

ŚŪNYATĀ IN THE LOTUS SŪTRA

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*Diverse points of view
for the study of the Lotus Sūtra*

The *Lotus Sūtra* can be considered from several points of view. The *Lotus Sūtra* is a foremost religious book. Its central teaching is the possibility for all living beings to achieve Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, i.e. to become a Buddha. Even Devadatta who attempted against Buddha's life can reach that state. The Sūtra shows also the way to attain the supreme goal of Buddhahood, the discipline to which one has to submit: the severe *bodhisattvacaryā*. Linked with its central thesis other notions are dealt with in the *Lotus Sūtra*: the *upāyakaūśalya* or ability, on the part of the Master, in the use of teaching methods, which allows him to adequate the message he will impart to the peculiar psychological and intellectual condition of the person who receives it; the *adhimukti* or open-mindedness, which permits the reception of a new beneficial message, even if it is contrary to deeply-rooted convictions; the *saṃdhābhāṣya* or that special form of discourse which, without deflecting from truth and as a result of the appliance by the Master of the ability in the teaching methods, presents the message in such a way that it can be grasped by the person, to which it is intended, with a certain (*provisional*) meaning that he accepts, and to which, later on, in the convenient moment, the Master will give its true, richer, more complete, *definitive* meaning; the *ekayāna* which affirms that Buddha has taught only a single Vehicle although it can be imagined that He taught several Vehicles in the course of His life, incurring by doing so into

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changes or even falsities; in fact this wrong impression is due to His having recourse to the *upāyakaśālya* which makes Him grant the *one* and *same* Teaching to His followers under *diverse* forms. Many other religious aspects of Buddhism are dealt with in the Sūtra.

The *Lotus Sūtra* can be considered also as a source of historical information. For instance it informs us about the reactions of the Hīnayānists in face of the Mahāyānists' new message. We have written an article concerning this matter, "The conflict of change in the Lotus Sūtra: the Hīnayānist reaction", which has been included in *Hokke Bunka Kenkyū* (Tokyo) 1998, pp. 1-30 .

References to the society of its time are also found in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The Sūtra describes the way of life, behaviour, reactions, feelings of monks and nuns, lay male devotees, lay female devotees, of the father that saves his sons from fire (Chapter III), of the rich householder and his son of low dispositions (Chapter IV), the physician who, with herbs found in the Himalaya and a special treatment, restores the sight to a blind-born man (Chapter V), the guide that safely leads the caravan through the dangerous forest (Chapter VII), the two intimate friends (Chapter VIII), the Preachers of the Dharma (*dharmabhāṇaka*), etc.

The *Lotus Sūtra* partakes of the conception of reality maintained by Buddhism. Cf. F. Tola and C. Dragonetti, "Buddhist Conception of Reality", *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. XIV, (1996), pp.35-64. The *Lotus Sūtra* refers to inexistence of temporal beginning, infinitude of space, the limitless number of worlds and beings, dynamic form of existence, laws that govern the empirical reality, the universal causality, etc.

In the present article we want to study the theory of *Śūnyatā* as manifested in the *Lotus Sūtra*. Of course, given the predominantly religious character of the Sūtra, we cannot expect to get on this matter a great amount of information. Nevertheless references to this important philosophical theory are found in several chapters.

Meanings of the word dharma

The word *dharma*, so much connected with *Śūnyatā*, in singular or plural has a wide range of meanings. Cf. Magdalene and Wilhelm Geiger, *Pāli Dhamma vornehmlich in der Kanonischen Literatur*, in *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1973, pp. 101- 228. Of all these meanings two interest from philosophical point of view: a. *laws* as the rules, norms, principles that govern the behaviour, the processes, the evolution of beings and things, and b. *elements of existence* as the components or factors of the existence. The second meaning is specially related to the theory of *Śūnyatā*.

Passages referring to dharmas and Śūnyatā

Śūnyatā and *dharmas* in relation to it are referred to in many passages of the *Lotus Sūtra* (we quote according to Kern-Nanjio edition), as for instance in:

1. Chapter II, p.48, verse 68 a-b:

evaṃ ca bhāṣāmy ahu nityanirvṛtā ādiprasāntā imi sarvadharmāḥ /

(And so I declare that all these *dharmas* are eternally extinguished and calm from the beginning)

2. Chapter III, p.62, verse 12 b:

... śūnyāṃś ca dharmān ahu sparśayitvā /...

(... I, having attained [the knowledge of] the void dharmas, ...)

3. Chapter IV, p. 101, line 1:

... śūnyatānimitāpraṇihitaṃ sarvam āviṣkurmo

(... we manifest that all is Voidness, [the state] devoid of causes, [the state] devoid of purpose)

4. Chapter IV, p. 117, verse 45 a-b:

nirvāṇaparyanti samucchraye 'smin paribhāvitā śūnyata dīrgharātram /

(In this body, whose end is the Nirvāṇa, having long been thoroughly imbued with [the idea of] Voidness)

5. Chapter V, p. 124, line 10 – p. 125, line 1:

so 'haṃ ... °dharmaṃ viditvā ... ākāśagatikam ...

(I, knowing the Dharma ... leading to Voidness)

6. Chapter V, p. 131, verse 41:

*ya riddhimantaś catudhyānadhyāyino ye śūnyatāṃ śrutva janenti prītim/
raśmīśahasrāṇi pramuñcamānās te caiva vuccanti mahādrumā iha //*

(those who possess the supernatural powers, who meditate the four meditations, who hearing about Voidness feel delight, and who emit thousands of rays, they are called 'Great Trees')

7. Chapter V, p. 133, line 1:

sarvadharmasamatāvabodhād dhi kāśyapa nirvāṇam

(since from the knowledge of the sameness of all the *dharmas* [comes forth], O Kāśyapa, the Nirvāṇa)

8. Chapter V, p. 136, lines 9-10:

*tatra yathā ta ṛṣayaḥ pañcābhijñā viśuddhacakṣuṣa evaṃ bodhisattvā
bodhicittāny utpādyānutpattikīṃ dharmakṣāntiṃ pratilabhyānuttarāṃ
samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambudhyante*

(As the *rishis* there [= in the parable] possess the five supernatural powers and a clear vision, so the Bodhisattvas, producing the Mind of Enlightenment and acquiring the *kṣānti* (patience, acquiescence) in regard to [the theory of] the *dharmas* having no origination, obtain the Perfect Supreme Enlightenment)

9. Chapter V, p. 136, line 13 – p. 137, line 2:

*yathā catasra oṣadhayas tathā śūnyatānimittāpraṇihitanirvāṇadvāraṃ
ca draṣṭavyam / ... evaṃ śūnyatānimittāpraṇihitāni vimokṣamukhāni
bhāvayitvā sattvā avidyāṃ nirodhayanti*

(The four herbs are to be considered [to represent] Voidness, [the state] devoid of causes, [the state] devoid of purpose, the door of Nirvāṇa ... thus producing in themselves Voidness, [the state] devoid of causes, [and the state] devoid of purpose -the doors of Liberation, beings suppress ignorance)

10. Chapter V, p. 137, lines 10-13:

*so 'vabudhya traidhātukaṃ daśasu dikṣu śūnyaṃ nirmitopamaṃ
māyopamaṃ svaṇnamarīcipraṭiśrutkopamaṃ lokaṃ paśyati / sa
sarvadharmān anutpannān aniruddhān abaddhān amuktān na tamo
'ndhakārān na prakāśān paśyati / ya evaṃ gambhīrān dharmān paśyati
sa paśyaty apaśyanayā sarvatraidhātukaṃ paripūrṇam
anyonyasattvāśayādhimuktam*

(He, having obtained the knowledge, perceives that the Triple World in all directions is void, similar to a magic creation, similar to an illusion, similar to a dream, a mirage, an echo. He perceives that all the *dharmas* are not produced, do not cease, are not bound, are not released, that they are not darkness and gloom nor light. Whoever

perceives that the *dharmas* are profound in such a way, perceives, by not seeing, the whole Triple World with the various dispositions and propensities of beings)

11. Chapter V, p. 138, verse 51:

*yas tu śūnyān vijānāti dharmān ātmavivarjitān /
saṃbuddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ bodhiṃ jānāti tattvataḥ //*

(But he who perceives that the *dharmas* are void, devoid of substantiality, knows the Enlightenment of the perfectly enlightened Bhagavants according to truth)

12. Chapter V, p. 138, verse 52 c-d:

śūnyajñānavihīnatvāc chrāvakaḥ saṃprabhāsyate //

(Because of being deprived of the knowledge of the Void, he is called “śrāvaka”)

13. Chapter V, p. 139, verse 53 a-b:

sarvadharmāvabodhāt tu samyaksambuddha ucyate /

(Because of [possessing] the [true] knowledge [of the true nature] of the *dharmas*, he is called “a perfectly enlightened”)

14. Chapter V, p. 140, verse 64 c-d:

sarvadharmāvabodhāt nirvāṇaṃ prāpyate ’mṛtam //

(By means of the [true] knowledge [of the true nature] of all the *dharmas* immortal Nirvāṇa is obtained)

15. Chapter V, p. 142, verses 75-76-77:

*upāya cṣa buddhānāṃ vadanti yad imaṃ nayam /
sarvajñatvam ṛte nāsti nirvāṇaṃ tat samārabha //75//*

*tryadhvajñānam anantaṃ ca ṣaṭ ca pāramitāḥ śubhāḥ /
śūnyatām animittaṃ ca prañidhānavivarjitaṃ //76//*

*bodhicittaṃ ca ye cānye dharmā nirvāṇagāmināḥ /
sāsravā nāsravāḥ śāntāḥ sarve gagaṇasaṃnibhāḥ //77//*

(This is the method of the Buddhas that they declare this principle:
Without omniscience there is not Nirvāṇa – try to get it (75),

and the limitless knowledge of the three times and the six pure
Perfections and the Voidness devoid of causes, devoid of desire
(76),

and the Mind of Enlightenment and the other *dharmas* leading to
Nirvāṇa with impurities, without impurities, calm, all similar to the
sky (77)).

16. Chapter V, pp. 142-143, verses 79-80-81-82-83:

*yaś ca dharmān vijānāti māyāsvapnasvabhāvakān /
kadalīskandhaniḥsārān pratiśrutkāsamānakān //79//*

*tatsvabhāvaṃ ca jānāti traidhātukam aśeṣataḥ /
abaddham avimuktaṃ ca sa vijānāti nirvṛtim //80//*

*sarvadharmān samāñ śūnyān nīrnānākaraṇātmaḡān /
na caitān [var.] prekṣate nāpi kiñcid dharmam vipaśyati //81//*

*sa paśyati mahāprajñō dharmakāyam aśeṣataḡ /
nāsti yānatrayam kiñcid ekayānam ihāsti tu //82//*

*sarvadharmāḡ samāḡ sarve samāḡ samasamāḡ sadā /
evam jñātvā vijñāti nīrvāḡam amṛtam śivam //83//*

(He who knows that the *dharmas* have the nature of illusion and dreams, that they are without substance like the trunk of the *kadalī*, similar to an echo (79),

and knows that the Triple World has throughout that [same] nature and that it is neither bound nor released, he knows extinction (80).

All the *dharmas* that are alike, void, whose essence is devoid of difference – he does not see them; he does not perceive even a *dharma* (81).

He, a man of great wisdom, sees the mass of the *dharmas* entirely. There is not any Triple Vehicle; but there is only one Vehicle in this world (82).

All *dharmas* are alike, all are alike, always exactly alike – knowing that they are thus, he knows the immortal, auspicious Nirvāḡa (83)).

17. Chapter VII, p. 186, lines 8-10:

*yasmin bhikṣavaḥ samaye tathāgataḥ parinirvāṇakālasamayam
ātmanaḥ samanupaśyati pariśuddhaṃ ca parśadaṃ paśyaty
adhimuktisārāṃ śūnyadharmagatiṃgatāṃ dhyānavatīṃ
mahādhyānavatīm*

(When, O monks, the Tathāgata perceives [that] the moment, the occasion of His Parinirvāṇa [has arrived], and sees [that] the Assembly is completely pure, full of faith, expert in [the knowledge of] *dharma*s being void, devoted to meditation, devoted to great meditation [He enters Nirvāṇa])

18. Chapter VIII, p. 200, lines 9-10:

*tadyathāpi nāma mamaitarhi sarvatra cāgryo dharmakathikānām
abhūt sarvatra ca śūnyatāgatiṃgato 'bhūt*

(As it is now with me, so he always was the best of the preachers of the Doctrine, he always was expert in [the knowledge of] Voidness)

19. Chapter X, p. 234, line 10:

*sarvadharmāśūnyatāpravveśaḥ khalu punar bhaiṣajyarāja
tathāgatasya dharmāsanam*

(Entering [ascertaining] the Voidness of all *dharma*s is, Bhaiṣajyarāja, the seat for [preaching] the *Dharma* proper of the Tathāgata)

20. Chapter X, p. 236, verse 24 c – d:

śūnyatā cāsanam mahyam atra sthitvā hi deśayet //

(Voidness is my seat and standing in it he should preach)

21. Chapter XI, p. 262, line 2:

*sarve ca te sarvadharmāñ śūnyān iti sañjānanti sma
mahāyānaguṇāms' ca*

(They all knew that all the *dharmas* are void and even the virtues of Mahāyāna)

22. Chapter XI, p. 266, line 1:

trayāṇāṃ prāṇisahasrāṇāṃ anutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilābho 'bhūt

(three thousand beings acquired the *kṣānti* [patience, acquiescence] in regard to [the theory that] the *dharmas* have no origination)

23. Chapter XIII, p. 275, lines 9-11:

*yathābhūtaṃ ca dharmāṇāṃ svalakṣaṇaṃ vyavalokayati / yā khalv
eṣu dharmeṣv avicāraṇāvikalpanā ayam ucyate mañjuśrīr
bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyācāraḥ*

([when] he sees the nature of the *dharmas* according to truth. The absence of doubt and of false discrimination in relation to the *dharmas*, O Mañjuśrī, is called the good behaviour of the bodhisattva mahāsattva)

24. Chapter XIII, p. 277, line 11 – p. 278 line 5:

*punar aparaṃ mañjuśrīr bodhisattvo mahāsattvo sarvadharmāñ
śūnyān vyavalokayati yathāvatpratiṣṭhitān dharmān
aviparīstasthāyino yathābhūstasthitān acalān akampyān avivartyān
aparivartān samādāya yathābhūstasthitān ākāśasvabhāvān*

*niruktivyavahāravivarjitān ajātān abhūtān na saṃskṛtān
nāsaṃskṛtān na sato nāsato nabhilāpapravvyāhṛtān asaṃgasthān
asthitān saṃjñāvīparyāsaprādurbhūtān*

(Moreover, O Mañjusrī, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva looks upon all the *dharmas* as void, assuming the *dharmas* as they are, being unalterable, being as they are, immovable, not to be shaken, not liable to turn back, not changing – being as they are, having the nature of space, devoid of explanation and of designation, unborn, not becoming, not conditioned, not not-conditioned, not being, not not-being, inexpressible by words, without contact with anything, not existing, coming forth from false notions and error)

25. Chapter XIII, p. 281, verse 17 (c-d):

sarvadharmā ajātavā gaveśanto na paśyati //

(Owing to their being unborn, even looking [for them], he does not perceive any *dharma*)

26. Chapter XIII, p. 281, verse 19:

*asantakā dharmā ime prakāśitā aprādurbhūtāś ca ajātakāś ca /
śūnyā nirīhā sthita nityakālaṃ ayaṃ gocaro ucyati paṇḍitānām //*

(*Dharmas* have been taught to be non existing, not manifested, not born, void, without activity, eternally standing - this is called the field of sages)

27. Chapter XIII, p. 281, verse 21:

*ekāgracitto hi samāhitaḥ sadā sumerukūṭo yatha susthitaś ca /
evaṃ sthitaś cāpi hi tān nirīkṣed ākāśabhūtān ima sarvadharmān //*

(With mind fixed in one entity, permanently concentrated, firm like the peak of Sumeru, and, standing thus, let him look upon all *dharmas* as being like the space)

28. Chapter XIII, p. 282, verse 22:

*sadā pi ākāśasamā na sārakā aniñjitā manyanavarjitās ca /
sthitā hi dharmā imi nityakālaṃ ayu gocaro ucyati paṇḍitānām //*

(Always similar to space, inconsistent, without movement, beyond vain imagining, for the *dharmas* are eternally standing - this is called the field of sages)

29. Chapter XV, p. 318, lines 8-10:

*dr̥ṣṭaṃ hi tathāgatena traidhātukaṃ yathābhūtaṃ na jāyate na
mriyate na cyavate nāpapadyate na saṃsarati na parinirvāti na
bhūtaṃ nābhūtaṃ na sattaṃ nāsattaṃ na tathā nānyathā na vitathā
nāvithā nānyathā na tathā / traidhātukaṃ tathāgatena dr̥ṣṭaṃ yathā
bālapṛthagjanā na paśyanti*

(The Triple World has been seen by the Tathāgata as it really is: it is not born, it does not die, it does not fall down, it does not run away, it does not transmigrate, it does not become extinct, it is not real nor non-real, it is not existing nor non-existing, it is not such nor otherwise, it is not false nor non-false, it is not otherwise nor such. The ignorant do not see the Triple World as it has been seen by the Tathāgata)

30. Chapter XVI, p. 327, line 4:

*bodhisattvakoṭinayutaśatasahasrāṇām anutpattikadharmakṣāntir
utpannā*

(in hundreds of thousands of millions of millions of Bodhisattvas the *kṣānti* [patience, acquiescence] in regard to [the theory of] the *dharmas* not being produced was born)

31. Chapter XVII, p. 351, verse 5 (c):

sarve bhavāḥ phenamarīcikalpā

(all beings are like foam and mirage)

32. Chapter XXI, p. 403, lines 7-8:

*aṣṭāṣaṣṭīnāṃ prāṇisahasrāṇām anutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilābho
'bhūt*

(sixty thousand beings acquired the *kṣānti* [patience, acquiescence] in regard to [the theory of] the *dharmas* not being produced)

33. Chapter XXII, p.419, lines 6-7:

anutpattikadharmakṣāntiṃ ca pratilapsyate

(and he will obtain the *kṣānti* [patience, acquiescence] in regard to [the theory of] the *dharmas* not being produced)

34. Chapter XXIII, p.437, line 1:

*dvācatvāriṃśatāṃ bodhisattvasahasrāṇām anutpattikadharmakṣānti-
pratilambho 'bhūt*

(forty two thousand bodhisattvas acquired the *kṣānti* [patience, acquiescence] in regard to [the theory of] the *dharma*s not being produced)

Something that calls the attention is the fact that the references to the *dharma*s and *Śūnyatā* theory in passages 1-28 from Chapters I-XIII of the Sūtra are more numerous and richer in contents than those in passages 29-34 from Chapters XIV-XXIII of the Sūtra, which limit themselves to point out the acquisition of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. As it is known, the first thirteen chapters, which correspond to Chapters I-XIV of Kumārajīva's Chinese translation, refer to Śākyamuni as the historical Buddha, while Chapters XIV-XXVII, corresponding to Kumārajīva's XV-XXVIII, refer to the eternal Buddha.

*Tenets of the Śūnyatā theory
in the above passages*

First of all let us see which are the characteristics attributed to the *dharma*s and to *Śūnyatā* in the quoted texts.

a. *Dharma*s (numbers refer to the quoted passages):

nityanirvṛta, *ādiprasānta*: 1;

śūnya: 2, 11, 16 (81), 17, 19, 24, 26;

anutpattika: 8, 22, 30, 32, 33, 34;

anutpanna, *aniruddha*, *abaddha*, *amukta*, *na tamo'ndhakāra*, *na prakāśa*, *gambhīra*: 10;

ātmavivarjita: 11;

nirvāṇāgamin, *sāsrava nāsrava*, *sānta*, *gagaṇasaṃnibha*: 15 (77);

māyāsvapnavabhāvaka, *kadalīskandhaniḥsāra*, *pratiśrutkāsamānaka*: 16 (79);

tatsvabhāvam...traidhātukam: 16 (80);
samatā, nīmānākaraṇātmake: 7, 16 (81, 83);
na caitān [= dharmān] prekṣate nāpi kiñcid dharmam vipaśyati: 16 (81);
yathāvatpratiṣṭhita, aviparītasthāyin, yathābhūstasthita, acala, akampya,
avivartya, aparivarta, ākāśasvabhāva, niruktivyavahāravivarjita, ajāta, abhūta, na
saṃskṛta, nāsaṃskṛta, na sat nāsat, anabhilāpapravyāhṛta, asaṃgastha, asthita,
saṃjñāviparyāsaprādurbhūta: 24;
sarvadharmā ajātadvā...na paśyati: 25;
asantaka, aprādurbhūta, ajātaka, nirīha, sthita nityakālam: 26;
ākāśabhūta: 27;
ākāśasama, na sāraka, aniñjita, manyanavarjita, sthita nityakālam: 28;
na jāyate na mriyate na cyavate nāpapadyate na saṃsarati na parinirvāti
na bhūtaṃ nābhūtaṃ na sattaṃ nāsattaṃ na tathā nānyathā na vitathā nāvitatthā
nānyathā na tathā: 29;
sarve bhavāḥ phenamarīcikalpā: 31.

b. Śūnyatā

śūnyatānimittāpranīhitaṃ sarvam : 3;
śūnyatām animittaṃ ca prañidhānavivarjitaṃ : 15 (76);
sarvadharmasūnyatā^o : 19.

The preceding analysis shows that the characteristics attributed to the *dharmas* and *Śūnyatā* in the *Lotus Sūtra* are the same as those attributed to them in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and in the treatises of Nāgārjuna and Nāgārjuna's disciples. It can be said that the *Sūtra* adheres to the classical Mahāyānist conception of the *dharmas* and *Śūnyatā*.

Now let us examine which is the importance attributed to the *Śūnyatā* and *dharmas* theory in the *Lotus Sūtra*. We shall approach this question from two

points of view: a. Number of references to that theory in relation to number of references to other important notions that appear in the *Sūtra*, and b. Context where these references are made.

a. *Number of references*

The number of references to the *dharmas* and *Śūnyatā* theory is 34. The number of references in the *Lotus Sūtra* to other notions, that have in it an important function, is as follows:

adhimuktī: 33, to which should be added the quotations of °*bala* (2), °*virahita* (1), °*saṃpanna* (1), °*sāra* (4), which increase its number to a total of 41;

upāyakausalya: 74, to which should be added the quotations of °*jñāna* (5), °*jñānadarśana* (2), °*jñānadarśanadeśanā* (1), °*jñānanidarśana* (1), °*jñānābhinihāra* (1), °*deśanābhinihāranirmitta* (1), °*pāramitā* (1), °*viśaya* (1), °*śata* (3), °*śatasahasra* (1); °*sahasrakoṭi* (3), °*susikṣita* (1), which increase its number to a total of 95;

ekayāna: 6;

nirvāṇa: 55, to which should be added the quotations of °*kāla* (1), °*gāmin* (1), °*dvāra* (1), °*dhātu* (3), °*nagara* (1), °*paryanta* (1), °*paryavasāna* (5), °*prāpta* (8), °*bhūmi* (5), °*bhūmisthita* (1), °*mātra* (2), °*marga*, (1), °*śabda* (1), °*saṃjñin* (2), °*samavasaraṇa* (1); °*parinirvāṇa* (23), °*kālasamaya* (5), °*vaineya* (1), °*saṃjñin* (1), which increase its number to a total of 119.

buddhakṣetra : 75, to which should be added the quotations of °*koṭīnayutaśatasahasra* (7), °*guṇavyūha* (3), °*parisuddhi* (1), °*vyūha* (1), °*sahasra* (3), °*upapatti* (1), which increase its number to a total of 91;

bodhi : 186, to which should be added °*kāraṇa* (2), °*caryā* (1), °*citta* (5), °*cittāvinivartin* (1), °*pakṣika* (1), °*prasthita* (1), °*maṇḍa* (31), °*maṇḍavarāgragata* (10), °*maṇḍasamprasthita* (1), °*margopadeśa* (1), °*vṛkṣa* (14), °*vṛkṣamūla* (10), °*hetu* (1), °*aṅga* (2), which increase its number to a total of 267, without taking into account *bodhisattva* (a great number of references) and its compounds, which would increase its number to a remarkable amount.

samyaksaṃbodhi : 127.

The number of references to the *dharmas* and Śūnyatā theory is inferior to that of the other notions, with the exception of *ekayāna*. It is possible to explain this fact taking into account that the principal themes of the *Lotus Sūtra* are those indicated at the beginning of this article. Thus, it is normal that the notions that are in a direct relation to those themes have more presence in the *Sūtra*. Nevertheless, the study of the question from the second point of view will reveal us that, notwithstanding the relatively low number of references to the *dharmas* and Śūnyatā theory, to this theory is attributed in the *Sūtra* a foremost importance.

b. *Context where references are made*

Passage 5 (V, p. 124, line 10 – p. 125, line 1):

The *Dharma* leads to Voidness.

Passage 6 (V, p. 131, verse 41):

Possession of the supernatural powers (*ṛddhi*), meditation of the four meditations and feeling delight on hearing about *Śūnyatā* are the requisites for being called “Great Tree” as a mark of distinction.

Passage 7 (V, p. 133, line 1):

By the knowledge of the sameness of the *dharma*s Nirvāṇa is obtained.

Passage 8 (V, p. 136, lines 9 - 10):

Bodhisattvas, who produce in themselves the Enlightenment-Mind (*bodhicitta*) and obtain the *kṣānti* in regard the theory of the *dharma*s being unborn, are compared to the seers (*ṛṣi*) who possess the five supernatural knowledges (*pañcābhijñā*) and a pure vision, and they obtain the supreme perfect enlightenment.

Passage 9 (V, p. 136, line 13 – p. 137, line 2):

Śūnyatā, the state devoid of causes, the state devoid of purpose and the door of Nirvāṇa are compared to the four beneficial herbs that restored the vision to the blind man.

Śūnyatā, the state devoid of causes and the state devoid of purpose are considered the doors of liberation, and beings, meditating on them suppress ignorance.

Passage 10 (V, p. 137, lines 10 - 13):

He who possesses the knowledge of *Śūnyatā* and of the true nature of the *dharma*s, perceives (= knows the essence of) the whole reality with its diverse beings.

Passage 11 (V, p. 138, verse 51):

He who knows that the *dharmas* are void and without substantiality, truly reaches the enlightenment of the Buddhas.

Passage 12 (V, p. 138, verse 52 c - d):

Śrāvakas are so called because they do not possess the knowledge of *Śūnyatā*.

Passage 13 (V, p. 139, verse 53 a - b):

On the contrary, he who knows the true nature of the *dharmas* is called “a perfectly enlightened”.

Passage 14 (V, p. 140, verse 64 c - d):

Nirvāṇa is obtained through the knowledge of the true nature of the *dharmas*.

Passage 15 (V, p. 142, verses 75 - 77):

Voidness among other *dharmas* leads to Nirvāṇa.

Passage 16 (V, pp. 142-143, verses 79 - 83):

He who knows the illusory nature of the *dharmas* and that the three worlds have that nature, knows extinction = Nirvāṇa.

Knowing that all the *dharmas* are always equal (*sama*) among themselves, one knows Nirvāṇa without death and auspicious.

Passage 17 (VII, p. 186, lines 8 - 10):

Buddha Śākyamuni will enter Nirvāṇa only when his disciples have become pure, full of faith, fully conscious of *dharmas* being void, and devoted to meditation.

Passage 18 (VIII, p. 200, lines 9 - 10):

The Buddha praises Pūṃṇa because he was the best of preachers and possessed the understanding of *Śūnyatā*.

Passage 19 (X, p. 234, line 10):

Knowing that *dharmas* are void is the seat where the Tathāgata preaches the *Dharma*.

Passage 20 (X, p. 236, verse 24 c - d):

Śūnyatā is the seat of Buddha, and sitting in it the *bodhisattva* should preach the *Dharma*.

Passage 22 (XI, p. 266, line 1):

The *anutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilābha* by many persons was the great auspicious effect of the conversion of the daughter of the Nāga king into a *Buddha*.

Passage 23 (XIII, p. 275, lines 9 - 11):

The good behaviour of a *bodhisattva* is to know the true nature of the *dharmas*.

Passage 24 (XIII, p. 277, line 11 - p. 278, line 5):

The second "field of action" (*gocara*) of the *bodhisattva* is to know that the *dharmas* are void and possess the corresponding characteristics.

Passage 26 (XIII, p. 281, verse 19):

The field (*gocara*) of the *pandits* are the *dharmas* taught as not being (*asantaka*), etc.

Passage 27 (XIII, p. 281, verse 21):

What the *bodhisattva* perceives, when concentrated in meditation, is that the *dharmas* are like the space, i.e. void.

Passage 28 (XIII, p. 282, verse 22):

This passage repeats what passage 26 expresses: the field (*gocara*) of the *pandits* is the knowledge of the *dharmas* being similar to space, etc.

Passage 29 (XV, p. 318, lines 8-10):

What distinguishes the Tathāgata is that He knows the true nature of the world, while the ignorant do not.

Passage 30 (XVI, p. 327, line 4):

The first effect of the teaching of the Chapter on the “Extension of the life of the Tathāgata”, to which a great importance is attributed, is that a very great number of *bodhisattvas* acquired the *kṣānti* in regard to the theory of the *dharmas* being un-born.

Passage 32 (XXI, p. 403, lines 7 - 8):

The effect of the teaching of the Chapter on the *Dhāraṇīs* is that a great number of beings acquired the *anupattikakṣānti*.

Passage 33 (XXII, p. 419, lines 6 - 7):

The woman who keeps in her memory the Chapter on a previous existence of Tathāgata Bhaiṣajyarāja and makes it known, will be reborn as a *bodhisattva*, who immediately to her birth will get the supernatural knowledges (*abhijñā*) and the *kṣānti* in regard to the theory of the *dharmas* being unborn.

Passage 34 (XXIII, p. 437, line 1):

The effect of the teaching of the Chapter on Gadgadasvara was that a great number of beings acquired the *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*.

Conclusion

The remarks that precede allow us to conclude that the *Śūnyatā* and *dharmas* theory as established by the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and in the *Mādhyamika* treatises is present in the *Lotus Sūtra* and that, although the number of references to it is inferior to the number of references to many other main doctrines in the *Sūtra*, anyhow the important contexts in which it appears leave no doubt that it has in the *Lotus Sūtra* also a foremost position.