

3. 文化

1. The lotus flower

Q: I wonder why some religions use the lotus flower (蓮花) in ceremonies so often. I have the impression that religions in Asia are especially interested in lotus flowers. Although I live in Asia and am Asian, I don't know much about this.

A: Well, actually, the lotus flower is a symbol of spiritual enlightenment (心靈啟發) and understanding.

Q: That's a beautiful idea, but how does the lotus flower symbolize those ideas?

A: Well, this special flower begins its life in the mud (淤泥) at the bottom of a pond or lake. Did you know that? Then, very slowly, the lotus flower "climbs" higher and higher until it pokes (戳、冒出) its "head" through the surface of the water.

Q: I didn't know that. What happens then? Does the lotus flower stop growing so tall after its "head" pokes through the water?

A: After the top of the lotus flower becomes visible (看得見) on the surface of the water, it does stop growing so tall. Then this flower does something quite special.

Q: Oh, really? What does it do?

A: The bud (苞) **of** the lotus flower blossoms (開花). This means it unfolds (展開) its petals (花瓣), like arms opening to embrace (擁抱) the world. The lotus flower then becomes visible for everyone to see.

Q: Well, that sounds interesting, but where is the spiritual meaning here?

A: The lotus flower moves from a place at the bottom of a lake, a deeply hidden and unseen place, and grows taller and taller until its beautiful petals one day become visible to the world. The lotus flower shows a wonderful process of change, of becoming.

Q: So, the lotus flower is a symbol of people moving and changing from somewhere down deep inside themselves to a moment in time where an "opening" happens, in which they see the light of the world.

A: That's exactly right. The lotus flower is a symbol of a person changing in life, and developing spiritual potential (潛能) hidden deep inside.

Q: Does the lotus flower stay open for a very long time?

A: At night time, the flower pulls itself down underneath the water and closes its petals. Then it rises up through the water in the morning, and opens up again.

Q: Besides this spiritual idea, does the lotus flower have any other use or meaning?

A: In China and also in Taiwan, the lotus plant is also used for cooking. And Chinese medicine uses the lotus plant to treat certain kinds of sickness.

Q: You mean some people may eat lotus plants or make drinks out of them to enjoy better health?

A: Yes, that's the idea.

2. The lotus flower and Greek mythology

Q: Someone told me once that "the lotus eaters" (食蓮族：註) refers to literature and maybe even hallucinogenic drugs (迷幻藥). Is this true?

註：在希臘神話中，尤利西斯於特洛伊戰爭後返國途中，在海上漂流數日後，來到一座島，島上居民嗜食蓮花，食後會讓人忘記一切，渾渾噩噩，樂不思蜀。

A: It is true. The original connection between "lotus eaters" and literature appears to be in the Greek myth (希臘神話) about Ulysses (尤利西斯), also known as Odysseus (奧狄賽：註一). On the way back to Greece after the Trojan War (特洛伊戰爭：註二), Ulysses directs his sailors to investigate an island they come upon which is said to have people who eat lotus flowers.

註一：奧狄賽：古希臘著名英雄，智勇雙全，在特洛伊戰爭中，提出木馬屠城計畫，讓希臘軍隊獲得大勝。

註二：特洛伊戰爭是指在希臘神話中，希臘聯合遠征軍為奪回世上最漂亮

的女人海倫，對特洛伊軍所發動的攻城戰。

Q: Was Ulysses brave enough to go with his sailors?

A: He was a hero and brave, but in this case, he sent his men first to explore, investigate, and then report back to him.

Q: Did his men find lotus-eating people?

A: Yes, they did, and the warriors (勇士) ate lotus flowers too. Then they fell into a dreamy and deep slumber (睡眠). Finally, Ulysses comes to the island in the mythological story to rescue his men, to pull them from sleep and become active warriors again.

Q: What about the claim about hallucinogenic (引起幻覺的) drugs and lotus flowers?

A: Lotus flowers are not drugs, and do not actually put people into a sleep-like state of unconsciousness (無意識). People who did use hallucinogenic drugs during the so-called hippy (嬉皮) days in the United States in the 1960s and 70s were seen as “dropping out” of society, of “falling unconscious,” and entering into an excessively “dreamy” emotional and physical state. Thus, some people in popular culture (大眾、流行文化) at the time called them “lotus eaters,” aware of the literary connection with Greek mythology.

