

Lady of the Lotus: The Untold Love Story of The Buddha and His Wife. William E. Barrett (Jeremy Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles, 1989, 376pp.)

Reviewed by Bruce Sturgeon

William E. Barrett was the author of the best-selling novels *The Lilies of the Field* and *The Left Hand of God* and eleven others. However, this work was one that he pursued for a large portion of his life. Although the idea for this book began when he met Dr. A.K. Coomaraswamy and his wife in India when Mr. Barrett was in his forties, the book was not published until he was 75 years old. In the meantime he collected over 430 volumes in his personal library on Buddhism, Hinduism, India and Nepal, and traveled extensively to insure the authenticity of his research. Because of this extensive research, Mr. Barrett is able to portray ancient India so vividly that the book flows along, keeps your attention and becomes a real page-turner.

I found it most interesting that Mr. Barrett did not simply use the time-worn myths of the Buddha's youth and his "discovery" of sickness, old age death and the religious path. This is an original rendering and is quite a bit different from the birth and youth stories of the Buddha that many of us are familiar with. While one could hardly call this an academic Buddhist text, it is a lyrical historical novel that reminded me of *Shogun* or a work of Leon Uris or Herman Wouk. There's a screenplay here somewhere.

The Lady and the Lotus is the only work about the Buddha's wife, Yasodhara and his son Rahula. The book begins by recounting the births of Yasodhara and Siddhartha, who were born on the same day in neighboring kingdoms in what is now Nepal. In fact, her name means "Companion to Fame." Their youthful romance is brought to life amidst the court intrigue, caste discrimination and the cultural narrowness that was ancient India. Yasodhara and Siddhartha were drawn to each other upon their first meeting and they had a romance that was so deep that New Agers would call them "Soulmates." However, Siddhartha was clearly "different" as a youth and almost seemed torn by his dual prophecy at birth. Yasodhara always wondered if he had not learned of his destiny of being either a great ruler or a great religious leader, that perhaps his early life would not have been so troubled.

With Yasodhara's support, Siddhartha learned the subtleties of political life and saw that the time was ripe for someone to seize the initiative and combine, through war or diplomacy, several of the smaller kingdoms in the region. It could have easily been him. Furthermore, he was uncertain how a religious life could be possible since he was not of the Brahmin caste.

However, Yasodhara saw clearly that Siddhartha's concern was the plight of the people, especially the untouchables, and that he had no stomach for war and the death it would bring or for diplomacy with its deceit, betrayal and alienation. While riding one day he discovered one of the holy men who lived in the dense forests. He then knew that he would have to follow this path that was prophesied—"The path that no man had walked before."

Only a month after their son was born, Siddhartha and Yasodhara parted as lovers, forever. Rahula, who was born during an eclipse, was named after the god who had stolen the moon. His father's kingdom now had an heir and Siddhartha joined those who wander seeking Truth. He would not see his wife, his son or his elderly father again until after his Enlightenment.

Yasodhara became a widow whose husband was still alive. A practical person, she maintained a certain composure so that she could raise the king-to-be, but her heart was broken.

Yasodhara would eventually meet the Buddha and remark that Siddhartha was indeed dead to her forever. She would later form a group of nuns who were, for the most part, widows and of the lowest caste. Unfortunately, they disbanded upon her death. Mr. Barrett suggests that she is honored today in Buddhism by the female figure of the Queen of Heaven and Kwan Seum Bosal.

Rahula renounces his right to the throne after meeting his father, the Buddha. He dies in his mother's arms, defending a group of nuns from a roving band of warring horsemen.

The Buddha lives and teaches into his 81st year leaving a legacy that survives to modern time. The story of his family and his renunciation are almost too real for most of us to contemplate. I felt more than a little sadness that no accommodation could be made for such an extraordinary romantic love and a son that would never know his father. Such is the weight of this Great Matter of Life and Death. This book gives us an excellent opportunity to vicariously explore our own relationships and the difficulty of the choice that the Buddha made in renouncing the house-holder's life.

Zen: Tradition and Transition, Kenneth Kraft, Ed., (Grove Press, 1988, 224 pp.) \$16.95

Reviewed by Dhananjay Joshi

He that findeth life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

- New Testament

O monks, if you die once on the cushion, you shall never die.

- Hakuin

The origins of Zen practice go back thousands of years, yet the practice is very much alive today. I think the secret lies in the fact that Zen practice has always embraced the spontaneous and at the same time held a high regard for the traditional. The title of this book is therefore appropriate in the sense that one finds a unique combination of both tradition and transition in Zen practice. Tradition is not discarded and change is very much a vital part of day to day life. This book brings together an impressive collection of articles by various Zen Masters and scholars. Practitioners tend to shun scriptural studies while academicians frequently have limited experiential insight. This book examines the gap. One cannot attain full benefits of Zen practice by just studying and yet studying need not necessarily hinder serious practitioners. Each can complement the other.

In the introduction, Kenneth Kraft talks about a "brand new brand of Buddhist practitioner and a brand new Buddhist scholar". Professor Maraldo's vision says: "I ask if Zen itself may be practiced as a field of scholarship,

that is, a kind of study which takes the self, life and death, and the entire world as its domain. Zen would then be a discipline in both senses of the word: a spiritual and intellectual training; and would bear directly on current attempts to resolve the issues of the modern world."

In the chapter titled "Recent Developments in North American Zen, Kenneth Kraft discusses transformations in Zen in North America. There are needs of lay practitioners and there exist issues concerning the role of the Master. There are also various traditions present simultaneously. The blend is exciting and there is a wonderful spirit of questioning and examination. Aitken Roshi makes mention of a "responsibility" upon every one of us "to learn what our practice is and to carry it forth". The commitment is two sided...for the practitioner and for the teacher also.

The generation of teachers that arrived from various countries into the U.S (Joshu Sasaki Roshi, Zen Master Seung Sahn) has slowly been giving way to another generation of Western teachers. More often than not, it is on-the-job training for them. Lincoln Rhodes, of the Kwan Um Zen School talks about this role: "None of you asked us to be your teacher. I didn't even ask myself to be in this situation. It just happened to us together....It also takes time for the people who are put in the position of being teachers to be able to do it...Just because Dae Soen Sa Nim gives someone permission to teach, it doesn't mean all of a sudden you are a great teacher. By analogy, maybe you can fix your own car, but you've never done Toyotas, and now it's interesting because you have to work on all kinds of cars."

There is also an important role for women practitioners and teachers. What does all this mean? It means "Involvement and Interaction" and a "Tradition in Transition". Zen Master Seung Sahn talks about this future transformation thus: "When Bodhidharma came to China, he became the First Patriarch of Zen. As the result of a "marriage" between Vipassana style Indian meditation and Chinese Taoism, Zen appeared. Now it has come to the West and what is already here? Christianity, Judaism, so forth. So, when Zen "gets married" to one of these traditions, a new style of Buddhism will appear. Perhaps there will be a Matriarch and all Dharma transmission would go from woman to woman. Why not? Everyone must create American Buddhism".

In Bernard Tetsugen Glassman's Zen community of New York, Zen meditation is the central practice, but the meditation hall is non-denominational. There are other developments such as use of chants in English and a lesser emphasis on Asian languages that reflect a spirit of adaptation and discovery. Toni Packer's organization, Springwater Center, removed a "lingering reference" to Zen in 1986 for they wanted to "work without any ties".

The process of transition is complex and rewarding, but, rarely free of problems. In the epilogue, problems of authority in Zen are addressed by Martin Collcutt. Zen groups in America have experienced not only growing

pains, but pains of confusion as well. Problems of authority and leadership are being faced with courage. What is trust? "There is a fine line between the kind of trust that leads to stronger practice and a misplaced trust that brings only pain". Martin Collcutt gives a thorough analysis of the teacher-student relationship in Zen. It is difficult to truly understand this in Western Zen simply because it is "detached" from a Buddhist context. There is no well-defined Sangha that would facilitate an integrated environment. It is a revealing insight!

Other essays in the book provide a profound treatment of the traditional aspects of Zen as well. Morinaga Soko Roshi gives a wonderful account of his struggles to enter a Zen Monastery. For three days he stood outside in bitter cold, withstood physical blows and kicks that sent him flying out of the gate, but he never gave in. That is courage and strength of will. He learned about Hakuin's Great Root of Faith, Great Ball of Doubt and a fierce Tenacity of Purpose by practical experience. Master Sheng-Yen writes about sitting meditation and provides instructions. Kapleau Roshi writes about the one-on-one encounter with the Zen Master which is a unique aspect of Zen practice. Canadian Zen teacher Albert Low tells about Hakuin's classic verse in praise of meditation.

Eido Roshi's essay discusses Zen Koans. He mentions a very creative idea about a new koan system for westerners. These are selections from various western sources that would help the western student gain a "real taste" of koan study. He also gives some parallel koans:

"If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite."

- William Blake

Ganto said, "If you want to know the last word, I'll tell you, simply -This! This!"

- Blue Cliff Record, Case 51

Or:

"And the fire and the rose are one"

- T.S. Eliot

"The Master Swordsman

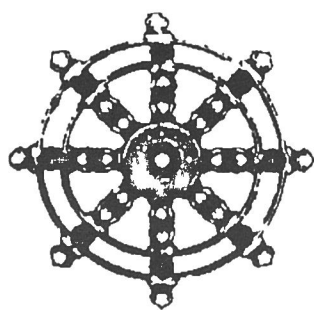
Is like the lotus blooming in the fire"

- Tozan (Tung-Shan)

Dr. Burton Watson's chapter on Zen poetry is followed by three chapters tracing the historical developments of Zen in China and Japan. Dr. McRae focuses on the story of the Sixth patriarch Hui-Neng, and Professor T. Griffith Foulk outlines the daily life of Zen monks today. All these essays provide a wonderful balance for the reader.

What is Zen practice then? Moment to moment, we must attain clarity in our lives. The Zen Masters say you must believe in yourself. The real Zen practice goes beyond creeds and dogmas. Everyday life is Zen. Zen Master Dogen said: "Studying the Buddha Way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself is being enlightened by all things."

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