



# Muddied Lotus

*Stephen W.F. Berwick*

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As has happened to all philosophies and religions throughout the ages, it is part of human nature to make simple truths complex, muddied. The lotus flower has long been associated in Asia as a symbol of spiritual purity for it rises above the mud to become a translucent, fragrant blossom without leaving any trace of the mud from which it grew. For this reason it has long been associated as a symbol of Buddhism. The title of Stephen's 8th book, "Muddied Lotus," illustrates that due to the human desire to ritualize and in some cases to make the teachings easier to understand, Buddhism inadvertently has become muddied in the process. Centuries of tradition, rituals, mixing with various spiritual and animist beliefs have, to an extent, made Buddhism less accessible to those working to make a living every day. Today, most forms of Buddhism in Asia are filled with rites and rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs intermixed with animism, Taoism, etc. The Buddhism of today is not the freedom originally envisioned by the Enlightened One – i.e. the freedom for the individual to perceive that the path to enlightenment is through the heart, and that we are all Buddhas waiting to be awakened. Although tradition is important and is a way for us to feel a part of something, it can also be a way of imprisoning ourselves if we are not mindful of the origin of ritual, or, more importantly, our heart. To act blindly without understanding can lead to imprisonment of our minds and hearts, making us blind to the purpose for our existence – enlightenment. The heart is our shrine, our holy place. Even if we don't travel anywhere at all, if we want to see the birthplace of the historical Buddha, we can "breathe in." When we want to visit where He visited Nirvana, we can 'breathe out.' Stephen has used writing as a way to reach into his heart and set it free. What is contained within these pages is his own pilgrimage in the path for his own enlightenment.

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