In Memoriam

Richard Hugh Robinson: 1926-70

Born in Alberta, Canada on June 21, 1926, Richard H. Robinson received his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Alberta in 1947, where he specialized in economics and modern languages. In 1950, he entered the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and received a first-class honors (B.A.) in classical Chinese in 1952. He returned to Canada in 1953. In 1954, he joined the faculty of the University of Toronto and received the degree of doctor of philosophy from the University of London in 1959. He joined the University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty in 1961. While in London, he married Hannah Grenville. Their daughter, Sita, and their son, Neil, were born in Toronto in 1955 and 1957, respectively.

Richard Robinson was constantly interested in expanding his knowledge of languages. Even as a high school student, he sought the instruction of a local Chinese laundryman in Alberta, under whom he began his Chinese studies; while in London, he studied under the eminent Orientalists Professor Edward Conze and Professor David Snellgrove, with whom he worked informally in Sanskrit and Tibetan, respectively. Languages, however, were but tools to probe into the subtlety of Oriental thought, particularly Buddhism, to which he had

viii IN MEMORIAM

been drawn since childhood. His attraction to Buddhism took on a new dimension during 1948–49 in Toronto, where he was working at odd jobs in preparation for entering the University of London. He assisted the Reverend Takashi Tsuji of the Toronto Buddhist Church, made friends with Japanese-Canadian Buddhists, began to learn Japanese, and participated in a translation project undertaken by the Aśoka Society of the Toronto Church. His involvement with Japanese-Canadian Buddhists helped greatly in developing a Buddhism amenable to the needs of Japanese-Canadian Buddhists, particularly at a time, at the end of World War II, when the Japanese-Canadian Buddhists were faced with the problem of an ethnic identity. His experience in Toronto contributed much as well in shaping his own professional career.

In 1960, he joined the faculty of the Department of Indian Studies of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught Indian Philosophy, Indian civilization, and Buddhism, upon which he lectured with great vitality and interest. In the course of his teaching career, he was granted two overseas research grants. On each occasion he went to India, where he carefully observed Indian culture and probed the various facets of Indian philosophical thought. Likewise, he expanded his interest in languages. He discovered new friends among Indians and Tibetans and renewed old friendships. He did not fail, however, to visit other Buddhist countries of Asia—Ceylon, Vietnam, and Japan—on which occasions he gained the regard of many Asian Buddhists and Buddhologists.

In addition to his contributions to many academic journals, he published four significant works: Chinese Buddhist Verse (London: John Murray, 1954); Let's Speak English, a text for non-English speakers, (coauthored with D. F. Theall and J. W. Wevers, Toronto: W. J. Gage, Ltd., 1960–62); Early Mādhyamika in India and China (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); and The Buddhist Religion (Dickenson: Belmont, California, 1970). He left numerous unpublished manuscripts, among which are an English translation

of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśasūtra and the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith, and a Sanskrit Primer.

Besides being a teacher and a research scholar, Richard Robinson demonstrated extraordinary administrative and organizational skills. He was chairman of the Department of Indian Studies (now the Department of South Asian Studies) and director of the South Asian Area Center on several occasions. In addition, from 1963 to 1965, he was secretary of the American Institute of Indian Studies. But his greatest contribution came in 1961, when he and his colleagues Professor Robert J. Miller and Professor Murray Fowler established the Wisconsin Ph.D. program in Buddhist studies—the first of its kind ever established in North America.

Richard Robinson was a linguist, a philosopher, and an internationally recognized scholar in Buddhist studies, but above all, he was a friend of the Indians, Tibetans, Vietnamese, and Japanese, a stimulating personality to his colleagues, and an inspiring teacher to his students.

Namo 'mitābhāya buddhāya