

said to him: “The Miyake of Imna should be established. We are all of the same opinion as Your Majesty.”

Winter, 11th month, 4th day. Ki no Omaro no Sukune [and others] were appointed as generals. Taking with them the imperial chieftains and deity chieftains of the various houses as adjutant generals of the divisions of the army, they marched out in command of over twenty thousand men and stationed themselves in Tsukushi.¹¹ Kishi no Kana was sent to Silla and Kishi no Itahiko to Imna to make inquiry respecting Imna.

5th year, Winter, 10th month, 4th day. A wild boar was presented to the emperor. Pointing to it, he said: “When shall those to whom We have an aversion be cut off as this wild boar’s throat has been cut?” An abundance of weapons was provided beyond what was customary.

10th day. Soga no Mumako no Sukune, having been told of the pronouncement of the emperor and, alarmed at his detestation of himself, called together his people and conspired with them to assassinate the emperor.

In this month, the Hall of Worship and the covered gallery of the great Hōkōji Temple were built.

11th month, 3rd day. Mumako no Sukune lied to the ministers, saying: “Today I present the taxes of the eastern provinces” and sent Koma, Yamato no Aya no Atae, who killed the emperor. . . .

5th day. Mounted messengers were sent to the general’s quarters in Tsukushi, saying: “Do not let foreign matters be neglected in consequence of the internal troubles.”

[Aston, *Nihongi*, II, pp. 112–120]¹²

THE REIGN OF SUIKO AND RULE OF SHŌTOKU

From the many entries in the *Chronicles of Japan* for Suiko’s reign, we have selected a few to show how greatly this empress and Prince Shōtoku came to be revered for the accomplishments of their joint rule. Particularly noteworthy is Shōtoku’s reputation as a profound student of Buddhism, such that he could expound some of the great sūtras at a time when few Japanese could read any Chinese. In addition to this prince’s legendary feats are recorded the building of many temples, the adoption of Chinese court ceremonial in the form of cap ranks, the sending of embassies (including students) to China, and the first project to write an official history of Japan comparable to the great Chinese histories.

11. Northern Kyushu.

12. Important personal titles left untranslated by Aston are rendered here according to the usage by R. K. Reischauer in *Early Japanese History*.

THE EMPRESS SUIKO, 592–628 C.E.

The Empress Toyo-mike Kashikiya-hime¹³ was the second daughter of the Emperor Ame-kuni oshi-hiraki hiro-niha¹⁴ and a younger sister by the same mother of the Emperor Tachibana no toyo-hi.¹⁵ In her childhood she was called the Princess Nukada-be. Her appearance was beautiful, and her conduct was marked by propriety. At the age of eighteen, she was appointed empress consort of the Emperor Nunakura futo-dama-shiki.¹⁶ When she was thirty-four years of age, in the 5th year and the 11th month of the reign of the Emperor Hatsuse-be,¹⁷ the emperor was murdered by the Great Imperial Chieftain Mumako no Sukune, and the succession to the Dignity being vacant, the ministers besought the empress consort of the Emperor Nunakura futo-dama-shiki, viz. the Princess Nukada-be, to ascend the throne. The empress refused, but the public functionaries urged her in memorials three times until she consented,¹⁸ and they accordingly delivered to her the imperial seal. . . .

1st year [593 C.E.], Summer, 4th month, 10th day. The Imperial Prince Mumayado no Toyotomimi [Shōtoku] was appointed Prince Imperial. He had general control of the government and was entrusted with all the details of administration. He was the second child of the Emperor Tachibana no Toyo-hi. . . . He was able to speak as soon as he was born and was so wise when he grew up that he could attend to the suits of ten men at once and decide them all without error. He knew beforehand what was going to happen. Moreover he learned the Inner Doctrine¹⁹ from a Koryo priest named Hye-cha and studied the Outer Classics²⁰ with a doctor called Kak-ka. In both of these branches of study he became thoroughly proficient. The emperor his father loved him and made him occupy the Upper Hall South of the Palace. Therefore he was styled the Senior Prince Kami-tsu-miya,²¹ Muma-ya-do Toyotomimi. [pp. 121–123]

. . .

11th year [604]. 12th month, 5th day. Cap-ranks²² were first instituted in all twelve grades:

13. Toyo, “abundant”; mi, “august”; ke, “food”; Kashikiya, “cook house”; hime, “princess.”

14. Kinmei.

15. Yōmei.

16. Bidatsu.

17. Sujun.

18. It was the Chinese custom to decline such an honor twice and accept it only when offered it a third time.

19. That is, Buddhism.

20. That is, the Chinese Classics. Inner and Outer have here something of the force of our words “sacred” and “secular.”

21. Kami-tsu-miya means “upper palace.”

22. The Chinese custom, transmitted through Korea, of distinguishing rank by the form and materials of the official cap.

Dai-toku:	. . .	greater virtue
Shō-toku:	. . .	lesser virtue
Dai-nin:	. . .	greater humanity
Shō-nin:	. . .	lesser humanity
Dai-rei:	. . .	greater decorum
Shō-rei:	. . .	lesser decorum
Dai-shin:	. . .	greater trust
Shō-shin:	. . .	lesser trust
Dai-gi:	. . .	greater rightness
Shō-gi:	. . .	lesser rightness
Dai-chi:	. . .	greater wisdom
Shō-chi:	. . .	lesser wisdom

Each cap was made of sarcenet of a special color.²³ They were gathered up on the crown in the shape of a bag and had a border attached. Only on the first day of the year were hair flowers²⁴ worn.

*In this year also, a Chinese-style calendar was officially adopted for the first time.*²⁵ [pp. 127–128]

. . .

14th year [606], 5th month, 5th day. The imperial commands were given to Kuratsukuri no Tori, saying: “It being my desire to encourage the Inner Doctrines, I was about to erect a Buddhist temple, and for this purpose sought for relics. Then thy grandfather, Shiba Tattō, offered me relics. Moreover, there were no monks or nuns in the land. Thereupon thy father, Tasuna, for the sake of the Emperor Tachibana no Toyohi, took priestly orders and revered the Buddhist law. Also thine aunt Shimame was the first to leave her home and, becoming the forerunner of all nuns, to practice the religion of Shākya. Now, we desired to make a sixteen-foot Buddha and, to that end, sought for a good image of Buddha. Thou didst provide a model which met our wishes. Moreover, when the image of Buddha was completed, it could not be brought into the hall, and none of the workmen could suggest a plan of doing so. They were, therefore, on the point of breaking down the doorway when thou didst manage to admit it without breaking down the doorway. For all these services of thine, we grant thee the rank of Dainin, and we also bestow on thee twenty *chō* of

23. In imitation of China’s contemporary Sui dynasty, purple was for officials of the fifth rank and upward. *Nin* was green, *rei* red, *shin* yellow, *gi* white, and *chi* black. Princes and chief ministers wore the cap of the highest rank, namely, *toku*.

24. Hair ornaments of gold or silver in the shape of flowers. Specimens are preserved in the Nara Museum.

25. Compare R. K. Reischauer, *Early Japanese History*, A, p. 140.

paddy fields in the district of Sakata in the province of Afumi.” With the revenue derived from this land, Tori built for the empress the temple of Kongō-ji,²⁶ now known as the nunnery of Sakata in Minabuchi.

Autumn, 7th month. The empress requested the Prince Imperial to lecture on the Sūtra of Queen Śrīmālā.²⁷ He completed his explanation of it in three days.

In this year the Prince Imperial also lectured on the Lotus Sūtra²⁸ in the Palace of Okamoto. The empress was greatly pleased and bestowed on the Prince Imperial one hundred *chō* of paddy fields in the province of Harima. They were therefore added to the temple of Ikaruga. [pp. 134–135]

...

16th year [608], Autumn, 9th month. At this time there were sent to the land of Tang²⁹ the students Fukuin [and others], together with student priests Nichibun [and others], in all eight persons.

In this year many persons from Silla came to settle in Japan. [p. 139]

...

22nd year [614], 6th month, 13th day. Mitasuki, lord of Inugami, and Yatabe no Miyakko were sent to the land of Great Tang. [p. 145]

...

28th year [620]. This year, the Prince Imperial, in concert with the Great Imperial Chieftain Soga, drew up a history of the emperors, a history of the country and the original record of the imperial chieftains, deity chieftains, court chieftains, local chieftains, the one hundred eighty hereditary corporations and the common people.³⁰ [p. 148]

...

29th year [621], Spring, 2nd month, 5th day. In the middle of the night the Imperial Prince Mumayado no Toyotomimi no Mikoto died in the palace of Ikaruga. At this time all the princes and imperial chieftains, as well as the people of the empire, the old, as if they had lost a dear child, had no taste for salt and vinegar³¹ in their mouths; the young, as if they had lost a beloved parent, filled the ways with the sound of their lamenting. The farmer ceased from his plow, and the pounding woman laid down her pestle. They all said: “The sun and moon have lost their brightness; heaven and earth have crumbled to ruin: henceforward, in whom shall we put our trust?”

26. Diamond temple.

27. Skt: Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda; J: Shōmangyō.

28. The Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra; J: Hokke-kyō.

29. When this occurred, China was ruled by the Sui dynasty, but at the time of this writing, it was ruled by the Tang dynasty.

30. Almost all of this work was burned during disturbances in 645, and the remainder is no longer extant.

31. To be understood generally of well-flavored food.

In this month the Prince Imperial Kamitsumiya³² was buried in the Shinaga Misasagi.

At this time Hye-cha, the Buddhist priest of Koryo, heard of the death of the Prince Imperial Kamitsumiya and was greatly grieved thereat. He invited the priests and, in honor of the Prince Imperial, gave them a meal and explained the sacred books in person. On this day he prayed, saying: "In the land of Nippon there is a sage, by name the Imperial Prince Kamitsumiya Toyotomimi. Certainly Heaven has freely endowed him with the virtues of a sage.³³ Born in the land of Nippon, he thoroughly possessed the three fundamental principles,³⁴ he continued the great plans of the former sages. He revered the Three Treasures³⁵ and assisted the people in their distress. He was truly a great sage. And now the Prince Imperial is dead. I, although a foreigner, was in heart closely united to him. Now what avails it that I alone should survive? I have determined to die on the 5th day of the 2nd month of next year.³⁶ So shall I meet the Prince Imperial Kamitsumiya in the Pure Land and together with him pass through the metempsychosis of all living creatures." Now when the appointed day came, Hye-cha died, and all the people that day said one to another: "Prince Kamitsumiya is not the only sage, Hye-cha is also a sage." [pp. 148–149]

...

30th year [622], Autumn, 7th month. . . . At this time the Buddhist priests E-sai and E-kō, with the physicians E-jitsu and Fuku-in, students of the learning of the Great Tang, arrived in company with . . . others. Now E-jitsu and the rest together made representation to the empress, saying: "Those who have resided in Tang to study have all completed their courses and ought to be sent for. Moreover, the land of Great Tang is an admirable country, whose laws are complete and fixed. Constant communication should be kept up with it." [p. 150]

[Aston, *Nihongi*, II, pp. 121–150]

THE SEVENTEEN-ARTICLE CONSTITUTION OF PRINCE SHŌTOKU

The influence of Confucian ethical and political doctrines is apparent in this set of basic principles of government, a key document in the process of state building led by Shōtoku. The fact that most of these principles are stated in very general terms reflects the characteristic outlook of Confucianism: the ruler should offer his people

32. Prince Shōtoku.

33. According to the Confucian conception.

34. Namely, Heaven, Earth, and Man. The meaning is that he was a philosopher.

35. Of Buddhism.

36. The anniversary of the prince's death.

moral guidance and instruction, not burden them with detailed laws involving compulsion rather than eliciting cooperation. Therefore this constitution exhorts the people to lay aside partisan differences and accept imperial rule in order to achieve social harmony. Ministers and officials are urged to be diligent and considerate, prompt and just in the settlement of complaints or charges, careful in the selection of assistants and wary of flatterers, conscientious in the performance of their duties while not overreaching their authority, and ever mindful of the desires of the people so that public good is put above private interest. Articles XII and XV alone refer to the imperial government's specific functions or prerogatives: the power to raise taxes and the seasons in which forced labor is to be exacted, likewise an aspect of the power to tax. Both of these represent practical measures indispensable to the establishment of the imperial authority over a hitherto uncentralized society, no doubt with a view to achieving the uniformity and centralization that the Chinese empire exemplified.

12th year [604], Summer, 4th month, 3rd day. The Prince Imperial in person prepared for the first time laws. There were seventeen clauses, as follows:

I. Harmony is to be valued,³⁷ and contentiousness avoided. All men are inclined to partisanship and few are truly discerning. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers or who maintain feuds with the neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are conciliatory and there is concord in the discussion of all matters, the disposition of affairs comes about naturally. Then what is there that cannot be accomplished?

II. Sincerely reverence the Three Treasures. The Buddha, the Law, and the religious orders are the final refuge of all beings and the supreme objects of reverence in all countries. It is a law honored by all, no matter what the age or who the person. Few men are utterly bad; with instruction they can follow it. But if they do not betake themselves to the Three Treasures, how can their crookedness be made straight?

III. When you receive the imperial commands, fail not scrupulously to obey them. The lord is Heaven, the vassal is Earth. Heaven overspreads, and Earth upbears. When this is so, the four seasons follow their due course, and the powers of Nature obtain their efficacy. If the Earth attempted to overspread, Heaven would simply fall in ruin. Therefore is it that when the lord speaks, the vassal listens; when the superior acts, the inferior yields compliance. Consequently when you receive the imperial commands, fail not to carry them out scrupulously. Let there be a want of care in this matter, and ruin is the natural consequence.

IV. The ministers and functionaries should make ritual decorum their leading principle, for the leading principle in governing the people consists in ritual decorum. If the superiors do not behave with decorum, the inferiors are dis-

37. From the *Analects* of Confucius, 1:12.

orderly; if inferiors are wanting in proper behavior, there must necessarily be offenses. Therefore it is that when lord and vassal behave with decorum, the distinctions of rank are not confused; when the people behave with decorum, the governance of the state proceeds of itself.

V. Ceasing from gluttony and abandoning covetous desires, deal impartially with the suits which are submitted to you. Of complaints brought by the people, there are a thousand in one day. If in one day there are so many, how many will there be in a series of years? If the man who is to decide suits at law makes gain his ordinary motive and hears cases with a view to receiving bribes, then will the suits of the rich man be like a stone flung into water,³⁸ while the plaints of the poor will resemble water cast upon a stone. Under these circumstances the poor man will not know whither to betake himself. Here too there is deficiency in the duty of the minister.

VI. Chastise that which is evil and encourage that which is good. This was the excellent rule of antiquity. Conceal not, therefore, the good qualities of others, and fail not to correct that which is wrong when you see it. Flatterers and deceivers are a sharp weapon for the overthrow of the state, and a pointed sword for the destruction of the people. Sycophants are also fond, when they meet, of dilating to their superiors on the errors of their inferiors; to their inferiors, they censure the faults of their superiors. Men of this kind are all wanting in fidelity to their lord, and in benevolence towards the people. From such an origin great civil disturbances arise.

VII. Let every man have his own charge, and let not the spheres of duty be confused. When wise men are entrusted with office, the sound of praise arises. If unprincipled men hold office, disasters and tumults multiply. In this world, few are born with knowledge; wisdom is the product of earnest meditation. In all things, whether great or small, find the right man, and they will surely be well managed; on all occasions, be they urgent or the reverse, meet but with a wise man, and they will of themselves be amenable. In this way will the state be lasting and the temples of the Earth and of grain will be free from danger. Therefore did the wise sovereigns of antiquity seek the man to fill the office, and not the office for the sake of the man.

VIII. Let the ministers and functionaries attend the court early in the morning, and retire late. The business of the state does not admit of remissness, and the whole day is hardly enough for its accomplishment. If, therefore, the attendance at court is late, emergencies cannot be met; if officials retire soon, the work cannot be completed.

IX. Trustworthiness is the foundation of right. In everything let there be trustworthiness, for in this there surely consists the good and the bad, success and failure. If the lord and the vassal trust one another, what is there which

³⁸. That is, they meet with no resistance.

cannot be accomplished? If the lord and the vassal do not trust one another, everything without exception ends in failure.

X. Let us cease from wrath, and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary men. How can any one lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all, one with another, wise and foolish, like a ring which has no end. Therefore, although others give way to anger, let us on the contrary dread our own faults, and though we alone may be in the right, let us follow the multitude and act like them.

XI. Give clear appreciation to merit and demerit, and deal out to each its sure reward or punishment. In these days, reward does not attend upon merit, nor punishment upon crime. Ye high functionaries who have charge of public affairs, let it be your task to make clear rewards and punishments.

XII. Let not the provincial authorities or the Kuni no Miyatsuko³⁹ levy exaction on the people. In a country there are not two lords; the people have not two masters. The sovereign is the master of the people of the whole country. The officials to whom he gives charge are all his vassals. How can they, as well as the government, presume to levy taxes on the people?

XIII. Let all persons entrusted with office attend equally to their functions. Owing to their illness or to their being sent on missions, their work may sometimes be neglected. But whenever they become able to attend to business, let them be as accommodating as if they had had cognizance of it from before and not hinder public affairs on the score of their not having had to do with them.

XIV. Ye ministers and functionaries! Be not envious. For if we envy others, they in turn will envy us. The evils of envy know no limit. If others excel us in intelligence, it gives us no pleasure; if they surpass us in ability, we are envious. Therefore it is not until after a lapse of five hundred years that we at last meet with a wise man, and even in a thousand years we hardly welcome one sage. But if we do not find wise men and sages, wherewithal shall the country be governed?

XV. To turn away from that which is private, and to set our faces towards that which is public—this is the path of a minister. Now if a man is influenced by private motives, he will assuredly fail to act harmoniously with others. If he fails to act harmoniously with others, he will assuredly sacrifice the public interest to his private feelings. When resentment arises, it interferes with order, and is subversive of law. Therefore in the first clause it was said that superiors and inferiors should agree together. The purport is the same as this.

39. The Kuni no Miyatsuko were the old local nobles whose power was at this time giving way to that of the central government.

XVI. Let the people be employed [in forced labor] at seasonable times. This is an ancient and excellent rule. Let them be employed, therefore, in the winter months, when they are at leisure. But from Spring to Autumn, when they are engaged in agriculture or with the mulberry trees, the people should not be so employed. For if they do not attend to agriculture, what will they have to eat? If they do not attend to the mulberry trees, what will they do for clothing?

XVII. Matters should not be decided by one person alone. They should be discussed with many others. In small matters, of less consequence, many others need not be consulted. It is only in considering weighty matters, where there is a suspicion that they might miscarry, that many others should be involved in debate and discussion so as to arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

[Ienaga, *Shōtoku taishi shū*, NST, 2:128–133; trans. adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, II, pp. 128–133; dB]

Questions have long been asked about the actual authorship and dating of this document, but even if not everything in the Seventeen Articles is by Shōtoku's own hand, few scholars have doubted that the contents are generally representative of his thinking. Since the text appears in the *Nihon shoki* (720 C.E.), it must in any case reflect views current in the early state-building period, and as recorded in that early chronicle, it became canonical as one of the founding myths of Japan. More than that, however, there are signs of a singular intelligence at work in its composition.⁴⁰

Besides their importance as a political document, Shōtoku's Seventeen Articles are significant as a remarkable synthesis of Confucian and Buddhist thought with native Japanese tradition. In the first article, the Confucian ideal of social harmony is set forth, and in the seventh article, the Confucian idea of having the "right man" or "wise man" (the sage) is said to be indispensable to attaining this ideal. However, in the tenth article, serious doubts are raised about the possibility of knowing right from wrong, no doubt reflecting Shōtoku's own awareness of Buddhist skepticism in this regard, as taught by the Emptiness (Three Treatise) school. Moreover in Article XIV, the extreme difficulty of finding a wise man—and, even more, the rarity of a sage—is emphasized. How then, without them, can one hope to achieve "harmony"? The answer is found in the concluding article: not by relying on one person to decide things, but by engaging in general consultation. If we recall how often in early myths the gods

40. Konishi, *A History of Japanese Literature*, I, p. 311, concludes his weighing of the evidence, pro and con, with: "The Constitution may well be Shōtoku's work, but Korean immigrant intellectuals in his entourage must have also made major contributions. I would like to think that the solicitation of cooperation from these intellectuals, and the consolidation of a composition of such speculative force, could only have been effected if Prince Shōtoku himself was the author of the work." In any case, says Konishi, "we may conclude that the extant Constitution remains essentially a work of Suiko Tennō's time."

themselves met in council and consulted together, we can see how Shōtoku's reference to concord in the discussion of affairs (in the first article) and consultation (in the last) evokes a native tradition of consensus formation that is characteristic also of the Japanese inclination, down to the present, for informal, consensual decision-making processes as a way of handling affairs. Note also that the Japanese emperor or empress is nowhere directly cited. He or she remains on a mystical plane or behind the scenes, symbolizing an ultimate authority whose mysterious power is in proportion to its not being directly used but only ritually exercised. Suiko reigns while Shōtoku rules and lays down the law.

In Shōtoku's case, we know that his promotion of constitutional law (*kenpō*) was only one aspect of an age marked by its promotion of spiritual as well as secular law. Whether or not Shōtoku is accepted as the author of all three of the sūtra commentaries attributed to him, the Lotus, Vimalakīrti, and Shrīmālā Sūtras are known to have traveled together through China and Korea and to have achieved great prominence in Japan at this time. The Lotus itself, as its title "The Lotus of the Wondrous Law" suggests, preached a universal law on a spiritual plane, which could be easily reconciled, through the principle of Emptiness and adaptive means, to the Chinese secular law and institutions that furnished the main content of the Seventeen Articles. Indeed, it was the principle of accommodation that enabled these two conceptions of law, religious and secular, to coexist in seventh-century Japan. The religious conception, with its lofty spiritual aspiration, took wings in the pagodas of temples like Shōtoku's own Hōryūji, "Temple of the Ascendancy of the Law," and numerous other temple structures that rose over the Yamato plain with the Law of Buddhism written into their names: Hōkōji, Hōrinji, Hokkiji, Hokkeji, and so on. In due time, alongside these embodiments of the religious law came the successive codifications of the secular law that gave more precise definition, at least in writing, to Shōtoku's "exemplary law" (*kenpō*).

THE LOTUS SŪTRA

The Lotus Sūtra, the chief text of the Buddhism sponsored by Shōtoku, was also one of the most influential and popular sūtras among Mahāyāna Buddhists in East Asia. Although its authorship and date are obscure, the Lotus was first translated from Sanskrit into Chinese during the third century C.E. In vivid language arousing the imagination, it relates what it claims to be the most profound teaching of Shākyamuni. More than any other sūtra, the Lotus is revered not only for its profound message but also because the text itself is sacred, with each Chinese character regarded as the embodiment of the Buddha. Nichiren Buddhists, who subsequently identified the Lotus Sūtra as their chief text, have treated the book itself as an object of worship, just as buddhas and bodhisattvas are worshiped by others.

Chinese and Japanese commentators have traditionally summarized the message of the Lotus Sūtra in three lessons. The first is that Shākyamuni was both a mortal being and a manifestation of the Eternal Buddha. As such, the questions of his demise are settled decisively in favor of his being present forever. That is, the Buddha does not die. Just as the Buddha's presence is extended throughout time, so the salvation of the Buddha extends to all beings. The second lesson is that salvation is universal and includes even women, who were regarded in other sūtras as being incapable of becoming buddhas. Third, the Lotus Sūtra encompasses all approaches to salvation in the One Vehicle, which is sometimes equated with Mahāyāna Buddhism; at other times the One Vehicle is limited to the Lotus Sūtra itself. Together these three lessons comprise a message that is eternal, universal, and comprehensive.

It is precisely on the basis of these characteristics that the Lotus Sūtra is presented as the highest truth. The highest truth is by nature a sovereign truth that stands above other teachings, and the One Vehicle is therefore supreme. This is an interesting logic that leads to the conclusion that because the Lotus Sūtra is inclusive of all times, persons, and approaches, it is the absolute truth that supersedes the messages propounded by other sūtras and teachers. It is this sūtra's dual character that makes it possible for Tendai Buddhists to accept so many other teachings and practices while Nichiren Buddhists reject them.

In the following parable of the burning house, a rich man saves his sons—who do not realize that the house they are in is on fire—by promising them a variety of wonderful carts to lure them out. Actually he has only one cart, but his deliberate misrepresentation is justified by the fact that it was an expedient device used for the boys' own salvation and by the magnificent splendor of the one kind of cart he did give them. Encompassing the virtues of all of the other carts, this One Vehicle was singularly supreme and eclipsed everything else.

This important point is made not through philosophical argumentation but by parable, a literary device that the Lotus Sūtra uses extensively. It is these stories that have endeared the Lotus Sūtra to so many people and have inspired poets, artists, and even politicians to create verse, paintings, and ideologies that make up what has been called the culture of the Lotus Sūtra.

PREACHING THE ONE GREAT VEHICLE [MAHĀYĀNA]

At that time the World-Honored One calmly arose from his samādhi and addressed Shāriputra, saying: "The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. . . .

Shāriputra, ever since I attained Buddhahood I have through various causes and similes widely expounded my teachings and have used countless expedient means to guide living beings and cause them to renounce their attachments.

Why is this? Because the Thus-Come One is fully possessed of both expedient means and the perfection of wisdom. . . .

Shāriputra, to sum it up: the Buddha has fully realized the Law that is limitless, boundless, never attained before. . . .

Shāriputra, the Buddhas preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, but the meaning is difficult to understand. Why is this? Because we employ countless expedient means, discussing causes and conditions and using words of simile and parable to expound the teachings. This Law is not something that can be understood through pondering or analysis. Only those who are Buddhas can understand it. . . .

Shāriputra, I know that living beings have various desires, attachments that are deeply implanted in their minds. Taking cognizance of this basic nature of theirs, I will therefore use various causes and conditions, words of simile and parable, and the power of expedient means and expound the Law for them. Shāriputra, I do this so that all of them may attain the one Buddha vehicle and wisdom embracing all species.” . . . [pp. 23–31]

THE PARABLE OF THE BURNING HOUSE

“Shāriputra, I will now make use of similes and parables to further clarify this doctrine. For through similes and parables those who are wise can obtain understanding.

Shāriputra, suppose that in a certain town in a certain country there was a very rich man. He was far along in years and his wealth was beyond measure. He had many fields, houses, and menservants. His own house was big and rambling, but it had only one gate. A great many people—a hundred, two hundred, perhaps as many as five hundred—lived in the house. The halls and rooms were old and decaying, the walls crumbling, the pillars rotten at their base, and the beams and rafters crooked and aslant.

At that time a fire suddenly broke out on all sides, spreading through the rooms of the house. The sons of the rich man, ten, twenty, perhaps thirty, were inside the house. When the rich man saw the huge flames leaping up on every side, he was greatly alarmed and fearful and thought to himself, I can escape to safety through the flaming gate, but my sons are inside the burning house enjoying themselves and playing games, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. The fire is closing in on them, suffering and pain threaten them, yet their minds have no sense of loathing or peril and they do not think of trying to escape!

Shāriputra, this rich man thought to himself, I have strength in my body and arms. I can wrap them in a robe or place them on a bench and carry them out of the house. And then again he thought, This house has only one gate, and moreover it is narrow and small.

My sons are very young, they have no understanding, and they love their games, being so engrossed in them that they are likely to be burned in the fire. I must explain to them why I am fearful and alarmed. The house is already in flames and I must get them out quickly and not let them be burned up in the fire!

Having thought in this way, he followed his plan and called to all his sons, saying, 'You must come out at once!' But though the father was moved by pity and gave good words of instruction, the sons were absorbed in their games and unwilling to heed him. They had no alarm, no fright, and in the end no mind to leave the house. Moreover, they did not understand what the fire was, what the house was, what danger was. They merely raced about this way and that in play and looked at their father without heeding him.

At that time the rich man had this thought: The house is already in flames from this huge fire. If I and my sons do not get out at once, we are certain to be burned. I must now invent some expedient means that will make it possible for the children to escape harm.

The father understood his sons and knew what various toys and curious objects each child customarily liked and what would delight them. And so he said to them, "The kind of playthings you like are rare and hard to find. If you do not take them when you can, you will surely regret it later. For example, things like these goat-carts, deer-carts, and ox-carts. They are outside the gate now where you can play with them. So you must come out of this burning house at once. Then whatever ones you want, I will give them all to you!"

At that time, when the sons heard their father telling them about these rare playthings, because such things were just what they had wanted, each felt emboldened in heart and, pushing and shoving one another, they all came wildly dashing out of the burning house.

At this time the rich man, seeing that his sons had gotten out safely and all were seated on the open ground at the crossroads and were no longer in danger, was greatly relieved and his mind danced for joy. At that time each of the sons said to his father, "The playthings you promised us earlier, the goat-carts and deer-carts and ox-carts—please give them to us now!"

Shāriputra, at that time the rich man gave to each of his sons a large carriage of uniform size and quality. The carriages were tall and spacious and adorned with numerous jewels. A railing ran all around them and bells hung from all four sides. A canopy was stretched over the top, which was also decorated with an assortment of precious jewels. Ropes of jewels twined around, a fringe of flowers hung down, and layers of cushions were spread inside, on which were placed vermilion pillows. Each carriage was drawn by a white ox, pure and clean in hide, handsome in form and of great strength, capable of pulling the carriage smoothly and properly at a pace fast as the wind. In addition, there were many grooms and servants to attend and guard the carriage.

What was the reason for this? This rich man's wealth was limitless and he

had many kinds of storehouses that were all filled and overflowing. And he thought to himself, “There is no end to my possessions. It would not be right if I were to give my sons small carriages of inferior make. These little boys are all my sons and I love them without partiality. I have countless numbers of large carriages adorned with seven kinds of gems. I should be fair-minded and give one to each of my sons. I should not show any discrimination. Why? Because even if I distributed these possessions of mine to every person in the whole country I would still not exhaust them, much less could I do so by giving them to my sons!”

At that time each of the sons mounted his large carriage, gaining something he had never had before, something he had originally never expected. “Shāriputra what do you think of this? When this rich man impartially handed out to his sons these big carriages adorned with rare jewels, was he guilty of falsehood or not?”

Shāriputra said, “No, World-Honored One. This rich man simply made it possible for his sons to escape the peril of fire and preserve their lives. He did not commit a falsehood. Why do I say this? Because if they were able to preserve their lives, then they had already obtained a plaything of sorts. And how much more so when, through an expedient means, they are rescued from that burning house.” . . .

[Adapted from Watson, *The Lotus Sūtra*, pp. 23–31, 56–63]

THE VIMALAKĪRTI SŪTRA (YUIMA-KYŌ)

The Vimalakīrti Sūtra eulogizes Buddha’s lay disciple, Vimalakīrti, who lives as a householder and yet achieves a wisdom unmatched even by those following a monastic discipline. At the Japanese court, this ideal of the Buddhist layman found favor among men active in state affairs, and later under Fujiwara auspices, a date was reserved on the court calendar for reading and expounding on this sūtra. An extant commentary on the Vimalakīrti text has been traditionally ascribed to Prince Shōtoku. Although some modern scholarship has questioned this attribution, there can be little doubt that the sūtra itself and its teaching of Emptiness and Expedient Means were influential in seventh-century Japan.

At the time in the great city of Vaishali there was a rich man named Vimalakīrti. Already in the past he had offered alms to immeasurable numbers of Buddhas, had deeply planted the roots of goodness and had grasped the truth of birthlessness. Unhindered in his eloquence, able to disport himself with transcendental powers, he commanded full retention of the teachings and had attained the state of fearlessness. He had overcome the torments and ill will of the devil and entered deeply into the doctrine of the Law, proficient in the perfection of wisdom and a master in the employing of expedient means. He had successfully

fulfilled his great vow and could clearly discern how the minds of others were tending. Moreover, he could distinguish whether their capacities were keen or obtuse. His mind was cleansed and purified through long practice of the Buddha Way, firm in its grasp of the Great Vehicle, and all his actions were well thought and planned. He maintained the dignity and authority of a Buddha, and his mind was vast as the sea. All the Buddhas sighed with admiration, and he commanded the respect of the disciples, of Indra, Brahma and the Four Heavenly Kings.

Desiring to save others, he employed the excellent expedient of residing in Vaishali. His immeasurable riches he used to relieve the poor, his faultless observation of the precepts served as a reproach to those who would violate prohibitions. Through his restraint and forbearance he warned others against rage and anger, and his great assiduousness discouraged all thought of sloth and indolence. Concentrating his single mind in quiet meditation, he suppressed disordered thoughts; through firm and unwavering wisdom he overcame all that was not wise. . . .

He frequented the busy crossroads in order to bring benefit to others, entered the government offices and courts of law so as to aid and rescue all those he could. He visited the places of debate in order to guide others to the Great Vehicle, visited the schools and study halls to further the instruction of the pupils. He entered houses of ill fame to teach the folly of fleshly desire, entered wine shops in order to encourage those with a will to quit them. . . .

The common people honored him as first among them because he helped them to gain wealth and power. The Brahma deities honored him as first among them because he revealed the superiority of wisdom. The Indras honored him as first among them because he demonstrated the truth of impermanence. The Four Heavenly Kings, guardians of the world, honored him as foremost because he guarded all living beings.

In this way the rich man Vimalakīrti employed immeasurable numbers of expedient means in order to bring benefit to others.

Using these expedient means, he made it appear that his body had fallen prey to illness. Because of his illness, the king of the country, the great ministers, rich men, lay believers and Brahmans, as well as the princes and lesser officials, numbering countless thousands, all went to see him and inquire about his illness.

Vimalakīrti then used this bodily illness to expound the Law to them in broad terms: "Good people, this body is impermanent, without durability, without strength, without firmness, a thing that decays in a moment, not to be relied on. It suffers, it is tormented, a meeting place of manifold ills.

"Good people, no person of enlightened wisdom could depend on a thing like this body. This body is like a cluster of foam, nothing you can grasp or handle. This body is like a bubble that cannot continue for long. This body is

like a flame born of longing and desire. This body is like the plantain that has no firmness in its trunk. This body is like a phantom, the product of error and confusion. This body is like a shadow, appearing through karma causes. This body is like an echo, tied to causes and conditions. This body is like a drifting cloud, changing and vanishing in an instant. This body is like lightning, barely lasting from moment to moment.

“This body is like earth that has no subjective being. This body is like fire, devoid of ego. This body is like wind that has no set life span. This body is like water, devoid of individuality. . . .

This body is impure, crammed with defilement and evil. This body is empty and unreal; though for a time you may bathe and cleanse, clothe and feed it, in the end it must crumble and fade. This body is plague-ridden, beset by a hundred and one ills and anxieties. This body is like the abandoned well on the hillside, old age pressing in on it. This body has no fixity, but is destined for certain death. This body is like poisonous snakes, vengeful bandits or an empty village, a mere coming together of components, realms and sense-fields.

“Good people, a thing like this is irksome and hateful and therefore you should seek the Buddha body. Why? Because the Buddha is the Dharma body. It is born from immeasurable merits and wisdom. It is born from precepts, meditation, wisdom, emancipation and the insight of emancipation. It is born from pity, compassion, joy and indifference. . . .

The body of the Thus-Come One is born of immeasurable numbers of pure and spotless things such as these.

“Good people, if you wish to gain the Buddha body and do away with the ills that afflict all living beings, then you must set your minds on attaining supreme perfect enlightenment.”

In this manner the rich man Vimalakīrti used the occasion to preach the Law to those who came to inquire about his illness. As a result, numberless thousands of persons were all moved to set their minds on the attainment of supreme perfect enlightenment. [pp. 32–36]

ENTERING THE GATE OF NONDUALISM

In the following passage, the sūtra deals with the question of how one enters “the gate of nondualism,” that is, the entrance to “supreme perfect enlightenment.”

At the time Vimalakīrti said to the various bodhisattvas, “Sirs, how does the bodhisattva go about entering the gate of nondualism? Let each explain as he understands it.”

One of the bodhisattvas in the assembly, whose name was Dharma Freedom, spoke these words: “Sirs, birth and extinction form a dualism. But since all

dharmas are not born to begin with, they must now be without extinction. By grasping and learning to accept this truth of birthlessness, one may enter the gate of nondualism.” . . .

The bodhisattva Delight in Truth said, “The true and the not true form a dualism. But one who sees truly cannot even see the true, so how can he see the untrue? Why? Because they cannot be seen by the physical eye; only the eye of wisdom can see them. But for this eye of wisdom there is no seeing and no not seeing. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism.”

When the various bodhisattvas had finished one by one giving their explanations, they asked Manjushri, “How then does the bodhisattva enter the gate of nondualism?”

Manjushri replied, “To my way of thinking, all dharmas are without words, without explanations, without purport, without cognition, removed from all questions and answers. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism.”

At that time Vimalakīrti remained silent and did not speak a word.

Manjushri sighed and said, “Excellent, excellent! Not a word, not a syllable; this truly is to enter the gate of nondualism.”

[Adapted from Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, pp. 32–35, 104, 110–111]