

THE LOTUS AND VAJRA MEDITATION OF TENDAI BUDDHISM

—The Use of Madhyamika in Tendai Tantric Ritual—

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The Lotus Mandala meditation of Tendai Tantric Buddhism, as practiced by the Ajari masters of Mt. Hiei, Kyoto, is divided into eight contemplative stages. Three of these internal segments (the first, seventh, and eighth) are taken from the *Juhachi-do* Eighteen path Mandala meditation, which serves as an introduction and an ending to all tantric ritual prayer. The remaining five sections, the second, third, fourth, and fifth, and most of the sixth, belong to the Lotus Mandala proper. The Tendai version of the Lotus Mandala is a composite text taken from Buddhist canonical sources, including the *Dai-nichi-Kyo* (Vairocana Sutra), the *Susiddhi Sutra*, and other texts from the Zomitsu (Tantric) section of the Taisho Canon, and privately published manuals preserved in the archives of Mt. Hiei. The sources used in the following translation appear in the footnotes and the bibliography appearing at the end of this work.

Although a dozen or more schools are listed in the annals of Tendai Buddhist history, in fact three major sects dominate the teaching of the Lotus Mandala meditation on Mt. Hiei today. These are the Homan, the Ano, and the Sanmai sects, whose Ajari masters thrice annually instruct novices and postulants in the manner of performing the esoteric Lotus meditations according to Tendai tradition. This esoteric tradition was learned by Ennin

and other Tendai monks who went to T'ang dynasty China from 835 C. E. onwards, and brought back to Heian period Japan a distinctly Tendai version of the ritual meditation. The other ritual version of the Lotus Mandala, brought back to Japan in 807 C. E. by Kukai, (posthumously named Kobodaishi) differs from the Tendai version translated below in several important details. The Shingon monks of Mt. Koya who follow Kukai's rubrics stress the *siddhi* or power meditations, i. e., the vajra (thunder-and-lightning) aspects of tantric prayer while the Tendai monks of Mt. Hiei emphasize the *bhakti* or lotus-devotional aspects of tantric meditation. Except for these differences of emphasis, the meditations of Tendai and Shingon tantric Buddhism are practically the same.

The text of the Lotus Sutra meditation does not give any indication of the various segments or of the internal meditative aspects of the ritual. To understand the real meaning of the text, and to translate the Chinese characters correctly, it is necessary to seek the orally transmitted explanations of an Ajari master. This is because the hermeneutic or interpretative tradition of tantric Buddhism (and other liturgical traditions, such as the Sufi, Kabbalah, or Taoist mediations and rituals) always demand the physical presence of a master who knows how to do the meditations, circulate breath, envision colors and sacred images, and chant liturgical music. The following study of the Tendai version of the Lotus meditation makes use of the oral teachings of all three sects, the Homan, Sanmai, and Ano *kuden* (orally transmitted directions for tantric meditation) as preserved on Mt. Hiei and recorded in privately recorded published notes. Rev. Ikuta Koken provided the verbal, physical, and musical instructions for this translation, over a full year of patient explanation and

correction. The Homan sect manual with Ikuta's oral teaching are the primary source, while the Ano, Sanmai, and the *Kokuyaku Issaikyo* collection of documents were used as secondary references. Comparative Shingon Buddhist documents such as the ground-breaking work of Togano, the exhaustive study of Yoshida Kengo on the meaning of the Sanskrit seed words, and dictionary of tantric Terms by Sawa Ryuken were daily companions. Other references appear in the appendix. By far the most useful of all texts was the privately published manual of the Ano sect, the *Shido Gyogi Shisho* compiled the Rev. Shibuya Shigai. The first edition of this text was printed at Hieizan in 1933. Recent photo offprints of this important study are still used during the Shugyo intensive training sessions prior to ordination on Mt. Hiei today.

This last manual outlines the eight sections of the Lotus Mandala meditation as follows:

1. Setting up and purifying the altar (Eighteen Path Mandala).
2. Meditation for building the central section of the Lotus.
3. Putting on the Thirty-two aspects of a Tathagata (Amida).
4. Invite Buddha (Acala) to be present interiorly.
5. Put on the Vajra armor and close the gates of the mandala.
6. Offer a banquet to the Lotus World.
7. Meditation on the Lotus World.
8. Thanking and seeing off the Buddhas; exit (Eighteen Path M.).

This outline can be further simplified into the following eight steps: 1) purification; 2) building the sacred area; 3) contemplating the Mandala; 4) Inviting the Buddhas to come; 5) Interiorize the mandala; 6) Offerings of thanksgiving to the Mandala; 7) enter samadhi (meditation); 8) exit. The last

words of the rite warn the monk that he or she must “go forth and do good things, based on compassion,” that is, the meditation was wasted unless the practitioner’s life is changed to a real unity with the compassionate heart of the Buddha.

The Lotus meditation is part of a series of four meditations, leading from the eighteen path purification, through the nine petals of the lotus, the five prongs of the thunder-bolt vajra, to the emptying fires of the Goma. Thus goal of the total Tendai rite is not different from the Chinese and Japanese interpretation of the Madhyamika school of Nagarjuna, neither affirming or denying the real or the Dharma world, but emptying mind and heart of all images so as to realize union with the void, empty Absolute. Just as the Lotus grows out of the mud of the world to blossom in the sun, and die, so the meditator uses the things of the world as a platform to stand before the transcendent, and cross over to the shores of union. In the final meditation, the practitioner sees “my heart, your heart, and the absolute” as equal, non-dual. Compassion is the real goal of the lotus blossoming in the heart. The central fire of the lotus, a gold pestil blazing with the light of Vairocana, is made to burn away all selfish images and desires, to be one with Vairocana.

The complexity of the Lotus Mandala is resolved and made simple by entering into the eight-fold meditation, and passing through the twelve hallways that surround the Lotus flower. The central lotus image, an eight-petaled blossom with Vairocana in the center, is surrounded by twelve outer halls, which act as a labyrinth to keep all worldly impurities out of the mind and heart of the meditator. The top of the Lotus world is seen as the direction East, from which the sun rises. The hall of wisdom with a triangle at

its center, the image of Sakyamuni Buddha, and Manjusri appear in the upper three hallways, with the Eastgate at the very top, guarded by Jikokuten (Dhrtarastra). The lower half of the Lotus Mandala is the west, the direction of the setting sun, and the underworld-afterlife. The light hallway with the terrifying figures of the five great light kings (Godai-Myo-o) is supported by the realms of the Space and the Susiddhi worlds, and guarded by Komukuten (Virupaksa). To the south or right side are the halls of the Vajra-Thunder world and the Purifying spirits, guarded by Zochoten (Virudhaka). While to the north or left of the Lotus are the realms of compassionate Kannon, the earth protector Jizo, and the northgate guard Bishamonten (Vaisravana).

The meditator explores these worlds in the process of contemplating each facet of the mandala, relentlessly pursuing the goal of purification and compassion. That is, the goal of the meditation is to put on the heart and mind of Buddha, through the practice of tantric visualization. Though such a lofty goal could never be attained with one's own powers, not even after a myriad of aeons of practice, the tantric way of prayer teaches the meditator to put on the mind and heart of Buddha i. e., a person who has crossed over to the shore of oneness with the absolute, through meditative visualization, mantra chant, and mudra hand dance. The union of self with Buddha's heart, and that of all other sentient beings, identifying self with the absolute "other shore" of reality, is done not through one's own power or practice, but by eidetic or living vision of one who has accomplished the goal. Thus we become what we envision, like a child becoming absorbed in and swallowed up by a vision seen on a television screen or a vivid dream. The mind, mouth, and body are united as a single unit, functioning together in Tantric prayer. Mind meditates, mouth chants, and

body dances (hand dance or mudra) to accomplish this holistic union.

Even though the Lotus World (Gharba Datu) and the Vajra World Mandalas are found in India, the structured use of the two tantric liturgies as a unified process probably came about, as the two texts were transmitted through China to Japan. The tantric teachers of Kukai (founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan) and of Ennin and later Tendai Monks from Mt. Hiei, did not have a lasting influence in China. We can only guess how the system was created. Whether the rituals were learned by the Japanese monks in China, or created by Kukai and modified by Ennin, the Eighteen Path, Lotus, Vajra, and Goma Fire rites became a coherent meditative practice, and profoundly influenced Heian period Buddhism in Japan. Scholars debate the influence that the Japanese monks may have had on the modern version of the four rites, which are now preserved as a single process system only in Japan. Due to the differences between Tendai and Shingon rituals in practice, a difference reflected in the philosophies of the two schools. It seems proper to surmise that Kukai's 803–806 C. E. version of the rituals and Ennin's later acquisitions gathered between 835–847 C. E., were indeed learned in China but later adapted to the cultural and religious needs of Japan.

In the Tendai version of the two mandalas, the Lotus World liturgy occurs before the Vajra meditation, the reverse of the Shingon liturgical process. This is because, in the Tendai tradition, the Lotus World stands for the female, self-emptying samadhi meditations of dhyana-Zen. The womb or cosmic center of the human body is emptied, so that the absolute vision of AH, the source of enlightenment and the cause or yin 因 of "crossing over," that is, the vision of Vairocana-Amida may be born there. It is essential, in the Tendai tantric

tradition, to see that the distinctions between Vairocana, Amida, Acala, Vajrasattva, or the other myriad images of the Lotus and Vajra world are but upaya or convenient skillful means to realize the Buddha nature (i. e., the potency for emptiness or transcending union) within the self.

The Vajra World liturgy, which follows the Lotus rite is called the “male” or outgoing, giving symbol of enlightenment. All of the seeds planted by the Lotus meditation are given away by the Vajra world meditations. Just as the meditation of samadhi-Zen is proper to the Lotus, so the contemplation of shikan-vipassana is proper to the Vajra liturgy. In the oral kuden tradition of Tendai, the goal 果 of Vajra meditation and of vipassana is compassion, that is, the ability to see the needs of others and respond to them in a physical, practical way without the use of word. Thus the quelling of selfish desires as well as words and mental images, are goals of the Lotus and Vajra meditations. The Lotus liturgy purifies and closes off the interior of the meditator so that the image of Vairocana can be implanted there. The Vajra meditations give away the sacred images and the merits gained from them, for the sake of all sentient beings.

Lotus is to Zen as Vajra is to Vipassana, that is, the samadhi concentration and emptying of the mind effected by Zen is completed and brought to fruition by the outgoing, other centered contemplation of Vipassana-shikan. The daily practice of Taza-shikan (Zen and Vipassana) as a single system of the Tendai kengyo or popular oriented system is echoed in the structured process of the Lotus and Vajra liturgies of the Tendai tantric tradition. For Tendai, *kengyō* popular Buddhism and *mikkyō* tantric Buddhism are like two wheels of a cart, or the two wings of a bird, without which the Tendai vehicle could not move, or

the bird could not fly. At the core of both popular and tantric forms of practice are the emptying philosophy of Madhyamika, and the compassionate bhakti emphasis of mahayana Buddhism, inherited from the Chinese T'ien-t'ai system.

The following two translations depend in their entirety on the kindness and patience of the Ajari master Ikuta Koken, who gave many hours and days over the past seven years to the completion of the *Shidogyogi* instructions for performing the four basic Tendai tantric rituals. Begun in the spring of 1980 and brought to a conclusion in the summer of 1987, the overall project includes a translation of the Jūhachi-dō and Goma rites, as a separate work, and the Lotus and Vajra world mandala meditations as a single meditative process. It is important to see, in this oral tradition of Tendai hermeneutics, that all four rites belong to a single, meditative process. The structure of tantric ritual as found in the Jūhachi-dō, the Eighteen Path liturgy, acts as ritual format for the Lotus, Vajra, and Goma meditations. The Lotus seeds of enlightenment, spread to the entire cosmos by the brilliant lightning of the Vajra, are burned to kenotic nothingness by the fire of the Goma. This spectacular contemplative system, in its liturgical entirety, was taught to me by the Rev. Ikuta Koken, a gift for which I am eternally grateful.

I must also express thanks to the Rev. Yamada Etai, the Ozasu head monk of Enryaku-ji and Tendai Buddhism in Japan. The Rev. Taki of Myōhō-in, the generosity of Rev. Haba of Tokyo, Rev. Ara Ryokan of Honolulu, and the advice of many other devout and gentle monks of Tendai made the study humorous as well as meaningful. The Rev. Watanabe of the Eizan Bunko library pointed out to me the importance of Zen-vipassana in the Tendai tradition. The staff of Ryukoku University, through the help of Shimazu Esho

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I . Meditations for Kenotic Emptying of Heart, Mind, Vajra Ritual

In the third phase of the Vajra ritual, the meditator passes through the sixth and fifth halls of the mandala, that is, union with Vairocana and the four central Buddha images surrounding him, and comes to rest in the third hall of Puja offerings, and the second hall of pure, undefiled wisdom.

1.] The first of the meditations takes place in the Single Mudra Assembly, Ichi-in kai, at the top (west) of the mandala. The meditator assumes the mudra of Samadhi (Zen) meditation, fingers intertwined, palms up, thumbs touching, and the third “fire” fingers bent upward and touching the thumbs. The mudra is placed in the lap, and the vision of the stupa is seen to arise in the center of the palms. The five segments of the stupa symbolize the five signs of Buddhahood attained:

- 1.) Square (base), awakened, earth. legs, seat
- 2.) Circle, purified, water. -stomach
- 3.) Triangle, firmed, fire. -heart
- 4.) Quarter moon, pervading, wind. -mouth
- 5.) Stupa crown, become one, space. -mind

The meditator is told by the Ajari master to realize that all Dharma, by its very nature, originates from within one’s own mind. Dharma here means worries, reasonings, regulations, praise, blame, all of the pressures and goals

piled on by the world of self-seeking desires. In the following meditation, the five aspects of Vairocana Buddha are “put on,” realized internally within me.

Clearly see that all Dharma nature

Originates from within the mind.

Worries piled upon worries, from
the World of Yin, desire to enter therein.

All are a phantom, a flickering flame,

Like the Castle of Gandarva,

Or a burning wheel of fire,

An echo from an empty valley.

If in this Samadhi vision of self,

You do not see into your own body and mind,

Then dwell a while in stillness and extinction,

and in the end, you will experience true wisdom!

If indeed you can peer into the center of the void,

see how all the Buddhas, numerous as sesame seeds,

fill the limits of the great void realm!

See one's body as proof of the ten Buddha paths; [Envision, work for,
welcome, honor, call on, understand, rely on, offer to, respond to, pray
to Buddha].

Dwell in the void between Dharma (mind) and reality.

All of the Tathagatas of this empty realm,

Snap their fingers to awaken and enlighten us!

Announce to all good sons,

Give proof of what is awakened in you!



A single path, of pure simplicity.
Not even by Vajra Yoga practice,
Nor by all kinds of wisdom,
Can the above experience
be attained.

But do not be proud of this
one experience;

We must be filled with Samantabhadra's wisdom.

Only then can we attain the highest true awakening,
when body and mind are stilled, unmoved!

From samadhi's depths we bow to the Buddhas.



Om saruba tatagyata

(Om sarva Tathāgata)

hannaman nanan kyaromi

(pāda-vandanām karomi)

“Hail, all ye Tathagata,

Let us now bow at your feet!”

The meditator now perceives him or herself to put on the five aspects of
Vairocana, who is seated alone in the center of the One Mudra Hall.

a.] Penetration of the Bodhi enlightened heart-mind.

O practitioner, when you experience this
Startling awakening from Samadhi's depths,
Pay universal homage (to the Vajra world) saying:
“My only wish is that all the Tathagatas
might manifest themselves here before me
as I perform these Sadhana prayers and offerings,”
All of the (Vajra world) responds with one voice:

“You must gaze into your own heart-mind!”

And when you have heard these words,

Just as told, gaze into your own heart,

And rest at length in a state of inner peace,

(Without dwelling on external mind relations).

Repeatedly envision self prostrate at Buddha’s feet.

Pray without ceasing to the Most Victorious Worthy,

saying, “I do not see my own heart-mind,

For what characteristics indeed does it have?”

Then all of the Buddhas respond, saying:

“Ah, mind hard to measure, depths hard to plumb,

give thy heart instead these mantric seed words, and let it sing until it
is filled with light.”

Now see the heart as a full moon, and the seed word

All floating there, as it were, in sea of mist.

Understand, at last, inner contemplation’s source.

Om sitta harachibeito (m) kyaromi

“Hail, mind-heart piercing

(Om citta-prativedham karomi)

(Vajra), penetrate me!”

b.] The Untainted Mind. The second aspect, cultivation of mind.

The storehouse consciousness, by origin unstained,
was pure and clean, nothing false or evil therein.

Now, if we realise the blessing of wisdom’s presence
in the heart-mind kept like a pure round moon,
and repeatedly perform, the meditation of emptying,
what external things can ever invade the mind?

Worry and troubles grow from words planted within,
good and evil develop from what is held in the heart.
The heart-mind creates Alaya stored consciousness.
Cultivate stillness, make it source of heart-mind,
and the six paramitas (charity, precepts, persevere, strength, Zen &
Vipassana) will flourish instead.
Such a heart-mind will be great in its deeds.

*

The storehouse consciousness, originally spotless,
is pure and clean, no stain or falsity there.
To always dwell with true blessing and wisdom,
is to see heart-mind as a pure, round moon.
No substance, no distractions allowed there
indeed, there is no moon there either.
It is due to making blessing real for others,
that my heart-mind is empty, like the pure full moon.
Skipping and dancing, the heart is filled with joy.
Repeatedly it sings to the heavenly worthies.
Now I have indeed seen my heart-mind.
It is pure and clean, like a full, round moon.

*

Leaving all worries, troubles, impurity,
able to control all that mind holds and controls,
all the Buddhas respond to me, saying:
“Your heart originally was like this, but when it sojourned in the

world's dust, it vanished.

The awakened heart-mind is a pure heart.

When you envision your heart as a pure full moon,
then you will know the Buddha's enlightened mind.

Again we give you a heart-mind mantra;

Secretly recite it, while contemplating within."

Om bojishitta bodahadayami "Hail heart-mind enlightened

(Om Bodhi-cittam utpadayami) Arise from within me"

c.] *Envision the Stupa.* The Bodhi heart strengthened.

The meditator now puts on the aspect of the firm and strengthened Bodhi heart-mind. First, envision the stupa, according to the instructions of the Ajari master, as follows:

1. Vairocana Buddha, center section, as the seed word VAM: ॐ
2. Vajrasattva section, bottom or east sector, seed word HUM: ॐ
3. Ratna (Jewel) sector, south or left side, seed word TRAH: ॐ
4. Lotus or Amida sector, top or west side, seed word HRIH: ॐ
5. Amogha Action section, north or right side, seed word AH: ॐ

This vision is called a samaya or symbolic lotus stupa, and it is kept in mind as the verse and mantra are recited:

Now that you can see the heart as a moon disk,
round and full, glowing and radiating light,
all the Buddhas respond to the vision and say:

"The Bodhi heart-mind, strengthen it!

Again let us teach you a heart-mind mantra;

see a circular Vajra stupa, Like a moon-orb above the heart.



Inside the wheel revolves a seed word, VAM! 


It becomes a Dharma wheel stupa.

Now once more intone the mantra:

Om chishuta basara sotoba

(Om tiṣṭha vajra stupa)

“Hail firm Vajra stupa!”

As the mantra is intoned, envision that the seed word VAM!  is implanted firmly in the center of the lotus stupa.

d.] *Pervading fragrance.* The fourth aspect of Vairocana is the all pervading fragrance of the Vajra-lotus, which spreads like a wind throughout the cosmos.

O thou meditator, now one with the moon orb,
envision therein an eight petaled lotus.

Let it fill the entire Dharma world, everywhere, so that there is only
one great lotus blossom.

Now realize that your own body, with the Vajra World's wisdom and
Lotus world's reason, is one!

i.) Open the flower of the Lotus stupa.

Form the three-pronged lotus mudra with the left
and right hands, (thumb pressing index finger, index,
third, and fourth fingers extended). Right hand, palm
out, is pressed to the left hand, palm facing inward. Then open the fingers of
both hands to symbolize a lotus blossom opening. Revolve the mudra three
times to the right, and recite the mantra:



Om sohara basara sotoba. Hail!

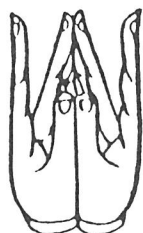
(Om sphara vajra stupa) Spread everywhere, Vajra Stupa!

Press the left mudra to the belly, and right to the face. Move the right hand in a circle on the face three times, while reciting the mantra a second time, showing that the stupa and my body are one. Finally, rub the two palms together, then place the right hand on the right shoulder, and recite the mantra a third time, seeing that I have now “become” empty of all thoughts and desires and am filled only with the light of Vairocana-Amida.

II. The Four Gates, i. e. the Tetralema of Madhyamika, are Locked and Bolted: Lotus Ritual.

Form the purifying five-sword mudra and revolve it to the left and right three times, then touch the five places and say:

Hail all Buddhas, KAM! KEN! Le Luppuri palace, Clean, pure, Svaha!



Five-sword
mudra

See an open lotus in the middle of the south gate, over which are the two seed words KAM and KEN. The words turn into the Great Protector from all harshness and anger, Zōjōten (Virudhaka) whose face resembles the image of Bhakti, seen above. His body is dark in color, and his clothes are a deep black. He wears a flanged helmet. His left fist is pressed to the waist, and in his right hand he holds a tancha sword.

The gates of the Lotus world are now locked and bolted, showing the immense difference between the spirit of the Womb-Lotus, and the male Vajra. The Lotus is female, a womb from which enlightenment is gestated, and therefore a place to be carefully sealed off and protected from all impurities and worldly evil. The meditation of the Lotus world occurs first in the Tendai

tradition, because the meditator must be first filled with the selfless wisdom of compassion, as proof of true enlightenment. Only after wisdom and compassion are fixed deeply in my own heart can I step forth and do the deeds of a Buddha in the exterior world. The Vajra world meditation is then performed, in which the blessings received from the Lotus are given away to all sentient beings. The philosophy of Sunya emptiness is thus practically realized in the two tantric meditations.

The four gates are first locked with the special mudra of protection, formed by inserting the index finger of the right hand into the closed left fist, then bolted by inserting the index finger of the left hand into the closed right fist. The meditator sees himself or herself again changed into the countenance of Acala, to perform the mudra and mantra of locking. The sequence is repeated four times, once for each of the four gates, to the east, north, west, and south of the mandala. The point of the meditation is to realize that the Lotus world is preserved interiorly by keeping the vajra vow of compassion exteriorly, i. e., the vow of Amida-Vairocana to alleviate suffering and save all sentient beings.

The countenance of Acala is seen to radiate bright red and white flames, as the mantra is recited:

Hail all Vajras!

Oh Thou who cannot bear
to see suffering, Great fierce one

(Acala)

devour, fulfill all the Tathagata
vows, for all of us, let it be done, SVAHA!

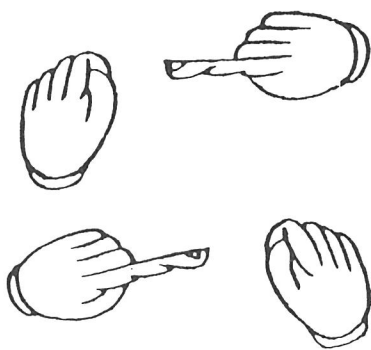
(right index finger is inserted into the left fist, and turned to the right, locking the gate).

Hey! Now for the other side,
Great violent fierce one,
devour, digest, hurry,
Why so slow!

Fulfill the original vow,
remember, SVAHA!

(left index finger is inserted

into right fist, and turned to the left, bolting the gate).



The sixth, seventh, and eighth stages of the Lotus meditation are taken from the Eighteen Path mandala, as in Part One, above. The six visible gifts, representing concrete deeds of compassion, and the six symbolic mudra representing the six paramitas of wisdom are offered, the meditation on the Dharma, Reward, and Response body of Vairocana, are repeated. The meditation on the Lotus stupa, Chapter Two part 7 is also repeated, and the structure of the entire Lotus Mandala slowly and thoroughly contemplated. The samadhi posture of Zen meditation is assumed, right palm over left, thumbs touching. The hall of wisdom above the eight petaled lotus of the center, and hall of the Light Kings beneath, guard the meditating figure of Vairocana in the center. The meditator and Vairocana have the same posture, are in fact the same person.

Above the meditator are the halls of Buddha and Manjusri. Below are the space storehouse with the beautiful figures of the 108 armed Vajra Boddhisattva, and 1,000 armed Kannon. Beneath this again is the marvelous Susiddhi

realm of loving compassion. To the right (south) of the meditator are the realms of the vajra buddhas and purifiers, while to the left (north) are the hallways of Avalokitesvara, and the Earth spirits, ruled by Ksittigarba. On all sides are the protecting spirits of popular religion, with names of Hindu, Taoist, and Shinto deities. Armed with this vast array of purified images, the meditator can now walk through life with the mind and heart of Buddha truly a part of one's own interior vision. As the closing lines of the Eighteen Path Mandala are recited, the meditator is reminded to "go forth and do deeds of compassion," if the Lotus meditation was truly meaningful.