

information that allows us to dramatically improve our lives.

Hershock says that Buddhist practice offers a way of liberating our minds from the colonization of the mass media. He says that if we learn to practice a sort of Zen mindfulness and "...place our attention-energy into appreciating rather than controlling our circumstances—and so the people and things sharing in our narration—our lives will be naturally and dramatically enriched." (275)

I have no argument with that at all. *Reinventing the Wheel* is an interesting book. Hershock deserves praise for having written it. It contains many solid ideas and many original insights into the nature of modern life. Hershock writes with an engaging mixture of passion and intelligence. Readers interested in thinking about the mass media will find many things of interest in this book.

Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age by Peter D. Hershock is recommended for those who are interested in the philosophy of mass media.

Tom Graham

The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of Compassion

Translated into English from the French by Gwendolyn Bays. Two volumes. Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1983. Pp. xxii + 704. ISBN 0-913546-86-0 (pbk.: vol. 1) and 0-913546-87-9 (pbk.: vol. 2).

Although biographies of the Buddha appear only after two centuries following his Parinirvāna, their importance cannot be underestimated. It was probably through this genre that the teaching and practice of Buddhism became popular for those common folk who did not have the educational background to understand the finer points of Buddhist doctrine. Thus it was that the story of the Buddha took on mythical proportions, exalting him to a level that was transhuman and unique. Within this context also was the establishment of the venue through which the

fundamental teachings and practices of Buddhism could be presented by the biographers. It is little wonder, therefore, that biographies, birth stories (*jātakas*), and parables or edifying stories (*avadāna*) remained popular among teachers of the lay Buddhist population. In addition, many of the scenes at Buddhist centers (for instance, on the gates and railings of tumuli or *stūpas* or at cave temple sites) exhibit scenes of the Buddha's life, another indication of the centrality of the life of the Buddha. This confluence of art and literature helped to make Buddhism a vibrant and meaningful religion to the lay majority.

Since bibliographies of the Buddha evolved in different schools, it is little wonder that variations appear. The earliest complete biography (2nd century B.C.E.), the *Mahāvastu*, reflects the philosophy of the school from which it derived, the Lokottaravāda. This Mahāsaṃghika school emphasized the supramundane (*lokottara*) nature of the Buddha, emphasizing that the body of the Buddha is not of this world, and that his actions are performed merely for convention's sake. On the other hand, the *Nidānakathā* of the Sthaviravādins (1st c. B.C.E.) reflects the Buddha's more human qualities.

In some ways, the most readable of the biographies, the *Lalitavistara*, is a product of both the Sthaviravāda and Mahāyāna traditions: originally a product of the Sarvāstivāda (belonging to the Sthaviravāda tradition) but later adopted and considerably altered and expanded by the Mahāyānists. It is a text that appears in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and two Chinese versions (*Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 186-187), and has appeared in a number of Western languages since the 1800s. The present work is a translation based on Philippe Édouard Foucaux's French translation from the Sanskrit and Tibetan, *La Lalita Vistara—Development des jeux—contenant l'histoire du Boudhha Cakya-Mouni depuis sa naissance jusqu'a sa predication* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1884 and 1892, *Annales du Musée Guimet*, vols. 6, 19),¹ and the Tibetan translation from the

¹ This date reflects the holding in the British Museum. The date of the first volume is also mentioned in the Publisher's Preface of the present work (p. xiv). An earlier translation is

Sanskrit by Jinamitra, Danasīla, Munivarman, and Ye-shes sde.

What makes the *Lalitavistara* unique is that its style represents not so much a biography but rather an autobiography, presented in the manner of a Mahāyāna sūtra. In the first chapter, we read that a deity implores the Buddha to “once more bring this teaching to light (i.e. to recite once again the sūtra known as the *Lalitavistara*), out of compassion for the world, as medicine for myriads of beings, for the happiness of many beings, for the flowering of the multitudes, for the happiness and greater purpose of gods and men, so that all beings may be well and happy” (p. 10): an indication that the recitation of this sūtra, and any sūtra for that matter, has a purpose that far surpasses a mere entertainment value.

Divided into twenty-seven chapters, the *Lalitavistara* relates the story of the Buddha from the time of his existence in the Tuṣita Heaven, where he dwelt as the Bodhisattva Śvetaketu, to the more familiar events just prior to, and during, his last rebirth: the descent into the womb of his future mother—Māyādevī—“in the form of a small, white elephant with six tusks,” his birth ten months later, his skill and superiority in all the worldly arts—martial, literary, mathematical, physical, musical (thereby winning the hand of his future wife Gopā), his renunciation and going forth from home to homelessness, his practicing of austerities following the renunciation, his receiving of the rice gruel from the daughter of the head villager, Sujātā, his passage to the tree of Enlightenment, the challenge and defeat of Māra, the Enlightenment, and the events following the Enlightenment culminating in the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

The translation is very accessible and to be sure very inspiring for anyone having empathy with these events. The *Lalitavistara* is one of the very few books that presents Buddhist (Mahāyānist) teaching in a comprehensive and entertaining fashion.

mentioned by Donld Lopez in his *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 158 based on J.W. de Jong’s *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*, 2nd edition (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987; Biblioteca Indo-Buddhica, no. 33), p. 21.

Indeed, I would not hesitate assigning this sūtra as primary reading for an introductory class on Buddhism, since it contains all of the major Buddhist teachings and numerous insights into Indian culture. Of added value are a glossary of terms (Sanskrit or English) and lists (in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and English) of the important teachings, including the traditional Buddhist cosmological levels, the four applications of mindfulness, the four planes of meditation, and the thirty-seven limbs of enlightenment.

It is rare for any didactic work to be comprehensive without being abstruse, entertaining without being vacuous, yet this sūtra certainly succeeds as a vehicle that will clearly instruct readers in the life of the Buddha and to cause them to be inspired by that life.

James A. Santucci

Food for the Thinking Mind

By K. Sri Dhammananda;
Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia;
1999.
478 pages.

“*Food for the Thinking Mind*” is an well-organized collection of quotations from various sources for light reading and handy reference. The compiler, Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda is a household name in the Buddhist world. As he is one of the prolific writers of Buddhism, his books are well known among the Buddhists across the globe. The present volume is different and enables us to share the wonderful thoughts of some of the great thinkers. Among them are founders of great religions, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, poets, and wise sages of humanity as a whole, such as Gautama Buddha, Socrates, Albert Einstein, Bertram Russell, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Mahatma Gandhi. They have wielded an enormous influence on human civilization. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining how these great people view the world and human existence. The compiler himself must have