

## Lotus Sutra-1

Syllabus : Reading Buddhist Scriptures 1

The Meadville Lombard Theological School

Instructor: Dr. Michio Tomonobu Shinozaki

Theme: Reading The Threefold Lotus Sutra

### Course Description:

This course will provide a basic knowledge of the Lotus Sutra (the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma), a Mahayana sutra. It has been one of the most popular sutras in China, Korea and Japan. Its philosophy was developed by Tiantai Chih-i.

The Tiantai Lotus philosophy was transmitted from China to Japan by Tendai Daishi Saicho at Mt. Hiei. Mt. Hiei came to be called the mother of the Japanese Buddhist schools. The founders of the new Buddhism of Kamakura (13th century)--- Honen of the Pure Land Sect, Shinran of Shin Buddhism, Dogen of Soto Zen sect, Nichiren of Nichiren Sect, and others--- all studied Tendai (the Japanese version of Tiantai) thought at Mt. Hiei. The philosophy and practice of the Lotus Sutra has influenced literature, martial arts, poetry and other forms of Japanese culture, and the spiritual life of the Japanese people. Many new Buddhist groups mid --after the World World II emerged under the influence of the Lotus faith tradition.

This course is designed for the students who are unfamiliar with the Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana Buddhist text. They are exposed to the historical formation of the Lotus Sutra thought and the content of the text of the Lotus Sutra and how it was read and appreciated in terms of thought and practice by the people in Japan.

What students can expect from this seminar:

This seminar will be useful to the students in a number of ways. They will be able to see, understand and relate to what a particular Mahayana sutra, as an example, tries to expound from the Mahayana point of view. The students will come to understand and relate to the Japanese culture, which has been under the influence of Lotus Sutra thought.

This seminar is designed for students who are interested in both understanding and becoming familiar with the Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana sutra which was highly influential thoughts for the development of Japanese culture and Buddhism.

## Lotus Sutra-2

Required texts: The necessary parts of the following texts will be provided by the teacher.

### Bibliography:

The Threefold Lotus Sutra trans. Bunno Katō (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1987)

The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic (Paperback)

by Gene Reeves (Translator) ( Wisdom Pubns 2008/12)

Nikkyo Niwano, Buddhism for Today: A Modern Interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra 「法華經の新しい解釈」 (New York: Weatherhill, 1961)

Nikkyo Niwano, A Guide to the Threefold Lotus Sutra translated and adapted by Eugene Langston (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1981)

Yoshiro Tamura, The Lotus Sutra 「法華經」 (Tokyo: Chuo Koron shuppansha, 1969), trans by Gene Reeves and Michio Shinozaki (unpublished)

Yoshiro Tamura, Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History, translated by Jeffrey Hunter (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2000)

Keicho Tsukamoto, Hokekyo no Seiritsu to Haikai: Indo Bunka to Daijo Bukkyo [法華經の成立と背景・インド文化と大乘仏教] [Formation and Background of the Lotus Sutra]. (Tokyo: Kosei Shupan-sha, 1986)

Keicho Tsukamoto, Source Elements of the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Integration of Religion, Thought, and Culture, (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2007)

Akira Hirakawa, A History of Indian Buddhism from Shakyamuni to Early Mahayana, translated and edited by Paul Groner (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990)

Daigan & Alicia Matsunaga, Foundation of Japanese Buddhism vol.1, (Buddhist Books International, 1974)

Daigan & Alicia Matsunaga, Foundation of Japanese Buddhism vol.2, (Buddhist Books International, 1976)

## Lotus Sutra-3

### Topics:

1. Overview of Early Mahayana Buddhism and its sutras, and theory and practice in Early Mahayana Buddhism, locating the Lotus Sutra in its history.
2. What is the Threefold Lotus Sutra? They are the Sutra of the Innumerable Meanings, The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue. Why and how were they compiled? General overview of the Threefold Lotus Sutra and the structure of the text will be discussed.
3. We can read extracts of the Lotus Sutra chapter by chapter.
4. The so-called Seven Parables of the Lotus Sutra
  - (1) the Burning House
  - (2) the Poor Son
  - (3) the Rain ( three trees and two grasses)
  - (4) the Magic City
  - (5) the Priceless Jewel
  - (6) the King's Jewel
  - (7) the Good Doctor
  - (8) (Digging for Water in a Tableland)
5. Predicting Buddhahood and the idea behind it
6. Never Despise Bodhisattva and non-violent action
7. The philosophy of integration; the teaching of opening up the Three Vehicles and revealing the One Vehicle.
8. The three main parts (ideas) of the Lotus Sutra: upaya and truth (the ultimate reality of all things or the true nature of all existence in and around Chapter Two); the development of the Buddha-body, i.e., the historical Shakyamuni Buddha and the Eternal Buddha in and around Chapter 16; Bodhisattva practice in the latter part of the sutra.

## Lotus Sutra-4

### 9. Cult Integration in the Lotus Sutra

(1) The Pure Land Cult and the Lotus Sutra

(2) The Avalokiteshvara Cult and the Lotus Sutra

(3) Integration of Dharani and the Devadatta and Naga Cults in the Lotus Sutra

### 10. Stupa worship and the Lotus Sutra

### 11. Bearers of the Lotus Sutra; the Teachers (Preachers) of the Dharma

### 12. Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra

### 13. Nichiren Followers in Modern Times in Japan

### 14. "Bosatsu-gyo (Bodhisattva Practice) and Modernity of the New Religions of Hokke (Dharma Lotus Flower) =Nichiren School: Concept of Integration based on Horizontal Solidarity" by Susumu Shimazono

Grading (Evaluation): Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

(1) 25% for class attendance and participation.

(2) 50% for two take-home essay exams.

(3) 25% for a 2-3 page final comment paper about the class.

Note:

Grading scale will be A: Outstanding; B: Good work; C: Satisfactory; D: Inadequate but passing. Pluses and minuses may also be given.