320.

Additional Commentary:

Shiro Ryōdō - "The Meaning of the Formation and Structure of the *Lotus Sutra*," in Tanabe & Tanabe, *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, pp. 15-36. [available as attachment on Moodle]

## MIDTERM EXAM

### 10. Week of April 15

Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva, and Entrustment of the bodhisattvas. Chinese practices of self-immolation inspired by the Lotus Sutra "Medicine King" chapter 23.

More East Asian theoretical understandings of the Lotus Sutra, with Zhiyi's "3,000 Worlds in a single thought-moment."

Assignment:

Chap. 20 & 22 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 337-343, 351-352.

James Benn- "The *Lotus Sutra* and Self-Immolation", pp. 107-131; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Additional Commentary:

Taigen Leighton audio: "Zhiyi's Three Thousand worlds in a Single Thought-moment"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20091109DT\\_ADZG\\_practicing\\_three\\_thousand\\_words.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20091109DT_ADZG_practicing_three_thousand_words.mp3)>.

### 11. Week of April 22

East Asian Practical Responses to the Lotus Sutra.

Assignment:

Dan Stevenson - "Buddhist Practice and the Lotus Sutra in China" pp. 132-150; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Willa Jane Tanabe- "Art of the Lotus Sutra", pp. 151-185; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Additional Commentary:

Allan Grapard- "The Textualized Mountain--Enmountained Text: The *Lotus Sutra* in Kunisaki," in Tanabe & Tanabe, *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, pp. 159-189. [available as attachment on Moodle]

## 12. Week of April 29

The Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, and Incantations [Dharani]

Assignment:

Chap. 25 & 26 - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 371-386.

Additional Commentary:

Leighton, *Faces of Compassion*, "Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin, Kannon): Heart of Compassion", chapter 7, pp.167-209. [available as attachment on Moodle]

## 13. Week of May 6

East Asian Responses: Nichiren Buddhism

Assignment:

Ruben Habito- "Bodily Reading of the *Lotus Sutra*", pp. 186-208; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Jacqueline Stone- "Realizing This World as the Buddha Land", excerpt, pp. 219-236; in Teiser & Stone, *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*.

Additional Commentary:

Commentaries by American Nichiren priest Ryuei Michael McCormick, "The Life of Nichiren" <<http://www.nichirenscoffeehouse.net/Ryuei/NichirensBio.html>>; and "The Subversive Nature of Nichiren's Prophecy" <<http://www.nichirenscoffeehouse.net/Ryuei/RAR5.html>>.

## 14. Week of May 13

Universal Sage Bodhisattva and the Closing Sutra

Assignment:

Chap. 28, & Closing Sutra, - Reeves, *Lotus Sutra*, pp. 393-423.

Additional Commentary:

Leighton, *Faces of Compassion*, "Samantabhadra: Functioning in the World", chapter 6, pp. 135-166. [available as attachment on Moodle]

## 15. Week of May 20

Review; General Discussion

Assignment:

Work on Final Paper.

Please listen again to: Additional Commentary:

Gene Reeves audio, "The Lotus Sutra Heart"

<[http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20090824DT\\_ADZG\\_the\\_lotus\\_sutra\\_heart.mp3](http://audio.ancientdragon.org/20090824DT_ADZG_the_lotus_sutra_heart.mp3)>

**FINAL PAPERS DUE May 31.**

### Course Objectives:

- 1) The class will do a close reading of selected chapters from the Lotus Sutra as well as modern commentaries on the Lotus Sutra, and students will gain familiarity with major issues and approaches in the Lotus Sutra.
- 2) We will consider the philosophical and soteriological implications of spiritual teachings proposed by the Lotus Sutra.
- 3) We will consider the major impact of the Lotus Sutra on East Asian Buddhism and culture.
- 4) We will discuss the practical applications of Lotus Sutra approaches described, and their relevance to contemporary spiritual concerns.

**Grading:** Your final grade will be based:

- 1) 35% on participation in online class discussion.
- 2) 30% on the 6 page midterm exam, due by end of week 9.
- 3) 35% on a 10 page final research paper, due by the end of the week following week 15, i.e. by May 31.

### Note on Reading the Lotus Sutra:

When trying to read the Lotus Sutra in translation, I had previously recommended using more than one translation, side by side. With publication of the excellent Gene Reeves translation, required, I do not feel you need to use a second translation in conjunction. But note that the Hurvitz translation, referenced in the required Teiser/ Stone reader, is a helpful scholarly rendition, and may be useful as a supplement. Students are also very welcome to consult other translations, listed in the Optional Research Bibliography.



**Participation in online discussion:**

Each student will contribute at least two postings and no more than six postings each week on the class material for that week. Each posting should be no more than 3 paragraphs or one page long. These maximum limitations of size and numbers of postings are intended to encourage you to consider carefully your inquiries or responses, and to express digested reflection. These suggested limitations may be shifted during the course at the instructor's discretion. Please try to write as clearly as possible. Feel free to respond to the material provided in the "Additional Commentaries," as well as the main readings. These may sometimes directly concern the assigned reading from the Lotus Sutra, and sometimes address tangentially related material. Your messages can include questions or comments about material in the reading, or responses to other students' questions or comments. Expressing varied viewpoints is encouraged, but please do so with respectfulness to all other participants. As instructor I will respond to comments and questions at least 2 or 3 times each week.

You may separately send questions about class procedures or protocols, either in the Moodle venue, or individually to the instructor at: <taigen108@gmail.com>.

**Midterm Test:** This will consist of three two-page essay responses to be selected from five questions.

**Final Research Paper:**

Your essays should express your critical response or inquiry into a particular, focused aspect of the material presented in the class texts, clearly articulating your point of view. Comparative papers are welcome, but should focus a significant majority of comment on the material from the class. It is not required that you consult any other than the required reading in the syllabus, but an additional research Bibliography is provided for those interested. Papers should be 10 pages typed and double-spaced, plus conventional forms of notes and bibliography.

**FINAL PAPERS DUE MAY 31.**

**Note: Prerequisite for this class is some background in Buddhist Studies or Practice.**

I am available for consultation via e-mail at: taigen108@gmail.com

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### Additional Research Bibliography [OPTIONAL]:

#### Note:

Required text, Teiser, Stephen and Jacqueline Stone, ed. *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*; and Recommended text, Reeves, Gene, ed. *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra* both have comprehensive and valuable bibliographies to supplement the following.

#### TRANSLATIONS:

[Other than Reeves and Hurvitz, listed as Required, and Recommended respectively]

Katō, Bunnō, Yoshirō Tamura, and Kōjirō Miyasaka, trans. *The Threefold Lotus Sutra: Innumerable Meanings, The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, and Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue*. New York: Weatherhill, 1975.

Kubo, Tsugunari, and Akira Yuyama, trans. *The Lotus Sutra*. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1993.

Murano, Senchū, trans. *The Lotus Sutra: The Sutra of the Flower Blossom of the Wonderful Dharma*. Tokyo: Nichiren Shu Shimbun, 1974.

Watson, Burton, trans. *The Lotus Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

#### COMMENTARY:

Groner, Paul. *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*. Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Study Series, 1984.

Hurvitz, Leon. *Chih-i (538-597): An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of a Chinese Monk*. Brussels: L'Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1962.

Kim, Young-Ho. *Tao-Sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra: A Study and Translation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

LaFleur, William R. *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Matsunaga, Alicia. *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*. Tokyo: Charles Tuttle Company, 1969.

Montgomery, Daniel. *Fire in the Lotus: The Dynamic Buddhism of Nichiren*. London: Mandala, 1991.

Niwano, Nikkyō. *Buddhism for Today: A Modern Interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra*. Tokyo: Kōsei, 1976.

Pye, Michael. *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*. Second edition. London: Routledge, 2003.

Sangharakshita. *The Eternal Legacy: An Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*. London: Tharpa Publications, 1985, 103-131.

Stone, Jacqueline. *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

Suguro, Shinjo. *Introduction to the Lotus Sutra*. Fremont, Cal.: Jain Publishing Company, 1998.

Swanson, Paul. *Foundations of T'ien-T'ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two-Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989.

Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. London: Routledge, 1989.