

ELECTRONIC EDITION

**S E C R E T S**  
OF THE  
*Lotus*  
**S U T R A**

*The Buddhist anthology on the enlightenment  
embodied in the invocation of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*

BOOK TWO

# The Cosmology of Buddhism

BY HARVEY KRAFT



**SECRETS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA**

The Buddhist anthology on the enlightenment  
embodied in the invocation of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo

By Harvey Kraft

AN ELECTRONIC BOOK  
published on the website of the  
EverLife Buddhist Education Center

by

The EverLife Foundation

<http://www.everlife.org>

© 1998. All rights reserved.

© 1998 by Harvey Kraft.  
All rights reserved under Pan American and International Copyright Conventions.

Published electronically exclusively  
on the world wide web by  
The EverLife Foundation

# **The Cosmology of Buddhism**

BOOK 2

SECRETS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

By Harvey Kraft

© 2009. Harvey Kraft. Ver. 3/09 (unpublished)

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The Dual Cosmology**

In a sudden, evolutionary leap ancient humans gained the gift of conceptual vision. Becoming aware of unseen forces shaping their existence. Imagining hidden worlds stretching far beyond familiar surroundings. Due to this dramatic awakening humankind launched on an ever-continuing quest for the true nature of existence.

Starting 3.8 billion years ago primeval life forms inhabited the oceans. Slowly plants and animals evolved on land and air. Inhaling the high amounts of oxygen in the atmosphere incited the growth of giant vertebrates who dominated Earth for 160 million years until their catastrophic destruction some 65 millions years ago.

Hominid scavengers, forerunners of the human species, first appeared nearly 2.5 million years ago. In time they mastered the ability to walk upright, evolved rudimentary means of communications, and developed primitive hunting skills. Ice ages, draughts and other dangers kept their numbers near the edge of extinction. Then, 40 - 50,000 years ago, small bands of early humans left the African continent on a worldwide migration. Their journey populated the planet and set the stage for humans to become self-aware beings capable of cosmic consciousness.

They may have started out on a hunt for food and water or a flight to safety, but along the way their journey turned into an expedition. These first explorers walked far and wide in constant awe of the grand canopy continuously hovering above. They embarked in waves — walking across vast continental tracts, peering into every nook of the vast world, tracking down the Sun as it rose in the East each day. Fiercely curious and valiant, they pressed on and on, night and day, driven by a fervent desire to behold whatever may loom ahead — no matter where it led. One tribe crossed from Northeast Africa into the Arabian Peninsula, continuing along the southern coast of the Indian subcontinent, some of its members making it as far as Australia. Another group headed north into the Middle East and then took an eastern course to India and China. Still other trailblazers searched Europe, the Americas and remote islands.

Humankind was the first species to stamp its presence on the entire planet.

What is it that drove them — generation after generation — to keep going, keep searching, traveling by foot across the globe? What were they looking for?

Early humans lived a ceaselessly challenging existence inside the change engine of Nature. No matter where they went, they encountered magnificent beauty contrasted by grave danger. Fully engaged in close proximity with animals, plants, and the elements, everywhere they found a struggle to exist. They observed that the survival of any species depended on its ability to adapt to change. In a world of hardship where the specter of death is always near, survivors were often those able to change themselves in a way that defied prediction.

They observed that any living thing with a desperate desire for survival could at times experience the sudden appearance of new powers. Desperately hoping to grasp this unfathomable phenomenon, they deduced that this elusive power of transformation could determine their own continuity or extinction...before it was too late.

Was it a wish to grow wings that gave birds the ability to fly? Was it their thirst for water that gave clouds the ability to produce rain? How can human beings gain new powers that would strengthen their chance for survival? How strong would a wish have to be for one to acquire such miraculous capabilities?

It was as if one could go to sleep, dream of having a different body, and wake up transformed. Is it possible, they wondered, for an emaciated man eagerly wishing to grow powerful arms to awaken from his sleep and discover that his wish came true?

Desiring to grasp the secret of transformation they came to be convinced that without this greater knowing, it would be a matter of time before their kind would succumb to life's unrelenting dangers. With the smell of impending doom in their nostrils, starving for a wisdom that would penetrate the veil of existence, the treasure trove of Nature's hidden secrets broke open.

As if in a dream, their desperate desire to acquire the power to survive sparked a staggering burst of enlightenment. Instantly, in one cathartic moment the door to greater consciousness unlocked and through it came the gift of a conceptual mind that would transform the human experience across the Ages.

With this one overwhelming thought, everything changed forever.

*All that is*

*Must have emanated*

*From that which is*

*Beyond what is apparent.*

This unexpected but decisive mutation triggered in at least one human being the emergence of a creative consciousness — a climactic awakening to the awesome specter of life's mystery. Propelled by this first transformation from primitive awe to modern consciousness, humans gained a propensity for strategic conceptualization and meaningful articulation.

The most skillful among the earliest beneficiaries of this conceptual vision quickly began to identify Nature's hidden entities. As if an eye had grown inside their mind, they suddenly acquired a whole new way of seeing. With this "mind's eye" they envisioned a world teeming with invisible creatures — a whole other side to existence.

Spirits existed everywhere, close and far. They resided in everything — the elements, inanimate objects, animals and plant beings. It was these Spirits that imbued every facet of Nature with life-fueling forces. Each host the Spirits inhabited received from them its potential, its purpose, and its energy. In plants the Spirits powered the ability to produce healing herbs or nurturing fruits. Spirits living in water bestowed it with the ability to quench thirst and help plants grow. In some animals the Spirits produced a willingness to be eaten, while to others they granted the strength to survive.

Gazing upon the heavens the newly conscious humans observed the greatest of all spiritual powers — Celestial Spirits. These Spirits were moody titans wielding overwhelming elemental and natural powers — from fire and light to rain storms and calm waters. They gave the Sun its energy to illuminate the day or set the land ablaze with scorching heat; they gave the Moon the ability to offer sight in the darkest of night; and, they willfully unleashed the frenzy of lightening, thunder, rain and winds. In every facet of the sky, sea and land the Spirits exercised their powers.

Spirits had an effect on the whole of existence — both the visible world and hidden dimensions beyond the observable. Having acquired the “Great Knowing” of animism, humans now beheld with both dread and admiration the impact of the Sprits on the fragile balance of life.

Among tribal communities appeared spiritual leaders who recognized that a friendly and cooperative alignment with the Spirits would engender reciprocal good will and cooperation. The Spirits could help them overcome the ever-enduring siege of hardships they faced from birth to death. By cultivating the kindness of Nature’s Spirits humankind would improve its lot — survive and thrive — if only they could communicate with the Spirits.

The earliest *shamans* were **Spirit Talkers**. It would be prudent, they advised, to contact the Spirits in plants and in animals and appeal to their good nature for protection, fertility, food and medicines. They would let the Spirits know that humans wished to co-exist with Nature’s creativity. They spoke to the Spirits constantly — in a loud voice or a soft voice. They briefed the Sun. Entreated the Moon. Reasoned with the Stars. Pleaded with the streams and honored the sacred ground they walked on. Always keeping the Spirits aware of, informed about, and engaged in the life of the community.

With ensuing generations these *shamans* became increasingly skilled in connecting with the Spirits. A second generation of *shamans* had become accomplished at “Spirit Listening.” These practitioners were able to read omens and signals sent from beyond, critical information of value to the nurturing and sustenance of their clan. Expert in gleaning the messages the Spirits had concealed in the tufts of Nature these *shamans* espoused the belief that the Spirits spoke to them of their devotion to the tribe. To enhance the communications, the **Spirit Listeners** designed rituals for the purpose of hearing such communications on a regular basis.

A third generation of *shamans* declared that they had pierced the veil of the Spirit world — initiating direct contact with the Spirits. They could conjure the Spirits and call upon them to take action. These go-between *shamans* had achieved the status of **Spirit Callers**. They engaged the Spirits with “magic” rituals, characterized by increasingly euphoric dances and hallucinogenic concoctions for stimulating hypnotic visions. They introduced sacrifice in exchange for services and as means to compel the Spirits to heal the sick and injured, feed the hungry and save the endangered.

A fourth generation of *shamans* claimed to be **Spirit Seers**. Not only could they speak to Spirits, hear Spirits, and call upon Spirits, but also they had developed “distance viewing” skills with which to see beyond this world into the Spirit realm. They were now able to describe the places where the Spirits lived. These visionaries utilized controlled trance-travel techniques to mentally “fly over” the transcendent landscape without engaging it. Journeying beyond the horizon of consciousness they crossed into unexplored territories, exotic other worldly domains occupied by unearthly forms.

The Seers discovered the Gods. Using their extraordinarily intuitive gifts they evoked transcendent vision to scale the topmost summit of the Spirit world. They reported back on what they saw. The Gods ruled from their heavenly seat. Here were the masters of all existence, makers of all laws, chiefs of an invisible, immortal, unfettered Spirit realm. They commanded legions of dutiful Spirits, celestial and elemental powers — all employed to govern the visible world as the Gods decreed and according to the truths the Gods had set forth.

The *shamans* spoke to the Gods with the skill of Spirit Talkers. They received instructions from the Gods using the ability of Spirit Listeners. As the Spirit Callers had done they called upon the Gods to lead their tribes through the treacherous terrain of the mortal domain. And as Seers they could describe the faces and bodies of the Gods.

Possessing all the skills required of a medium, the *shamans* consolidated their leadership role, at once serving as the voice of the Gods and as spiritual guides for their people — a position that quickly asserted control of tribal daily life and blocked the threat of rivals.

To assure their flock that only those qualified to do so would be able to speak to such things, Seer-*shamans* returning from trance journeys described the sights and sounds of the divine realm using surreal parables replete with symbolic meanings

and imaginary metaphors. They became fluent in secret, mystic, and visually poetic languages used to communicate with the deities and convey other-worldly visions.

These sacred languages were crafted to tell stories about the deities and their works in a way that would resonate on multiple levels — according to a listener's ability to comprehend. On the simplest level adventurous tales of supernatural feats were designed to imprint upon the young an appreciation for the heroic powers of the Gods and their messengers. To impress adults, the stories illustrated the importance of worship, following the doctrine, and appropriate fealty. To appeal to tribal leaders and elders, these visionary tales were embedded with subtext delivering important wisdom, revelations, and guidance from the Gods.

The Gods were invested with specific roles. Each had duties, powers and the minions to execute their will. Not only would they direct the Spirits answering to them, but personally engage the visible world. They could appear in the mortal world by putting on masks — various physical forms, including human, animal, elemental, celestial, even inanimate objects. Seers would describe the manifest forms of the Gods sometimes in mixed metaphor — verbally painting surreal composite images or sculpting them in wood or stone. The Gods would come to create, nurture, protect, and sustain Nature and the fertility of its inhabitants. They did so with generosity for those who were loyal and thankful for their divine intervention.

*Shamans* linking mortal fate to the parallel Spirit world cast all human beings as subjects of the Gods. Solidifying their role as intermediaries the *shamans* called for worship of the Gods and the organization of tribes according to divine structure and laws. To ensure that their people would receive the blessings of protection, fruition, nutrition and the perpetuation of their existence, they warned of disregarding the supreme commands of the Gods or trespassing on sacred ground designated for the Gods. Those who would defy or defile the Gods — whether by ignorance, malice or negligence — would be cursed with suffering, chaos and destruction.

With this provision no longer could tribal leaders send others on a hunt or make other communal decisions without consulting the *shamans* for assurance of divine consent. The *shamans* had gained and consolidated their social dominance by investing the Gods with spiritual authority greater than tribal chiefs, parents, spouses and other figures of authority.

But despite this powerful political hold, a tribe suffering from epidemics, starvation or natural disasters would become agitated. Persistent hard times meant that their Gods had abandoned them and their *shaman* had lost influence in the Spirit realm. A rival invariably would challenge the incumbent by introducing new Gods. To shield themselves from being overthrown in such circumstances, *shamans* learned to survive upheaval by placing blame on others.

Their solution to troubling challenges was to create a new doctrine declaring that humans also had a Spirit living inside them. Earlier, the *shamans* had viewed the existence of Spirits in animals, plants and the elements. Now they expanded that perspective by introducing the concept that human beings also possessed a dual nature. This doctrine proposed that each human being acquired a God-given Spirit at birth — a divine entity that returned to report the actions of the individual to the Gods once the mortal body expired. This proposition established individual accountability for living according to the laws of the Gods.

Once this doctrine was established, if the tribe experienced poor outcomes, the *shaman* can claim that it was not the God who failed. Rather, it was the actions of one or more tribal members who caused the Gods to shun the tribe. Furthermore, the *shamans* declared, Gods will judge such sinners when their Spirits reported back to the divine realm.

The **Doctrine of Human Duality** — the cohabitation of an ethereal Spirit in the corporeal human body — further represented the mission of the soul to nurture and give purpose to individual lives. To facilitate a good report upon the return of their souls to the embrace of the Gods, humans would be required to honor the Gods by paying appropriate tribute. Doing so would raise the status of humans in the eyes of the immortals ensuring that their souls would be fed and honored in the divine realm.

Moreover, even prior to death a Spirit could abandon a human being who defied or ignored the will of the Gods, refused to make offering, or brought harm upon their people. Such a person could lose his mind or be exiled. On a larger scale, if an entire community turned away from their Gods, all the Spirits living in and around their land would leave. The departure of Spirits produced a spiritual vacuum into which malevolent forces are drawn. Chaos, loneliness, hunger and pain would ensue.

The doctrines of Animism, Divinity, and Human Duality gave the *shamans* the power to govern the mortal realm with immortal laws. But some wanted more.

Their status as messengers of the Gods should entitle them to a position of special status in the afterlife, as well. Seers observed that when the departed souls of *shamans* reached their divine destination their human bodies were resurrected in the immortal realm and they were invited to sit among the Gods. With their ascension to the top echelon of the heavenly hierarchy *shamans* could claim that their ancestors held influence among the Gods, and their own eventual death would further the cause of their tribe.

By 7,000 B.C.E. humanity had traveled a long distance both on foot and in their minds — a journey of ironic proportion. The spark of spiritual awakening saved humanity from extinction. But in time this spiritual vision turned into a tool for social control. Primitive humans overwhelmed by awe had transformed into immortals living with the Gods. For 30 to 40 millennia humanity had searched the planet and the realms beyond. Now it was time to settle down.

Competing tribal groups congregated in the fertile river valley regions — Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, and the Indus attracted the first permanent farming settlements. But bringing together a number of different tribes into close proximity resulted in competition for resources and with it came clashes among their respective *shamans*. They quickly fell to pitting the supremacy of one God over another. Power struggles kept neighboring groups in constant conflict. Hunters turned into warriors. Weaker Gods fell. Stronger Gods prevailed. Eventually, exhausted with unprofitable death and destruction, wiser heads prevailed.

Political expediency required the priests to learn how to dominate more diverse, more demanding populations, as well as the growing influence of warrior chiefs. They needed to develop larger hierarchical organizations to increase their power and influence. Diplomatic *shamans* consolidated their favored Gods into pantheons, integrated rituals and sacred languages, and changed from the rule of one *shaman* to the rule of priesthood. Shamanic alliances were essential to the establishment of organized religious order. Mutual interest made this possible. They designed a priesthood to mirror the hierarchy of Gods — forming the first human institution of any kind.

The priesthood was now charged with guardianship of the sacred practices and their applications. The Gods had been renamed and their roles redefined to suit permanent settlements, rather than nomadic lifestyles. But the original shamanic doctrines and practices remained virtually in tact.

However, growing populations also empowered the role of secular leaders. Warriors, hunters, farmers, and traders sought to establish their influence in the community. The continuing challenge of keeping peace among these competitors prompted the priests to add more social controls.

Cloaked in divine intercession, but directed by social and political agendas, the priests continued to employ the trance practices of shamanic-seers. They evoked increasingly intricate visions that produced new laws consistent with the prescription of human duality — laws prescribed by the Gods, increasingly focused on the spiritual journey one encountered in the afterlife.

The integration of inter-tribal societies required greater diversity in the realm of the Gods resulting in a more elaborate divine cosmology with newly crafted exotic provinces, visions of opulent heavenly palaces, spiritual paradises and underworlds. A detailed expansion of the divine cosmology created a multitude of regions —glorious paradises and hellish environments among them.

Further expanding the afterlife scenario, they envisioned a divine court wherein judiciary Gods presided over the fate of humans in the Spirit world — deciding on the appropriate final destination for a particular human soul. The judges weighed the accomplishments of a soul against the scale of divine expectations. Invariably this vision invested in the priesthood the role of agent-arbitrators able to influence one's final destination in the afterlife landscape.

Placing immense emphasis on the ultimate fate of one's soul in the world beyond gave the religious class power over secular leaders. Their expanded cosmology and its accompanying judgment principle had taken root even beyond their expectations. Its wide acceptance commandeered the attention of civilized cultures from their inception. It prompted a seemingly unshakeable dedication to curry the favor of priests and produced among their people and secular leaders a devotional obsession with pleasing their Gods.

The rise of city-states produced new power struggles. Secular ambitions became more difficult to manage. Competition among priests and their political allies created disagreements over the relative hierarchal standing of various Gods within a pantheon, or preferences for certain Gods over others. Increasingly, doctrinal arguments arose over the roles of the Gods, the reasons for human accountability and the destination of souls beyond death.

As fractures in the priestly class produced divisions and treachery from within, warrior chiefs emerged stronger. To appease them some head priests anointed sovereignty upon the powerful and militant ones declaring some to be Gods on earth.

Political expediencies had corrupted the spiritual sanctity of the religious order. Some Seers called for a return to the *shaman* ways declaring that parochial priests had lost touch no longer able to accurately pierce the veil of the divine. Rejecting the impurity of civilized enclaves, those aspiring to reconnect with their spiritual heritage returned to trance-visionary travel and a personal dedication to unlocking the mysteries of the beyond. They resumed the practice of migration by heading out to remote areas.

Two profoundly different visions of the divine world would emerge from the breakaway Seers in their effort to answer the two primary questions dividing them:

- (1) Which God was the most powerful?
- (2) How is fate determined?

As to the first question, one stream envisioned a centralized cosmography headed by an all-powerful God. To deflect the rise of militant kings, they declared the existence of a sovereign God — seeing Him as the greatest of all *shamans*. In derivative mythologies, this God was the master magician of the divine world and overseer of a court of minor Gods. Whether described in elemental terms, such as Sun-God, or as a sovereign, King-God, or as a transcendent God, the primary attributes of the supreme God was as a Creator, Judge, Guardian of all beings, and Maker of Divine Laws.

A rival group of Seers advanced a holistic view wherein the laws of Nature and the Gods were interdependent. In this scenario the primary duty of the Gods was to sustain the continuity of Nature and its laws. Some Gods had designated responsibilities to engage the mortal world through human thoughts, feelings, and experiences. But there were also Gods who set all of existence into motion by turning the Great Wheel of Natural Law. These Gods were charged with advancing the continuity of time and existence. While one God had the power to create worlds, including the earthly one, none of the Gods were invested with all powers.

As to the second question, the first group argued that divine judgment came in the afterlife. Accordingly, human beings would experience only a single mortal lifetime — one birth, one death. In the afterlife, the court of the immortal realm decreed

judgment on their souls based upon their status, merits or sins accumulated during existence. Thereafter and forever more, the souls of some would reside in one dimension or another of the spirit world, either damned to serve a sentence of eternal punishment in a hellish netherworld, or forever enjoying their earthly-gained status in the blissful peace of a heavenly realm.

The second group of Seers denied the idea that in death the human Spirit traveled to the divine dimension. As the Gods lived in a pure and sacred land, it would be impossible for impure human beings to enter. Rather, humans would be reborn in various impure mortal worlds, lifetime after lifetime, their physical being repeatedly reconstituted in another form, place and time. One's fate or future lifetime would be determined by the purity one achieved in the present lifetime. According to this view, it was impurity that kept one trapped in the cycle of rebirth — landing one in a world of enduring hardships.

The circumstances and destination of one's rebirth invariably depended on the quality of one's status in society, merits, sins, the use of one's free will, and the character of the individual. The worst sinners were to be born into hellish underworlds; the majority of people will repeat enduring hardships; but, a small few, those skilled in becoming pure, those vowing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of humans, they would be released from the mortal plane and be reborn in the heavens, perhaps as a God.

From 3,000 – 2,000 B.C.E. these two distinctly different approaches evolved more advanced versions of monotheism and shamanism.

In Western Asia the God-centered vein developed a monotheistic model founded upon the one supreme, omnipotent God, a single immortal Creator, whose will and authority was omnipresent and even superseded natural law. He existed even when there was nothingness. He gave rise to all that is and to all the laws. He also enforced all the laws — moral, social, and natural.

In the Indus Valley, shamanic practice became focused on attaining freedom from rebirth. Seeking emancipation from physical existence through the practice of self-purification, they rejected attachment to the gratification of the senses believing it to be the cause of impurity that kept one out of the divine realm. Their strict standard for purity was total annihilation of all that binds mortals to a fate of repeated physical forms. Liberation from rebirth in this mortal world required total disconnection of one's

soul from desires and earthly behaviors, good or bad, whether in action, thought or speech and nothing short of complete purification would accomplish the intended goal.

Religious practitioners able to achieve the total purity of their human-Spirit would be freed from repeated rebirth and would instead ascend in the afterlife to a merger with the immortal God-Spirit becoming forever one with the divine. ■

## 2

**The Buddha's Law**

In the first millennium B.C.E. in India a sage of the Sakya clan (Skt Sakyamuni) succeeded in achieving a clear, unobstructed view of all existence. The Enlightened One (i.e., Buddha), a title chosen in honor of his supreme wisdom, introduced a new vision quite different from the traditional doctrine of dual dimensions and dual-natured beings. He proposed that fundamentally all states of existence were facets of one indivisible cosmology. In the Buddha's world-system, a single identity encompassed everything — including humans, spirits, gods, universe, eternity. All existence was one Reality of Life. The purpose of his teachings was to define the scope and essence of this singularity. According to the Buddha, the Reality of Life was boundless, everlasting and absolute, and simultaneously finite, mortal and ever-changing. The Buddha explained that the infinitely multifaceted scope and essential singularity of Life transcended relativist thinking and comprehension. His view of Life was profoundly ironic. While it was not itself a substance, without it substance could not exist. Although it had no actual form of its own, it could not be described as nothingness. Moreover, the singularity of Life could not be proved at all, although the existence of sentient mortal beings testified to it.

Sakyamuni compared the boundless entirety of Life in the universe to an ocean, and likened individual mortal manifestations of Life to the drops that composed it. Through this metaphor the Buddha illustrated that no actual distinction can exist between individual life and the universal life-singularity. Just as no distinction exists between the ocean and its component drops, there is no distinction between existence and death, spirit and form, person and environment, mortality and immortality. He proposed that the mortal mind creates the illusion of segmentation causing the eye of human perception to conjure a divided cognitive reality.

According to Sakyamuni's metaphysical teachings, the physical senses caused one to discriminate. Sentient beings discerned their world through mental markers,

such as substance, shape, size, color, age, origin, distance, destination, movement, speed, direction and so on. Thus, the senses triggered the perception that the external world was separate and distinct from the subjective self. As a result of this false sense of separation, Sakyamuni asserted, it would appear natural that a dual-self of body and soul co-existed. However, he declared, at the very core of both form and formlessness was one Reality.

The Buddha viewed apparent distinctions as nothing more than superficial designations — relative and temporary boundaries. By contrast he advanced a Doctrine of Nondifferentiation wherein he proposed that all of existence was one indivisible singularity — a cosmic essence which all mortal entities arose from, eventually receded to and were composed of. He saw a transcendent, infinitely boundless field of Life conjuring countless objects and subjects all sharing a single inseparable quality. According to his Reality, there were no dual worlds of spirit and substance, no physical form could ever be immortal, no soul could exist as an independent entity separate from a body, and as all effects required a cause neither the universe nor any single phenomena could be born by spontaneous origination.

The Buddha's teaching regarding the boundless singularity of Life was the overarching theme of his Dharma — a Sanskrit word that simultaneously meant Cosmology, Reality, Truth and Law. The Buddha's Dharma represented a single, integrated Theory of Everything. His Cosmology encompassed a view of the universe that encompassed phenomenal as well as spiritual facets. The reference of the Buddha's Dharma to Truth meant that it revealed both the observable and hidden truths of existence. In reference to it as the "Reality of All Existence," the Dharma included tangible, as well as intangible realities. Wherein the Dharma also meant Law, it referred to universal laws governing all natural functions affecting matter, energy, space, time, as well as the laws of life and death, and social/moral laws. Hence, the Buddha's Law encompassed all the laws of existence, including natural, metaphysical and human laws. In all the Buddha's Dharma interchangeably conveyed his views regarding the configuration of the universe, natural laws and forces, and the role of human beings within the grand cosmos of existence.

As the Buddha's sutras provided the vehicle for unveiling his Dharma, the word Dharma also came to be synonymous with his teachings. In that context, Dharma referred to the Buddha's sermons on the purpose and function of Life.

The sutras described a super-cosmos. It encompassed the present large-scale universe and all mortal subjects within it. The absolute singularity they recounted spanned an infinite and eternal field, yet these teachings deemed it to be actively

everchanging relative to mortal existence. Within the framework of the Buddha's cosmology, everything that was mortal manifested in the mortal realm repeatedly. This applied to universes as well as human beings. It was easy to see that birth ended in death, but to propose the reverse as viable required the configuration of a cosmic dynamic that tied together a string of mortal existences. From Sakyamuni's vantage, the True Reality of All Existence was the cosmic ocean from which the waves of mortal transmigration repeatedly arose and to which they receded. This doctrine was deemed to be of such profound scope, nature and essence that only a Perfectly Enlightened being could fathom it. Nevertheless, the Buddha declared that those who would choose to follow his teachings in due course would accomplish Perfect Enlightenment — a state-of-being equal to his own. Thus, he set forth to describe a new cosmology in carefully crafted stages guided by the capacity of his to absorb it. As they honed their abilities to learn it, Sakyamuni advanced his Dharma. As they grasped each progressive stage of his Cosmology, they awakened within themselves a greater capacity to fathom it.

Sakyamuni's disciples embarked on the journey toward Perfect Enlightenment — some by learning through listening, others by using exceptional intuitive and meditation skills to realize the truth of his teachings. Yet, from the start of his discourse he presented them with a seemingly irreconcilable dilemma concerning this lofty state. Accordingly, Perfect Enlightenment was infinitely profound. Hence, Perfect Enlightenment was beyond the grasp of one's mental processes, whether it be pursued by learning or realization. Therefore, it was impossible for any of his disciples to fathom the ultimate Dharma unless they were already buddhas. Nevertheless, if they are to fathom that which the Buddha teaches, they must never forsake their desire for Perfect Enlightenment.

The paradox of attaining Perfect Enlightenment was defined as follows: Perfect Enlightenment cannot be attained, because only a buddha can fathom Perfect Enlightenment. Yet, the teachings of the Enlightened One cannot be fathomed unless one desires to fathom Perfect Enlightenment. The caveat appears to say that one must pursue that which one cannot hope to gain.

To the many learned and spiritually skilled disciples who chose to follow the Buddha's course, this Paradox of Attainment placed the achievement of buddhahood beyond reach. Awestruck by the majesty of his supernaturally august appearance they deemed Perfect Enlightenment to be the crown worn by the king of all wisdom — the Enlightened One who has deciphered all the secrets of the universe. When asked how he had achieved such a state, Sakyamuni replied that

for countless eons of past lives he selflessly devoted himself to the salvation of others. He urged his followers to similarly turn their focus away from pursuing enlightenment for their own sake. Vowing to aid the Buddha in his effort to lead people toward the liberating teachings of the Buddha's Law, many of his disciples chose to apply the practice of Selflessness (Skt bodhisattva) by devoting their lives to aiding the welfare of others.

While the practice of Selflessness equated the path of Perfect Enlightenment with action rather than reflection, Sakyamuni still impressed upon them another version of the Paradox of Attainment. In their case he had described a lengthy journey across many existences during which a devout bodhisattva would undergo 52 stages of advancement to be climbed one step at a time. After an incalculable span of time one would reach the threshold of the summit — the fifty second stage of enlightenment. Nevertheless, the Buddha advised, it did not necessarily follow that one who reaches the fifty-first (non-regression) will be able to find that it provides access to the fifty-second step (buddhahood). On the contrary, he cautioned, even the most selfless being would not be able to ascend the top to the level of buddhahood from a stage below. Once again, Sakyamuni declared that only a buddha could ascend the fifty-second step (buddhahood), as only a buddha can know the way to Perfect Enlightenment. For the practitioners of Selflessness, he provided the following Paradox of Attainment: one who climbs the stages of Selflessness cannot reach Perfect Enlightenment, because the final rung to Perfect Enlightenment can only be ascended by one who is already a buddha. As only a buddha can access buddhahood, one who ascends Perfect Enlightenment must be a buddha who is returning to that level. Thus, through the Paradox of Attainment Sakyamuni placed those who practiced Selflessness in the same quandary as the practitioners of Learning and Realization

Ironically, from the start of his teachings, Sakyamuni harbored a Dharma which would allow his followers to know the secret of Perfect Enlightenment and in so doing overcome the Paradox of Attainment. Nevertheless, until they were ready to receive this gift, the Buddha forestalled his revelation of his ultimate Cosmology wherein he would reveal the "Truth of the Reality of All Existence" — for in their ignorance they might reject it.

To protect them from premature misunderstandings, the Buddha spent over 40 years imparting the depth of his Dharma in progressive stages before leading his followers to the portal of buddhahood. Gradually, he taught them increasingly sophisticated principles probing the theoretical underpinnings of his Cosmology.

Eventually, he completed his provisional teachings and led them into the Dharma of the Lotus Sutra wherein he resolved the enigma that stood in the way of Perfect Enlightenment.

**COMING SOON**

**SECRETS**  
OF THE  
*Lotus*  
**SUTRA**  
ANTHOLOGY

**Installment #2**

**Book Two**

**The Cosmology of Buddhism**