

MAITREYA

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The following article first appeared in the July-August-September 1984 edition of The Journal of Shasta Abbey and was published as part of a series on the stained glass windows of the monks' meditation hall at Shasta Abbey. It is reprinted here with permission.

Maitreya, Maitreya
Everywhere.
Yet people do not
See him.

The Bodhisattva Maitreya sits in full lotus position on the new window of the Meditation Hall. He wears the royal robes and jewels of the Crown Prince of the Dharma. In his folded hands he holds the relics of Shakyamuni in a miniature stupa, for he is the guardian of the Teachings of the Buddha. It is said in the scriptures that when the teachings of Shakyamuni have been forgotten by mankind, Maitreya will appear as the next Buddha to once again proclaim the Dharma.

Maitreya means the Loving One, the Friend, and appears in many forms and in all places. One of these forms is Hotei, the jolly, fat monk with bare chest and belly, whose statue is found in any Chinatown. Hotei was an eccentric Chinese monk in ancient times, who went about the streets carrying a large cotton sack from which he often took small gifts of candy and other treats for the children who followed him about. Once, when asked about his practice, he immediately plopped his bag on the ground, which means to sit still, the dropping off of body and mind. When asked about its actualization, he picked up his bag and went on his way, the “going, going, going on”¹ of endless training.

He was greatly loved by the people for his good heart and childlike behaviour. It is said that when he became very old, he recited the poem at the beginning of this article and disappeared. The local people took this to mean that Hotei was Maitreya who, when no one recognized him, returned to the Tushita Heaven to await a more favourable time to teach the Dharma; for in order to see “Maitreya” anywhere, we must see him everywhere. People began to paint pictures and make statues of this fat monk and identify them with Maitreya, until now we see representations of him everywhere, although few in the West know the meaning of the Chinese and Japanese love for this particular representation.

¹ *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, trans. by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, in the *Shasta Abbey Book of Ceremonies* (Mt. Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1979), p. 15.

Maitreya appears on the window of the Meditation Hall because he is endless training, the “always going on beyond, always BECOMING Buddha”.² This is why it is said that training ourselves “brings Maitreya here”.³ We are the future Buddha, for “we shall be as they in the future”.⁴ “The light of Buddha is increasing in brilliance and the Wheel of the Dharma is always turning”.⁵ The promise of Maitreya is that, even when the Dharma seems forgotten and nowhere to be found, it is still present, safe within the keeping of the Maitreya, the Eternal, until someone looks for it with True eyes and a sincere heart.

² Ibid.

³ Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life* (Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1976), p. 404.

⁴ Great Maste Dogen, “Shushogi,” trans. by Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life*, p. 156.

⁵ See the Meditation Hall Closing Ceremony in Jiyu-Kennett, *Shasta Abbey Book of Ceremonies*, p. 29.