

# The Lotos of Faith

By Lafcadio Hearn

*Or, "The Furnace of Fire," which is in the Jatakas of Buddha. . . . At his birth the waters of the Sea became fresh, and the deeps of the Seven Hells were illuminated. The blind received their sight, that they might behold the bliss of the world; the deaf their hearing, that they might know the tidings of joy; by sevenfold loins-flowers the rocks were riven asunder; the light of glory immeasurable filled the world systems of ten thousand suns. . . .*

In the years when Brahmadata reigned over Benares,—the holy city,—the city of apes and peacocks,—the city possessing the seven precious things, and resounding with the ten cries, with the trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of horses, the melody of instruments and voices of singing girls,—then the future Buddha-elect was born as a son in the family of the royal treasurer, after having passed through kotis of births innumerable.

Now the duration of one koti is ten millions of years.

And the Buddha-elect, the Bodisat, was brought up in splendid luxury as a prince of the holy city, and while yet a boy mastered all branches of human knowledge, and becoming a man succeeded his father as keeper of the treasury. But even while exercising the duties of his office, he gave rich gifts to holy men, and allowed none to excel him in almsgiving.

At that time there also lived a holy Buddha, who, striving to fulfil each and all of the Ten Perfections, had passed seven days and seven nights without eating so much as one grain of rice. Arousing himself at last from his holy trance, he cleansed and robed his person, and purified himself, and passing through the air by virtue of his perfection, alighted before the door of the treasurer's house, with his begging-bowl in his hand.

Then the Bodisat, beholding the sacred mendicant awaiting in silence, bade a servant fetch to him the Buddha's bowl, that he might fill it with such food as those who seek supreme wisdom may permit themselves to eat. So the servant proceeded to fetch the bowl.

But even as he advanced, and before he might reach out his hand, the ground rocked and heaved like the sea beneath him; and the earth opened itself, and yawned to its entrails, making an abyss between the holy mendicant and the servant of the Bodisat. And the gulf became a hell of seething flame, like the hell of Avici, like the heart of a volcano in which even the crags of granite melt as wax, pass away as clouds. Also a great and fantastic darkness grew before the sun, and blackened all his face.

Wherefore the servant and his fellows fled shrieking, leaving only the Bodisat standing upon one verge of the abyss, and the Buddha, calmly waiting, upon the other. Where the feet of the perfect mendicant stood, the abyss widened not; but it widened swiftly, devouring the ground before the feet of the Bodisat, as though seeking to engulf him. For Mara, Lord of Rakshasas and of evil ones, desiring that the Buddha might die, sought thus to prevent the almsgiving of the Bodisat. And the darkness before the sun was the darkness of Mara's awful face.

And as a muttering of mountain thunder came a voice, saying: "The Buddha shall not live by thine alms-gift his hour hath come. . . . Mine is the fire between thee and him."

And the Bodisat looked at the Buddha across the abyss of fire; and the Buddha's face changed not, neither did he utter a word to dissuade nor give one sign to encourage.

But the Bodisat cried aloud, even while the abyss, widening, grew vaster to devour him:

“Mara, thou shalt not prevail! To thee power is not given against duty! . . . My lord Buddha, I come to thee, fearing not; take thou this food from the hands of thy servant.”

And with the dish of rice in his hands, the Bodisat strode into the roaming waste of fire, uttering these jewel-words: “*Better to enter willingly into hell than neglect a duty or knowingly commit a wrong!*”. . .

Even then the Buddha smiled on the other verge. And ere the Bodisat could fall, there suddenly arose from the depths of the pit of fire a vast and beautiful lotos-flower, like unto that from whose womb of gold was Brahma born; and it received the feet of the Bodisat, and bore him beyond the pit, upcasting over him a spray of golden dust, like a shower of stars. So he poured into the Buddha’s bowl the holy gift of alms.

The darkness vanished; the abyss was not; the Buddha, rising in air, passed over a bridge of rosy cloud to the mountain regions of Himalaya. But the Bodisat, still standing upon the lotos of gold, long discoursed unto the people concerning holy things.