

WHAT IS THE PRACTICE of copying sutras? The *Lotus Sutra* says repeatedly that those who copy the *Lotus Sutra* will accomplish supreme enlightenment. Copying is an excellent way to put yourself fully into a sutra. You are one with copying and one with the sutra, truly sensing and feeling it. The action and object are easily unified. When you are copying, there is a sense of copying and also of the sutra allowing you to copy it. The sutra is copying you, too! This interrelationship is felt intimately, and such a state of being is itself supreme enlightenment.

Which sutra should you copy? You can copy any sutra or even part of a long one. Copying the *Heart Sutra* is a very common practice in Japan these days. Of course this is copied in Chinese, but there is no reason for you not to copy the sutra in English. There are different ways to copy a sutra. Some people copy one stroke or one word, do three bows, sit down, write another stroke or word, and then do three bows again. Others write one character or one word, then make a bow. Others simply copy. However you express your respect toward the sutra, please do it with sincere devotion and reverence.

In his writings on the *Lotus Sutra*, Dogen Zenji wrote of the lotus as the blossom of the subtle dharma. The lotus is a very unusual flower. Do you know its unique characteristics? When a lotus blooms, the seeds grow together with the flower. Usually a flower blossoms and after that turns into seed. But not so with the lotus. It is amazing. When the lotus blooms, big lotus seeds are already growing in the bottom of the flower.

Consider these seeds and flower as an analogy for our life and its blossoming. If we say that the major part of our life extends for

twenty, forty, or fifty years, that period could be called the flowering. But the result, or the seed, does not necessarily come after the flowering as such. It exists *now* within our life; it is always existing. The result is already here with us!

Another characteristic of the lotus is that it grows in the mud and yet is not defiled. At the end of our meals, we chant: “May we exist in muddy water with purity like a lotus, thus we bow to Buddha.” This is a good translation, but there is another translation that makes a different point. Chinese is a very rich language. The same words are pronounced in a different way according to the different dynasties. Personally, I like to chant this verse with the T’ang dynasty pronunciation instead of how we do it in Japanese, which is more like the Han dynasty pronunciation.

Using the T’ang dynasty pronunciation, this verse can also mean: “May we live in the world with purity like a lotus.” While living in the world, live like the lotus flower, not attached to the water or the mud. When water drops on the lotus leaf, the water rolls off right away. The analogy for us is to live like the water droplet, not attaching anywhere. So consider both implications, that of being pure and genuine, and at the same time that of being free. Not being attached, the mind is kept in a pure and free way.

What does the lotus flower stand for? The subtle dharma. We chant the “Gatha on Opening the Sutra” before every talk in the zendo:

*The dharma, incomparably profound and infinitely subtle,
Is rarely encountered even in millions of ages.
Now we see it, hear it, receive and maintain it.
May we completely realize the Tathagata’s true meaning.*

That subtle dharma is this subtle dharma of the lotus blossom. How do you receive it? How do you maintain it? Living this subtle dharma every day, how do you see it? When chanting, we experience it. When reading, we experience it. When writing and copying, we experience it. What are we truly copying? We can say

that I am literally writing my life through copying this most precious subtle dharma.

So what is truly the sutra? And how do you truly read or copy the sutra? How do you see it, hear it, and maintain it *now* as the subtle dharma? The sutra must be alive as the functioning of your life! Please trust yourself. Trust in yourself as the sutra, as the dynamic, boundless dharma itself. This is what I mean when I say be nice to yourself. Trusting your life as the sutra is the best way to be nice to yourself.

This practice of sutra copying has wonderful merit. I encourage you to do it and enjoy it. By copying, you will enrich your life, and you will experience yourself being revolved by the sutra. Unify yourself with what you do! This is actually the key, this unity of your true life and the life of literally everything. Do you see?