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Your Enlightened Mind Wants to Know: Mahayana's Origins and the Implications for Buddhism

J.M. Walsh
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J. M. Walsh, a Mahayana Buddhist of the Sokka Gakkai tradition, wrote *Your Enlightened Mind Wants to Know* to share his extensive research into the fascinating and complex roots of Buddhism in an effort to discern whether Shakyamuni Buddha directly taught the Lotus Sutra, and whether it matters if he did not. Walsh left few, if any, stones unturned in his quest to separate fact from myth in the convoluted history of the Lotus Sutra, in particular, and Mahayana Buddhism, in general, as Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings traveled from India into Central and East Asia and beyond.

Your Enlightened Mind Wants to Know is an odd and somewhat lightweight title for such a serious and scholarly volume. Those who might find Walsh's work a tremendously good read would likely not be drawn to such a generic, new-age-sounding title, and those who would find the contents complicated and heavy might assume, based on the title, that it is more of a feel-good book along the lines of the writings of Deepak Chopra or Thich Nhat Hahn. The subtitle and excellent copy on the back of this attractively packaged text do redeem the vague title. To the author's credit, by the end, the truth-seeking reader could vehemently concur with his message.

The 267-page book is organized into three parts and ten chapters, with several sections to each chapter. Walsh did an exemplary job of carefully editing his work, as there are literally no discernible typographical or grammatical errors, a Herculean task in a text with such a multitude of obscure names, places, and concepts.

In the first part, "Surveying the Terrain," Walsh offers a concise introduction to Buddhism, explores the significance of questioning the origins of teachings, and commences the often-returned-to listing of lineages, translators, and travels of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. Walsh also shares his deeply personal motivations for excavating the source of the Lotus Sutra, something he seamlessly weaves into the fabric of the book. The author's quest for clarity and understanding becomes a quest the reader might share.

"Digging Deep," the book's second part, is subdivided into four layers that are titled "Vajrayana Buddhism," "The Lotus Sutra Tradition in China," "Mahayana Buddhism in India," and "Central Asian Connections along the Silk Road," respectively. The early history of Zoroastrianism is explored extensively in this part, especially how it influenced Buddhism, as are the lesser influences of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Finally, in part three, "Interpreting Our Findings," Walsh successfully pulls an immense amount of philosophical, esoteric, and practical information together into a profoundly meaningful conclusion that can leave the reader satisfied and potentially a little closer to realizing his or her Buddha nature.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (January 9, 2013)

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