The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction

CARL OLSON

Rutgers University Press

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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY, AND LONDON

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Olson, Carl.

The different paths of Buddhism : a narrative-historical introduction / Carl Olson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8135-3562-X (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-8135-3561-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Buddhism. I. Title.

BQ4022.057 2005

294.3—dc22

2004011754

A British Cataloging-in-Publication record for this book is available
from the British Library

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Manufactured in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to
the memory of John Y. Fenton,
an early mentor and friend.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the outcome of over twenty years of teaching Buddhism on the undergraduate level at large universities and a small liberal arts college in what at times in the winter seems like Tibet. Critics might assert that I should have spent another twenty years working on the subject. I would have to agree, because the Buddhist tradition is very rich, complex, and widespread. It is impossible to do Buddhism full justice in a single volume, and I have not attempted to cover everything. This book focuses on major highlights of the tradition from India, Tibet, China, and Japan, and also takes a look at Buddhism on the village level in such countries as Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), and Thailand. This book is intended for college-level courses and instructors who are not fearful of challenging students.

After composing a book, there are many people whom one should thank. Most important, I want to thank the many Buddhist scholars who have shaped my understanding of the tradition and this book. It is more their book than mine. I thank former Dean Lloyd Michaels and President Richard Cook for giving me the Teacher-Scholar Chair in the Humanities at Allegheny College, which gave me free time to research and begin writing this book at Clare Hall of the University of Cambridge. I want to express my appreciation to the staff and fellows at Clare Hall for a wonderful adventure and for creating a terrific atmosphere in which to work. My time spent with Anindita and Julius Lipner was a major bonus of my stay in the beautiful town. I also must thank Peggy for her understanding, generosity, hard work, and love to pursue my fellowship and work; and Casey for teaching me about friendship and companionship. I would be remiss not to thank my colleagues Glenn and our rookie Eric for sharing their collegial spirit. I also need to thank the people at Rutgers University Press, especially David Myers for the faith and encouragement he gave me at the start. These good people also include Kristi Long and Adi Hovav. Kristi's constructive criticism and suggestions helped to improve this book, along with the comments of an anonymous reviewer. Finally, I want to thank the many students whom I have taught over the years for allowing me to have fun and to share what little I know with them.

Illustrations 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 are photos taken by the author at the British Museum, London. Illustrations 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 are photos used by permission from the Asian Religious Media Resources, Yale Divinity

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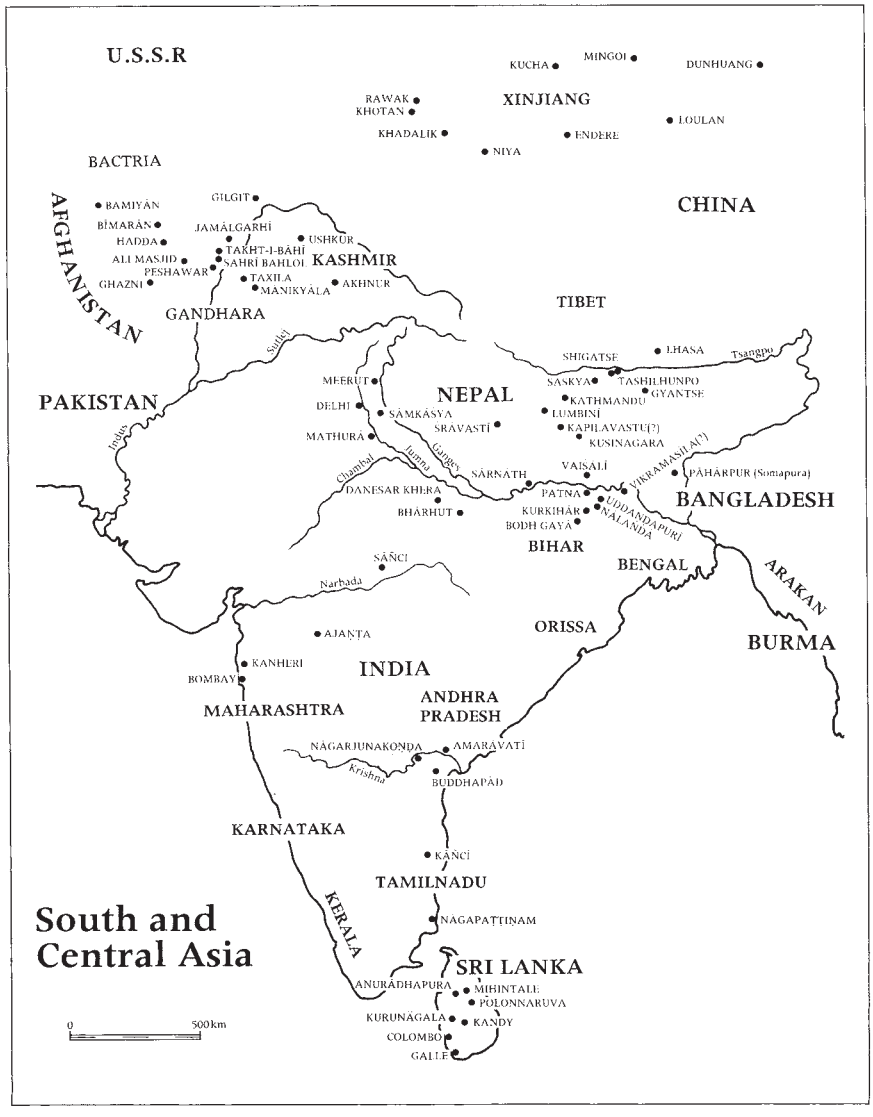
PART ONE

Origins and Historical Development



South and Central Asia

1

Crows and Monks: Introduction

The early Buddhist tradition is sometimes characterized in the popular imagination of Westerners as somber, serious, austere, and pessimistic. Because of its emphasis on suffering and rejection of the world for a more solitary life of contemplation and meditation, it is understandable how people could arrive at such a characterization. But such a caricature would be incorrect and misleading. Within the hardships of ordinary life, Buddhists have been able to find humor. In a commentary to the text of the *Dhammapada*, a story is told about some old monks who became friends with an old woman, the wife of a former member of their group. When the old woman died, the monks were inconsolable. In order to help them understand, the Buddha told them a story from the *Kāka* (Crow) *Jātaka* (stories of former lives) about their former existence as crows. One day, it seems, the mate of one of the crows got very drunk, was swept out to sea, and drowned. The crows attempted to save her by baling out the sea with their beaks, until they finally just gave up their fruitless effort.[1] We can commiserate with the sorrow of the monks, but we can also laugh at the absurdity of the desperate actions of the crows.

If the sea in this narrative is a metaphor for the suffering associated with life, and if the crows are metaphorical figures for human beings, the impossible task of the crows is analogous to the struggle of humans against the suffering of the world. Like the sea-baling crows, humans need a life raft to help them navigate the sea of suffering that is symbolic of human existence. During the fifth century B.C.E. in India, a man named Siddhārtha became the Buddha (Awakened One), and he functioned as a life raft for all those suffering in the sea of pain. With his concern for the absurdities and suffering associated with human life, the historical Buddha functioned as a human savior figure, even though he was not considered divine during his life. During the formative period of Buddhism, the Buddha was considered an ordinary man of flesh and blood and a gifted charismatic teacher. He was not an incarnation of a deity. He was simply a man who discovered the truth by means of his own efforts and shared it with others.

The Buddha also did not function as a mediator, reformer, prophet, priest, or theologian, because there was nothing to mediate, no organization to reform, no divinely inspired message to share with others, no organized ritual to perform or duties of office, and no deity upon which to reflect. The Buddha is best understood as a teacher, philosopher, and founder of a major world religion. His teaching was rational in the sense of analyzing the basic problems of life and devising a solution. By systematic reasoning about human existence, he came to the conclusion that it was painful, and he prescribed a remedy for the pain by means of his self-discovered path. Moreover, he discovered an end to pain that formed his goal of *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*). We will discuss his analysis of life, pragmatic solution, and goal in chapter 3. Briefly, the Buddha's teaching emphasized gaining direct access to a greater reality by means of determined efforts. The Buddha stressed an immediate rather than a cumulative religious experience, although it could take many years of arduous practice to reach one's goal. Like major religious figures such as Jesus and Muhammad, the Buddha gathered a small group of followers who were attracted to his charisma and teaching. But unlike figures such as Jesus and Muhammad, the Buddha insisted upon the creation of a monastic community. The monastic community shaped those who joined it, and it influenced Indian culture and the laity who were necessary for its support.

The tale of the crows is a good example of the use of narrative by Buddhists to make a point about some aspect of religion or philosophy. Early Buddhism developed from within the context of an oral culture in which verbal communication and narrative were important for spreading one's message to a mostly illiterate populace. Buddhist teachers told stories repeatedly, long before these tales were preserved in texts. This study of Buddhism proposes to follow the lead of Buddhist teachers over the centuries by taking a narrative approach to the subject as much as possible, in order to do justice to a rich religious tradition in a style long sanctioned by Buddhists themselves. A major advantage of this approach is that it reduces the imposition of a Western method upon Buddhism. Moreover, a narrative approach, whose framework is temporal, is a chronological sequence, which implies that it is also historical. Such an approach includes not merely traditional stories but also cultural metaphors, similes, anecdotes, symbols, and history to tell a tale or illustrate a point. In short, this book tells the story of Buddhism. It fails to tell the entire story, however, because Buddhism is a major world religion that has spread around the globe. Because it is necessary to make certain choices, this study will focus on India, Tibet, China, and Japan, with some looks at Buddhism on the village level in such countries as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma).

Buddhism is a world religion named after its founder, like Christianity. As in the case of Jesus, there were no Buddhists during the lifetime of the historical Buddha. The same thing can be said for many centuries afterward. This might seem to be a strange claim: a Buddha without Buddhism. Certainly, during his lifetime, the historical Buddha insisted upon the creation of a monastic community,

shared his teachings with others, and designed a path to salvation, but it is not certain that he intended to create a religion in the strict sense.

The designation "Buddhism" originates in the West, not the East. In short, it is a construct of the minds of scholars in the West. There is no definitive evidence, for instance, that Tibetans, Indians, Sinhalese, or Chinese referred to or conceived of themselves as Buddhists before they were given this label by Westerners.[2] Moreover, the study of Buddhism was an offspring of earlier studies of Indology, Sinology, and classical philology, and the term "Buddhism" may not be the best term for an incredibly rich variety of cultural phenomena and levels of discourse. It is important not to reify Buddhism into a monolithic entity. Does this mean that we should not refer to the path of the Buddha as Buddhism and those that follow his teachings as Buddhists? Since many people in the East and West use the term to define their religiosity at the present time, and since the term is pragmatically useful in a general way, it seems permissible to use the term at the introductory level, while remembering that it is inadequate.

A major feature of Buddhism is its great diversity throughout the world. This diversity is evident even within specific countries with respect to schools, beliefs, and practices. Although the term "Buddhism" is not hollow, a student should expect to be exposed to a wide variety of doctrines, modes of thought, practices, and lifestyles. In order to include a discussion of some neglected aspects of the religious tradition left out by other introductions to the subject, this study includes a discussion of its political and ethical aspects, the role of women in the tradition in South Asia, and Buddhism as practiced by villagers in South Asia. This study will conclude with a review of some recent developments.

Religious Context of Primitive Buddhism

Before the advent of Buddhism, there were two major religious trends in ancient India. There was the predominant orthodox Brahmanical tradition that accepted the four Vedas as divinely revealed literature; it was dominated by a learned priestly caste and centered on a complex sacrificial cult with roots dating back to around 1600 B.C.E. In contrast to the more conservative social force of the Brahmins, there were various kinds of holy wanderers who existed on the margins of the orthodox society, and who exerted an influence on Indian culture as rich as that of the prevailing Brahmanical culture. The early Buddhist cult was part of this diverse group of holy wanderers. From the margins of the dominant society of the period, early Buddhists reacted in various ways to the Brahmanical way of religion by rejecting certain aspects of the religion and incorporating other features into its own path.

The plethora of Brahmanical deities was, for instance, incorporated into the worldview of the Buddha and thereby rendered less powerful and ultimately inconsequential. Like human beings, these deities were subject to the law of cause and effect (*karma*) and eventual rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Therefore, the Brahmanical

deities were not omnipotent or eternal from the Buddhist perspective, although they were better off materially than human beings. The complex sacrificial system of Brahmanism drew the ire of the Buddha, who was antagonistic toward its violent nature. By accepting followers from all walks of life, the Buddha also undermined caste prejudice and pretensions. Moreover, the Buddha did not accept the ancient Vedic scriptures as revealed literature, which means that from the orthodox Brahmanical viewpoint Buddhism is a heresy. This heretical position is embodied in the Pāli canon of southern Buddhism for what is sometimes designated as Nikāya Buddhism, from the term meaning "collection" (*nikāya*), which refers to various texts (*suttas*) of the body of literature.

Even though Nikāya Buddhism rejected certain Brahmanical beliefs and practices, it was still influenced by the orthodox tradition and adopted some of its ideas. The law of cause and effect (*karma*) has already been mentioned, along with the notion of rebirth *saṃsara*. These two inseparable notions meant that all actions had inevitable consequences: that karma caused rebirth, and that rebirth was a continual process of birth, life, and death that never ended. These two notions were interconnected with a cyclic concept of time, which were important components of the Brahmanical worldview. Nikāya Buddhism also adopted the conviction espoused by some thinkers in the Brahmanical tradition that human life and the world in which it was lived were not satisfactory or ultimately real because of their apparently impermanent nature. Nikāya Buddhism accepted the conviction that meditation was the preferred way to gain salvation from the cycle of time, and it adopted yogic types of techniques that it altered and developed for its own purposes. Like some aspects of Brahmanism, Buddhism thus placed a high value on religious introspection and insight.

Once Buddhism became established as a viable religious movement and competitor for adherents during the fifth century B.C.E., there developed a tension between the two different paths of religion that was reflected in the literature. Brahmins were satirized as foolish, corrupt, greedy, venal, stupid, and lusty by Buddhist writers. In one text, the Buddha allegedly (it is difficult to determine the precise words spoken by the Buddha) compared Brahmins to dogs.[3] He said that Brahmins were once virtuous and pure as dogs, but now they were inferior to them. The reason for this was that Brahmins copulated with both women of their own caste and non-Brahmins, whereas dogs copulated with dogs and never with other species. Besides this kind of vicious attack, Buddhists also claimed that there were animals and humans that were eaters of manure—in fact, they came running when they smelled it from a distance. The Buddhists compared this observation to Brahmins who ran when they smelled a sacrifice and got excited about the meal that awaited them.[4] Indian satirists over the centuries returned the venomous criticism when they portrayed Buddhist monks as carnivorous drunkards, lecherous thieves, and brawling gamblers, which are all forms of behavior forbidden to virtuous monks.

Besides the orthodox Brahmanical tradition with its polytheistic beliefs and

complex ritual system, numerous people lived on the fringe of this orthodox culture, individuals called *munis* and *śramana*. They were the holy wandering beggars of ancient India. The term *śramana* literally means "laborer in the spiritual life." Often a group of these figures formed around a charismatic leader, called an instructor or teacher, thus forming a sect that adhered to the teaching of the leader. It was also common for groups to merge with one another, which tended to place a value on proselytizing that increased the prestige of the leader.[5]

Although primitive Buddhism resembled these cults held together by a charismatic teacher, it attempted to differentiate itself from the other groups by claiming that the Buddha was not a cult leader like others because he was teaching something that he had realized for himself before he began to teach. What the Buddha taught was not the speculative system of a particular sect but rather embodied a universal message that transcended the limits of a cult-group.

During the lifetime of the Buddha, there were other sectarian groups that Buddhists competed with for followers. A group of materialists rejected the ideas of karma, rebirth, and survival of the human personality after death because they accepted matter as the ultimate reality. Materialists like the Cārvākas or the Lokāyatikas agreed that all phenomena and consciousness could be traced to transformations of matter. There were also skeptics who were agnostic. And the Ājīvakas were believers in fatalism because they thought that a person's rebirth was determined by an impersonal fate. But the early Buddhists probably received the most competition for adherents from the Jains, whose teacher Mahāvīra was a contemporary of the Buddha, although they probably never encountered one another.

From the Jain perspective, Mahāvīra was not the founder of a new sect or the initiator of a new religion, but was rather the reformer of an old religion, although it was acknowledged that he represented the final *tīrthankara* (maker of the river crossing). This scenario suggests that Jainism conceived of itself as an eternal religion, and Mahāvīra simply rediscovered what already existed—a position presupposing that Jainism has been continually revealed throughout the course of history.

Jain thought espoused a belief in an immortal soul that was pure in its ideal state and represented the animating principle of the body. When an embodied person acted, he or she received either of two kinds of karma: good or evil. Karma possessed a threefold efficacy in the sense that it restricted the natural qualities of the soul, caused various kinds of negative human qualities, and resulted ultimately in continual rebirth. The influx of evil karma was conceived as a dark matter that clung to the soul and colored it, and bound it to the cycle of pain, sorrow, and ignorance. The Jains compared the ignorant person to a fly ensnared in glue. The more a person struggled to escape, the more that person became engulfed in the sticky glue of life. In order to escape from the results of karma, it was necessary to return the self to its original pure condition, defined as isolation (*kaivalya*). In order to actualize this state of primordial purity of the soul, the avenues of the

human body through which karma gained entrance had to be blocked. Accomplishing this blockage was achieved by extreme forms of asceticism that worked to prevent new influxes of karma and exhaust old accumulations.

It was possible to distinguish between two types of asceticism: external and internal. The former type focused on the body and restricted a practitioner from dependence on worldly objects, whereas the latter concentrated on nonperceptual things as emotions, attitudes, and thoughts.[6] A Jain practice that helped to stop the influx of new karma was the practice of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), a doctrine that was based on the conviction that all life-monads were fellow beings. This included lower animals, plants, and atoms of matter. With the soul purified of prior residues of karma and new influxes blocked, the soul was able to gain enlightenment, which was knowledge devoid of karmic obstruction.[7] The enlightened soul remained within the body until death, when it was finally liberated. This liberated soul was able to rise to the top of the Jain cosmos free from ignorance, the law of karma, rebirth, and the suffering characteristic of this cycle. In comparison to the Jain position, the Buddha did not share its notion of soul or the extreme forms of asceticism that even included fasting unto death, but it did share the Jain emphasis on nonviolence.

Historical Context of Nikāya Buddhism

Arising during the sixth century B.C.E., Buddhism developed within a period of great political, social, and economic change. The political change involved the transition from local ruling families to monarchies and empires. From a social perspective, there was a change from a society of small villages and towns toward the development of a more urban society, even though small villages continued to exist and still do throughout India. Some of the important economic changes included the use of iron tools to clear land and cultivate it, which led to an ability to support a larger population. Other economic changes involved the development of a monetary system, increasing trade and craft specialization, and the eventual growth of a rich merchant class. In fact, an influential mercantile community organized into guilds was reflected in Buddhist texts.[8]

According to traditional legend, the Buddhist held their first council at Rājagriha after the death of the Buddha in order to establish the authoritative teachings and discipline of the founder. This council established the validity of the oral tradition in preserving the teachings of the Buddha by dividing them into initially two baskets (*piṭakas*) and eventually a third. This council was followed a hundred years after the Buddha's death by a second council at Vaiśālī, called because of disputes about monastic rules. This council resulted in a split of the community into two sects: Sthavīras (Elders) and Mahāsaṃgikas (Great Assembly). The former group claimed to preserve the genuine teachings and discipline of the Buddha, and they emphasized the importance of monastic life for genuine practice of the religion and eventually enlightenment. They stressed the authority of monks

within the Buddhist community. The Mahāsaṃghikas were lay-orientated in the sense that they allowed lay followers into their meetings and were sympathetic to popular religious values and practices. They depicted the Buddha not as an historical person but as a supermundane and pure being. A number of groups split from these two sects.

These developments culminated during the Mauryan Dynasty (322–183 B.C.E.), which established the first genuine Indian empire. This dynasty ushered into Indian culture many changes that began in the reign of Chandragupta (c. 322–298 B.C.E.), who came from lower-caste origins. This ruler freed India from Macedonian political hegemony, and he united politically a greater part of the subcontinent of India. Chandragupta Maurya established a central administration with the aid of his adviser named Kauṭiliyā, famous author of the *Arthaśāstra* (Treatise on Material Gain), which propounded a theory for establishing political and military power for a state. The empire was maintained and expanded by his son Bindusāra (298–273 B.C.E.) and his heir, the famous Aśoka (269–232 B.C.E.).

The Mauryan Dynasty was strengthened by a decline of tribal culture and a growing agrarian economy. With a firm economic basis and the security afforded by political unification, there was an expansion of various craft guilds, towns, and trade. Thus the dynasty continued the development of an urban culture. With growing wealth and political stability, religious movements such as Buddhism and Jainism expanded their influence into new areas. These religious movements and others were assisted by the Mauryan advocacy of religious tolerance and support for both orthodox and heterodox religions. An excellent example of this spirit of tolerance was the twelfth Rock Edict of Aśoka, which appealed for religious toleration of all sects. The dynasty supported religious groups by donating caves to be used as retreats, and it financed the construction of monasteries and *stūpas* (memorial mounds). The kings also sponsored Vedic sacrifices, even though the Brahmanical priesthood was not enamored of the dynasty.

During the Mauryan Dynasty, Buddhism spread rapidly, due in part to the support by the king Aśoka, who had converted to Buddhism after his conquest of Kalinga and the remorse that he felt for the bloody carnage caused by the war. There was a legend that he became a Buddhist monk, although it was more likely that he lived for a period of time among the members of the brotherhood. According to tradition, the third Buddhist council (c. 250 B.C.E.) was allegedly held at Pāṭaliputra during Aśoka's reign. The most important development for the subsequent history of Buddhism during Aśoka's reign was the sending forth of missionaries to spread its teachings to other parts of South Asia and the East.

After the death of Aśoka, a political decline began that culminated in the assassination of Bṛhadratha, the final Mauryan ruler, by his commander-in-chief named Puṣyamitra around 185 B.C.E. There has been considerable scholarly debate about the reasons for the decline of the dynasty. Some have traced the decline to Aśoka's advocacy of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), Buddhist dharma (doctrine), and his ill treatment of Brahmins. There has been no recorded Brahmin revolt to support

this part of the thesis. And without evidence, it has been difficult to assert unequivocally that nonviolence emasculated the army. A fact that tends to contradict the argument about the weakening of the army is that Aśoka continued to maintain the death penalty. The failure of his advocacy of dharma (doctrine) was probably associated with its vagueness as an instrument to unite the kingdom. The reasons for the decline of the dynasty were a combination of social, economic, administrative, and outside military pressures. Whatever the reasons for its decline, it was many centuries before another empire was established in India.

It was not until the Gupta Dynasty (320–540 C.E.) that a genuine Indian empire arose again. The dynasty founded by Chandra Gupta I (c. 320–335) was expanded by his sons Samudra Gupta (c. 335–376) and Chandra Gupta II (c. 376–415), who were both patrons of literature and the arts. Even though the dynasty extended over a wide area, it never attained the centralized control exhibited by the Mauryan Empire. During the Gupta Dynasty, there was a creative cultural explosion with significant developments in such areas as grammar, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, literature, philosophy, and religion. Scholars have often called this period the classical age of India.

The kings of the Gupta Dynasty favored and supported theistic forms of Hinduism, as evident in the growth of temple construction and production of religious texts. Because of a lack of royal patronage from the Gupta monarchs, Buddhism began to decline, but it continued to retain the support of the commercial class. During this period, popular worship was directed to the image of the Buddha, and important literary activity occurred among Buddhist sects. Significant literary developments included contributions by the great commentator of the Pāli canon Buddhaghoṣa, and the brothers Asaṇga and Vasubandhu of the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Buddhist logician Dignāga was also active during this period. The Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism was capturing the imagination of the people with its assertion that anyone could become an enlightened being (*bodhisattva*) with the duty to save others from the cycle of suffering. The historical Buddha was conceived as the eternal truth in the doctrine of the three bodies (*trikāya*) of the Yogācāra school, which provided an intellectual foundation to a more devotional form of religion. Chinese pilgrims to India witnessed this devotional form of Buddhism directed to such celestial bodhisattva figures as Avalokiteśvara, a personification of compassion, and Mañjuśri, a personification of wisdom, and observed the veneration of funeral mounds (*stūpas*). The decline of Buddhism continued during the Gupta period until it ceased to be a major religious force in India.

The reasons for the decline of Buddhism in India include a complex web of internal and external socio-religio-historical factors. Buddhist monastic communities were always vulnerable to the withdrawal of social and political support. With the loss of royal support because of political machinations and changes, monastic life became more precarious and its leadership gradually eroded. During the fourth century C.E., there was a proliferation of Hindu devotional move-

ments that gradually swept away adherents of Buddhism and undermined its social support. Moreover, Hindus adopted some Buddhist notions, making the latter less distinctive. The uniqueness of Buddhism was further eroded when, along with Hinduism, it adopted Tantric notions. Moreover, in a wave of destruction that began in the sixth century in the northwest region of India with the invasion of Ephthalite Huns, and that continued in the tenth century with the invasion of Muslim Turks, monks and nuns were killed, images for worship were destroyed, monastery complexes obliterated, and centers of Buddhist learning such as the prestigious Nālanda University were annihilated. Buddhism never really recovered from this onslaught, although it survived in southern India into the seventeenth century. But it was deeply entrenched in other South Asian and Far Eastern cultures long before this time. In fact, Buddhism had begun to spread to other countries even before its decline in India.

Later Historical Spread of Buddhism

Foreign missionary activity of Buddhism had begun during the reign of Aśoka, when he allegedly sent some of his children to Sri Lanka during the latter part of the third century B.C.E. Whereas this mission to Sri Lanka represented the beginning of the southern expansion of Buddhism, the Silk Road played an important role in the northern and eastern expansion of the religion. Along this important trade route, merchants, envoys, and immigrants helped to introduce Buddhism to China and locations along the way during a period from first century B.C.E. to the middle of the first century C.E. After the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220 C.E., Buddhism spread more rapidly in China, penetrating the upper-class gentry clans in north China around 300 C.E. From a flourishing stronghold in China, Buddhism was introduced into Korea in 372 C.E. From Korea, it was transmitted to Japan around 552 C.E. Each of these cultures developed and modified Buddhism. Buddhism also spread to Campā (Viet-Nam) around the third century C.E., and may have reached Siam as early as the first century C.E. By the sixth century C.E., Buddhism made its way to Tibet, after its king married Nepalese and Chinese princesses who were adherents of Buddhism. A more detailed account of the development of Buddhism in Tibet will be given in chapter II. And because later chapters of this book concentrate on China and Japan, the remainder of this historical survey will concentrate on these countries.

During Aśoka's time, Buddhism reached north to Gandhāra and Kashmir. Near the border of Gandhāra in northwestern India was Bactria, a state established by Ionian Greeks that dated to the military campaigns of Alexander the Great. As the Mauryan Dynasty disintegrated, the Greeks invaded northern India. The most memorable Greek king was Menander, who ruled around the second century B.C.E. Coins from his realm depicted his name and image on one side and the Buddha wheel, which signified the teaching of the Buddha, on the opposite side. Menander was best remembered as the king in the dialogue with the monk

Nāgasena in the text entitled *Milindapañha* (Questions of King Milinda). The Sythians, who originated in northwestern China around 130 B.C.E., eventually conquered the kingdom of Bactria. The most famous Scythian king was Kaniṣka (reigned c. 78 C.E.), who converted to Buddhism. His support of Buddhism helped it to spread throughout his vast kingdom. A milestone of his reign was the convening of a Buddhist council to collect manuscripts and compose commentaries on them. Buddhist missionaries used their northern Indian bases to spread their religion through central Asia and into China.

Missionaries also traveled a more southerly route through central Asia, which took them through towns such as Khotan, whereas the northern route took them through places such as Kucha and Turfan. The two routes joined at Tun-huang on the northwestern frontier of China. This became a very important center for Buddhism in China, where caves were dug in the hills to accommodate traveling monks. Tun-huang was also an important place where texts were translated, religious discussions took place, and Buddhist art and sculpture were promoted. Besides these land routes, it was also possible to travel to China by the sea route, which took a traveler to southern China. By 65 C.E., there were thriving Buddhist communities in both northern and southern China.

When Buddhism gradually made its way into China, it did not dominate the culture, as it did in such countries as Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, and Thailand, because China had already been shaped for centuries by Confucian and Taoist modes of thought. Because Buddhism was a foreign religious import, it had to struggle to secure a position and ward off attack by the predominant traditions. The situation for Buddhism in China was complicated by both its own structure and what it encountered in the culture. For one thing, Buddhist monks did not feel obligated to pay homage to a ruler, because the monastic community was a separate entity apart from the prevailing society, with its own laws and form of self-governance. This placed Buddhism in potential conflict with Chinese culture, in which there was no recognized separation between religion and state. In fact, in China all religious bodies had to be subordinate to the state bureaucracy. The Buddhists adapted to their new situation by integrating themselves into the structure of the state by establishing chapels, for instance, in the imperial palace, where monks recited religious texts for the welfare and protection of the state. The monks also became involved in the political fortunes of the state. In response to their subordination to the state and helpful attitude, the state built and financially supported national monasteries. One result was to provoke jealously; Buddhism raised the suspicions of religious groups already entrenched in powerful and influential positions, eager to maintain their status. The charges made against Buddhism by Confucians and Taoists were periodically translated into state persecution of the religion.

Besides its encroachment into the upper reaches of Chinese society, Buddhism laid a foundation with common people. After the fall of the Later Han Dynasty (25–220 C.E.), there followed the so-called Period of Disunity (220–589).

During this age of instability, ordinary people embraced Buddhism because it offered spiritual solace and even material aid. Buddhist leaders organized people into religious groups that provided them with a sense of security and functioned as mutual aid associations. The Period of Disunity was a time for the development of what was called Gentry Buddhism in southern China. This intellectual development stressed Buddhist and Chinese learning, philosophical discussions, literary activities, and the mixing of Taoist and Buddhist notions.

The Sui (589–618) and T'ang (618–907) dynasties continued state patronage of Buddhism. With patronage came increased state control and greater incorporation of Buddhist rituals into state ceremonies, especially those associated with imperial accessions and ancestral worship. Buddhists also encouraged efforts to transform emperors into Buddha figures, like the celestial bodhisattva (enlightened being) Vairocana. Moreover, Buddhism endeared itself to the Chinese people by embracing the Confucian virtue of filial piety; this took the forms of erecting memorial mounds (*stūpas*) and statues of the Buddha in memory of deceased parents.

In spite of their efforts to adapt to Chinese culture, Buddhists endured a period of persecution from 574 to 577. When the Sui Dynasty came to power, Buddhism experienced a revival lead by Yang Chien. A decree was issued in 581 that established Buddhist monasteries at the foot of each of the five sacred mountains and donated landed estates for their support. The early rulers of the Sui Dynasty constructed Buddhist temples at locations to commemorate their military success, and they ordered previously destroyed temples restored.

During the T'ang Dynasty, Buddhism grew in power and influence that even exceeded that of Taoism. But as Buddhism became more Chinese, this did not stop Emperor Wu-tsung, a fanatical Taoist adherent, from persecuting Buddhists and attempting to expunge the religion from China. The hostile measures began in 842 with the forced return of monks and nuns to lay life and the confiscation of Buddhist properties. A second phase of the persecution dissolved smaller monastic communities and forced monks to pay taxes.

Prior to the years of persecution during the T'ang Dynasty, there was a large increase in the numbers of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims going to India. Leaving China in 629, Hsüan-tsang (c. 596–664) traveled to India, secured texts and relics, and returned to a hero's welcome in 645. In 671, the monk I-tsing left Canton by sea, translated texts, and wrote about his experiences in two famous books: *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms in the Southern Archipelago* and *Biographies of Famous Monks of the T'ang Who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions*. There were even earlier important monks who supervised and collaborated on translation projects; these included Kumārajīva (344–c. 413), who abandoned an older method of translation and used a method of matching meanings with Taoist terms; Fa-hsien, who reached India in 399 searching for an original monastic code; and Dharmaraksa (232–309), a translator of over a hundred Mahāyāna texts. Even though China was predominately Mahāyānist, Buddhist monks followed rules of discipline established by the

Sarvāstivādin and Dharmagupta schools of the so-called Hinayāna, or southern, tradition.

The newly translated texts stimulated the development of Chinese Buddhist schools. These schools included a variety of approaches to salvation such as the following: the devotional Pure Land (Ching T'u); the philosophical San Lun (Three Treatise School), which featured two texts by Nāgārjuna of the Mādhyamika school and one work by Yogacāra thinkers; the Ch'an sect; T'ien T'ai school, which relied on the *Lotus Sūtra*; the Hua-yen (Garland School); Fa Hsiang (Yogacāra); Lü (School of Discipline); and Chên Yen or Mi Tsung, which was a Tantric Buddhist school. The Pure Land, Ch'an, T'ien T'ai, and Hua-yen schools will be discussed more fully in later chapters. The teacher Tsung-mi (780–841) provided a unified vision of these various contending lineages.

Signs of the decline of Chinese Buddhism could be found during the Sung Dynasty (960–1279), if not before this time. It was possible to find examples of moral degeneration, lack of discipline, and corruption in the sale of monk certificates and titles of nonexistent accomplishments during this time. The Sung Dynasty also represented both a transition in the structure of Chinese society and a cultural flowering of literature, art, and philosophy.

During the period of late imperial China that encompassed the Ming (1368–1644) and Ch'ing (1644–1912) dynasties, there is evidence that the former dynastic rulers tapped into the Maitreya legend of a future Buddha that would descend to earth and be accompanied by an enlightened (*ming*) ruler, because they adopted this popular notion to name the new dynasty. After encouraging the growth of the clergy and receiving an enthusiastic response from the people, the leaders of the Ming Dynasty were focused to control the growth. During this period, only Ch'an and Pure Land schools remained vibrant religious movements because they shared practices like meditation and chanting. Other schools went into decline or merged into each other in a process by which they lost their identity. The choice for Buddhists was not between schools but rather practices. Buddhism continued to produce new sects and movements during this period. It also influenced the development of Neo-Confucianism, responded to criticism by Westerners such as the Jesuits, and suffered considerably during the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion (1851–1865).

When the Communist Chinese occupied the mainland in 1949, they ushered in a difficult time for all religions, which were considered an opiate of the people and an escape from reality. The Communists charged that Buddhism was a tool used by the ruling elite to keep the oppressed classes docile, satisfied, and subjugated. Moreover, Buddhist notions of harmony and integration were directly opposed to Marxian theories of dialectical history and inevitable conflict. The Communist Chinese confiscated temple lands and wealth, prohibited clergy from performing religious rites, reduced the size of the monastic organization, infiltrated it, and attempted to undermine it both externally and internally. In 1953, the Chinese Buddhist Association was founded with the intention of controlling

Buddhism by the state. Buddhists were allowed to take trips outside of the country and host foreign Buddhist groups and dignitaries. These activities were part of state foreign policy intended to present a positive picture of Buddhism under Communism. But there was a genuine question about whether or not Buddhism could survive Communist control because it represented a worldview that competed with the totalitarian government and the political ideology whereby all social and historical "contradictions" must be overcome. With the more recent encouragement of free markets and modified capitalism by the Chinese government and the constitutional promise of religious freedom, it is possible that Buddhism will experience a brighter future in China.

The history of Chinese Buddhism manifested periods of growth, creativity, persecution, and decline, and the same types of historical vicissitudes can be found in Japanese Buddhism. After Buddhism was introduced into Japan from Korea in the mid-sixth century, it was gradually accepted by leading families; it was then embraced by the imperial court and finally by the nation. From the Korean king, the Japanese emperor received a Buddhist scripture and image with a letter praising the merits of these items. During the Asuka period (552–645), the Soga family argued for the adoption of Buddhism, in opposition to the Mononobe and Nakatomi families, who were traditionally connected with indigenous Shinto (literally, way of the *kami* or gods) priestly functions. This dispute led to a civil war in which the Soga family prevailed after Soga no Umako had the emperor assassinated and replaced with his own niece, Empress Suiko, an ardent Buddhist. She appointed the imperial prince Shotoku (573–621) as her regent. Shotoku used Buddhism as an ideology to unify the nation, because it transcended the clan. He also founded the first major national temple, called the Horyuji Temple, near the city of Nara in 607. Popular opposition to Soga rule grew because of its style of governance and favoritism of foreigners to run the government. Soga rule came to an end in 645 with its overthrow by the Fujiwara clan, which introduced major reforms that led to the centralization of the nation under an absolute monarchy, a nationally organized bureaucracy, and a more equitable redistribution of land. The emperor, however, continued to promote both Buddhism and Shinto for the welfare of the country.

During the Nara period (710–794), Buddhism became a state religion in 728. Emperor Shomu had the Todaiji Temple built at Nara, which served as the first permanent capital of Japan. He also decreed that two provincial temples be constructed in every province. At this time, various kinds of Buddhism were welcomed to Japan, although the most significant schools were the Hosso, a Japanese version of Yogācāra, and Kegon, grounded on the *Garland Sūtra*. The Hosso school entered Japan in 654 and the Kegon school in 736. Four other schools entered Japan during the Nara period: the Jojtsu and Sanron in 624, the Kusha in 658, and the Ritsu in 738. These schools were grounded on one or more texts in Chinese translation. The Nara period also manifested priestly interference in politics, corruption, and moral decadence, and it saw a rapprochement between Buddhism

and Shinto, with each religion allowing protective shrines on the properties of the other.

The Nara Period gave way to a golden age of classical Japanese culture and imperial court society in the Heian period (794–1185). The Emperor Kammu moved the capital to Heian, which is modern Kyoto. Nevertheless, the emperor was a figurehead, and the real power continued to reside with the Fujiwara family. There developed over time a gap between the court and the warrior class that was to result in several competing pockets of political power. Because of social ranking in Japanese society at this time and the lack of upward social mobility, the priesthood became the major means of social mobility.

Two major Buddhist sects dominated the Heian period: Shingon (True Word), was founded by Kukai (773–836), called posthumously Kobo Daishi; and Tendai, founded in Japan by the monk Saicho (767–822), who imported the Chinese T'ien T'ai school and established a monastery on Mount Hiei, northeast of the city of Heian. For Saicho, the text of the *Lotus Sūtra* was equivalent to the truth. He was also concerned about the unity of all Buddhist practices, and he made accommodations with Shinto. Kukai wanted to harmonize Buddhism with Taoism and Confucianism. He later discovered the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, which represented an esoteric form of Buddhism in which Vairocana or the Great Sun Buddha was the supreme deity; a person could unite with Vairocana and achieve Buddhahood during this life. The path to achieve this goal included such esoteric rites as hand gestures, chanting, complex diagrams and rituals, and yogic meditation. The use of lavish rituals and magical practices were features that Shingon shared with the Tendai school. These schools gained great wealth and power during this period, and their monks became part of the political and social elite of Japanese culture.

In reaction to the predominance of Tendai and Shingon, there evolved new sects during the Kamakura era (1185–1333), during which the former Heian aristocracy was eclipsed and replaced by the new samurai warrior class. The Gempei War (1180–1185) marked the end of the power of the Taira/Fujiwara clan, defeated by the Minamoto (Genji) clan, which ushered in a strong feudal system governed by provincial landed barons (*daimyo*) who used the services of samurai retainers and vassals. The clan leader Yoritomo (1147–1199) moved the capital to Kamakura, where new cultural forms blossomed. With the removal of former aristocratic Buddhist patrons from positions of power, new movements could develop, flourish, and offer security and certainty during a period of sociopolitical turmoil. During this period, Eisai (1141–1215) founded the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and Dōgen (1200–1253) established the Sōtō school of Zen. These Zen developments will be examined more fully in chapter 12.

Having grown dissatisfied with elitist politics and the esoteric Buddhism of the dominant sects, the prophetic and charismatic Nichiren (1222–1282) took his religious message directly to the people and undermined the distinction between monks and lay people on the basis of teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Likewise, Pure Land Buddhism reached out directly to ordinary people. The leadership of Honen

(1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1262) proved vital for the success of this movement, which will be explored more fully in chapter 10. These men led devotional religious movements that responded to personal problems and questions about salvation. During this period, Buddhism became a mass devotional movement in Japan, while the former powerful Shingon and Tendai sects declined from a lack of financial support.

Zen and the devotional movements grew in strength, respectively, among the ruling class and common people during the Muromachi Period (1336–1573). This was a period during which the Ashikaga clan became powerful and established a new shogunate in the Muromachi section of Kyoto. Due to the protracted Onin Wars (1467–1477) and other events, this was a difficult period of Japanese history, characterized by widespread suffering due to starvation and military conflict. Zen Buddhism grew especially strong during this period with the establishment of a vital temple system, and it exerted a strong influence on artistic ways, especially in calligraphy and painting.

In sharp contrast to this period of disorder and suffering, the Tokugawa Period (1600–1868) was an era of peace, order, stability, and unity. This new order was centered in the new government located at Edo (modern Tokyo). During this period, the leadership turned toward Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and Shinto, because these modes of thought stressed the maintenance of social order and a strong moral code. During the later part of this period, there developed an emperor cult that stressed his divine nature and was connected to a growing nationalism that promoted the sacred nature and superiority of Japan, as evident in the ancient myths of the nation. With this development and its connection to a renewed affirmation of indigenous, ancient traditions expressed in mythology and literature, there arose hostility toward all foreign notions. This historical pattern developed into what was called the "imperial way," a kind of state religion that was to culminate in World War II.

Japan became a modern nation-state during the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), when the emperor was returned to power by younger members of the samurai class, who looked back to ancient Japan for inspiration. The emperor's political role was, in fact, intended to be primarily symbolic because the leaders were interested in turning Japan into a modern nation. Wealthy industrial families filled the social and political vacuum created by the collapse of the old feudal system. Confucian and Shinto ideals helped to shape the turn to a more conservative and nondemocratic form of government, the creation of a national army, and the replacement of feudal domains with prefectures. With the rise of nationalism and Shinto, Buddhism proved to be the loser because state patronage went to Shinto. Buddhist influences were purged from Shinto in an attempt to use it to unify the country. Some Buddhist leaders responded by calling for a renewal of faith, reorganization, and sending scholars to study in Europe to learn Western subjects. Nonetheless, the growing nationalism reached its tragic culmination with Japan's defeat in World War II.

After World War II, Japanese Buddhism became more of a missionary religion in the West. Japan also witnessed the growth of numerous new religions like Soka Gakkai, which found its inspiration in Nichiren Buddhism. The new religions filled a social and emotional void created by the aftermath of the war, which brought a loss of meaning, secularism, loss of national identity, disconnection with Japan's history, growth of urbanization, and fragmentation of traditional social structures. Although these new religions manifested Buddhist and Shinto influences, they were often created around a charismatic leader who stressed this-worldly benefits of following a particular religion. This fluid religious situation stood in sharp contrast to the nation's political stability, economic growth, and social change after the end of the war and the reconstruction of the nation with a constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. As Japan became an international economic powerhouse and a political partner of the West after World War II, it not only exported its electronic and other goods to the West, it also sent various forms of Buddhism and its culture.

This historical survey of Buddhism allows a reader to recognize that the tradition comprises many different movements with their own histories. Even though there was an essential commonality among the various schools, there also developed a grand diversity, with the core message transformed under the influence of different texts and cultures that its practitioners encountered. During times of crisis in China and Japan, Buddhism met the spiritual needs of ordinary people. This was a very important part of the Buddhist legacy in these countries. Moreover, it is possible to recognize extraordinary growth and spread of the religion over centuries and its adjustment to and accommodation with different cultures. This more than 2,500-year process continues today as Buddhism establishes roots in new locations in the West.

Early Buddhist Literature

As we will see in the next chapter, after the Buddha achieved enlightenment, he proceeded to the Deer Park in Benares to give his first sermon based on his personal discovery of the truth. What he preached that day and for his approximately forty-year teaching career was called the Dhamma (Sanskrit: Dharma; teaching, doctrine, law). The Dhamma preached by the Buddha was preserved by memory before it was finally committed to writing, long after his death. For about three hundred years, monks subjected to intense memorization training transmitted Buddhist teachings orally. The repetitive nature of some Buddhist texts reflects the oral nature of the early tradition. In order to preserve the teachings of the Buddha, the monastic community divided the canon into manageable collections (*nikāyas*) that were placed into the care of groups of transmitters who specialized in particular collections, which were eventually passed to their students. With war, famine, and ever-shrinking numbers of monks, Buddhist leaders became apprehensive about the preservation of the canon, and decided to commit the collection to writing. This literature evolved into the famous "three baskets" in

the canonical language of Pāli, rather than the Sanskrit typical of ancient Brahmanical religion or Mahāyāna Buddhism. (I shall use Pāli terms when discussing movements based on this literature, and Sanskrit terms in the sections discussing Mahāyāna.)

The Pāli canon consists of the following three baskets: Vinaya-piṭaka (basket of monastic discipline), Sutta-piṭaka (basket of discourses), and the Abhidhamma-piṭaka (basket of additional teachings). This division of the canon not only reflects an organizational principle according to subject matter but also suggests the manner in which the oral traditions preserved the teachings according to the specialization of the reciters.[9] Before his death, the Buddha specified some guidelines to be followed in order to determine the authenticity of a text. He identified four principal authorities: a text traced directly to himself, a text that originated with elders (*theras*) of an authentically constituted monastic community, a text that conformed to the spirit of the teachings already established, and one that adhered to the spirit of the monastic code previously established.

The basket of monastic discipline (Vinaya-piṭaka) covers the rules and precepts governing monastic life, and it often gives the circumstantial context for a particular rule. The Vinaya literature is divided into three major categories: Sutta-vibhanga, Khandhaka, and Parivāra. The 227 rules of the *Pāṭimokkha* represent the core of the Sutta-vibhanga. Monks would periodically chant these rules as a group, an action that functioned to unite them and remind them of the rules to which they adhered. These are the rules that govern all aspects of the lives of monks and nuns. Chapter 5 will look more closely at many of these regulations. The Khandhaka is a broader body of rules that function as a supplement to the core rules of the *Pāṭimokkha*, and is not as concerned with individual adherence. The Khandhaka is concerned with the wider issues of communal discord and actions by the overall order. It also embodies procedures for the ceremonial life of a monastery and regulations for dealing with a schism or the threat of a split within the order. The third major division of the Vinaya corpus is the Parivāra, a collection of auxiliary texts of different dates of origin.

The Sutta-piṭaka is a collection of texts that contain discourses of the Buddha, arranged according to length. There are five major collections of these texts: the collection of long sayings (*Dīgha-nikāya*); collection of middle-length sayings (*Majjhima-nikāya*); a collection of works united together by their contents (*Samyutta-nikāya*); texts arranged by numerical groupings of items (*Anguttara-nikāya*); and a collection of minor works (*Khuddaka-nikāya*).

At a later historical date, the Abhidhamma-piṭaka, consisting of scholarly treatments analyzing material from the Sutta-piṭaka, was added to the other two baskets. There are seven such books in the Pāli collection of the Theravāda (teaching of elders) school, whereas other schools added their own texts. According to one legend, the Buddha preached its seven books in a mentally created body to his dead mother in a heavenly realm.[10] The term *abhidhamma* has a wide range of meanings. For the purposes of this chapter, it implies "understanding the teachings" or "analysis of the teachings." It appears that it developed from lists of doctrinal topics

(*mātṛkās*) that were used to collect and preserve concepts and teachings of the Buddha and to elucidate these teachings from a variety of angles.[11] It is from these lists that Abhidhamma developed into a formal Buddhist scholasticism.

The texts of this collection focus on the way that objects or things (dhammas), either physical or mental, appear to our pre-reflective consciousness. These basic constituents of mental or physical life exist only momentarily. Buddhist schools disagreed about the precise number of moments that they last. These elements are unique and able to exist on their own despite their momentary nature. Because these elements are real, it is possible to identify Abhidhamma as representing a pluralistic realist position. This position suggests that the elements of existence are real, and there are many of these elements that need to be identified.

Because the early Buddhist texts were originally orally recited, and were probably not written until a couple of centuries later, it is nearly impossible to separate the original teachings from additions and changes made by others. It is also impossible to give precise dates for the texts of the canon. Due to the difficult task of determining with any certainty the historically genuine teachings of the Buddha, these early chapters will understand these teachings through the artful interpretive skill of what became to be called the Theravāda school.

In addition to the three baskets, there were books that assumed postcanonical status, such as the *Milindapañha* (Questions for King Milinda), the *Peṭakopadesa* (Discourse on the Traditions), and the *Nettippakaraṇa* (The Guide). Mention should also be made of Buddhaghoṣa, an Indian monk who traveled to Sri Lanka in the fifth century to work on texts by translating commentaries into Pāli and writing a seminal work entitled the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification). Buddhaghoṣa became recognized as a great authority and a spokesperson for Buddhist orthodoxy. The Pāli canon also includes texts called *Jātaka* tales that focus on previous births of the Buddha; *Udāna,* which are solemn utterances; and *Itivuttaka* discourses that are prefixed by "Thus has been said by the Lord." These three works are included with the collection called the Khuddaka-nikāya, which is not recognized as canonical by other schools because of disputes about their authenticity. There are fifteen various types of books within the collection of the Khuddaka-nikāya. In addition to the three texts already mentioned, it is also worth calling attention to the popular *Dhammapada*, *Sutta-nipāta*, *Peta-vatthu*, *Theragāthā*, *Therīgāthā* (which contains poems by nuns), *Niddesa*, and *Apadāna*. Other types of literature were added over time that included short introductions relating the context for a discourse (*nidāna*), faith-inspiring biographies of associates of the Buddha (*avadāna*), and literature explaining the contents of the texts (*upadeśa*). It is possible to find the early Buddhist worldview embodied in some of this literature.

Early Buddhist Worldview

According to the early Buddhist view, the world in which we find ourselves is not unique, because there are innumerable world systems like this one. The Buddhist

world is not a result of the creative effort of some deity, nor is there an ultimate beginning to the world that can be absolutely determined. This world operates and is maintained by natural laws, and is characterized by a cyclical passage of time, which Buddhism divides into eons (*kappa*; Sanskrit: *kalpa*). A *kappa* is defined as the duration of time between the origin of the world and its destruction, although the world itself is without a known beginning—a subtle point made by Buddhists to eliminate the possibility of a god as the creator of the world. It is possible to measure an eon by the length of time that it takes to wear away a huge granite mountain by stroking it with a piece of cloth once every year.[12] Thus the world follows a cyclical pattern much like the seasons of the year. This cyclical pattern continues until the destruction of the world system. After a period of dissolution, the cycle begins again. It is impossible to know for certain when a cycle will end or begin. However, the most significant event to occur within a particular *kappa* is the appearance of a Buddha.

The Buddhist cosmos is depicted with three tiers that contain thirty-one planes of existence; these descend downward from the base of Mount Meru, a central, mythical, and universal mountain that represents the center of the Buddhist world. This mountain is surrounded by four great islands and to the south is located Jambudipā (India). The earth is established on water that rests on wind, which in turn resides on space. This conception of the world suggests a lack of stability—there is no substantial ground. This worldview thus implies a place that is precarious and impermanent.

The three tiers of the world include the following: world of nonform (*arupa-loka*), the world of form (*rūpa-loka*), and the world of desire (*kāma-loka*). The formless realm represents immaterial spheres and modes of existence that are purely mental. It is possible to gain entrance into this realm by mastery of the four formless meditations. Even though it is a formless realm, it is still subject to the law of cause and effect (karma) and to the cycle of rebirth. The world of form represents a fine material sphere that consists of sixteen divisions. Without delving into detail, we may describe these planes as hierarchically ordered from the finest at the top to the grossest at the bottom. These planes are significant in the sense that as you progress upward starting at the sixteenth and lowest plane, the materiality of form becomes finer until it reaches a point of near immateriality. For the purposes of a student of Buddhism, the world of desire is the most important to grasp, because this is the realm in which human beings live. It is described as an elevenfold realm of pleasure and a sevenfold realm of sensual bliss. This world includes the realm of gods and human existence on the fifth level. Although human existence is a combination of bliss and suffering, it is only from this point that one can strive for liberation from the cycle of time. The world of desire also includes the fourfold realm of punishment, which consists of the following: demon (*asura*) world, ghost (*peta*) world, animal world, and various hells.

Besides Indian deities that are not omnipotent or omniscient, cannot liberate or save anyone, are impermanent, and are subject to birth and death like humans, there is a threefold division of the heavens that corresponds to the

threefold division of the world. As one descends from the highest to the lowest of the heavens, the life span decreases.[13] The Buddhist worldview also includes lower divine beings such as *yakkhas* (Sanskrit: *yakṣas*), spirit attendants of the Indian deity Kubera, who is a god of wealth in Hinduism. The yakkhas tend to be depicted as benevolent and associated with the earth and the wealth that it hides. They are sometimes depicted holding flowers, which symbolically connect them with nature and fertility, and a fly-whisk (*caurī*), a symbol connected to court life and the king.[14] Yakkhas can cause, moreover, demonical possession and are known to kill and eat victims, especially females. The Buddhist world also includes snake spirits (*nāgas*), bird spirits (*garudas*), heavenly musicians (*gandharvas*), who are the husbands of the celestial nymphs (*apsarases*), and nature sprits of rivers, earth, mountains, and air.

This collection of polytheistic deities and spirits is opposed by less benevolent figures such as demons (*asuras*) that tend to be linked with celestial elements, in contrast to earthly aspects. The evil malignant demons called *rākṣasas* along with the yakkhas share an antagonism toward prayer and sacrifice.[15] In addition to demonic *piśācas* that eat flesh, there are also evil spirits called *kumbhāṇḍas*, which are demons with testicles the shape and size of pitchers that guard the southern direction. Finally, the archenemy of the Buddha is called Māra, a name etymologically connected to death. A fuller discussion of Māra will follow in the next chapter.

The ghost realm represents a place in which disembodied figures suffer, and are motivated by their anger to inflict suffering on human beings living in the world. Although they are disembodied, these ghosts possess enormous appetites and desires that outdistance their capacity to fulfill them. A ghost is described as having a belly as huge as a mountain with a mouth as small as the eye of a needle. The animal world represents human beings that are reborn as animals for karmic transgressions in a previous lifetime. A pig, for instance, may have been a gluttonous person in a prior life, whereas a tiger may represent a rapacious person.

With respect to the hells, early Buddhist texts enumerate ten hells, but there are later references to eight hot and cold hells. The very worst hell is called Avīcī (no-interval), suggesting by its name that the suffering never ceases. Buddhist monks demonstrated very vivid imaginations when describing the sufferings inflicted on victims. The literature describes such things as hot iron stakes that are driven through a sufferer's hands, feet, and chest. Being cut with sharp razors while suspended upside down, pushed up and down a flaming mountain, or being plunged into a burning cauldron and cooked are other examples of punishment.[16] Or a person may fall into a hell of dung where needle-beaked worms rip away one's flesh. Being cut to pieces, the victim is continually revived to suffer the same torture again. These kinds of punishment continue until a person's karma is exhausted. Monks calculate the time span for each hell from five hundred to sixteen thousand years. The Buddhists correlated the punishments and types of hells to the evil deeds of a person.[17]

2

The Elephant and the Buddha

According to the *Jātakamāla* of Ārya Śūra (fourth century C.E.), the person known historically as the Buddha was born as an elephant during one of his earlier lifetimes. This huge elephant lived alone like an ascetic (a preview of his later life) in a verdant forest far from human habitation. On a particular day, he heard human voices coming from the direction of the desert area. Upon investigating the source of the voices, he encountered several hundred of an original group of a thousand men, who had been abandoned by their king as they now wandered despondently, lost, starving, thirsty, and desperate. The elephant felt compassion for these men clinging to life. After gaining their trust and hearing their sorrowful tale of hardship, the elephant told them to go in a particular direction where they would find water and the body of a dead elephant; they could use the flesh for food and the entrails for bags to collect water. The elephant went ahead of the men, threw himself off the steep cliffs, and died where he reported there would be a body. Finally, the men arrived to find the body of the elephant, and they slowly came to realize that the dead elephant was the same one with whom they had spoken earlier. Impressed by the elephant's self-sacrifice, they considered honoring the animal and cremating its body, but they realized that this would be defeating the wishes of the elephant, which sacrificed his life to save their own. Thus they made use of the elephant's body as it had intended. The elephant's original intention had been to use his body as a vehicle to save the lost men.[1]

Although this tale represents a later addition to Buddhist literature, this narrative demonstrates six important themes in early Buddhism. It introduces the metaphor of the raft that is used to convey others to safety; we will see the metaphor of the raft equated with the teachings (Dhamma) of the Buddha. Second, the elephant plays an important role in the infancy narrative of the Buddha, and later an enraged elephant is sent to destroy the Buddha during his adulthood. The importance of the figure of the elephant to the narrative of the Buddha is evident when Buddhaghoṣa, an important commentator and philosopher, compares

the stature of the Buddha to that of an elephant in his *Path of Purification* (5.26). Third, this tale manifests the spirit of compassion and self-sacrifice in Buddhism. Moreover, it and many others emphasize the importance of giving (*dāna*), a very important virtue in Buddhism. Fifth, it shows the Buddhist acceptance of and conviction in the belief of rebirth. Finally, it manifests a belief that someone as extraordinary as the Buddha needed prior modes of existence and good deeds in order to be born as a human being with the potential of becoming a Buddha, an awakened or enlightened being.

The spirit of selfless giving is evident in the narrative of the final reincarnation of the historical Buddha in the tale of Prince Vessantara in a *Jātaka* story (547). In a narrative reminiscent of the spirit of a Native American Indian potlatch, Prince Vessantara gave away everything. Among his gifts was a white elephant, considered to be a very valuable and auspicious animal and a kind of good luck charm for any king, which he gave to a neighboring kingdom. These caused his own citizens to rebel and chase him away. As he wandered with his wife and children, the gods and nature provided for their welfare because of the virtue of the prince. Finally, a wandering Brahmin came to him and asked for his children. After giving away his children, Vessantara also gave away his wife. In some versions of the narrative, everything is eventually restored to the prince, and in his next life, he is reborn as a man destined to become the Buddha. These examples of the Buddha's past lives are an indispensable part of the frame of reference of the narrative of the Buddha.

As in the case of many other great religious leaders in religious history, we do not know what the exact words of the historical Buddha were because his teachings were transmitted by an oral tradition for a long period of time. We do not know anything about his physical stature or facial appearance. We know little about his personality with absolute certainty. Within the development of the Buddha legend, there is no account of his life that one might term historical. The scholar André Bareau has classified the evidence into three principal groups: facts that are historical, other evidence in which it is difficult to separate legend from history, and accounts that arise in the imagination of the narrators.[2] Due to the limitations of our knowledge, the historical Buddha will always remain a mysterious figure, not unlike the historical Jesus or Muhammad. Nonetheless, the narrative of the Buddha has played a paradigmatic function in various Buddhist countries, serving as a model of behavior, thought, and way of life. Toward the end of this chapter, we will note the continuing relevance of this spiritual paradigm for ordinary people, and how they incorporate it into their lives in a meaningful way.

The narrative of the Buddha's life includes several accounts preserved by different schools of Buddhism, dating to different periods in Buddhist history. The retelling of the Buddha's biography here will rely primarily on evidence from the *Jātaka* tales, the *Majjhima Nikāya*, other examples of Nikāya literature, and the *Buddhacarita* of the poet Aśvaghoṣa (second century C.E.).

The various biographies and biographical material associated with the life of the Buddha are not very helpful with the precise dating of his life. Basing their conclusions on Sri Lankan historical chronicles, earlier Western scholars put the birth of the Buddha in 563 B.C.E. and his death at 483 or 484 B.C.E. These dates were arrived at in part by the so-called dotted record method. According to this method, at the end of each rainy season retreat after the death of the Buddha, a monk would add a dot to the Chinese translation of the Buddhist Theravāda school's commentary on the Vinaya texts, and these dots were totaled in order to reach the proper date of the founder's death. On the basis of material from the northern tradition of Buddhism, a Japanese scholar argued for the dates 466–386 B.C.E. Other Japanese scholars agree that the dates 463–383 B.C.E. are more correct.[3]

Birth Narrative

According to legend, Mahāmāyā, future mother of the Buddha, dreamed that she was taken to the Himalaya Mountains by four guardian angels; there she was bathed, purified, clothed, and perfumed. She reclined on a divine couch. Thereupon, the future Buddha appeared to her as a white elephant, and he proceeded to walk around the couch three times. Finally, he struck her on the right side of her body, and he seemed to enter her womb.[4] Within Indian culture, elephants were associated with royalty. In fact, in some parts of India only a king could own one. Elephants were also associated with fertility, and they were referred to as walking rain clouds. A white elephant was considered very auspicious and a sign of good fortune.

According to Buddhist tradition, this conception occurred on the full moon night of Āṣādha (July). The full moon, and moon symbolism in general, played a significant role in the narrative of the Buddha. In India, the moon was connected to cosmic waters and the immortal drink called *soma*. Since the moon waxed, waned, and eventually disappeared, like things on earth, it was obviously subject to the law of causation, birth, and death. In this case the moon was tied into the Buddhist emphasis on the impermanence of all things. Due to its rhythms, the moon was also associated with the symbolism of death followed by rebirth. In a sense, the Buddha died to the world only to be spiritually reborn, in a pattern similar to the rhythm of the moon. Since time was governed and measured by the phases of the moon in ancient India, the moon is symbolically connected to life, nature, the agricultural cycle, and the menstrual cycle of women. Moreover, the moon's cycles were symbolically connected with darkness and light. The rich symbolism of the moon in Indian culture evoked many of these notions in the birth narrative.

When the queen awoke from her dream she informed her husband King Śuddhodana of her dream, and he summoned numerous eminent Brahmins to ascertain its significance. The Brahmins told the king that he would have a son who would become either a universal monarch or a Buddha, depending on the course of life the son followed.[5]

Dreams play an important role in many religious traditions, because they can be sources of prophecy and a recognized form of cognition. Within the Indian cultural context, dreams are a form of seeing (*darśana*), suggesting that "the dreamer is a passive recipient of an objective vision."[6] The emphasis is on a perceptual experience. It is possible for dreams to bestow charismatic status or religious authority upon the dreamer, but this usually entails proving one's dream in real life. Thus dreams and their interpretation are often subjected to some kind of empirical verification. It is moreover, often possible to gain insight in a dream state because it acts like a memory once lost and now restored.[7] Dreams also offer a certain kind of continuity in the sense that they enable humans to look simultaneously in two directions, backward to a beginning and also forward toward an end.[8] There are hints of these motifs in the narrative of the Buddha with the roles played by the śala tree in the birth and final death narratives. But we need to return to the narrative to witness this.

After a ten-month period, the queen retired to the garden of Lumbinī, where she gave birth while standing and holding unto the branch of a śala tree. According to Buddhist tradition, this occurred on the full moon of Vaiśākha (May). There are versions in which the infant Buddha was received by angels in a golden net, and any impurity from his mother's womb was wiped off.[9] In Aśvaghoṣa's version of the narrative, the infant took seven steps, and the soles of his feet rested evenly upon the ground as he walked, a gait that characterized him as a superior being. The brightness of the footprints was comparable to that of the seven stars. After taking the seven steps, the infant announced that this was his final birth and that he had arrived to save the world.[10]

The number seven plays an important symbolic role in many religious traditions. In ancient Indian religion, it is connected to the Hindu deity Agni, god of fire, who has seven flames or tongues, wives, mothers, or sisters. Seven horses transport the chariot of the sun god through the skies. The number seven also plays an important role in Buddhism. Besides the seven steps taken by the Buddha after his birth, Siddhārtha seeks salvation for seven years, and he circumambulates the Bodhi (enlightenment) tree seven times. There are also seven terraces in the Buddhist paradise, and seven good works will bring positive kamma for the believer in this life.[11]

The meaning of this birth scenario can be seen to include an understanding that the Buddha symbolically transcends the cosmos and abolishes time and space after his birth by means of his seven steps.[12] The narrative also incorporates the symbolic distinction between pure and impure. Within the Indian cultural context and its Brahmanical notions of pollution, the infant Buddha and his close relatives were not subject to the normal pollution associated with blood released in the act of giving birth. The birth narrative concludes with the infant Buddha's praises being sung by spiritual beings and men of wisdom who predict his future greatness. This is a way to emphasis the extraordinary nature of the event for all humankind.

The infant Buddha's mother died seven days after he was born. The future Buddha was named Siddhattha according to the *Nidāna-kathā*, or Siddhārtha ("he whose aim is accomplished") according to the later *Lalitavistara* (first century C.E.). He was born into the Śākya tribe, and he belonged to the Gotama (Sanskrit: Gautama) clan (*gotra*) in the northeastern part of India on the Indian-Nepalese border. His father was a local chieftain in Kapilavastu, named Śuddhodana. It is not unusual in the Buddhist literature for the Buddha to be referred to by his clan name or by Śākyamuni (sage of the Śākyas).

According to the narrative, Siddhārtha lived a comfortable life of a prince in the palace of his father. Upon reaching adulthood, he married a woman named Yasodharā, who gave birth to a son named Rāhula (fetter). The name of his son was significant as an indication that the life of the householder tied one to family life and a larger society of relationships. Siddhārtha lived the life of a royal householder in magnificent splendor. His wealthy father, for instance, gave Siddhārtha three mansions suitable for the three major seasons of the year. Each of the mansions was built to heights of nine, seven, or five stories. They were populated with a plethora of beautiful dancing girls, who were presumably at the sensual disposal of the young prince. A *Jātaka* narrative compares the young Siddhārtha to a Hindu god surrounded by celestial nymphs and numerous musicians.[13] And like a Hindu deity, the young Siddhārtha led a hedonistic life. Remembering what others had predicated about his future vocational possibilities, the king was fearful that his son might become an ascetic. Thus he never ceased providing every kind of pleasure to him. By following this pattern of lavish giving, the king hoped to entice Siddhārtha with worldly delights and keep him attached to the world. The perspective of the narrative at this point is that this entanglement in earthly pleasures was intended to represent a major obstacle that the future Buddha would have to overcome if he was to achieve his spiritual destiny rather than a political destiny. Since the narrative depicts a person immersed in the pleasures of life and oblivious to everything else, a major disruption was needed to disturb the hedonistic equilibrium of Siddhārtha. The narrative of the four signs provided this.

Renunciation of the World

Learning that his son wanted to wander through the gardens of the royal grounds, the king ordered all unpleasant or offensive matter removed from his highway. Siddhārtha had his attendant prepare his chariot for a day's sojourn along the royal highway, and set forth on what would prove to be an awakening that would send him in another direction altogether. When Siddhārtha set forth, the gods of the pure abode seized this opportunity to show him a series of signs.

While Siddhārtha rode along the royal highway, a deity appeared by the side of the road as an old man. Upon seeing this old man, Siddhārtha became filled with apprehension, and he asked his charioteer what kind of man possesses white

hair, bent shoulders, bleary vision, and a withered body.[14] The charioteer replied that such a man has reached old age. When he learned what his son had witnessed, the king increased efforts to prevent Siddhārtha from seeing any further unpleasant things. His efforts, however, proved useless. On subsequent days Siddhārtha saw a diseased man, a dead man, and a monk. These four signs witnessed by Siddhārtha disrupted his existential center of gravity and inflicted mental pain upon him.

After witnessing the four signs, Siddhārtha returned to his father to ask his permission to become a hermit. His father refused because the prince was too young and should prepare himself to assume, eventually, governance of the kingdom. The king argued that by disobeying his wishes, Siddhārtha would be acting irreligiously.[15] Respectfully, Siddhārtha replied that he would give up the thought of leaving home if the king promised him that he could be saved from four calamities: death, disease, old age, and loss of earthly possessions.[16] The king replied that there was no one who could grant these four things, and he then took precautions to keep the prince within the palace.

The deities of the pure abode knew that the time had come for Siddhārtha to leave the city. These divine beings arrived on earth and made all the women in the palace appear unattractive to the prince.[17] The deities also unlocked all the doors and gates of the palace, after putting everyone into a deep sleep. Finding the sleeping women loathsome because of their contorted bodies and disheveled appearance, Siddhārtha asked Chandaka, a trusted charioteer, to saddle his horse named Kanthaka. Chandaka was uncertain whether he should follow the prince's order or inform the king, but he was given spiritual strength by the gods. Thereupon, with the help of his charioteer, Siddhārtha left the palace, reached the forest, and clothed himself in hermit garb.

After his father found Siddhārtha missing, he sent ambassadors to induce him to return home, but they had no effect on the young man. Siddhārtha also refused to succumb to the suggestion of King Bimbisāra that he lead a life of pleasure. In response to the king's inducements, Siddhārtha replied in part by asking, "A hare rescued from the serpent's mouth—would it go back again to be devoured? Holding a torch and burning himself—would not a man let it go?"[18] By means of his own determination and fortitude, Siddhārtha was able to overcome various kinds of obstacles in the form of inducements to change his mind. Only some of these were human entreaties.

Siddhārtha discovered that living in the forest was dangerous and distracting. The latter problem was especially acute for a person who did not have powers of deep concentration. It was common for recluses to encounter fear and dread in the forest, which were attributed to their impure bodily actions, Siddhārtha admitted, however, to a Brahmin named Janussoni that he gained confidence in the forest because of his pure bodily actions.[19] Furthermore, he related to this Brahmin some of his experiences in the forest and how he conquered fear and dread.[20] Why would the forest evoke feelings of fear and dread? Within the context

of Indian folk religion, trees, groups of trees, parks, and forests were considered strange places of solitude and darkness. In addition, dangerous animals and reptiles inhabited the forest. These places of danger possessed a sacred character that was probably related to the fear and dread to which texts refer. The night and the darker phases of the moon contributed to the mysterious and sacred character of the forest. There was a prevalent folk belief among Indians that spirits resided in the trees of the forest, and they appeared to be particularly dangerous during periods of darkness, which was often associated with chaos in early Indian literature.[21]

Within the narrative of the Buddha, the forest played an important part. The forest was often the site of the cult of trees, and this cult was generally connected with fertility. It was not uncommon, for instance, for various species of trees to be married to each other. Moreover, barren women—who were in an especially unfortunate situation given the importance of being able to bear children in Indian culture—participated in the rite of tree marriage in order to become fertile. Within the context of this cult, there was also a connection between the lunar cycle and the menstrual cycle of women.[22] The notion of birth or new life was, of course, connected with fertility. Thus the forest had ample symbolic value in connection with Siddhārtha's search for a new mode of life. From another perspective, if one understands that the forest represented the wilderness, it is possible to conclude that the forest also symbolized chaos, which was the primal, unformed reality.[23] Chaos was a place uninhabited by human beings, lying on the outskirts of human space. The renouncer of the world sought chaos, for by mastering chaos, one's was renewed; thus out of the chaos a new person was created.

For six long and arduous years, Siddhārtha practiced various types of austerities (*tapas*) without reaching his goal. For instance, he related to Aggivessana that he stopped breathing in and out through his mouth and nose unrhymically. This type of ascetic practice had some adverse consequences because Siddhārtha reported having very bad headaches, hearing loud noises, and suffering intestinal gas and increased body heat.[24] In another account, the Buddha discussed some of the other extreme forms of asceticism that he had practiced, such as sleeping on human bones in cemeteries, crawling into cow pens to eat cow manure, and consuming his own feces and urine. He described these practices to emphasize that they were ineffective.[25]

In addition to these extreme forms of asceticism and their negative consequences, Siddhārtha now considered abstaining almost entirely from food. In fact, he was eating so little his body became emaciated, his eyes sank into his head, and his scalp shriveled and shrank. He declared that when he touched the skin of his abdomen he could grasp his spinal cord. In time, it is said, the skin of his abdomen began to cleave to his backbone.[26] Over a period a time, it became evident to Siddhārtha that this process of self-mortification was not enabling him to reach higher states of consciousness. He therefore rejected this way as a path to enlightenment. From the point of view of those who composed and preserved

these stories—the defenders of the canonical doctrine—they proved the dangers and barrenness of the practice of austerities and could be used to bolster lay support for the Buddhist path.[27]

Awakening Narrative

Because Siddhārtha saw the futility of subjecting his body to extreme emaciation, he decided to take some food. There were five monks attending to him at this time, and they became very upset when they saw him take some nourishment of boiled rice and were critical of him for wavering in his asceticism. These five monks are taken to symbolize the bounded spirit of Indian ascetics in general who would not seek true salvation but rather live in the stupidity of their practice of austerities.[28] In other words, their practice of austerities had become an end in itself and, from the Buddhist viewpoint, did not lead to final liberation. After taking some nourishment, Siddhārtha's strength was renewed, and after being reinvigorated he resolved to achieve enlightenment.

With restored vitality and strength, Siddhārtha proceeded to the Bodhi (enlightenment) tree, which was an aśvattha or pīpal tree, and began to practice deep meditation sitting beneath it. Māra, a personification of evil, viewed Siddhārtha's attempt to achieve enlightenment as a threat to his domain, and there ensued a cosmic battle between them.[29]

It is possible to catch a glimpse of what was at stake in this battle by considering the figure of Māra. The term *māra* comes from a root that means to die, and Māra is the being that slays or causes to die.[30] The other terms that come from the same root as Māra refer to conditions that are impermanent and subject to death, and defilements, fetters, and interruptions that cause death. Another related term means to kill or destroy.[31] Māra is thus the symbol of suffering in Buddhism, and in Buddhist scripture, his realm is equated with birth and death. Māra also represents an almost infinitely broad variety of unenlightened states of mind. Thus he serves in Buddhist literature as a metaphor for death and negative states of mind.[32]

Since Māra failed to convince Siddhārtha that he should gain merit so that he would be rewarded in heaven, the cosmic confrontation between them began. Māra sent his hideous army to destroy the meditating Siddhārtha, but their weapons were powerless against him. The spears, lances, and javelins thrown by the army could not harm him because they were changed into five-colored lotus flowers by the radiance emanating from Siddhārtha.[33] In some accounts, Māra used his considerable powers to create whirlwinds, a great rainstorm, flaming rocks, and darkness—but nothing was able to deter Siddhārtha.[34] Realizing their defeat by the seated meditator, the army of Māra fled in all directions. Māra also sent his three daughters named Discontent, Delight, and Desire to seduce Siddhārtha, but they were just as unsuccessful as Māra's army.

Toward the end of the cosmic encounter between these two antithetical

forces, Māra and Siddhārtha engaged in an argument over the seat that Siddhārtha had been sitting on during the assault by Māra's troops.[35] Throughout the attack, it had been Māra's intention to dislodge him from this seat. Why was this important? Siddhārtha's seat was symbolic of a royal throne. Māra claimed that the seat was his because he had given away the most alms. The Buddha called forth the earth to be a witness to his own generosity in his former births. Generosity was a primary duty of kings in ancient India, and only those who were the most generous or who had earned the most merit for their acts of generosity could legitimately claim to be king, entitled to the royal throne. Thus, from one point of view, the battle between the Buddha and Māra was a struggle over kingship.[36] From another perspective, Māra was the guardian of the threshold of the unknown against those who sought to win and obtain it; he also bound human beings to the realm of pain and sorrow. Within the context of the Indian religious tradition, the Buddha's conquest of Māra was a reenactment of the myth of Indra's victory over the demonic serpent Vṛtra and the release of cosmic light, warmth, and water, which were elements necessary for life.[37]

With the defeat of Māra behind him, the Buddha proceeded toward *samādhi* (concentration). This procedure calmed his mind, made it one-pointed, and enabled him to focus it. Siddhārtha attained the four meditations, which prepared him for the great awakening. The first meditation was characterized by initial and discursive thought, which were absent in the second meditation. In the third meditation he experienced equanimity. The fourth meditation was characterized by the absence of anguish and joy. Siddhārtha's mind had now become purified by equanimity and mindfulness.[38] The significance of the four mediations was related to the suppression of all desires, bad thoughts, secondary mental activities, and sentiments that could distract the mind. The objective was to concentrate and unify the mind on its object.[39]

Aśvaghoṣa's biography relates that the Buddha attained right perception in the first watch of the night. This enabled him to recollect his former births.[40] In the middle watch of the night, he reached the knowledge of the pure *devas* (deities), whom he saw in heaven and hell. In another account, there is a slightly different emphasis: in the second and third watches of the night, the Buddha attained, respectively, knowledge of impermanence and knowledge of the Four Noble Truths.[41] In a sense, the third form of knowledge possessed more importance than the other two from the viewpoint of the doctrine: the sudden appearance of knowledge of the Four Noble Truths provoked deliverance.[42] In short, it contained the essence of the enlightenment. Free from the discomfort of his body, the Buddha sat for seven days looking into his own mind. It is interesting that the text mentions that he did not blink his eyes, because this is a characteristic that differentiates humans from gods, who never blink.

With his enlightenment, Siddhārtha was now a Buddha, which simply means "one who has awakened." The term "buddha" implies that everyone else is asleep. In fact, the rest of humanity spends their entire lives in a condition of not being

able to see the world and the human situation as it truly is. The metaphors of truly seeing and blindness are frequently encountered in Buddhist texts. These types of metaphorical distinction make it evident that becoming a buddha is a unique experience, and a buddha is unlike anyone else.[43]

Teaching Career

The Buddha's teaching career spanned approximately forty-five years. He did not spend long periods of time in a single place, except in the rainy season, but rather wandered to villages, towns, and cities, spreading his message and gaining converts to his view (*diṭṭhi*). Some people joined him as monks and others as lay followers. The various narratives about his teaching career tend to agree on two points: the Buddha made a personal impact on those who heard him, and people were drawn to him, as if he was a magnet and they were metal filings. To what can we attribute his impact and attractiveness? The Buddha had charisma, a gift of leadership by which one is able to convince others of one's message and motivate them.

There is some evidence within the Buddhist textual tradition that the Buddha almost did not have a teaching career because he was inclined not to instruct others.[44] There is another tradition that the Buddha was asked by the Hindu deity Brahmā to teach for the welfare of all beings.[45] But the general opinion within the Buddhist tradition is that the Buddha decided to return to the world and teach because of his compassion for the plight of the inhabitants of the world. Here we can only touch on some highlights of this teaching career.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha proceeded to the Deer Park near the sacred city of Benares or Vārānasī to give his first sermon, referred to by the Buddhist tradition as "the Turning of the Wheel of the Dhamma." There he found his former ascetic colleagues, and he related what he had discovered. As the ascetics listened to his sermon, the one named Koṇḍañña began to experience his teaching personally, according to one account.[46] From the very depths of his being, the teaching arose in him. The ascetic's impression was that this was something that he had always known, but that he was now finally recognizing it. Upon watching the reaction of his former colleague, the Buddha repeated excitedly "Koṇḍañña knows!"[47] This experience caused the ascetic to become a Buddhist stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), someone who has now entered the path to liberation. This narrative depicts the Buddha acting as a midwife. In other words, he was assisting at the birth of an enlightened human being by allowing what was already there to come forth. Eventually, all of the Buddha's former ascetic colleagues attained enlightenment. By converting his former colleagues to his view, the charisma of the Buddha was confirmed.

This initial sermon and conversion of the five ascetics was not an ordinary sermon or teaching situation. The turning of the wheel of the Dhamma (teaching) was a cosmic event, witnessed by the gods of the earth and the six levels of the heavens as well as the hells. The words of the Buddha functioned like a cosmo-

logical uproar that reached into the heavenly worlds of Brahmā. This cosmic uproar embodied several meaningful events because it marked the termination of an age; it represented the coming of a *cakkavatti* (world-king); it announced the appearance of a Buddha; it marked the arrival of an auspicious or favorable pronouncement; and marked the point when a monk asked a Buddha about the highest wisdom.

This first sermon given to the five ascetics concerned the Four Noble Truths: first, all life is suffering; second, there is a cause; third, there is a way to suppress suffering; and fourth, there is a path to follow. The second sermon concerned the doctrine about the nonexistence of a permanent self or soul.[48] These topics will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. There is no way for us to be certain about the precise teachings of the Buddha and the historical sequence in which they were presented. The important point is not the historical accuracy of the account, but rather that the Buddhist tradition has come to understand the sequence of the teachings in this way.

Another text contains a suggestive story about a young son of a rich merchant living in the city of Vārānasī named Yasa.[49] In a narrative similar to the early biography of the Buddha, Yasa awoke one night to see his servants lying asleep on the floor around his bed, looking so awful that he was filled with disgust. He cried in distress about how terrifying and horrible this scene was to him. Slipping surreptitiously out of his father's house, he set out to find something better. His seeking took him to the Deer Park, where he encountered the Buddha, who had risen early that morning. By means of his acute mental powers, the Buddha recognized Yasa and motioned him to be seated. Thereupon, the Buddha taught the young man the Dhamma. In response, Yasa became happy and hopeful. This is a good example of a person who is transformed by the teaching of the Buddha and being metaphorically dyed a purer color by the doctrine.

The Buddha noticed an old merchant coming toward them and surmised that it must be the young man's father. Using his spiritual powers (*iddhi*), the Buddha made Yasa disappear. The display of such yogic powers was not encouraged by the Buddha, although he was depicted as using them to win converts or to make some kind of point in various narratives. The Buddha had the distressed father sit down, and instructed him as his invisible son watched the proceedings. The impressed father expressed his confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma (teaching), and the Saṅgha (monastic community). According to the Buddhist tradition, this was the earliest expression of taking what were later known as the three refuges. While listening to the teaching of the Buddha directed at his father, Yasa became enlightened. Then the Buddha revealed the young man to his father, reunited them, and they went home together for the sake of Yasa's mother. The father invited the Buddha for dinner, and there the Buddha instructed the wife, who tradition claims was the first female lay disciple.

Not everyone converted personally by the Buddha was a virtuous person. According to one text, there was a mass murderer named Angulimāla who wore a

necklace of 999 severed fingers of his victims. Needing just one more victim to reach a thousand and fulfill a vow, the murderer spied the Buddha walking through the forest and decided to make him the final victim. Angulimāla ran after his intended victim rapidly as the Buddha walked along at a leisurely pace, but the killer could not catch up with his target. Finally, Angulimāla spoke to the Buddha, and he was converted to the path of Buddhism. After converting, Angulimāla, a killer of 999 victims, encountered a woman in labor, and he saved her life and that of her baby by reciting an act of truth that affirmed that he had not harmed any living creature since joining the Buddhist movement.[50] The truth statement is recited today in Sri Lanka to assist women safely deliver their children.[51]

The conversion of royalty and members of the Brahmin caste to Buddhism was a frequent theme in many narratives. For instance, according to the *Mahāvagga* (1.23), two friends from Brahmin families, named Sāriputta and Moggallāna (also spelled Maudgalyāyana), joined the order. There was a tradition that the Buddha had a premonition that these gifted individuals would be his chief disciples. Sāriputta was known for being austere in his practice and possessing an analytical mind, whereas Moggallāna was noted for his yogic powers. Śāriputra was converted to Buddhism after meeting a disciple of the Buddha. Since he had made a pact with Moggallāna that whoever reached the truth first would help the other, Śāriputra told his friend about the message of the Buddha, and they set off to join the teacher.

The conversion of followers to the new Buddhist movement included the Buddha's family. When his father heard that the Buddha was teaching in the area, he sent a large entourage to invite him to visit Kapilavastu. According to the account in the *Jātaka* tales (1.87), after hearing the Buddha preach, the group became adherents, and they neglected to give the Buddha his father's message. After this scenario was repeated several times, the Buddha finally received the message and went home. His former tribe, the Śākyas, refused to pay homage to him. In response to the social snub, the Buddha staged a marvelous display of power (*iddhi*) by levitating his body above the group, while jets of fire and water gushed from his limbs as he traversed a jeweled causeway in the sky. The Śākyas were stunned into acquiescence and bowed down before the Buddha. The Buddha's teaching to those that he formerly knew motivated some of them to join his monastic order. The most notable of these converting figures included the Buddha's son Rāhula and his cousin Ānanda. The latter became his personal attendant for twenty years. Another convert was Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha, who became infamous in Buddhist history as a disrupter of the monastic community.

Narratives of Death

Later in the career of the Buddha, his cousin Devadatta vowed to kill the Buddha, and he conspired with Prince Ajātaśatru, son of King Bimbisāra of Magadha, to assume leadership of the Buddhist order. Prince Ajātaśatru attempted to get his

father to join the conspiracy, but the father refused, deciding instead to turn the reins of the kingdom over to his son. After Bimbisāra abdicated his throne, his son had him thrown into prison, where he died shortly thereafter. In the first plot to kill the Buddha, Devadatta hired some archers to assassinate him, but they were overcome with remorse and fled when they encountered their intended target. Then Devadattta unleashed a fierce, intoxicated elephant. As the enraged elephant charged the Buddha, Ānanda advised destroying the wild beast. But the Buddha threw Ānanda aside out of harm's way and exuded loving-kindness toward the elephant, which instantly became docile. Next, Devadatta decided to perform the murder himself by hurling a huge rock at the Buddha, but the rock was severed in half and passed by the Buddha without striking him, except to give him a bloody toe. His monks wanted to hire a bodyguard for the Buddha, but he told them that it was impossible to murder a Buddha. After three failures, Devadatta resorted to slandering the Buddha and attempting to cause a schism in the monastic order. Devadatta's gains in support were countered by the Buddha's prediction that Devadatta would be reborn in hell. In another version of the narrative, Devadatta disrupted the Buddha's sermons to demand repeatedly that the enlightened being step down as leader of the community, but the Buddha refused and called Devadatta spittle. Although Devadatta was expelled from the order, he persuaded a large number of novices to secede from the order. But Śāriputra and Moggallāna won back the secessionist monks by preaching while Devadatta slept. Finally, Devadatta lost the support of King Ajātasatru, who became a lay disciple of the Buddha. Unable to recover from an illness, Devadatta died, was cremated, the earth opened, and his remains reappeared in the Avīci hell.

According to a classical text, the Buddha experienced sickness and pain during the rainy season while staying at Veśālī, but he did not think that it would be right to die without first addressing his disciples.[52] By means of his extraordinary willpower, he overcame his illness. Ānanda told the Buddha that he did not think that the Buddha would pass away until he had left final instructions for the monastic community. The Buddha responded to Ānanda that he had taught the truth without making a distinction between exoteric and esoteric teachings. In fact, the Buddha admitted that he had kept nothing hidden and had not taught with a closed fist. Thus the monastic order was not dependent on the Buddha, and there was no need to leave any instructions. Then the Buddha informed Ānanda that his life was coming to an end after eighty years on earth. Moreover, the Buddha told Ānanda to be a lamp unto himself, take refuge in himself, not to rely on any external refuge, and to hold onto the truth as a refuge.[53] Thereafter, the Buddha had an encounter with Māra, who urged him to die. But the Buddha vowed to teach some more for the benefit of the monastic community. Finally, he acknowledged that he would die at the end of three months.

While staying at Pāvā, the Buddha was invited by the son of a goldsmith named Cunda to dinner. According to different accounts, the meal included some substance that in Pāli was termed *sūkaramaddava*, identified by modern scholars

as either a soft pork product or some kind of mushroom. The food caused internal bleeding and diarrhea. Although he was very ill, the Buddha and his followers went to Kusinārā. After arriving there, the Buddha instructed Ānanda to set a couch between two śala trees—same type of tree as the one to which the mother of the Buddha clung as she gave birth to her son. The Buddha reclined on the couch with his head pointing north, and he lay on his right side. The northern direction and right side were both considered auspicious. The Buddha instructed Ānanda not to weep or be depressed. While he was lying there, a monk stood in front of him waving a fan to cool him, but the Buddha rebuked him. Ānanda was astounded to hear such harsh language from the Buddha, who had to explain that he wanted the monk fanning him to move so that the deities who had come to witness the rare passing away of a Buddha would have an unobstructed view. With his death, the Buddha achieved his final nibbāna (*parinibbāna*). This meant that he was no longer alive in the usual sense, but neither was he dead in the usual sense of the term—that is, he was no longer subject to the cycle of rebirth. The Buddhist tradition referred to the Buddha after his death and parinibbāna as the Tathāgata. This term means that he has come thus (*tathā*) and gone thus (*gata*). In other words, the Buddha came into the world, gained enlightenment, and transcended the cycle of causation, space, and time. In short, he has gone to nibbāna.

The texts report some miraculous events associated with the death of the Buddha. Upon his death, there occurred an earthquake and thunder, and the funeral pyre for the cremation of his body ignited by itself.[54] The body was burnt completely, so the only parts that remained were his bones. This suggests that the corrupt flesh was totally extinguished. Finally, the funeral pyre was extinguished by astounding streams of water that surged up from the interior of the earth and fell from sky. It is possible to see in this a symbolic purification of his bodily remains, which now become sacred relics, and it is also possible to understand the relics of the Buddha as uniting the earth and sky, such as one finds in some hymns in ancient Vedic religion. Just as dying between two śala trees recalled his birth narrative, these unusual natural phenomena also remind one of events at his birth. In a sense, nibbāna represented the end of the cycle of life for this enlightened being. And with the death and *parinibbāna* of the Buddha, his life narrative had come full circle and was concluded.

The historically most significant event to occur immediately after the death of the Buddha was the collection and distribution of his relics. The Mallas of Kusinārā gathered the relics together in order to construct a *stūpa* (memorial mound) over them, but the representatives of seven other kingdoms also claimed the relics, and the various groups were ready to fight the intransigent Mallas for them, until a Brahmin named Dhūmrasagotra persuaded all the parties to agree to share the relics.

In retrospect, the sacred biography of the Buddha operates on at least two levels. Its most dramatic and crucial function is to serve as a paradigm to lead other readers or listeners to question their own life situation and to lead them to

enlightenment.[55] At another level, the sacred biography serves as a paradigm for human imitation. This does not necessarily mean that someone imitating the life pattern of the Buddha will be motivated to renounce the world and strive to attain liberation. An example of imitation on a smaller scale is the *shimbu* (confirmation) ceremony in Burma, in which a young boy imitates Siddhārtha by dressing like a prince, riding in a procession under royal umbrellas, and then, forsaking the world for a few days, living as a monk. Again, in imitation of the Buddha, laypeople observe the moral-ethical precepts of Buddhism, even though their intention is to gain a better rebirth and not to achieve nibbāna.

The Dhamma and Authority of the Buddha

In the narrative of the Buddha's death, he instructed his disciples from his deathbed to rely on two things: their own experience and the Dhamma (teachings).[56] Within the Pāli tradition, the term Dhamma possesses a variety of meanings. It can mean holy wisdom, salvific truth, teaching, and doctrine. When Dhamma refers to the teaching of the Buddha, a person must apply *pariyatti*, which means to take the teaching into one's heart and mind, think about it, repeat it to oneself, and make it an essential aspect of one's consciousness. This teaching is normative and authoritative. According to the Pāli commentarial tradition, Dhamma transcends the world and its social norms. As the truth that possesses saving power, it stands at the center of Buddhist soteriology. Besides embodying the potential to save a person lost in the realm of suffering, the Dhamma protects, supports, and preserves a person. With its guarantee of safety and assurance of deliverance, Dhamma provides a truth on which one can depend. The Pāli tradition also refers to Dhamma as ninefold because it comprises four paths, four fruits, and nibbāna. The four paths and their fruits of sanctification refer to the levels of attainment that one can achieve: one, stream enterer (*sotāpatti*); two, once returner (*sakadāgāmin*); three, nonreturner (*anāgāmin*); and four, (4) *arahant* ("worthy one"), a fully enlightened being that will be discussed more fully in chapter 5.[57]

From one perspective, the teachings of the Buddha were intended to serve as a guide, whereas personal experience was intended to function as a means of verifying the Dhamma (teaching). From another perspective, the Buddha identified himself with his Dhamma: "He who sees the Dhamma sees me, he who sees me sees the Dhamma."[58] The Buddha knew that he would die some day. But how would his movement survive? Apparently, the Buddha sagaciously attempted to convert his personal charisma based on his ability and qualifications into something resembling what can be called office charisma, which tends to be more rational, institutionalized, and demands a tempered obedience to the teaching.

This transformation of his personal charisma into something more enduring was evident in the metaphor of the raft. In one text, there is a narrative about a traveler who encountered a large body of water that he desperately needed to get

across.[59] Because there was no bridge or ferry, he constructed a raft, and he rowed it across. Once he was safely on the other side, he wondered what he should do with the raft: Should he carry the raft on his back? Should he simply moor it and continue on his way? The message of the Buddha is that everything in the world is transient. This is also true of the raft, which is like the teachings of the Buddha. Once the teachings or raft are used to cross the river of life, one does not need to continue to grasp them. Once the travelers are safely on the other shore, the job of the Dhamma is completed because suffering is relieved and the travelers attain the peace of nibbāna.

The metaphor of the raft suggests that the Dhamma (teaching) of the Buddha should be applied in a pragmatic way. Rather than a theoretical body of knowledge, the Dhamma is a method of liberation. The Buddha compares his Dhamma (teaching) to the flavor of ocean water—salty. His point is that his teaching possesses one flavor, which is also that of liberation.[60] It is, more precisely, a method intended to help one see correctly. This method of seeing rightly brings about the cessation of ignorance and insight into the truth of things and events. And this is an insight that everyone can attain, just as the Buddha did. Along these same lines, Dhamma represents a prescriptive force in the sense that it stands for the truth that must be realized and what needs to happen for its realization. And progressing toward realization involves a certain amount of skill.[61]

Because the Dhamma (teachings) of the Buddha represents the ultimate truth, it takes precedence over the Buddha, but at the same time it constitutes the source of his authority.[62] In one text, the small clan of the Kālāmas went to the Buddha for advice because they had encountered numerous itinerant teachers with different messages that were based on diverse sets of authority.[63] Thus they were confused about what was true, how they might reconcile the conflicting teachings, and what criteria they could use to differentiate true views from false ones. In response to their confusion, the Buddha told them that he rejected teachings based on reports, tradition, hearsay, supposed authority of religious texts, claims made based on rational knowledge or speculation, the personal reliability of a person, and respect for a teacher. If none of these are adequate grounds for authority, is there any source of authority on which one can rely? The Buddha replied that the members of the Kālāmas should come to know for themselves and to rely on this existential experience as their source of authority. Needless to say, the Buddha's position was intended to undermine the claims and pretensions of the Brahmanical tradition, with its claim of authority based on the revealed Vedic scriptures. The Buddha's position reflected his conviction that one should verify Dhamma for oneself by means of one's own experience.

After the death of the Buddha, early Buddhism broke into many different schools that eventually evolved into the path of Theravāda Buddhism. When a new school developed it was common for its members to create a new recension of the scriptures. The Theravāda community identified its scriptures—the so-called *Tipiṭaka* or three baskets—with the word of the Buddha and the authority

associated with the person of the Buddha. Over a period of time, the Theravādins made a distinction between the words that the Buddha verbally uttered and other words that he mentally expressed.[64] This enabled the Theravādins to bring later teachings within the Buddha's authority and to reconcile the historical development of the *Tipiṭaka* with their position that the literary corpus represented the word of the Buddha.[65]

Nonetheless, it is curious to encounter parts of the Pāli canon in which the Buddha refers to the incipient decline of his teaching during his lifetime.[66] The Buddha is even depicted as predicting the disappearance of his teaching in the future.[67] These positions reflect the Buddha's realism and his conviction that everything is impermanent, even his teachings. In this case he is being very consistent with his own thought.

Dhamma and Language

A problem arises when we consider that the Dhamma of the Buddha was expressed in language. This is problematic because language is a human product that is uttered in a world characterized by impermanence. This would seem to suggest that language is also impermanent, so how can language embody the truth of the Dhamma? It order to respond to this question, it is necessary to review briefly the early Buddhist understanding of language.

The Buddha did not accept a belief in the divine nature of words. For the Buddha, words were ordinary creations of human beings to be used for practical purposes of communication. Because words have no intrinsic worth or metaphysical grounding in a supreme power or entity, they are only valuable in an instrumental way in order to accomplish something.[68] In early Buddhism the nature of language is ambiguous because it is subject to the cycle of temporal and causational flux, like everything else in existence, which implies that it cannot have any permanent or enduring nature. Words and any concepts that they may form are thus not absolute—but neither are they entirely arbitrary.[69] If words are impermanent and nonabsolute, it is impossible for language to have an enduring structure, although it is possible for there to be a kinship among words based on their usage.[70] It is best to think of language as having limited and supplemental characteristics, and being unable to embody or express absolute truth.

Although no absolute truth can be expressed in language, the word or teaching (Dhamma) of the Buddha is embodied in its literature. Unlike ordinary language, the unique, supreme teaching of the Buddha, possessing its own structure and logic, is not in a state of bondage, and its meaning can be grasped by an interpreter.[71] This implies that the words of the Buddha are based on his enlightenment experience, and this also suggests that they are liberating words and not the language of a state of ordinary bondage. A highly respected Buddhist scholar explains that "The meaning is single and invariable, while the letter is multiple and infinitely variable."[72] This does not imply that the Theravāda school accepted

the word of the Buddha as a means to liberation in the sense that the utterance or acceptance of the words functions to liberate a person. If the teachings accorded with the experience of the monk, the words of the Buddha could then be accepted as authoritative and truthful: "Monks, this Dhamma is self-realized, timeless, a come-and-see-thing, leading onward, to be understood individually by the wise."[73] The words of the Buddha are important as a guide, but the individual is encouraged to test the words with his or her own experience. While on his deathbed, the Buddha says to his trusted disciple Ānanda: "Be a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a Lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the Truth. Look not for refuge to any one besides yourselves."[74] As well as acceding to the Dhamma (teaching) of the Buddha based on his earthly utterances, the Theravāda community also accepted the Vinaya (monastic regulations) as the words of the historical figure.[75] Over time, the word of the Buddha becomes a formal category that "did not necessarily imply the Buddha actually spoke these words but only that they conformed in some way to what were taken to be the basic lines of his teaching."[76] The special nature of the words or teachings (Dhamma) of the historical Buddha is made clear by Buddhaghoṣa, the erudite Buddhist commentator and philosopher, when he claims that the Dhamma possesses meaning and intention.[77]

Due in part to the impermanent nature of language, the Buddha did not think that the Dhamma should be taken literally. A Pāli text classifies people who hear the teachings into four types: the best type understands the teaching upon hearing it; the second type needs to reflect on what they hear; the third type needs to work at it; the last type does not really understand the teachings, even though they are heard, recited, and remembered.[78] In another text, a monk named Ariṭṭha criticizes the prohibition against sexual intercourse in the monastic code. Other monks report Ariṭṭha to the Buddha, who strongly reprimands him.[79] The point of this episode is that Ariṭṭha took the Buddha's prohibition against sensual desire in a literal way and failed to recognize that it precluded sexual intercourse, whereas the Buddha made it perfectly clear that sensual desire certainly included sexual intercourse.

Cult of the Buddha in the Pāli Tradition

During his life, the Buddha's charisma and message won the admiration and praise of others. There is evidence that he was so highly revered by his contemporaries that some conceived of him as a divine being. As his deeds and achievements became magnified after his death, he was separated from ordinary people as someone with authority as a teacher, a self-enlightened being, and wise person. The commentarial literature refers to him as "the eye of the world" and the "embodiment of wisdom," and it refers to the colorful and dazzling rays that emanate from his body.[80] The Buddha was called Bhagavā (one endowed with great riches), Satthā (teacher), Tathāgata (thus gone one), and Mahapurisa

(Superman). These honorific appellations tended to overshadow the historical person and emphasized a universal Buddha.

The Theravāda belief in the historical nature of the Buddha did not deter it from emphasizing him as the Mahapurisa (Superman or Great Man). The Superman possesses thirty-two physical characteristics.[81] Among these characteristics are the following: projecting heels; hands and feet like a web; legs like those of an antelope; concealed male organs in a sheath; a halo; body hairs pointing upward; smooth and golden skin; forty even, gapless, and white teeth; jaws like those of a lion; voice like that of the god Brahmā; blue eyes; eyelashes like a cow's; white, soft hair growing between the eyebrows; a long tongue; symmetrical bodily proportions; and so forth. These various characteristics emphasize his bodily perfection. Overall, the physical appearance of the Buddha serves two purposes. First, it indicates a connection between his physical appearance and other kinds of perfections that are associated with his action, cognition, attitude, and control. Examples of these nonphysical perfections are the four immeasurables (that is, friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity), eight liberations and spheres of mastery (that is, different kinds of altered states of consciousness produced by meditation techniques), and six kinds of supernatural awareness (that is, ability to see and hear at a distance, direct knowledge of the minds of others, and ability to recollect past lives). Nonetheless, his physical attributes manifest certain symbolic messages. The soles of his feet and palms of his hands display thousand-spoked wheels with hubs and rims, which suggests his mastery over the Dhamma and his setting the wheel of the Dhamma turning. Since his feet are firmly placed and walk evenly on the ground, this signifies his doctrinal mastery. Second, his physical characteristics are auspicious and pleasing to others.[82]

According to one text, a supernatural radiance comes from his body, and he possesses powers such as the foreknowledge of human events, as well as the ability to see into the past and future, to read other minds, and to levitate his body.[83] These and other kinds of powers set the Buddha apart from other mortals and even from arahants (fully enlightened beings). The *Kathāvatthu* (3.1) defends the view that his disciples do not share the Buddha's powers. This is also true of the Buddha's qualitatively and quantitatively different wisdom and omniscience. The wandering ascetic Vacchagotta illustrates this in a narrative account when he asks the Buddha about whether or not a report about his omniscience represents the ability to see everything at all times.[84] The Buddha replies that such a report distorts his knowledge, and he states that a more accurate description would be that he is a man of threefold knowledge and not an omniscient being. What sets the Buddha apart from others is that he discovered and reached his goal by means of his own power.[85]

With respect to the powers attributed to the Buddha, Buddhaghoṣa differentiates between *abhiññā* (Sanskrit: *abhijñā*, super knowledges) and *iddhi* (Sanskrit: *ṛddhi*, magical power) in his work entitled *The Path of Purification*. The former kind of power includes the ability to know former modes of birth (14.2–6), a divine eye

that enables one to view the death and rebirths of other beings (14.7–48), and the ability to know the minds of others (16.35). The magical type of power includes the ability to fly up to the sky (19.12), to touch the sun with his hand (19.13), transform his body into many bodies (19.13), travel great distances by flight (21.22), and travel to other realms and to converse with beings in these other realms, even if they are gods (20.56–58). Like the earlier Pāli writers, Buddhaghoṣa wants to stress the superiority of the Buddha in comparison to ordinary people, but he also wants to emphasize the humanity of the Buddha, although he depicts his subject as an ideal human who perfects his capabilities.

Although he is depicted as sometimes displaying his powers—and Pāli texts are inconsistent about this—the Buddha was generally opposed to such an exhibition. A monk named Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja displayed his powers, for instance, by levitating his body before a crowd. The Buddha responded by comparing this display to a woman publicly exposing her genitals.[86] According to another text, the Buddha stated that the public exhibition of supernormal powers is loathsome and disgusting. He gave two reasons for his attitude: the display of powers can be achieved by magic, and, from a more pragmatic perspective, they do not convert anyone.[87]

After the Buddha's death, there began a cult of reverence for the historical figure. Monastic adherents and ordinary people were able to express their warm feelings, respect, and trust for him by both stūpa and image veneration. The stūpa is a funeral mound for bodily remains (relics). The practice of building them predates Buddhism in India. It was once thought by scholars that stūpa worship originated with the laity and eventually found a place in the monastic community, and that the monks invested it with a sacramental character. But examinations of archaeological sites and inscriptions make it evident that monks and nuns played a leading role in the cult.[88] It was believed that the relics of the Buddha were infused with morality, concentration, wisdom, or other such qualities. Since the relics were believed to possess life, it was accepted that the Buddha was present and alive wherever the relics were located. In this way the relics served as a magnet for the faithful. A distinctive feature of the relic cult was its ability to transform locations into centers of sacrality.

Throughout Buddhist history, there has been a close connection between the relic cult and royal sovereignty. This tradition of royal support for the stūpa cult dates back to the reign of Aśoka (274–236 B.C.E.). The Kandyan tooth of Sri Lanka, for one example, was enshrined within the precincts of the royal palace. The role that a king played in the protection, maintenance, restoration, and celebration of stūpas on festival occasions helped to legitimate his rule and demonstrate his fidelity to the ideal of a righteous Buddhist ruler.[89] Besides its connection with royal sovereignty, the stūpa incorporates symbolism of Mount Meru and the four cardinal directions from Buddhist cosmology.

There are three kinds of relics: corporeal (such as bone, teeth, or hair); objects used by the Buddha (such as begging bowls, robes, walking staff, drinking

vessel, water strainer, or razor); and reminders (that is, the stūpa represents the prototype of this kind of relic). It is important that any relic be authentic. Being linked to the historical Buddha can authenticate a relic, but even if a relic can be linked to the Buddha, there is still an inherent tension with the ideals of Buddhism. Since relics are material objects that one can possess, they can lead to attachment, which contradicts the Buddhist ideal of nonattachment.[90] For laity and monastic members, however, relics provide access to power and sacredness. Relics also demonstrate that the death of the Buddha did not entail the end of his presence on earth or restrict that presence to his Dhamma (teaching).

By paying respect to the stūpa or image of the Buddha, the practitioner gains merit and good kammic consequences. Upon entering the temple grounds, one removes one's shoes because one is about to enter sacred ground. The devotee washes the object of offering with water. The remainder of the steps can be summarized as acts of respect and giving, which include appropriate bodily posture, physical gestures, and recitation of Pāli verses.[91] Besides these acts of respect and giving, there are a number of prohibitions: for instance, against covering one's head or one shoulder; sitting with one's legs extended toward the stūpa; washing of hands, face, or clothing; spitting or yawning within the precincts of the stūpa; and climbing on the stūpa. Similar strictures apply to an image of the Buddha. If *pūjā* (worship) is directed to an image of the Buddha, one would bathe it, dry it, brush its teeth, wave a fly whisk, raise a finger, ring a small bell seven times, light and wave camphor before the image, touch the altar three times, worship by holding hands clasped together over one's head, wash the feet of the image by pouring water three times in small vessels and then three times into a spittoon, and clothe the image with great care.[92]

Worship (*pūjā*) directed toward either a stūpa or an image of the Buddha enables the devotee to have *darśana* (viewing) of either object. In a profound sense, the Buddha presents himself to be seen by the devotee, and the devotee responds by opening to the Buddha and accepting the spiritual energy of the Buddha. The devotee is transformed by the experience and participates in the charisma of the Buddha. The practice of darśana offers several benefits for the viewer: the practice enables one to know the Buddha, to commune with him, and possibly to be inspired to renounce the world; it can cause an experience of faith, initiate spontaneous acts of devotion, or lead to insight.

Concluding Remarks

The biography of the Buddha is a rich narrative that embodies a profound religious message about the world, human existence, and how we should live our lives; it addresses issues of attachment, greed, hate, compassion, self-sacrifice, and living a selfless life. This narrative is also full of symbolic significance. Reading or listening to the story of the Buddha's life elicits strong emotions among Buddhist adherents, much like reactions of the faithful to the rich narratives of

Jesus and Muhammad. The narrative of the Buddha invites a listener or reader to imitate the lifestyle and the religious message that it incorporates. Moreover, the narrative of the Buddha appeals to the whole person and summons one to a new way of life.

The teachings (Dhamma) embodied within the narrative of the Buddha also serve as an invitation to live it and experience it for oneself. Although there is an element of faith on the part of an aspirant who is willing to give the teaching a try, the teachings of the Buddha are to be verified by oneself through one's own experience. The teachings are not restricted to fifth- or fourth-century B.C.E. India, but rather are applicable to different times and even contemporary life. The narrative of the Buddha makes it evident that his teaching is not secret, but very public. It is for everyone to hear and to practice. Even though a guide is very useful, the teachings have to be implemented and experienced by each person. If one is to find liberation from suffering and its causes, such as greed, hatred, confusion, and ignorance, one must strive to reach one's goal by oneself and not rely on divine intervention. In the next chapter, the major features of the Dhamma will be discussed in more depth.

PART TWO

Theravāda Philosophy and Practice

3

The Narrative Path of the Buddha

According to the *Mahāvagga* (1.2–7) of the Vinaya collection of texts, the Buddha meditated on the notion of causation three times in direct and reverse order for a week during the initial period of the four weeks that he meditated at the Bodhi tree. Since the Buddha claimed to teach only what he had personally experienced, this episode from his quest for liberation demonstrates that the notion of causation played an important role in the Buddha's thought from a very early period. In fact, it is impossible to grasp the teachings of the Buddha without understanding the theory of causation, because it forms the ground of his teachings.

The Buddha's grasp of causation provides support for his basic claim that "All life is suffering" (*dukkha*). The assertion that suffering is caused by craving (*taṇhā*) is partially true. But craving should not be understood as the first cause of suffering, because it depends for its arising on sensation, which in turn depends for its arising on contact, and so forth in an unending chain. This circle of causation is called dependent origination, conditioned genesis, or dependent co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), depending on which translation of the term one prefers. The etymology of the term suggests that something arises on the ground of a preceding cause. This implies very emphatically that everything (since nothing is excluded from the cycle of causation except nibbāna) is causally conditioned or produced. The book that you are reading is caused by a publishing process, you are the product of biological causation, the chair on which you are sitting is due to a cause traceable to a manufacturing process, the lighting on which you depend for your ability to read is due either to a power source or sunlight, and so forth. And, like the overall path of the Buddha, this theory of causation is called the "middle way" because it avoids two extreme philosophical positions, those of self-causation and external causation. The position of self-causation leads to a belief in eternalism, in which nothing ever ends. The position of external causation leads to a belief in annihilationism, or the complete destruction of elements within the chain of causation. From the Buddhist perspective, an eternalist position would be

the Brahmanical Hindu belief in an eternal self (*ātman*), whereas the annihilationist position would be represented by Materialists who believe in the complete dissolution of the physico-conscious being upon death.

For the sake of teaching about it, the Buddha identified a chain of causation that forms a twelve-linked chain that is cyclical in nature. The early Buddhist texts express the cycle of causation this way:

1. Ignorance (*avijjā*) is dependent on dispositions;
2. Dispositions (*sankhāra*) are dependent on consciousness;
3. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is dependent on a psychophysical person;
4. The psychophysical person (*nāmarūpa*) is dependent on the six sense doors;
5. The six sense doors (*saḷāyantanā*) are dependent on contact;
6. Contact (*phassa*) is dependent on sensation;
7. Sensation (*vedanā*) is dependent on craving;
8. Craving (*taṇhā*) is dependent on grasping;
9. Grasping (*upādāna*) is dependent on becoming;
10. Becoming (*bhava*) is dependent on birth;
11. Birth (*jāti*) is dependent on old age and death;
12. Old age and death (*jarāmataṇa*) are dependent on ignorance.

Because everything is subject to this chain of causation, there are no accidental occurrences within the world. And by perceiving and understanding the law of causation, it is possible to perceive and understand a fundamental truth about the teachings of the Buddha: that everything is both caused and conditioned. Thus there is a direct connection between the causal law and the truth (Dhamma). This truth informs us that the theory of causation also emphasizes the interconnectedness of all phenomena. And it is this basic insight that links all the major traditions of Buddhism.

If we consider the twelve links of the chain of causation, we see that although each link is necessary for the arising of the following link, no single link is a sufficient cause to engender the emergence of the following link. This is because each instant in the process of causation is determined by other conditions. And since everything is subject to the chain of causation, innumerable interrelated processes constitute human existence. There is also a direct connection between the chain of causation and time. The initial two links are related to the past, the third through the tenth links are connected to the present, whereas the final two links (11 and 12) are related to the future.[1]

People caught within the chain of causation are analogous to a blind man who uses a stick to find his way. There are times when he chooses the right path, and there are instances when he chooses the wrong one. It is also true that when the blind man chooses the right path he is unaware of his correct choice. The blind man is a paradigm for all unenlightened human beings subject to ignorance. The ignorant person is unaware of the chain of causation and how it functions, and thus lacks a fundamental understanding about human reality. To be

ignorant means in part that one lacks correct views. Necessarily, this means that one's choices in life are blind, a situation that the teachings of the Buddha are intended to fix. Without correct views, a person's choices may result in either good or bad actions, mostly by accident. When actions arise from ignorance they remain tainted by ignorance, and the results are deposited within our consciousness. As a believer in free will, the Buddha argues that we can shape our lives by the choices that we make, although our volitional activities are not completely within our control. We are like a potter who works with a wheel and clay to shape a pot. Even though the potter determines what is to be created with the clay, he is dependent on the quality of the clay and the correct functioning of the wheel for a product that he shapes with his hands and the whirling of the wheel. This analogy suggests that it is possible to shape our own lives through our choices into something productive and wholesome.

The third link of causation, which affirms that consciousness depends on a psychophysical person, involves a concept of consciousness with two functions: it is an organ of awareness and a body of accumulated past experience. Imagine yourself holding a burning match. Your eye and sense of touch convey to your consciousness an awareness of something hot in your hand. This basic awareness is identified and classified in accordance with prior personal experiences, and you recall that in fact fire has the potential to burn if you are careless. Thereupon, your mind transmits a decision to your hand to extinguish the match or to use it to light some combustible material in order to cook some food. This suggests that consciousness has the ability to condition the psychophysical person. Nonetheless, the continuous development of a person depends on conscious changes that result from volitional actions; the present individual is a product of accumulated past conscious experiences. This suggests that your current character and personality are the result of past actions, conscious experiences, your social and cultural environment, your assigned or earned social identity, and what other people might think about you.

The psychophysical individual is, then, depended upon the six organs of sense, which are themselves dependent on external objects or events that condition the sensory and mental receptors. But before the six senses can be activated, they depend on contact. That is, the six organs of sense (that is, eyes, ears, nose, touch, taste, and mind) have contact with objects that stimulate each of them to arise. These objects can be either external or internal to consciousness at a given moment.

Since contact depends on sensation, this suggests that the mind, other sense faculties, and objects come into contact with each other. But the sense faculties and the mind are driven by craving, which results in grasping and attachment to the object or objects of desires. Grasping (*upādāna*) represents a more formidable type of greed than craving (*taṇhā*) by extending its reach to sense pleasures, speculative viewpoints, customs, and the self. The root meaning of the term *upādāna*, grasping, suggests something that keeps an active process alive or

going. A Buddhist text compares craving to a fire that needs fuel (that is, grasping) for combustion.[2] In other words, grasping is the fuel that keeps the fire burning. Grasping also plays a more subtle part in the process of causation because it involves an emotional investment in an object of its focus. As the fuel of craving (*taṇhā*), grasping (*upādāna*) forms the bridge between consciousness and rebirth by providing the means by which kamma and conscious energy pass to a new mode of existence.[3]

Since grasping depends on becoming and becoming depends on birth, old age, and death, this cycle culminates in sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair. Due to the endless nature of this beginningless cycle of pain, the suffering that arises simply leads to more pain, increased ignorance, and a repetition of the entire cycle. It is important to recognize that a break in any link of causation brings the cycle to an abrupt end. This possibility is embodied in a summary of the way the entire cycle operates: "When this exists, that exists or comes to be; on the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not exist or come to be; on the cessation of this, that ceases." This summary statement affirms the way that the cycle of causation works, but it also suggests that it can be brought to an end. This theory not only points to the interdependent nature of all phenomena but also indicates that everything is impermanent.

The concept of beauty is used to illustrate impermanence in the narrative of Kemā, a chief consort of King Bimbisāra. Because she was very comely and had heard that the Buddha found fault with beauty of form, she avoided him. One day, after listening to songs in praise of a monk, she was seized with a desire to visit the Buddha. In order to teach her a lesson, the Buddha created the form of a woman of incredible beauty, and he caused her to stand beside him with a fan in her hand. The royal consort Khemā stood with her gaze riveted upon the beautiful woman. The Buddha caused the woman to pass through old age, disease, and death before the gaze of the consort. Khemā was thus brought to a realization of the transitoriness of outward beauty.[4] In another Buddhist text, impermanence is compared to four archers and a fast runner. If four archers stand at the four quarters of a compass, and if a person claims that he can catch each arrow before it hits the ground, would not such a person be considered very swift? If he could catch just one arrow before it hit the ground, would he not be considered swift? As swift as such a man is, the impermanence characteristic of this life is even swifter.[5] These features become more evident by considering how the doctrine of kamma/karma (action, deeds, doing) interacts with the twelve-link-chain theory of causation.

Kamma (karma in Sanskrit) is the Indian theory of the law of cause and effect. This natural law means that for every action there is a positive or negative result. Thus the deeds that a person performs intentionally always and inexorably bear fruit in any of the three moments of time (that is, past, present or future). From a metaphorical perspective, kamma is like an unshakable shadow that a person can never lose. The Buddhist tradition stresses the importance of cultivating the

cessation (*nirodha*) of action because it enables one to exhaust past evil actions and to avoid any further actions that can contribute to additional negative kamma. A typical means of classifying kamma is according to the threefold mode of acting: acts of the body, acts of speech, and acts of mind. Thus what we do, say, and think determines kammic results.

The Buddha's understanding of kamma cannot be grasped without an awareness of its relationship to volition (*cetanā*), a term that means stimulus, drive, or motive. Because it embodies will and impulse, cetanā is what drives a person to carry through what is intended. The Buddha wants to make clear that the ethical quality of an action depends on one's intention. This means that if you hit another person who is changing a tire by the side of the road with your automobile or truck in an act that results in accidental manslaughter, such an act is not subject to the same degree of negative kammic consequences as premeditated actions that result in murder. The results of actions are not, however, always so starkly distinguished. In order to determine the kammic effect of a deed, the Buddhists consider not only the deed itself but also the nature of the person who commits the deed and the intention of that person. The distinctive volitional character of the Buddha's understanding of kamma eliminates any deterministic conception of the doctrine. Essentially, the Buddha redefines action as intention, and it is possible to witness the Buddha shifting the focus of the theory of kamma from physical action to psychological process.[6] Buddhist texts, however, closely associate intention with wisdom.[7]

One text illustrates the context of kamma by using an agricultural metaphor.[8] Kamma is like a field, whereas conscious intention serves as the seed and craving acts as the moisture for the growth of action. Kamma provides the soil necessary for the unfolding of consciousness in the sense that it represents past modes of existence, old deeds, prior intentions, and old actions that provide the background from which consciousness arises. When the seed of consciousness is embedded in this soil of kamma it is, then, possible for craving to nourish it and enable the production of additional seeds of consciousness that carry or transmit its own energy. Such conscious energy proceeds from one mode of existence to another, in an unending cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and more pain and suffering.

Within the context of ancient Indian culture, an important issue concerns the connection between kamma and a person's caste. According to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4.15), a person's caste is determined by one's kammic state at death. The Buddha denies that kamma determines one's caste, because he argues that caste is a mere social designation settled by convention and not by any inherent trait of a person. In other words, individuals do not become what they are by an accident of birth. It is rather one's past actions and not into which caste one is born that determines what one becomes in the future. At this point it is possible to see how the Buddha radicalized the notion of kamma by making it more ethical and less dependent on the soteriological value of ritual and the value of social distinctions. He replaced a hierarchical social ethic and its

particularistic concept of duty with a simple and universal ethical distinction between right and wrong.[9]

Does this mean that everyone who commits murder, robbery, or lies will necessarily be reborn into an unhappy and unpleasant condition? The Buddha does not accept such a view. Although such evil people commit horrendous deeds, it is still possible that they could be reborn in even a heavenly realm. How is this position reconciled? The Buddha thinks that it is possible for an action to come to fruition in the present or in a future state. If a person saves the life of a child, for instance, the results of this positive deed may come to fruition in a person's present existence and enable such a person to find happiness, or it may come to fruition in a future lifetime. It is also possible for the effects of a weak, bad deed to be superseded by the effect of a comparatively strong, positive deed, or by the results of a series of good deeds. Thus it is possible for an evil person to be reborn into a pleasant state if the results of his or her accumulated good deeds are sufficient to overcome the evil actions.

According to a metaphor from one Buddhist text, the law of causation is like an ancient buried city.[10] This is because it represents a path followed by former buddhas and is rediscovered by the historical Buddha named Gautama. Just as the ancient city possesses objectivity for the person who discovers it, the law of causation is also objective and not some mental construct. The Buddha stresses that causation is a component of human experience with an ontological status, and is not simply a subjective phenomenon. In other words, change and cause can be discovered in nature. Since everything is subject to the law of causation, it has an element of necessity. The law is also invariable because it refers to the constant relationship that exists between causes and their effects, and not to some kind of sameness between them. Moreover, the Buddha's law of causation is conditional because it avoids the extremes of determinism and accidentialism. By avoiding a rigid determinism, the Buddha's position evades fatalism with its insistence on unconditional necessity and the possibility of accidentalism with its unconditional arbitrariness.[11] In summary, the theory of causation explains how suffering arises, and explains how it can be terminated.

The Four Noble Truths

Although there is some scholarly debate about whether or not the early message of the Buddha included the so-called Four Noble Truths, the Buddhist religious tradition assumes that these truths were a fundamental part of his teachings. We will not argue over the actual words of the historical Buddha because there is no way to arrive at a position that will meet with universal agreement. According to Buddhist lore in the *Mahāvagga*, however, the Four Noble Truths were part of the first teaching of the Buddha after his enlightenment experience at the Deer Park at Isipatana near ancient Benares.[12] The Four Noble Truths are not rational truths

derived by means of some sophisticated theory of knowledge. By calling these truths "noble," the Buddha suggests that they are valuable, worthy, and relevant.

As the substance of what the Buddha learned when he became enlightened, the Four Noble Truths represent a summary of some of his teachings grounded in his personal experience, and they represent a right view (*diṭṭhi*) in contrast to a wrong view that implies false opinion or erroneous speculation. These wrong views are identified as theories about the permanence of the self and the world. These kinds of wrong views represent a hindrance to understanding the truth about the self and world and make it difficult to see that these are subject to constant change. A right view is defined within the context of references to enlightenment and the Four Noble Truths, and it represents starting on the path to liberation, because it implies being able to distinguish between right and wrong. It also means to be favorably inclined toward the teachings of the Buddha.[13] Since right views are associated with insight and wisdom, they can help to eliminate wrong views and help a seeker to see things as they really are by means of wisdom instead of ignorance. This is a gradual process that can culminate with a liberating insight.[14] Right views are also a factor in the process of rebirth because they can affect one's destiny when combined with correct actions.

Buddhist texts make an even more subtle distinction with respect to views when they insist that it is possible to distinguish between views that are modes of insightful awareness grounded in personal experience and simply holding views derived from some external source. Buddhist scholars think that holding a view is bad because it is a form of grasping (*upādāna),* which is the ninth link in the chain of causation. And the last thing that a seeker after liberation needs is an additional form of attachment. The Buddha thinks that no right or wrong views should be grasped as such. This does not imply that views cannot be used. It does, however, suggest that a seeker should not become attached to any views, because views are merely a means to a goal.[15] Once the goal of enlightenment is reached, a seeker is able to see everything perfectly and lucidly. This means seeing things as they are without grasping after anything or being attached to anything.

In a Buddhist parable, the Buddha takes up a bit of dust on the tip of his fingernail and asks his followers, which is greater, the dust on his fingernail or the whole earth? The answer, of course, is that the earth is greater. Just so, the Buddha replies, is the amount of pain that is destroyed by one who comprehends the Four Noble Truths greater than the amount of pain that remains.[16] In all cases, according to the Buddha, an effort should be made to realize and understand the Four Noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths are based on a pattern adopted by the Buddha from Indian medical science. This medical method involves a doctor who uses the following procedure: first, recognizing the existence of a disease in a patient; second, making a diagnosis of the disease; third, prescribing a cure; and fourth, giving the medicine. Each of the Four Noble Truths conforms to this pattern.

The first Noble Truth is that all life is suffering (*dukkha*). This basic Buddhist presupposition rests upon the Buddha's observations of the impermanence of existence, and of sickness, old age, and death. These are all observations connected to his meditation on causation. The ordinary meaning of dukkha is suffering, pain, sorrow, or misery. The term also suggests that the many facets of human existence within the world are unsatisfactory. The exact opposite of dukkha is happiness (*sukha*), comfort or ease. The word *dukkha* implies, however, more than mere suffering because it also includes the notions of imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, and insubstantiality. If one retrieves the root meaning of the term, dukkha refers to an axle that is off-center with respect to its wheel, or it is like a bone that slips out of its socket. This suggests that life is dislocated in its present condition. Even if life slips out of joint for the Buddha, this does not mean that there is no happiness. The Buddha acknowledges many happy events and moments of life. And thus it would be incorrect to think that the Buddha is teaching a pessimistic philosophy. The message that the Buddha intends to make clear about these happy events and moments of life and the enjoyment that we derive from these things is that they are impermanent. When happiness and joy pass away, as they inevitably do, this brings unhappiness and regret. Therefore, the Buddha recognizes the existence of happiness; it is just that it does not last very long.

Dukkha can be viewed from three viewpoints:

1. ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*)
2. suffering produced by change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*)
3. suffering inherent in conditioned states (*saṃkhāra-dukkha*)

The first type of suffering embodies such emotional and mental states as fear, and anxiety, sorrow caused by separation from loved ones for various reasons; frustration of desires; being stuck in the presence of persons, things, or situations that we dislike; degeneration of our physical and mental faculties, sickness, old age, and finally death. It is these types of ordinary suffering that counterbalance the joys and happiness that we experience during life.

Suffering produced by change, the Buddha explains, means that lurking within the pleasant and joyous moments of life is suffering. This is directly connected to the temporary nature of these moments. Joy and happiness pass away before long, and this passing brings suffering. The wealthy, successful, and admired businessperson loses his or her position in the business world, resulting in a change of status that brings poverty and unhappiness. Or a wealthy person may be concerned about being robbed or kidnapped for a large ransom. Imagine a formerly successful high school student with a history of academic success who attends college for the first time and is uncertain about success at this higher level of competitiveness, difficulty, and stress. One's success or failure will affect one's future life to a great degree. Behind every emotion and thought that a student might have, there lurks the potential for pain and suffering. These types of examples suggest that suffering on this level creates unconscious fears and anxi-

eties. Suffering at this level is more psychological than it is physical. Moreover, not to be aware of the facts of suffering means that one is in a state of ignorance.

The third type of suffering produced by the changing nature of things can be characterized as existential, in the sense that human beings tend to cling to their self, I, or ego. It is exactly this love of or clinging to the self that makes possible the prior two levels of suffering. It is necessary to recognize that the self is a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces that render it impermanent. The Buddha's thinking on this subject will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

In Buddhist thought, there is a tendency to emphasize the universal nature of suffering. This is illustrated in the story of a young woman named Kisā Gotamī, who asks the Buddha for help for her dying son. Taking pity on the tearful woman, who is seeking a cure for her son's snakebite, the Buddha instructs her to go through the town and ask for a black mustard seed from a house in which no one has ever died. Holding her dying son to her breast, the distraught mother sets forth to canvas the town for mustard seeds. But she returns to the Buddha without a single mustard seed because she cannot find a home at which there has not been a death. After this discovery, she becomes a nun and eventually attains enlightenment.[17]

The second Noble Truth identifies the origin of suffering (*dukkha*) as *taṇhā*, a term that can be translated as craving, desire, or thirst. I tend to prefer ignorant craving because the term presupposes that craving is shaped by ignorance. It is ignorant craving that is connected with passionate greed, leading to rebirth. A Buddhist text identifies three types of ignorant craving: craving for sense pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*); craving for existence and becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*); and craving for nonexistence (*vibhava-taṇhā*).[18] As the third type suggests, it is just as wrong to crave no further rebirth as it is to crave being. It is best to remain detached from either rebirth or being. A Buddhist text, like the *Dhammapada* (24.1), compares the craver to a monkey wishing for fruit, bounding every which way seeking to gratify its desire, although complete satisfaction can never be achieved. Craving is closely connected to grasping (*upādāna*) in the sense of attachment to the objects one is grasping. Craving is also associated with a chronic condition that leads one in whatever direction one's cravings take. The more that one is at the mercy of one's cravings, the more one is a slave to them. This is aptly illustrated by the image of a spider that follows the web it makes for itself.

From the perspective of the Buddha, the way that we normally live is based on an erroneous presupposition and a fundamental misjudgment. We tend to assume that the world in which we live is permanent and the things within this durable world are also permanent, stable, and reliable. As we look around this supposedly unchanging world and at the things within it that attract our attention, we tend to assume that if we can have one or more of these desirable and permanent things, we will be satisfied and happy. This basic presupposition and misjudgment manifest an even more pernicious ignorance.

It is important not to comprehend ignorant craving as the first cause of suffering, but to understand the origin of suffering within the context of the entire cycle of causation. The twelve-linked cycle of causation represents a universal law of contingency that denies independent existence to finite phenomena. The most that we can claim in this instance is that craving is the immediate cause of suffering. This ignorant craving is centered in the false idea of the self, which arises from ignorance.

A Buddhist text illustrates eliminating craving by comparing such an objective to cutting down a tree.[19] If a person cuts down a tree with an axe and removes the roots of the tree, cuts the tree into logs, splits the logs, makes them into chips, dries them in the wind and sun, burns them to ashes, winnows the ashes in a strong wind, and lets them be blown away by the wind or carried away by a river, would not the tree be a no-thing incapable of arising in the future? The Buddha's point is that this is exactly what one must do with craving to get rid of it.

The third Noble Truth affirms that the suppression of suffering can be achieved. This is called cessation (*nirodha*). This hopeful Noble Truth implies that to eliminate suffering one must extricate its root, ignorant craving (*taṇhā*). In short, this is called nibbāna in Pāli or nirvāṇa in Sanskrit. Nibbāna is also referred to as the extinction of craving (*taṇhākkhaya*). In order to reach this goal, there is a path to follow.

This path represents the fourth Noble Truth, which is called the Noble Eightfold Path. This path represents a middle path (*majjhimā patipadā*) between two extremes. It is precisely at this point that the life of the Buddha provides the model for examples of the two extremes of sense indulgence or a hedonistic lifestyle, on the one hand, and extreme forms of asceticism, on the other hand—both of which he experienced and rejected. Although the path may have eight steps, it is important to keep in mind that they are to be practiced simultaneously, because they are interrelated. The Buddha's teachings on this subject make it evident that he was well aware that human beings are different and possess different levels of ability. Therefore, following and practicing the path is dependent upon the capacity of each individual.

The Eightfold Path can be divided into three major parts:

Right View or Understanding Right Thought or Purpose	Wisdom (paññā)
Right Speech Right Behavior Right Livelihood	Moral Action (sila)
Right Effort Right Mindfulness Right Concentration	Meditation (dhyana)

Right view and thought embody wisdom. Right speech, behavior, and livelihood are connected to moral action or virtue. And right effort, mindfulness, and con-

centration entail the regimen of meditation. But before an aspirant can begin, the Eightfold Path presupposes a preliminary step of right association, which basically involves entering into a relationship with an experienced senior monk who serves as one's spiritual guide to help one develop the correct meditation techniques and to monitor one's spiritual progress. The Buddha compares the training of a monk to the process used by an elephant tamer, who begins by placing a wild elephant in the company of a tame pachyderm in order for the wild creature to imitate the behavior of the tamed animal. Or the Buddha compares the discipline of a monk to the training of a thoroughbred horse.[20] It is not beyond the spiritual ethos of Buddhism to compare the training regimen of monks to that of spiritual athletes.

With respect to the wisdom phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, right view means to see or understand things as they really are. What explains things as they really are? The answer is simple: the Four Noble Truths. This is the greatest wisdom that one can achieve in this life. These are skillful, useful, and beneficial views. If you attain this wisdom, you are liberated from the cycle of pain and sorrow. Therefore, the initial step of the path is really the goal, from one perspective. By placing right views first, the Buddha wants to emphasize the importance of cultivating correct and wholesome views that will lead you in the right direction rather than lead you astray and waste your time and frustrate your efforts.

Right thought denotes thoughts of detachment. It suggests purposeful action that implies renouncing sense pleasures, having malice toward no one or thing, and harming no living creatures. A text mentions reason (*takka*) as an aspect of right thought.[21] This does not mean that the Buddha is a rationalist, because he rejects the possibility of basing a philosophy on self-evidently true premises and deducing a philosophy from that position. The Buddha is convinced that reasons can be valid or invalid, and that facts can contradict consistent and valid arguments, although we do find the Buddha recommending his viewpoint on rational grounds, depending on his audience.[22] The Buddha does not make a distinction between a priori arguments (which are valid independently of observation) and empirical reasoning. Even though the Buddha and early Buddhist debaters use reason in debates with rivals, they think that the soundness of reasoning is no guarantee of truth.[23] The early community of Buddhist thinkers is not concerned with formal logic, and the principle of contradiction in a formal, logical sense is lacking in their writings, even though it does function as a basic rule of debate.[24] The Buddha tends to appeal to experience rather than reason, although his position is not irrational. What he wants to avoid are intellectual entanglements and arguments. A Buddhist narrative illustrates this point very nicely in a tale of a man without the correct grasp of the doctrine, who is compared to a man that does not hold a water snake properly. If a man takes hold of a water snake by the coil or the tail, it will turn and bite him and thus cause his demise. But the man who possesses an intuitive and correct grasp of the how to hold a water snake (that is, read Buddhist doctrine) will be successful in his intended purpose.[25]

The third rung on the Eightfold Path is right speech. It means to abstain from lying, slanderous talk, and idle gossip. It involves avoiding harsh, rude, impolite, malicious, or abusive kinds of language. The basic guideline is to avoid any kind of language that promotes enmity and causes disharmony among individuals. If Buddhism is ultimately a path of meditation, why does the Buddha stress language? The language that one uses is indicative of one's general character and level of education. If a person uses slang or obscene forms of language predominately in their speech, a listener could conclude that that foul-mouthed person is crude, uneducated, and without virtue. Right speech is recognition by the Buddha of the social nature of humans and of the importance that language plays in promoting harmonious social interrelationships; it is thus a rejection of radical asceticism. Our use of language informs others about us and, more important, it can also be used as a lever for shifting our character. How can this be accomplished? As we become more aware of our speech patterns, we can notice how often we deviate from the truth. Once our awareness is increased, we can take steps to alter our speech patterns toward language that moves toward the truth, is charitable, and is non-harmful.

The fourth step of the Eightfold Path is right behavior. Again, we can begin by becoming more introspective and reflect more fully on what we do and, more important, to examine the intentions behind our actions. This part of the Eightfold Path emphasizes that the Buddha comprehends his way as wholly moral and ethical. In order to help us follow the right path, he instructs us to use the five precepts as a guideline: do not kill or injure any living creature (*ahiṃsā*), do not steal, do not lie, do not be unchaste, and do not drink intoxicants. In the next chapter we will explore more fully the ethical implications of the Buddha's teachings.

The final moral and ethical aspect of the path is right livelihood. The primary guide for choosing a worthy occupation is to abstain from a profession that brings harm to others and to follow one that is ethically righteous. This is evident in a passage from a Buddhist text that mentions as harmful such actions as trickery, cajolery, insinuating, and rapacity for gain.[26] Professions that are considered harmful and unrighteous are occupations that trade in lethal weapons, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, cheating, selling slaves, pimping, and prostitution. If one works for a munitions company or any branch of the military; as a bartender or a butcher; for an insect control company or a dishonest sales company; as a professional thief; or in any occupation that takes advantage of others for personal gain, one is engaged in an impure profession. In contrast, an occupation that is honorable, blameless, and harmless is a pure profession. Farming, teaching, or being a monk are all professions that would qualify.

Right effort refers to the meditation, exerting oneself enormously, and mentally struggling to keep one's mind free of evil states. The Buddha uses the example of a heavily laden ox that struggles through deep mud with its load and does not stop until it extricates itself from the mud, even though it is very tired. As the example of the ox suggests, right effort involves cultivating a strong will and for-

titude in order to succeed in one's quest for liberation from the cycle of suffering. The Buddha recognizes four forms of right effort: preventing, relinquishing, developing, and maintaining. The preventive effort entails not grasping after concepts derived from sensual experience. The relinquishing effort refers to abandoning evil and unwholesome thoughts already present. The developing effort means to engender wholesome and helpful attitudes in the future, whereas the maintaining effort means to nurture and retain wholesome objects of concentration.[27] An aspirant's goal is to transform the mind into a calm and quiet state. Since the surface part of the mind is in a state of perpetual agitation and turmoil, like the surface of the ocean in a storm, the aspirant wants to reach a deeper level of the mind that is calm and quiet by a process of introspection. By reaching this deeper level of the mind, one is more capable of preventing evil and unwholesome states of mind from arising, such as greed, anger, selfishness, lust, and delusion. It also becomes easier to overcome evil and unwholesome states of mind that are already present, and to cultivate more favorable states of mind. Finally, one is encouraged to develop and maintain pure states of mind already present.

With a solid foundation created by right effort, one cultivates right mindfulness (*sati*), which involves a single-minded awareness that enables the mind to know, to shape, and to liberate itself. This is accomplished by analyzing the objects of existence, beginning with one's body, sensations, and feelings, and the activities of the mind (that is, thinking and conceiving). Mindfulness of the body includes becoming attentive to one's breathing, which can be accomplished by counting, for instance, one's breath as one breathes in and out. It is important to become attentive to bodily positions, postures, and activities. Mindfulness of the body includes contemplating the elements (*dhātus*) of which the body is composed, with the overall objective of controlling one's body. In this respect the meditating monk is much like an athlete in training. If one's body is not under control or finely tuned, it is difficult to perform well or make progress with one's practice of meditation. The Buddha uses the example of a butcher who cuts a slain ox and displays the carcass and its parts as he cuts them. He admonishes monks to do likewise and reflect on their bodily parts and fundamental constituents.[28]

Becoming mindful of one's sensations and feelings is similar to mindfulness of the body, although the object of one's focus is different. By means of introspection, one becomes aware of whether one's sensations and feelings are pleasant, unpleasant, or simply neutral. The aspiring monk can become mindful of how they arise and disappear. This process of introspection and mindfulness continues with one's mental activities. It is important to become aware, for instance, whether or not one's thoughts are greedy, lustful, deluded, distracted, and so forth. It is also important to become mindful of how thoughts arise and disappear and how thoughts develop or are suppressed. It is especially worthwhile to become aware of the conditions on which thoughts depend. By restraining and controlling the mind, one molds it like an island that cannot be overwhelmed by a flood.

Finally, right concentration (*samādhi*) constitutes the final step of the Eightfold Path. It consists of an intense concentration of the mind that leads to the four trance (*jhāna*/*dhyāna*) states. In one text, guarding the senses, constant mindfulness, and being content with little characterize samādhi and the two previous steps of the path. Emancipation from the five hindrances follows, resulting in joy and peace, and this leads to the four trance states.[29] These trance states are a means of preparing the mind for understanding.[30] Passionate desires and unwholesome thoughts are discarded in the first stage of trance, which is characterized by joy and happiness. All intellectual activities are suppressed in the second stage of trance. Tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind are developed, along with the feelings of joy and happiness. One-pointedness of mind normally refers to a state in which the mind is absorbed in a single object. In the third stage, although the feeling of happiness remains along with mindful equanimity, joy disappears. In the final stage of trance happiness and unhappiness, joy and sorrow are abandoned. All that remains are equanimity and awareness.[31] At this point one is completely detached from the world and all it entails.

The aspiring monk finally attains wisdom (*paññā*) that gives him insight into the nature of things. This functions to free consciousness to the knowledge of ultimate reality.[32] The attainment of wisdom means having right knowledge. And according to one text, this is equivalent to knowing the Four Noble Truths.[33]

From a symbolic viewpoint, the early Buddhist texts envision the Eightfold Path as a process of purification. A Buddhist text, for instance, equates the path with purification, while another text connects the Four Noble Truths with purification.[34] Moreover, one Buddhist text makes it clear that control of the body, speech, and mind represents a process of purification, whereas another text equates wisdom with purity.[35] In comparison, other modes of life are impure. By purification, these textual references mean a refinement of a practitioner's mental capacities and control over the body, emotions, and senses.

The View on Non-self

The first Noble Truth informs us that life is suffering. In examining the notion of causation, we learned that each factor in the chain of causation is both conditioned and conditions something else, and we noted that the chain of causation means that everything in the phenomenal world is relative, interdependent, and interconnected. We also noted that everything in life comes to an end. Thus there is nothing in the phenomenal world that is permanent. A basic reason that life is suffering is that we think that we can satisfy our self or ego. From the Buddhist perspective, this assumption represents a fundamental misconception, because there is no permanent self, I, ego, soul, or *ātman* (an immortal self, as in classical Hinduism). If this is true, where does the sense of self that we experience originate?

The Buddha's answer to this question is that our sense of self springs from

self-created delusion. It is as if there is a human need to identify, designate, or claim some part of the universe as our own—we need to possess something to which we can cling. This attempt to grasp onto something permanent and call it our self is futile, from the Buddha's perspective, because reality is much too dynamic, fluid, and changing for this to happen. If reality is an ever-changing process, the establishment of a permanent self is impossible for us.

If there is no self or soul, what are we? The Buddha answers that we are composed of five *khandhas*, which can be translated as heaps or aggregates. The term *khandha* can designate the trunk of a tree, the body of an elephant, a bundle, or a heap.[36] A secondary meaning connects the term to the branches of a tree or the shoulder of a body. Just as a shoulder is attached to a human body, branches are connected to a tree.[37] The five aggregates the Buddha identifies are:

1. matter (*rūpakkhandha*)
2. sensations or feelings (*vedanākkhandha*)
3. perceptions (*saññākkhandha*)
4. mental constituents (*sankhārakkhandha*)
5. consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*)

These five aggregates are constantly in a state of flux. Thus what can be called a self is only a convenient label given to a combination of these five groups, suggesting that the so-called self is nothing more than a phantom. In order to comprehend this, it is useful to examine each of the five aggregates.

The aggregate of matter includes the four primary material elements (*mahābhūta*)—earth, water, fire, air—and their derivations. The earth element includes whatever is hard and solid, such as hair, nails, teeth, and other parts of the body. Blood, tears, saliva, and sweat are all examples of the liquid or water element. The fire element is obviously hot, and it implies body temperature and the heat connected to the digestion of food. The opposite of a warm body would be a cold or dead body. The air element is characterized by motion. An example in this context would be the diverse gases in the abdomenal area. The famous Buddhist thinker and commentator Buddhaghoṣa elaborates on the four primary elements. According to his commentary, the earth element is spread out, and it represents the support of the other three. Flowing, gliding, and satisfying characterize the water element, whereas the fire element produces temperature. Finally, the air element represents the most dynamic aspect of the entire group because it is mainly characterized by mobility and flux.[38] None of these four primary elements can exist independently of the others. Later monkish scholastic Abhidhamma literature develops an additional scheme of twenty-three secondary elements, which is not necessary to cover at this point. What is important is that the matter aggregate is directly connected with the cycle of causation, where we can find a direct connection between the fifth (six sense doors) and sixth (contact) links. In other words, contact requires the presence of consciousness, sense organs, sense objects, and a human body to make the link a reality.

Throughout the Pāli literature, it is possible to find many negative references to the human body. This literature refers to the body as impure, foul, and impermanent.[39] The *Dhammapada* compares it to foam (4.3) and a useless piece of wood (3.9), and summarizes its attitude in the following manner:

> Oh, see this beautified image;
> A mass of sores erected.
> Full of illness, highly fancied,
> Permanence it has not—or constancy.
> Quite wasted away is this form,
> A nest for disease, perishable.
> This putrid accumulation breaks up.
> For life has its end in death. (11.2–3)[40]

The intended message of such passages is the following: If life is suffering, it is our body that transports us on the path of misery. The Buddhist writers want us to see the body as impermanent so that we become detached from it.

The second aggregate includes all pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations based on the six organs and their objects (such as ear and sounds, nose and odor, tongue and taste, body and tangible objects, and mind and thoughts or ideas). The Pāli canon develops several divisions of this aggregate that it is not necessary to review except to say that it also includes any kind of mood or feeling. If one places this aggregate within the theory of causation, it is, however, obvious that for sensations to arise, contact (*phassa*) is a necessary condition.

Including mind within the aggregate of sensations might strike some readers as unusual. According to the Buddha, the mind (*citta*) is a sense faculty because it senses ideas and thoughts. It is not some spiritual essence opposed to a material substance. The ordinary mind is thus not concrete or physical. Being incorporeal, it is closely related to perceptions and feelings, which are dependent upon it. It is also connected to memory and the intellectual ability of an individual. When the mind is trained, controlled, and refined by means of a regimen of meditation it becomes free of deleterious cravings. The untrained and uncontrolled mind, however, is at the mercy of a dynamic and ever-changing situation. It is constantly bombarded with sensory impressions and risks being manipulated by ignorant cravings. This untrained mind cannot escape the cycle of rebirth. But when the mind is refined through a process of meditation it can eradicate the four cankers (*āsavās*): sensual desire, desire for life, ignorance, and opinions.

The third aggregate, the perceptions—which imply recognition—is defined with respect to the six sense doors (*āyatana*) and their six external objects: visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects. These can all be obstacles to spiritual progress. In a worst-case scenario, any of them can become an obsession, a possibility that is obviously connected to craving (*taṇhā*). Since this aggregate creates a foundation for obsessions, the Buddha compares it to chasing a mirage in order to satisfy a need for water. However, its primary func-

tion is to recognize, interpret, and classify various sensations, and finally to impose categories upon them. With respect to the cycle of causation, it connects the links of *vedanā* (the seventh link, sensation) and *taṇhā* (the eighth link, craving).

The fourth aggregate represents mental constituents in the sense of impulses to action. This includes all volitional activities. Since volitional actions produce kammic effects, the notion of kamma falls within this aggregate. This aggregate represents a force that is connected to what is produced and conditioned. As this force flows, it generates more conditioned phenomena and sustains life. Since it refers to everything that causes and is caused, there is nothing within the phenomenal world that does not involve mental dispositions (*sankhāra*) to some degree. Therefore, mental dispositions help to explain why it is impossible to have pure perceptions. These dispositions also play a part in forming the continuity of a person's experiences, individuation, process, and interests.[41]

The fifth aggregate is consciousness, which represents a reaction to the six faculties and their objects. The Buddha teaches that consciousness is impermanent, rising and passing away from moment to moment. Within the cycle of causation, it represents the third link. Since consciousness is viewed as pure awareness, this suggests that it does not recognize a particular object as a ball or a hat. It is simply aware of the presence of an object. And if the ball or hat is red, for instance, it is perception that recognizes it as red, whereas consciousness is merely aware of the presence of color. The Buddha is suggesting that consciousness is a process that illuminates objects. If consciousness is always consciousness of something, it cannot be a thing or an abstraction.[42] That is, consciousness is one of the five aggregates and a process, and is not reified into something identified as pure consciousness. Ever-changing consciousness serves to explain continuity of experience, time, and ultimately rebirth, even though it represents disunity rather than the unity of a personal self.

Whereas, eternalism represents a position for an unchanging self, and annihilationism fails to accept any real connection between events, the middle way of the Buddha views the self as changing and insists on the connectedness among events. Moreover, if we take into consideration the chain of causation and the relationship between each link in the causal chain, the causal connection of events suggests that events (physical and mental) happen according to particular clusters and patterns. From this perspective, a "person" is a series of clusters of physical and mental events that occur in a human pattern.

If for the purposes of illustration we create an imaginary person named Jennifer Student, we can see the following sequence to her life: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and finally death. As a young child, five years old, Jennifer enjoys watching cartoons on television, playing with her dog, attending school, and encountering her many playmates. When she reaches adolescence and high school, she excels at her studies, serves in student government, composes lovely poetry, is a star basketball player, and is popular with her classmates. Jennifer's high class rank, numerous extracurricular achievements, and scores on

national standardized tests enable her to gain admittance to a prestigious university. Jennifer pursues her studies at the university in the area of biochemistry with the intention of pursuing a career in the area of stem-cell research. Due to her outstanding performance as an undergraduate science major, Jennifer wins a fellowship to a major research university for her graduate studies. Upon completion of her graduate program, Jennifer is awarded a doctorate in biochemistry and lands a well-paying job with a major research corporation in the area of stem-cell research. Due to scientific breakthroughs directly related to her research, Jennifer discovers a cure for Alzheimer's disease and is awarded the Nobel Prize for her scientific work. Is the Nobel Prize winner the same person who used to watch cartoons on television?

The adult Jennifer is not exactly the same person who watched cartoons on television when she was five years old. During the course of her life, she changed many times, but she is still connected to the child who enjoyed cartoons, because there continues to exist a causal connectedness among the patterns of physical and mental events that occurred in her life. On the other hand, the person who is now the Nobel Prize-winning Jennifer, is not the same person who was a cartoon lover at one period of her life, because there is no substantial essence that persisted throughout the course of her life. Rather the award-winning scientist represents a changing cluster of physical and mental aggregates that were linked causally throughout the course of her remarkable life.

Because Jennifer relieves suffering for many victims of Alzheimer's disease and their families, when she dies her passing receives considerable mention in the national and international media. Nonetheless, her death represents the dissolution of the physical and mental events, although the causal connectedness of them does not totally cease with her demise. And since Jennifer did not achieve nibbāna during her life, she is reborn into a family of wandering gypsies in central Europe, on the basis of a new pattern of events that are connected to the previous set of physical and mental clusters related by a causal connection. But within the flow of this causal process from one life to another, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist named Jennifer did not endure as a substantial self from her distinguished life to her new mode of existence as an infant member of a gypsy family. This suggests that the death of the person known as the award-winning scientist named Jennifer did not disrupt the causal flow of the aggregates from one life to another. The new infant gypsy baby represents a new pattern of aggregates that is dependent upon the prior pattern of the award-winning scientist. The new person who is actually reborn as a gypsy is neither the same as Jennifer nor completely different from Jennifer. This is the middle way of the Buddha, a path between annihilationism and eternalism.

In retrospect, it is possible to understand that the objective of the Buddha in analyzing the physical and mental constitution of a human being is to demonstrate that it is a construct, and it contains nothing that can justifiably be called a self or a soul.[43] Furthermore, the Buddha's notion of causation helps us to see

that we are subject to a succession of modes of existence through the cycle of rebirth and an endless series of events that affect our ultimate destiny. Instead of a permanent self, we are an aggregate of impersonal, conditioned, and conditioning elements. The Buddha's position is expressed lucidly by the monk Nāgasena in his dialogical encounter with King Milinda in the text called the *Milindapañha* (The Questions of King Milinda, 27). The sagacious monk uses the term "chariot" to illustrate the king's inquiry about the nature of the self. The monk states that the term "chariot" is nothing more than an expression for an axle, wheels, chariot body, pole, and other parts that are placed in a certain relation to each other. If we examine the parts individually, we discover that in the absolute sense there is no chariot. Thus the chariot is much like the constructed notion of a self or soul, because there is nothing among the five aggregates that possesses an unchanging or eternal character. At the very most, the five aggregates give us a false idea of a self. It certainly does not mean that the self or person possesses an essence.

The overall position of the Buddha gives rise, however, to some additional questions. If there is no real self that endures, what happens after death? And what is it that is subject to rebirth? Death represents the complete dissolution of the five aggregates, which represents the total loss of any distinctive or mental identity. There does not appear to be anything that is left over to be reborn. The Buddha responds to this problem by using the example of a flame being passed from one candle to another. The question arises: Is the flame on the last candle the same as the original flame? The point that the Buddha wants to make is that there is a causal connection between the flames of the candles, although there is nothing of substance that is involved. Likewise, what is subject to rebirth is an impulse of kammic energy that is transmitted to a new mode of existence.

Since we tend to put plenty of energy and effort into developing and enhancing our self-image or ego in both healthy and unhealthy ways, the *anatta* (non-self) doctrine within the context of the first Noble Truth of the Buddha may appear to be a bleak and pessimistic perspective on human life. However, from the Buddhist perspective, the anatta view is really positive news because it means that suffering is not necessary, since there is no permanent self. In other words, because there is no permanent you, I, self, or soul, this means that the chain of causation can be stopped, which emphatically suggests that suffering is not necessary. But it order to break the chain of causation, one must sever the love of self. This implies becoming detached from the five aggregates and the cycle of pain and suffering to which they bind one.

These three views—causation, the Four Noble Truths, and anatta (non-self)—constitute for the early Buddhist community the three marks of existence. In other words, all existence in some sense represents the marks of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. There are no exceptions—except the third Noble Truth, or nibbāna, which is beyond the cycle of suffering. Is there any advantage to knowing the three marks of existence? Buddhaghoṣa responds directly to such a

question by stating that insight into impermanence gets rid of greed, insight into suffering rids us of hate, and insight into non-self dispels delusion.[44]

The Goal of Nibbāna

From one perspective, *nibbāna* means the extinction of ignorant craving (*taṇhākkhaya*). Nibbāna is also expressed negatively by terms such as uncompounded or unconditioned (*asankhata*), absence of desire (*virāga*), causeless, and cessation (*nirodha*). Nibbāna can also be expressed positively as absolute freedom (*mutti*, Sanskrit: *mukti*). This means that nibbāna is freedom from all evil, craving, hatred, ignorance, duality, relativity, time, and space. With respect to the ending of time and space for the fully enlightened person, it is only private time and space that comes to an end, because ordinary space and time (that is, history) does not end for other mortals. Although it might not be necessary to draw an absolute distinction between the negative and positive ways of expressing nibbāna, the important points to keep in mind are that nibbāna is unthinkable and incomprehensible because it is beyond logic and reason, which implies that it cannot be described or characterized in any way by discursive thought. In fact, nibbāna is inaccessible to ordinary human thought. This situation is much like the folk story of the fish and the turtle. When the turtle returns to the lake after walking on land, he tries to explain to his friend the fish the nature of land. But the fish insists that there is nothing like that being described by the turtle, that it must be liquid, and that one must be able to swim there.[45] Those who have never experienced nibbāna are like the fish insisting that nothing like hard, dry land exists because it is not part of their life experience or creative imagination.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that nibbāna is conceptual; in fact, it stands in opposition to conceptual and representational modes of thinking. It is also not a thing. There is nothing within the world to which we can point and say "this is it." It is best to conceive of nibbāna as an event or an experience that happens to you during your existence. It does not occur after you die; it must happen while you are alive. With the advent of nibbāna, greed, hatred, and delusion cease to arise, although you continue to live, think, speak, reflect, remember, imagine, encounter others, and act in the world. What are missing are all motivations that cause greed, aversion, and delusion.

What exactly nibbāna is, in fact, or what we can call its ontological status, is undetermined. It is, however, something that really does exist and can be known by the mind. The sage Nāgasena uses the simile of the wind to make his point to the king in the *Milindapañha* (270). Just as it is possible to know that the wind exists without its being seen or touched, nibbāna also just is. But if nibbāna can be known, this does not mean that it is an object of the mind, because it cannot be caused or produced. Even with its timeless, spaceless, and unconditioned characteristics, nibbāna can be realized within a spatio-temporal and causal relationship by means of the enlightened human mind. With the attainment of nibbāna,

one's consciousness and moral character are transformed. This type of transformation means that actions of an enlightened person are completely good (*kusala*) and without kammic result.[46] Because of these features and the consequences of it, nibbāna is a topic that has been misconceived and misrepresented over a long course of time, but the scholarship and interpretation on this subject are beyond the scope of this present discussion.[47]

The term *nibbāna* is derived from a Sanskrit root *vā*, meaning to blow, as the wind, or to breathe out, by a person.[48] With the addition of the prefix *nir*, it means "blown out," as when the fuel keeping the flame going becomes totally exhausted or used up. In a literal sense, nibbāna means the blowing out or extinction of a fire or the flame of a candle. From the Buddhist perspective, this does not mean that the flame is utterly annihilated. It rather persists in an unseen state. According to the predominant classical Sanskrit viewpoint, to blow out a candle is not to destroy the light but is rather to transform its mode of existence from visible to invisible.[49] Similarly, nibbāna is not annihilation of the person or soul, as some scholars have argued.[50] What are extinguished finally by the realization of nibbāna are the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion.[51] Nibbāna is also not the natural result of the extinction of craving, because it is not the result of anything, including the Noble Eightfold Path; nibbāna is beyond the cycle of causation.

Moreover, nibbāna is also not a state or a transcendent realm that one enters. In other words, there is no such thing as entering into nibbāna after death. There is a term, however, used by Buddhists to denote the death of an enlightened one: *parinibbuto*. Rather than meaning entering into nibbāna, it means rather to be "fully passed away," "fully blown out," or "fully extinct," because an enlightened being is not subject to rebirth after death.[52] This is akin to the flame of a lamp going out because the oil has been totally exhausted. The term *parinibbuto* is often used to distinguish nibbāna without a basis from nibbāna when there is a basis remaining. The former refers to an enlightened being after death, whereas the latter refers to an enlightened being during his or her lifetime, and with the basis of a body and mind. The Buddha lived in a nibbānic condition during the final forty-five years of his life, according to tradition. Such a fully enlightened being is called an arahant in the Pāli texts.

If one does not achieve nibbāna during one's current lifetime, one is absolutely assured of being reborn into a similar or different state, depending upon one's kammic energy. Thus there is an urgency built into the overall message of the Buddha to unenlightened listeners. This urgency is illustrated very nicely by a story in the Pāli canon.[53] Having arisen from a long period of solitary meditation, a monk named Mālunkyaputta approaches the Buddha to ask him to explain whether or not the world is eternal, whether an enlightened being exists after death, and other types of abstruse and difficult questions. In response to these questions, the Buddha uses an analogy of a man hit with a poisoned arrow whose friends procure a physician to save his life. But the injured man proceeds to ask the physician a series of questions about the identity of the shooter of the

arrow, his social background, his height, skin color, residence, type of bow, and string used, material used to create the arrow, the type of bird feathers used to make the arrow, and so forth. The Buddha's point is that the wounded man would die before he received the answers to all his questions. Moreover, the answers to such questions have little to do with understanding and practicing the path. Since time is short, do not waste any more of it and get started right away on the path to liberation.

If we place the notion of nibbāna in conjunction with the anatta (non-self) teachings, it is legitimate for one to ask a question: If there is no self, who or what realizes nibbāna? The Buddhist answer is that it is wisdom (*paññā*), which is the content of enlightenment, that realizes it. But there is no permanent self behind the realization. The arahant (fully enlightened being) is selfless, although such a person possesses knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Another problematic question is whether nibbāna represents the annihilation of the self! Again, the Buddhist answer is that there is no permanent self to annihilate. There is, however, the annihilation of the illusion or the false idea of the self by the fully enlightened person.

Is it possible to speak of nibbāna as a state of happiness, if categories of space and time do not apply to it? Nibbāna is not happiness as commonly conceived by human beings, such as, for instance, a condition of material comfort, sense pleasure, and mental and physical health; lack of worry, anxiety, and fear; or joy and contentment. With the dissolution of the five aggregates, there is a lack of feeling and a lack of conceptual consciousness with which one can experience happiness.[54] The great Buddhist commentator Buddhaghoṣa refers to the special perceptual nature of the nibbānic experience that is characterized by equanimity (*upekkhā*). This experience is like a condition of happiness in its blissful and peaceful nature. This is happiness, then, in a very restricted sense. Buddhaghoṣa also describes this experience as a perception of lightness due to being liberated from various hindrances.[55]

Concluding Remarks

The Buddha's philosophy of causation makes it clear that everything within the phenomenal world is impermanent. There is nothing that one can point to that possesses an enduring permanent nature. We have seen that this is true for the self, ego, or soul. The initial assertion of the Four Noble Truths makes it clear that life is unsatisfactory due to suffering, which is most immediately due to ignorant craving and ultimately to being subject to the entire cycle of causation. But the Four Noble Truths also embody a hopeful message, in the sense that there is a path to liberation that one can choose to take during one's lifetime. This path is grounded in a moral and ethical lifestyle that demands becoming mindful of our breathing, body, mind, and all that we do and say. The successful completion of the path can only be accomplished by oneself through one's own energy, striving, determination, and fortitude.

The goal of this journey leads one to a blissful and peaceful destination that is the opposite of the phenomenal world, its ephemeral happiness and pleasures, and its cycle of pain and suffering. In contrast to the phenomenal world, nibbāna is permanent, constant, timeless, and changeless. Nibbāna represents thus a strange kind of utopian goal. Steven Collins expresses this uniqueness in the following way: "Thus nirvana is not only eu-topia, Good-place, metaphorically, it is also ou-topia, No-place, twice over: First, by Buddhist definition, it exists outside the spatio-temporal locations of the conditioned world of rebirth, *saṃsāra*, second, in my argument, it is part of the discursive textual world of soteriology embodied in the Pali imaginaire, which is, one might say, No-place in history."[56]

What if the possibility of nibbāna did not exist and did not form part of the message of the Buddha? What if there were just the initial two Noble Truths? Given the fundamental presuppositions of the thought of the Buddha based on his personal experience, human existence would be absurd, because there would be just senseless suffering and nothing more. Moreover, human existence would be absurd because suffering would be never-ending. There would be no end to the narrative message of the Buddha. But within the context of a narrative mode of thinking, "nirvana proves the sense of an ending, in both the Buddhist master-text and in the countless actual texts and ritual sequences."[57] Therefore, there is a beginning and end of the narrative message of the Buddha. The beginning is grounded in the cycle of human existence and the end of the narrative takes one to a good place that is paradoxically a no-place. But this is a place devoid of suffering.

4

Ethical and Political Implications of Buddhist Narratives

Along the tree-lined banks of French Creek in northwestern Pennsylvania there lives an old woman in the small town of Meadville. The old woman lives in a cardboard box that she found in the rear of a local appliance store. This box serves as her home throughout the year; there she sleeps, eats, finds shelter from the natural elements, and spends much of her time. There are some in this community of hard-working people who think that she is a little crazy. Other people have been concerned enough to ask a local social service agency to check into her situation. Social workers have visited the old woman, who has been locally dubbed "Granny," to inquire whether or not she needs help and to discern if she is mentally competent to take care of herself. Old Granny always insists that she is fine and does not need any assistance. Some social workers who have examined her have questioned whether she is mentally competent. Some citizens think that her cardboard box is an aesthetic blight in a normally scenic area, and they insist that she be removed, which the local political authorities are reluctant to do, because they think that her forcible removal will only lead to negative publicity for being uncaring and unsympathetic. This scene could, of course, be taking place in India or any other country. What is the responsibility of society to a person like Granny, who is not harming anyone except perhaps herself by refusing aid. What is the responsibility of individuals passing by the creek in their automobiles on their way to work or some other destination? Should Granny be forced to submit to a psychological test to determine her level of mental competency? Should she be forcibly removed and placed into a shelter for the homeless for her own welfare? These are not questions with simple answers, because political and ethical issues are never easily solved, as if they were simple issues of black and white, right and wrong, ethical and unethical.

There are some earlier Western interpreters of Buddhism who would argue that the religion would not be concerned with the plight of Granny, because Buddhists are supposedly unconcerned about moral and ethical issues: the religion's

orientation is toward world renunciation and its goal is something that sounds nihilistic. In short, they would argue, Buddhism lacks an ethical perspective and thus would simply ignore an indigent person. But to assume that Buddhism is devoid of an ethical perspective is short-sighted and simply mistaken. The previous chapter called attention to the Noble Eightfold Path and the fact that it calls for a certain pattern of moral and ethical behavior in the way one conducts interactions with others, speaks, earns a livelihood, and thinks.

Regardless of the path and goal of the religion, Buddhism embodies a consistent and powerful ethical position. The Buddha draws a distinction between rules of discipline (*vinaya*) and virtues (*sīla*). Because the rules of discipline are the correct course of action, they ought to be performed. The proper rules of conduct are distinct from ordinary modes of behavior because they are not characterized by the passion and hatred typical of normal modes of action.[1] In contrast, the virtues represent the foundation of the moral life.[2] Once a person is established in virtue, he or she can proceed to develop thought (*citta*) and wisdom (*paññā*). As significant as virtues are, they are insufficient by themselves, because Buddhism does not advocate being virtuous as the goal of life. Although virtue can serve as an impetus to liberation from the cycle of suffering, there is no virtue that is ultimate or absolutely essential from the Buddhist perspective.[3]

With this distinction in mind, how might a Buddhist respond to the plight of Granny and her living conditions? At the bare minimum, a Buddhist would show compassion (*karuṇā*) toward Granny by having sympathy for her suffering. The Buddhist would not draw a distinction between Granny's suffering and his or her own. However, the Buddhist would not become emotionally identified with her suffering, because this could lead to mere sentimentality. To become emotionally identified with her would be like a person without any ability to swim jumping into a lake to save a drowning child, which would result in a double drowning. It is necessary for a compassionate person to be cool-headed and emotionally self-controlled, a posture similar to that of a medical doctor analyzing a patient and prescribing a remedy in a detached manner—which does not mean a cold-hearted, uncaring way. The Buddhist goal is to strive for the spontaneous exercise of compassion. From a stance of compassion, the Buddhist might visit Granny in her cardboard box of a home, and attempt to discern the reasons for her situation.

Once the Buddhist demonstrates compassion to the woman, he or she might then exercise loving kindness (*mettā*). This major Buddhist virtue is contrary to ill will in either deed or thought. The *Mettā Sutta* expresses the spirit of this benevolent harmlessness and respect for others in the following way:

> Just as a mother would protect her only child
> A the risk of her own life
> Even so let him cultivate a boundless heart
> Towards all Beings
> Let his thoughts of boundless love

Pervade the whole world,
Above, below and across without any obstruction,
Without any hatred, without any enmity.[4]

What is striking about this quotation is that it begins with loving kindness for a particular person and then extends it to include everyone in the world. This reflects the importance of beginning loving kindness with oneself, destroying narrow selfish interests, and eradicating greed and hatred. After beginning with oneself, a person extends loving kindness to loved ones, and then to those toward whom one feels neutral. A person next extends it to those toward whom one is hostile, and finally shares it with the entire universe. The loving kindness of oneself and others are the same, and they mutually enhance each other, because loving kindness toward others purifies you and loving kindness toward yourself strengthens this virtue toward others. It is important to be aware that it is unwise and dangerous to begin the practice of loving kindness by directing it to a person that you do not like, a loved one, a neutral person, a hostile person, a dead person, or a member of the opposite sex. By beginning one's practice of this virtue with any of these examples, a practitioner risks falling into mental fatigue, emotional involvement, anger, lack of concentration, or lust.[5] By avoiding any of these pitfalls, the person exercising this virtue radiates a positive influence that exerts a real effect on others, including benevolence toward all living creatures and charitable action toward them. The Buddhists view loving kindness as a unique power that is able to counteract its opposite by preventing it from arising, and it is able to overcome it if its opposite does arise.[6]

An excellent example of the spirit of loving kindness is embodied in a *Jātaka* narrative about an arrogant king and a loving, patient, and forbearing teacher. The king is upset one day when he finds his concubines listening attentively to a teacher. The wicked king decides to test the patience of the teacher by having him flogged. After the teacher replies to the king that his patience is not skin deep but that it lies deep within the recesses of his heart, the monarch commands that his hands, feet, nose, and ears be cut off. The composed teacher remains unfazed and free of anger toward the sick-minded king, and he tells the monarch that he only feels loving kindness toward him. In response, the king kicks his victim in the chest and storms away in a huff.[7]

Another virtue that a Buddhist monk can utilize is sympathetic joy (*mudita*), which means rejoicing in the success or joy of others without envy or hypocrisy. This is a difficult virtue to cultivate, because it involves forgetting one's own success or failure, and often the good fortune of others reminds us of our own failure and misfortune. This virtue is beyond fellow feeling, in the sense that there is a complete identification of one's self with others. Therefore, there is no distinction between my joy and the joy of others. In relation to someone living in a cardboard box, there is unlikely to be much joy of theirs that one can share, although the fourth major virtue, equanimity, should prove to be applicable.

Equanimity (*upekkhā*) suggests being detached, disinterested, and emotionally neutral. In practical terms, equanimity means to perform action in a detached manner. Since all actions produce kammic results, one must attempt to perform action that undermines kammic consequences. A perfect deed is one that is performed without attachment or emotional clinging to the deed or its results, creating no positive or negative kammic consequences. Whatever a monk offers is best performed on the basis of this virtue, which emphasizes how to exercise compassion. With respect to Granny, a Buddhist might share some food with her, listen to her story, inquire about her needs, attempt to meet her needs if possible, determine if there is a way to make her life more comfortable and tolerable, and maybe share the teachings of the Buddha with her, which is the most important gift that a Buddhist can give to her. The practice of giving is important for both a Buddhist and Granny, because it leads to mental calm, joy, and gladness. In the case of Granny it can help to prepare her for meditation, if she decides to try it.[8] Loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity are called in some Buddhist texts "illimitables" or "divine abidings" because in the former instance the virtues possess the potential of universal extension and in the latter case they are akin to heavenly qualities.

The practice of these various virtues can provide immediate benefits for a person by giving subjective happiness, freedom from fear in this life, and lack of anxiety over death.[9] The practitioner of virtue is free of remorse and regret with respect to actions. These benefits of practicing virtues can also produce further consequences such as delight, joy, happiness, concentration, knowledge, and insight.[10] In other words, a virtuous person does not have to die to reap the positive kammic rewards of behavior. If Granny, for instance, behaved in a virtuous manner, she could expect some immediate benefits from her virtue.

If Granny lived in a Buddhist country, she would have had the opportunity to give to the Saṅgha (monastic community), which provides a layperson an opportunity to plant positive kammic seeds. There are two dimensions of giving in Buddhism: the condition of the mind and motivation of the donor, and the virtuous condition of the recipient. If the donor is motivated by greater returns for his or her generosity, or if the recipient is not a virtuous monk, the giving will not result in kammic fruitfulness, because the parties to the transaction are not pure. Moreover, the gift must have been ethically acquired to be pure.[11] Stealing food from a local store to present to a monk to acquire positive kammic results is self-defeating. On the other hand, a gift bestowed by an evil person to a holy person can be purified by the virtue of the recipient. Of course, a gift from a virtuous person to a virtuous recipient brings the very best kammic results.[12] Whenever and whatever one gives, it is also preferable to do so without discrimination and calculation.

After talking to Granny, a Buddhist might discover that her current condition in life is due to her actions in a previous birth. This might help explain Granny's current situation, and it can serve as an impetus to help her, because she may

have been related to you in another life. Insects, animals, and humans are all part of the same cycle of existence. If there is a possibility that Granny may have been related to you in a previous life, this is further motivation to help her. Granny's dire situation is not due to a deterministic fate (*niyati*), which needs to be distinguished from the law of kamma because the latter stresses human action and its effects. According to the Buddhist understanding of the law of kamma, a person shapes his or her destiny according to deeds performed, making the working of it flexible and dynamic instead of rigid and mechanical.

Let us assume that a compassionate Buddhist discovers while talking to Granny that a large part of her problem is economic deprivation. Underlying the Buddhist's response would be understanding that Buddhism does not encourage poverty for lay people because economic deprivation encourages theft, social unrest, and immorality. Poverty makes it more difficult to lead a moral, ethical, and spiritual life.[13] The Buddhist might offer Granny a job, education, or social assistance to help her extricate herself from her poverty. If our compassionate Buddhist gives Granny a dollar that he had been given by a donor, and she spends it on a lottery ticket and wins a huge sum of money, is this contrary to Buddhist ethical principles or attitudes? The Buddhists are not opposed to wealth per se, but they are against wealth acquired by illegal or dishonest means.

The spirit of the Buddhist's position with regard to wealth is embodied in a narrative about a man named Ghatīkāra.[14] Instead of joining a Buddhist monastic community as he desired, he supported his ageing and blind parents by his occupation as a potter. He was a generous potter, because he allowed people to take his products without payment. His generosity inspired the king to give him food and his customers to repay him with useful items. This tale stresses the spirit in which wealth is earned and used. Whatever wealth the potter gained was accomplished without violence, in accordance with Buddhist teachings, sharing with others, enjoying the pleasure of giving for oneself, being free from greed, and being liberated from clinging to one's wealth. The fundamental Buddhist attitude toward economic ethics centers on the appropriate use of wealth. It is considered a detrimental use of wealth to hoard it or to be niggardly: wealth is only beneficial when it is used correctly, for the benefit of others. If one hopes to benefit from one's wealth, it is absolutely necessary to be generous during one's lifetime.

A Buddhist text relates the story of a king who failed to create economic opportunities for his subjects. As a result, poverty became rampant, corrupted people, and motivated them to steal in order to provide basic necessities for themselves. This suggests that the Buddhists think that a comfortable material life contributes to a harmonious society. The king decided to act on this belief by providing a thief with an opportunity to acquire some wealth. This action motivated other impoverished people to steal and led to an uncontrollable situation. The king responded to the social chaos by punishing those caught stealing.[15] This narrative is suggestive about Buddhist attitudes toward economic justice. The simple equal distribution of wealth does not by itself solve socioeconomic problems. The

redistribution of economic resources must be accompanied by virtue and moral progress.[16]

From the Buddhist perspective, a social problem like hunger is a physical and economic social disease to which all societies are subject. How can we get at the root problem of hunger? Society is subject to three natural disabilities (that is, desire, hunger, and decay), and hunger is experienced because of desire; it can therefore be alleviated by not allowing desire to prevail in a society. Decay is more difficult to cure because it is part of the fabric of human existence, in which everything is subject to birth and death within the cycle of arising and ceasing.[17]

Buddhist Ethical Guidelines

The Buddha provided some basic guidelines for acceptable behavior that are part of the eightfold path discussed in the previous chapter. He specified five precepts (*pañca śīla*), and the monastic community later added five more rules. These five precepts are not divine commandments. They are comparable, however, to wise counsel, which is why we can refer to them as guidelines for behavior. These precepts need to be examined to demonstrate the ethical dimension embodied within the path of Buddhism.

The initial precept is noninjury or nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) to all living creatures, from the lowest insect to humans. This precept defines an benevolent attitude toward all life and living entities. The Buddhist practice of this precept does not extend to the extremes exhibited by Jainism. But from both the Buddhist and Jain perspectives, nonviolence suggests an intimate involvement with and relationship to all living things. The precept of nonviolence is a guideline injunction that ultimately demands the virtue of loving kindness (*mettā*) toward all creatures.

Even though all creatures possess inalienable dignity, this does not mean that one is obligated to preserve life under all circumstances.[18] Buddhists are convinced that not all life is equally valuable, a determination that is made on the basis of a creature's ability to attain nibbāna. Another criterion is whether or not something possesses a kammic life, which in turn depends on two criteria: sentience and ontological individuality. Those that fit the criteria of ontological individuality are distinct beings such as a cow, horse, dog, bird, or fish, in contrast to those that are not, like bacteria, cells, and micro-organisms.[19] Only sentient and individual life is kammic and possesses intrinsic worth, whereas non-kammic life is merely instrumental. This suggests that non-kammic life provides an environment that kammic life needs to sustain itself and achieve its end. The precept of nonviolence thus presupposes a respect for all life, which is a universal moral imperative, as well as pointing to the instrumental need to preserve an ecological balance in order to survive and achieve one's goal.

In order to determine whether or not an act of violence has occurred, it is necessary to determine whether the act has met five conditions. These types of conditions can be applied to violations of other precepts. The first condition is

obvious: there must be a living being. The second is that the perpetrator must know that the victim is a living being. Most important is the presence of an intention to harm or kill; next is the expenditure of effort to harm another; and finally, the result—whether it is harm or death.

The second precept, against stealing, also measures the act by five conditions: the existence of another person's property, an awareness that it belongs to another person, the intention to commit the act of stealing, the use of some sort of means or device to steal, and the actual removal of the property. Buddhist texts identify two modes of stealing: deceptive practices used to cheat another person, and taking an item without gaining consent.

The remaining precepts involve chastity, abstaining from false speech, and abstaining from the use of intoxicants. The rationale for restraining from sexual relations is obviously intended to control a monk's desires and cravings. The Buddhists radicalize chastity by insisting that its complete observance involves abstinence from the five forms of self-indulgence, both direct and indirect, connected to the five types of sensuous objects.[20] The precept about speech includes an injunction against telling something that you know is untrue; it extends to concealing the truth, using exaggerated language, accepting as true something that you know is false, and being negligent in the search for the truth. This fourth precept involves being careful of misapprehension, because speaking the truth is always dependent on accurate and lucid thinking.[21] With respect to the final precept, it is obvious that some people use intoxicants to flee personal problems and escape from social responsibilities. The Pāli texts describe drunkenness as "the delight of fools."[22] These texts also acknowledge that drinking intoxicants is a waste of financial resources, and it leads to various forms of antisocial behavior like quarreling and indecent bodily exposure. It increases the possibility of becoming ill and of losing of one's good name and wisdom.[23] The precept against using intoxicants is connected to the danger of distorting one's mental vision. The importance of this precept is best understood within the context of the importance of body, mind control, and meditation. From the Buddhist perspective, intoxicants, which are broadly defined, are counterproductive because they hinder your spiritual progress and leave you not in control, potentially attached to some liquid or substance. Intoxication is also contrary to the five ethical precepts that presuppose detachment and self-control: "The wise person, by rousing oneself, by vigilance, by restraint, by control, may make for oneself an island which the flood cannot overwhelm."[24]

Taking the five precepts as a foundation, Buddhist monastic communities added five additional precepts that make best sense within the context of monastic life. Monks were prohibited from eating at certain times, which usually means after midday. Monks were prohibited from dancing and singing, which suggests that monasteries were not abodes of mirth; they were rather quiet, sober places for reflection and meditation, much like monastic communities in the West.

Monks were prohibited from adorning their bodies with perfumes and garlands. This precept would today include tattoos on any part of one's body. The ninth precept prescribed avoidance of using a high chair or seat. The rationale for this was that such items of furniture were connected to high social rank, whereas a more egalitarian spirit prevailed in a Buddhist monastery. The final precept forbids receiving or using gold or silver.

A review of these 10 precepts enables us to see that ethics played a central role in the path of Buddhism. A reader might have noticed that the various precepts did not originate from a divine source like the Ten Commandments of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In contrast, an historical human being offered the Buddhist precepts as wise courses of action by which to guide one's life, taking into consideration the inexorable law of kamma. If you follow the five basic precepts diligently, you will not incur any negative kammic results that can hinder the attainment of your spiritual goal. Thus it is possible to characterize Buddhist ethics as essentially religious in the sense that it offers a virtuous pattern of conduct and the possibility of salvation.

The five basic precepts are not intended simply for the benefit of monks and nuns. Leading an ethical lifestyle is also beneficial for the laity, although practicing celibacy would be optional for the laity. Buddhist texts make it very clear that an ethical life can lead to both religious and more mundane results. The texts identify these as gaining an excellent reputation, wealth, and joy by recalling to oneself one's moral purity; self-confidence in social contexts; dying without anxiety; and rebirth in a heaven instead of a hell. An ethical life also makes progress in meditation more effortless.[25]

Action and Intention

In the Pāli Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha essentially equates intention and action.[26] An ethical or unethical action is, however, more than a physical or mental deed. Any action involves three aspects: thought, word, and deed. Each of these aspects produces significant kammic results: your actions affect your consciousness, which in turn determines the type of person that you become. At death, the law of kamma based on your deeds during life and in prior lives determines your future destiny. Kamma is a natural law built into the cosmos to which even the gods are subject, and not something over which they are have control. To grasp this from a Buddhist viewpoint, it is beneficial to think of a deed as a seed that you create. This seed eventually ripens and gives rise to fruit. Obviously, Buddhists prefer fruitful actions because these types of deeds are auspicious, which work to purify one's mind and also lead to good fortune in the future.[27] The opposite of fruitful actions are evil (*pāpa*) deeds, which have connotations of infertility, harmfulness, barrenness, and inauspiciousness.[28] In summary, the Buddha upset the traditional Indian notion of karma by radically ethicizing it. This

implied the denial of any liberating value to ritual and to social distinctions. It also transformed the universe into a vast ethical arena, because people were given a status that depended on their actions.[29]

To perform a deed because it will bring fruitful results is not sufficient by itself. If you give to those less fortunate in order that your generosity will result, for instance, in a better state of rebirth for yourself, this is not acting from the purest and highest of motives.[30] A person ideally does not demonstrate any interest in the eventual results of his or her generosity, and so is detached from the results or fruits of his or her actions. The Buddha praises such a person for both generosity of action and purity of motives.[31] From the Buddhist perspective, the size of a gift is not important. A large monetary gift from an extraordinarily wealthy person might not, in fact, be as kammically fruitful as a small gift from a poor person.[32] The kammic fruitfulness of a gift is dependent on both the mind of the giver and the status of the recipient. If the motive and manner of giving by a donor is impure in the sense of being generated by greed, hatred, or delusion, the fruitfulness of the act will be less, and if the recipient is impure or unworthy, the fruitfulness will be less than if the recipient were righteous.[33] Thus there is more than motive at stake, because one does not want to waste generosity on unworthy people.

Even though the condition and motivation of the donor and the ethical status of the recipient are important, it is imperative to look at the intentionality of the act in order to determine whether it is good or bad. The simplest Buddhist way to measure whether an intention (*cetanā*) is positive or not is to discern whether it leads to detachment or attachment. Actions that lead to detachment are obviously positive, whereas those that lead to attachment are negative. The former leads to a path of freedom and happiness, while the latter leads to bondage and suffering. The intention of an action determines its ethical quality and the possible positive or negative kammic consequences. If you harm another living creature, you have violated, for instance, the first ethical precept. Assuming that you perform the harmful act unintentionally, the negative kammic consequences are not as great as if you had actually intended to harm someone.[34] A *Jātaka* story (3.64–66) illustrates nonintentional action with the tale of a captured partridge that is struck by a hunter to attract other birds. When the hunter hits the captured bird it cries, attracting other birds to their death. Since the partridge plays a passive and nonintentional role, it is not guilty of any intentional and harmful actions. The guilty party is the hunter, because the partridge is as much a victim as the birds that are killed. This is analogous to the distinction in many legal systems between a premeditated act and an accidental action. It is mental and willful intention that gives a motive impetus in the short term and sustains it over the long term.[35] Fully knowing what one is doing also has consequences, because acting in a negative way unknowingly is actually worse, that is, produces a more negative kammic consequence, than if one acts knowing precisely what one is doing.[36] What Buddhists object to then is the ignorance with which one performs the negative deed.

The Buddhist ethical position with respect to intention avoids a doctrine of radical free will that would insist that a person is responsible for any intentional voluntary or conscious action. Buddhism also avoids a deterministic position that denies free will. For the Buddhist, any intentional bodily, verbal, or mental actions generate corresponding dispositions that gradually shape the moral and ethical character of a person. This has important ethical consequences because we can be held responsible for actions done unintentionally because of the nature of our dispositions created over a long period of time.[37] It is possible to eradicate these various dispositions by a regimen of meditation, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Besides the importance of intention in Buddhist ethics, there is also a role for conscience, as long as it is exercised with certain human qualities. Self-respect is the first such quality; this motivates a person to avoid actions that would result in disgrace and denigrate one's moral integrity. To care about consequences is the second quality of the conscience. We cease to act in a negative way when we are concerned about being reproached or blamed for an action, and we feel embarrassed for our unethical behavior. The final quality is heedfulness, which is a combination of energy and mindfulness, and forms the basis for other virtues.[38] The role of conscience in Buddhism is not inconsistent with scriptural teachings, because conclusions made according to conscience are in accord with the teachings.[39]

In addition to conscience, Buddhists find a role for remorse for one's unethical actions. The kammic consequences of committing a bad deed are less if the perpetrator expresses regret than no remorse is expressed.[40] A similar scenario can also be true of good acts. There was a man in a previous lifetime that gave to an enlightened being, but he later regretted his action of generosity. After he died, he was reborn a wealthy man because of his previous generosity, but he was also reborn a miser, and he could not enjoy his wealth because he had regretted his generosity.[41]

Issues of Kingship, War, and Peace

During the earliest stage of humanity, according to the Buddha, virtuous conduct was the norm. There was mutual respect among people, and no theft, no false speech, no cheating, and no violence. (As we will see in the next chapter, the Buddhist monastic code was from one perspective an attempt to recapture this golden age.) Within the context of such an idyllic condition, the state was unnecessary because its role as a regulatory agency was superfluous. This pristine, stateless condition of humanity did not last. Over a period of time, human behavior deteriorated, and untruth, deceit, stealing, and violence became common. Communal and interpersonal conflicts prevailed. This development led to a state of anarchy in which life was governed by the law of the jungle. Having witnessed the impossible nature of life, the people decided to elect one person from among them to govern them as a king, who was given authority to enforce law and order. For his services, the people agreed to pay the king one-sixth of their produce each

year. With the creation of kingship, anarchy was terminated, social order was established, and life became possible.[42] Since kingship was established to prevent a state of anarchy, and since the king held absolute power, Buddhists attempted to inject a higher morality into the king's role in order to control its absolute nature.

Early Buddhists accepted the political reality of monarchies. Kingship was certainly preferable to social disorder. It is possible to find denunciations of the coercive exercise of power by ruling members of the warrior caste, however. Buddhists' objection to the warrior code of conduct should be understood as evidence for opposition to a narrow definition of politics and not to politics as such.[43] The early Buddhists were not opposed to the practice of politics per se, as is evident in the role that monks played in many kingdoms as political advisors to rulers, but they did want to substitute an ethically comprehensive theory of politics for the prevailing political machinations concentrated on military power. The early Buddhists wanted to substitute for kingship by force, self-interest, and intimidation a more benign system focusing on the sovereignty of the universal cosmic law (Dhamma; Sanskrit: Dharma), and through it a corrective process that they identified with the righteous ruler. This cosmic law and corrective process tended to be identified with the teachings of the Buddha. Functioning as both the reality discovered by the Buddha and the cosmic law that regulated and governed the universe, the Dhamma was both the source for cosmic order and a means of liberation from the world.[44] The Buddhists envisioned a Dhamma that functioned as a universal and all-encompassing norm for human behavior. The code of the righteous ruler would embody this Dhamma, and he would govern his kingdom in accord with this law.

The ideal ruler was called a Cakravartin (Pāli: Cakkavatti), and he formed the crux of order within a society. The sovereign was the wheel (*cakra*; Pāli: *cakka*) turner. The wheel was a symbol of the Dhamma, which replaced the scepter or rod as a symbol of social and political authority. The king symbolically turned a metaphorical wheel that was twofold: a wheel of morality and a wheel of dominion. He also provided for the welfare of religion. In fact, the king and religion needed each other in the sense that religion acted as a field of merit in which the king functioned as the foremost merit maker. From a Buddhist perspective, the king needed the Saṅgha (monastic community) to make and to realize his merit and to thus fulfill his kingship. A basic presupposition of the Buddhist position was that a king was generous by definition, whereas a niggardly king contradicted the definition of what it meant to be a king.

The wheel turner was also a cosmocrator in the sense that by conquest the king created a world. In short, he turned chaos into cosmos. Within this cosmos, the king was the center and axis of orientation, so that symbolically his rule radiated outward from its central position. A king thus extended his control to the continents located at each of the four cardinal points.[45] As the axis of this world created by his conquests, he functioned to correct confusion by maintaining order and justice. From the Buddhist perspective, kingship had a multiplier effect

because actions of the king influenced the rest of society and the cosmos. If the king's influence was causing negative results in the society and the natural world, this rationale could be used to overthrow an unsuccessful king. It was essential for the king to practice a policy of pacification after his conquest of a territory instead of a policy of intimidation and repression. In practical terms this meant that he returned the conquered land to the defeated king, and the subdued sovereign submitted to the basic five precepts of Buddhism.

There were some important consequences and implications for this policy. A righteous ruler became identified with the socially corrective process embodied by the Dhamma to the extent that his code of conduct was informed and suffused by it and his actions formed a righteous society. Most important, the king became a propagator of the Buddhist precepts, and he thus became the overseer and guardian of morals and ethical behavior. Another implication was that the victorious king became a king of kings (*rājarāja*), a world monarch, by letting the vanquished kings keep their thrones, administer their kingdoms, and pay tribute to the victor. Overall, the Buddhist notion of kingship was paradoxical because its theory exceeded the Brahmanical theory of monarchy and raised the notion of the world ruler to the level of both sovereign regulator and the ground of society, by claiming that the basis and epitome of kingship was the universal cosmic law.[46]

Within the Indian cultural context, kingship was commonly assumed to be a reward for meritorious acts performed in a previous life, although it was also assumed that a king would be born into the family of the warrior caste with an honorable lineage.[47] The basis of kingship was traced to the notion of the five powers, however: strength of arms, strength of wealth, strength of ministers, prestige of high birth, and strength of intellect.[48] In addition to having these powers, many Indian kings were charismatic figures. For those that lacked personal charisma, their charisma was embodied in their status and the symbols associated with their exalted station. What might be called institutional charisma was associated with such items as the flag, jewel, coronation conch, slippers, sword, diadem, fan, throne, wheel, elephant, horse, and white umbrella. Some of these symbols were connectioned with powers of nature, is especially the wheel, which was associated symbolically with the sun. Finally, the king was a father figure, and his subjects were his children for whom he cared.[49]

The historical sovereign that Buddhists often alluded to as a model was Aśoka, grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, who was the founder of the Mauryan Dynasty. Aśoka, who reigned from 274 to 232 B.C.E., who brought the dynasty to its apogee as he united nearly the entire Indian subcontinent for the first time. Aśoka was remembered best, however, for his royal edicts and rock inscriptions that appeared all over the empire. In his edicts, he attempted to establish policies for enlightened rule based on Buddhist principles. They were promulgated in the aftermath of his war with the Kalingas in 262 B.C.E., when he was forty-two years old. This war and its bloody aftermath served to trigger an identity crisis, and over a two-year period he became a convert to Buddhism.[50] He became remorseful over

all the death and suffering that the war initiated, and he decided to renounce violence and devote himself to the study and propagation of Buddhist Dhamma, which was to be the legal standard of his empire. During his reign, Aśoka sent Buddhist missionaries to other South Asian countries, transforming Buddhism into a missionary religion and setting it on its path toward becoming a major world religion.

An examination of Aśoka's rock edicts and pillars is very instructive. Rock edict 12, for instance, advocates religious tolerance in that it honors people of all religious paths. Pillar edict 12 manifests ecological awareness by ordering banyan trees and mango groves to be planted, and resthouses to be built and wells to be dug every half-mile along the main roads. Other rock edits and pillars promoted ordinary ethical precepts, whereas others renounced war. Although the ultimate Buddhist goal of nibbāna (Sanskrit: nirvāṇa) was not mentioned in the edicts, Aśoka's goal for his understanding of the Dhamma was happiness in either this world or the next life. Virtues of giving and merit making were also extolled. In fact, many edicts reflected the major Buddhist virtues already discussed in this chapter. In addition, Aśoka's use of Prakrit language suggests his attempt to achieve cultural uniformity. And his use of the term Dhamma reflects his concern for ethical behavior and not specifically a promotion of the Buddha's teachings.[51]

Buddhist texts traced war and other types of human conflict to greed, hatred, and delusion.[52] Enduring harm occurs when you react to an attack with anger or violence, because of the suffering that you perpetrate upon yourself by arousing negative feelings and creating dire karmic results for the future.[53] Reacting to aggression with intense anger is like throwing dust into a strong wind: you will be the person that will ultimately be harmed. Instead of conquering others by force, the Buddhist position was rather to conquer by Dhamma. This type of conquest was preferable because Dhamma generated no antagonism or opposition between either party. Instead of viewing one's enemy as an antagonist, the Buddhist transformed the aggressor into a beneficial opportunity for practicing patience and nonviolence, which Buddhists wanted to strive for at all times.[54] Buddhist teachings did allow for violence for purposes of self-defense, although it did not approve of violence. In fact, it was a violation of the monastic code to observe armies fight, to witness sham conflicts, or simply to watch a military parade.[55]

For a king or anyone else involved in a dispute, Buddhism suggested seven ways to settle a disagreement. The first was to reach a consensus by concentrating on principles on which the opponents agreed. If this procedure failed, the parties should resort to majority voting. In some cases, it would be best to overlook an offence when a guilty party could not recall committing it, or when the perpetrator was not rational or promised not to repeat it, or when a person only admitted to an offence after being questioned. Finally, Buddhist texts advocated covering over a dispute when each person or party admitted to faults.[56] These guidelines were obviously intended for the context of a monastic community, but the Buddhists wanted to suggest their applicability on a larger social scale.

Besides being involved with resolving conflicts and protecting the inhabitants of his realm, a king had to care for the economic welfare of his people. It was incumbent upon a king not to let poverty develop in his land, because it led to crime and other forms of social malaise. A Buddhist text tells about a former life of the Buddha as a righteous king who had a beautiful lotus pond built, and around it needy people could receive food, drink, shelter, money, and even marriage partners.[57]

It is possible to imagine an economic system based on Buddhist principles. Such a system would refrain from harmful activities like the manufacture of armaments and chemical poisons. With a focus on simplicity, it would concentrate on essential social and economic needs, with the aim of avoiding poverty and high unemployment. It would use renewable resources whenever possible. It would encourage self-sufficiency and the use of cooperative economic ventures. It would not neglect rural areas at the expense of urban areas.[58]

In response to someone who might think that this imagined Buddhist economic system was too idealistic to be practical, one can point to the Buddhist monastic establishment during the T'ang and Sung dynasties of China, which confirmed the viability of such a system. Monastic communities operated water-powered flour mills and oil presses to produce oil used for cooking and fuel. They operated large markets, and they lent seed, grain, and money at interest. Monasteries served as hostels for traveling state officials and for candidates for civil examination going to provincial or national capitals to take the exams.[59] Buddhist monasteries were thus an important part of the Chinese economy.

Environmental Ethical Issues

Within the context of Buddhist thought, humans have not been given dominion over the earth, as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, although humans are considered superior to animals in the sense that they have the capacity for spiritual development and can act ethically and morally. Instead of a distinction between humans and nature, Buddhism prefers a distinction between sentient and nonsentient beings. The former can think, experience suffering, and be able to transcend suffering. Although only humans are capable of achieving enlightenment, this does not mean that other animals should be exploited or harmed. In the context of a worldview in which the law of kamma and rebirth are an integral part, lesser beings may formerly have been a friend or a relative.[60] Therefore, it behooves us to treat them with kind consideration.

Harmonious cooperation between humans and the environment, including its animal and plant life, is the Buddhist ideal relationship.[61] This obviously involves not polluting the environment. In Buddhist thought, there is also a connection between the environment and moral decay. If there is a decline of social morality, this is reflected in a decline in the environment, because it becomes less fruitful.[62] Thus general moral decay can lead to the eventual destruction of the environment

and the community that depends on it for its survival. From the Buddhist perspective, what actions we perform not only determine our personal destiny but also influence the destiny of the earth; this represents a radical ethical stance.

With respect to animals, this ethical system involves not harming them and having compassion for them. Buddhist monks are instructed to use a water strainer to avoid ingesting any small creatures.[63] The radical spirit of the Buddhist insistence on nonviolence toward animals is captured in a narrative about the fifth-century monk and philosopher named Asaṅga. Striving to gain a vision of the bodhisattva Maitreya, Asaṅga meditated in a cave for twelve years without success, and became very frustrated that his efforts had not yielded better results. He encountered a dog one day with sores on its body, infected with maggots. Wishing to help the suffering dog, he also did not want to harm the maggots. He devised a method to coax the maggots onto his tongue to remove them from the dog's sores. As he was about to cut off a piece of his own flesh to feed the maggots, they and the dog suddenly disappeared, and Maitreya appeared in their place, giving the monk the vision that he had sought for so long.[64]

Consistently with respect for life, animal sacrifice is to be avoided because of its associated violence and cruelty. Although the Buddha thought that vegetarianism is the preferred manner of eating, he is depicted as resisting making it compulsory for monks, who are allowed to eat meat as long as they are unaware that the animal was killed specifically for their benefit.[65] From the Buddha's perspective, vegetarianism is connected to extreme forms of asceticism, which he wants to avoid. There is an unequivocal case made for vegetarianism in some later Mahāyāna Buddhist texts such as the *Lankavatara Sūtra*, which gives some eight reasons for the practice, as follows: animals were relatives in past lives; eating meat gives one a bad reputation and projects a poor image for the Dharma; the smell of meat is objectionable; meat eating interferes with progress in meditation, and leads to bad dreams; it also leads to bad rebirths, and destruction of life.[66]

The Buddhist monastic code emphasizes that releasing captured animals is a compassionate act.[67] There are numerous stories in the *Jātaka* tales about saving the lives of animals, like the one in which the Buddha was a leader of a herd of deer in a previous life, and he agreed to let a king shoot him in order to save the life of a pregnant doe.[68]

Starting around the time of the T'ang Dynasty in China, releasing creatures from impending death became a popular practice among lay followers of Buddhism. In fact, some monasteries had releasing ponds in which to place aquatic animals such as fish, turtles, and eels. This practice was connected to compassion for sentient beings and the precept of nonviolence. There were several benefits to be gained, such as gaining merit by freeing the creature, affirming the original bond of all sentient beings, celebrating a reunion with all creatures, and obliterating momentarily the selfish human will. There were also more personal rewards to be gained, such as honor and prestige, longevity, being spared disasters, recovery from illness, and rebirth in heaven; some even attained enlightenment by

means of this practice. Everyone was encouraged to buy animals for release whenever the opportunity presented itself, and to not begrudge the money spent. Promoters of the practice emphasized that the merit long outlasts the impermanence of the money spent. The practice, it was said, should be continuous and repetitive. It was best to release a life in conjunction with reading from a sacred text and reciting the name of the bodhisattva Amitabha's name. This procedure was intended to save both the creature's physical body and its spiritual life.

At the present time, there is a movement called Green Buddhism with a strong emphasis on ecological problems and Buddhist solutions to these problems. There are scholars who warn us that these Green Buddhists show a tendency to distort the Dharma and to reduce Buddhism to a one-dimensional teaching of simple interrelatedness.[69] Another problem with supporters who advocate a Buddhist environmental ethic is the tendency to neglect the history and complexity of the Buddhist tradition.[70] Nonetheless, there are strains of thought in the Buddhist tradition that can be utilized to develop an ecological stance.

Ethical Issues of Life and Death

A materialist asked the monk Mahākassapa why monks were enjoined to refrain from committing suicide when they stood to gain from ending their lives to prevent any future negative kammic consequences and thus avoid risking the chance of a bad rebirth. There were, of course, precedents for committing suicide by Jain ascetics who vowed to starve themselves to death, a sanctioned religious practice of that movement. There is a strange narrative about the two wives of a Brahmin. After one wife suddenly died, the second wife cut open her own abdomen to discern whether or not the child she was carrying was a male heir; the moral of such a story is that a person should not attempt to hasten the ripening of what is not yet ripe.[71] There is evidence in Buddhist scriptures, however, of monks who commit suicide, but the Buddha took a strong stand against this.[72] The arguments made against suicide to hasten a monk's release from life and the cycle of suffering focused on its violent nature, its self-defeating nature because it could lead to something worse, its ineffective results due to the inescapability of rebirth, its connection with a craving for annihilation, its abrupt stopping of any opportunity for future spiritual advancement, and the fact that it deprived other people of any benefits that the victim of suicide might have been able to share with them.

These comments about suicide are also applicable to both active euthanasia, an intentional hastening of death by overt action, and passive euthanasia, an intentional act that causes death by the deliberate omission of necessary medical care or elements necessary to sustain life such as food and water. Although the Buddhist ideal with respect to death is to die without causing anxiety for survivors, either type of euthanasia violates the basic ethical precept not to commit violence against anyone, and it does not terminate suffering connected to rebirth.[73] Moreover, if the goal of Buddhism is to escape from the power of death,

any decision that affirms death is counterproductive and to be rejected. The Nikāya Buddhist tradition did not have a definition of brain death, which is a recent issue raised in part by the ability of machines to keep people alive. Thus it is difficult to know precisely what the Buddha might have done in the case of a disease like Alzheimer's. The Buddhist did, however, leave us a definition of bodily death. A body can be declared to be dead when it lacks three things: life (vitality), heat, and discriminative consciousness.[74] An Alzheimer's patient would still have life and body heat. But such a patient would not fully qualify as being alive under a Buddhist definition because of the loss of mental function.

The issue of abortion for Buddhism is clearer, because of the conviction that life begins at conception, making abortion immoral and prohibited.[75] The penalty for a monk who intentionally causes an abortion is permanent expulsion from the monastic community. The monastic code makes it clear that abortion is murder, and that it is equivalent to killing an adult person.[76] The fetus is not simply a part of a woman's body for her to decide what to do with it. From the Buddhist position, it is another living being. It is also important to note that a fetus is the end result of a sexual action performed at the right time of the month, and involves both the presence of a rebirth being (*gandhabha*) prepared to be reborn and former kamma.[77] From the Buddhist perspective, all conception is reconception. Moreover, there is no evidence in the Buddhist literature of an abortion performed for medical reasons.[78] The Buddhist objections to contraception are more muted because it is a practice designed to prevent life rather than terminate it.[79]

In Japan there has evolved a religious practice constructed around the guilt of women who have had abortions or a stillborn child. A memorial service called *mizuko* (water child) *kuyō* (literally, "to offer and nourish") is performed with offerings of light, food, flowers, incense, and prayers to the bodhisattva Jizo. The bereaved couple purchases a sculpted stone statue approximately two feet high that resembles a Buddhist monk. This statue is more precisely a monk-child. After the ceremony, the statue is left in a specially designated place within a temple compound. A posthumous Buddhist name is given to the child and is inscribed on a mortuary tablet that can be taken home or left at the temple.[80]

Sexual Ethical Issues

Buddhist scriptures are attentive to issues of sex, usually in relation to concerns such as desire and power. Along with hatred and ignorance, desire is one of the three passions, and both pollutes human existence and maintains it by means of the process of rebirth. Desire includes such associated notions as lewdness, concupiscence, lust, hunger, thirst, and attraction, all of which tend to defile human existence. Desire is broadly conceived in a sensual way that is not strictly confined to sexual desire. Buddhist texts also make a distinction between sensual desire and more subtle desires such as thirst for being, nonbeing, or rebirth in paradise. Desire is conceived as a motive force that humans seek to gratify in this life, which

simply multiplies human cravings and drives people inexorably to rebirth after death.

In order to decrease cravings, control already-present desires, and avoid the cycle of rebirth, Buddhist texts insist on the necessity of chastity. Within the context of Indian culture, there is a common belief that the loss of semen results in a corresponding loss of energy by a male. By practicing celibacy, a monk gains power by the accumulation of spiritual energy. There is a story about the buddha who had become a powerful ascetic due to his extreme ascetic practices. A major power that he possessed was the ability to fly. While he was flying about the kingdom one day, he spied the queen sunbathing naked in the palace gardens. Overcome with lust, the ascetic flew to his encounter with the queen to enjoy her sexually. After their tryst, the ascetic realized that he had loss his ability to fly.[81] This type of narrative is suggestive about the powers that can be gained by celibacy, how they can be quickly lost by a foolish decision, the dangers of associating with women, the powerful pull of desire, and the spiritual strength that it takes to maintain control over one's sensual impulses. Buddhists refer to the loss of power in such a story as a "small death." When a monk engages in sexual relations with a woman, this event is, of course, immoral and a violation of the monastic code, although such restriction is not expected of lay followers of Buddhism.

The Buddhist notion of desire cannot be understood in isolation from the Buddhist attitude to the human body. In early Buddhism, the human body was depicted as impure, as noted in the previous chapter, although this attitude changed with the influence of Tantra after the fourth century C.E. Nikāya Buddhism compares the human body to an open sore, a boil overflowing with pus, an infected wound that never heals, and other odious images.[82] Due to its fatal attraction to a monk and the defiling nature of menstruation, the female body is depicted even more negatively than a male body. The monkish literature concerning the female body reflects fear, disgust, distortion, and fascination. Some of these features are captured in a narrative about Sirimā, a beautiful courtesan of the city of Rajagṛha, and a Buddhist monk who falls in love with her. The comely courtesan suddenly dies. In order to teach his love-infatuated monk a valuable lesson, the Buddha asks the king to expose her body and to auction it to the highest bidder. Because of a total lack of bids, the king keeps lowering the asking price. Finally, the king offers to give it away free, but no one accepts the offer. While witnessing this unfolding scenario, the monk becomes cured of his infatuation with the physical beauty of the courtesan.[83]

In order to overcome their desires and maintain their celibacy, some monks took the drastic measure of castrating themselves. In response to such episodes, the Buddha declared that such behavior must stop, and that a violation represents a grave offence against the monastic code. Based on tales of castration in China and Japan, it appears that such a practice continued to some degree, although it is difficult to determine its extent. Less extreme measures to control sexual desire were also used by monks, such as reciting a mantra (sacred formula) or engaging

in meditation. The power of meditation can be directed to the female body itself. This is illustrated by the tale of the monk Upagupta and the courtesan Vāsavadattā, in which she sends her servant to propose a sexual encounter between herself and the monk, with whom she is infatuated. The monk refuses her invitations a couple of times. Later, seeking a wealthier and more powerful patron, the courtesan kills her lover, but she is caught and punished by having her hands, feet, nose, and ears cut off. When she is exposed at a cremation ground for her crime, Upagupta decides to visit her, and she attempts to hide from him because of her embarrassment and shame at her condition. The pious monk uses his vision of the hideous-looking courtesan to reach liberation.[84]

Not all Buddhist monks attained the enlightened success of Upagupta. Some monks found the injunction of celibacy too difficult and the lure of desire too strong to resist. If we concentrate on just male sexuality and what the monks hoped to achieve, it comes as no surprise that heterosexual activity was strictly forbidden. This prohibition originated with the case of a monk who left his parents and wife to join the monastic life. After the death of his father, his mother begged him to return home to procreate a child who would continue the family lineage, and he eventually yielded to this family pressure. After the Buddha learned of this situation, he essentially said that it would have been better for this monk to place his male organ into the mouth of a poisonous snake than the sexual organ of a woman. Thereupon, the offending monk was expelled from the monastic community for his violation.[85]

Other types of sexual behavior were also forbidden. Bestiality was forbidden, although it was considered less reprehensible than heterosexual relations. The monastic texts also forbid turning oneself into a eunuch. Such figures were called Paṇḍakas (ones without testicles). The monastic texts reflect a view of these men as promiscuous, passive, and homosexual. Likewise, hermaphrodites must not be ordained because of the danger of enticing a heterosexual monk to violate the monastic code.[86] In contrast, transexuality was not encouraged but was not condemned by the monastic rules. Transexuals were considered weird and to be pitied rather than condemned for their condition, whereas homosexuality was more clearly condemned in Indian Buddhism.

Another type of forbidden sexual activity was masturbation, which was considered a serious offence for monks that could lead to temporary expulsion. Masturbation was considered a waste of energy and potential life force. It represented a moral defeat for the offender. Since it was a solitary action, it was also a potential threat to the monastic community because of its potential to undermine the social unity of the community.[87] Strictly speaking, a so-called wet dream was not equated with masturbation and required only repentance by the offending monk.

Within the context of Indian society, homosexuality elicited notions of social decline and decadence. Certainly, homosexual activity presents a danger in a community exclusively of males. It was considered a serious offence to masturbate oneself, have it done by another monk, or to perform it upon a sleeping novice.[88]

It is of historical interest to find homosexuality widespread among Chinese and Japanese monks, who retained young boys for their pleasure.[89] The Japanese even made a distinction between active and passive homosexuals. The young boys would fall into the latter category, a role that did not carry any negative connotations, although descriptions of the boys make them appear like professional geishas (courtesans). This scenario suggests that the practice was age-structured rather than structured by gender.[90] Those who practiced homosexuality used a secret language to convey meaning and intention. This trend in China and Japan did not preclude the fact that homosexuality was generally condemned, and it was predicted that violators of the monastic code would be reborn in hell and suffer a gruesome punishment.

In summary, sexual misconduct represented a violation of the monastic code, it disrupted the spiritual development and quest of the offender, it undermined the unity of the monastic community, and it compromised the monastic field of merit with respect to the lay donors. In other words, if the monastic field were impure, the gifts of lay people would not be able to grow to fruition. Giving donations was then like casting seeds on barren rocks. In order to protect everyone concerned, it was essential that sexual misconduct, in whatever form, be controlled by a strong monastic code and mechanism of enforcement.

Needless to say, the laity were allowed and expected to have an active sexual life. The Buddhist texts imply, however, that approved sexual activity by the laity would be heterosexual. Thus laypeople were expected to avoid deviant types of sexual behavior like bestiality, sodomy, and other practices. Moreover, the laity could freely choose to refrain from sexual activity and thus imitate the model of monks and nuns.

Concluding Remarks

In retrospect, the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha that was modeled on his personal experience began with ethics, but concluded with ethics and wisdom. Developing ethical perfection is an integral part of the path to salvation. This does not mean that ethical behavior can be jettisoned once enlightenment is achieved. It is essential that a seeker of liberation maintain a balance between ethics and wisdom because an imbalance or fixation on one at the expense of the other can obstruct progress toward one's goal.[91] Buddhaghoṣa illustrates the interrelationship between them with his image of a man lost in a dense bamboo jungle.[92] He escapes by standing firm on the foundation of ethics and cutting his way through the thick bamboo with the knife of wisdom. This does not mean that ethics is a means to the achievement of some end; it is, rather, an end in itself. From a slightly altered perspective, it does not lead to liberation, by itself, but it is an integral part of enlightenment.[93] In conclusion, Buddhist ethics are certainly religious, but they are also teleological in the sense of moving toward an end and being an integral means of reaching that goal.

5

The Tale of Beggars and Donors

There are a couple of narratives from the *Theragāthā* (Verses of the Elders) that are very suggestive about the way of life of Buddhist monks. In the first tale, Uttara was the son of an eminent Brahmin, well educated in the Hindu religious tradition and renowned for his breeding, appearance, wisdom, and virtue. Due to his many admirable attributes, a leading minister at the court wanted him to marry his daughter, but the young man declined because he wanted to renounce the world and join the Buddhist monastic order. During his early tenure as a monk, Uttara went to seek a doctor when the elder of the order became ill. Uttara left his begging bowl on the banks of a river while he went to wash his mouth in the water. Meanwhile, a fleeing jewel thief was being pursued by authorities, and dropped the stolen jewels into the bowl of the monk. The pursuing authorities saw the jewels in the bowl and concluded that they had found their thief. The monk was mistakenly accused of stealing, and was bound, and punished. The Buddha attributed Uttara's misfortune to kammic fruit from a previous birth. The Buddha visited Uttara, and sent him into an ecstatic state with his touch. Thereby, Uttara attained the sixfold *abhiññā* (higher knowledge). Rising from the stake to which he had been impaled, he stood in the air and performed a miracle, and his wound was also healed, to the astonishment of others. This narrative highlights the central place of the begging bowl of a monk, the actions of the Buddha, and the powers gained by a monk.[1]

In the second story, Sabbamitta was born into a Brahmin family, and he witnessed the power of the Buddha at the Jeta Grove. He entered the monastic order, and decided to live in the forest instead of the monastery. After the period of the rain retreat, he went to pay his respects to the Buddha, and on the way he encountered a fawn trapped in a hunter's net, while the doe stood nearby out of love for her young, who bleated for pity. This incident helped the monk make a connection between love and suffering. Later he encountered a band of thieves who had captured a man and were wrapping him in straw to set him ablaze. These two

incidents inspired him to create some verses. Hearing his verses, the bandits were converted to Buddhism, and the poetic monk gained enlightenment.[2] This narrative suggests that some monks lived in solitude apart from the monastic community, learned lessons about Buddhism from ordinary incidents of life, and influenced other people through their teaching.

Around the fifth century B.C.E., the historical period of the Buddha, there were numerous wandering sects and individual ascetics in India. This wandering lifestyle had to be broken each year during the monsoon season, when flooding blocked roads, rivers, and bridges. Because travel became difficult and dangerous, it was customary for wanderers to take shelter from the inclement weather. Among the members of the wandering Buddhist sect, however, the custom of rain retreat became institutionalized. The Buddhists gradually began to return and occupy the same habitat around the beginning of each rainy season. Over a period of time, two types of rain retreats were developed: one located in the countryside, which was built and maintained by monks (*āvāsa*); and the other a retreat located in or near a town, which was donated and maintained by a wealthy supporter (*ārāma*).[3] These two types of retreat enabled the Buddhists, over time, to develop a congregation of fellow monks.

From a sectarian group, the early Buddhist community evolved into a Saṅgha (monastic community), a term that is synonymous with *gaṇa*, which indicates a political, professional, or commercial group. The term *saṅgha* also referred to an assembly of elders that governed tribal states as well as various wandering ascetic groups, but it had a narrower meaning for the Buddhists. It represented an entire fraternity of monks, on the one hand, and it was a bond of association among monks, on the other hand. Two essential features of the Buddhist Saṅgha were prominent: no religious leader was necessary, and the rules of the monastic community should guide it. As monasteries in India continued to develop historically, some of them evolved into great universities around the second century C.E., such as Nālānda in northeastern India and Valabhī in the western part of the country. These universities were a testament to the need to train monks in philosophy and other subjects, even though the old ideal of a wandering lifestyle continued to endure.

The wandering lifestyle of the Buddhists and others necessarily entailed begging as a means of sustenance. The term applicable to an individual monk was *bhikkhu*, which means almsman or beggar. The Buddhists attempted, however, to differentiate their begging from that of others by stressing its sacramental character. For the Buddhist monk, the begging bowl became a visible symbol that one had renounced the world. This emphasis was evident in the fact that the earliest Buddhist community called themselves the Bhikkhu-saṅgha, union of bhikkhus.[4]

Eventually, the rain retreats evolved into monasteries (*leṇas*, meaning a private abode). The meaning of the term implied that it was a private residence for monks and that it was not open to the public. These private abodes were intended to house a single fraternity of monks, but at times it accommodated

various schismatic groups under the same roof. Over the course of time, the monasteries became integrally linked with the towns, cities, and villages in which they were located. This bond between the monastery and laity was an important dimension for comprehending the dynamic relationship between the two parties.

Before a person could join one of the monastic communities, a basic step was necessary: an act of world renunciation. The act of forsaking the world was a movement from one condition of life (social) to another (monastic), and was called "going from home to homelessness." This state of homelessness did not necessarily involve aloofness or lack of companions, although this was an option. In other words, a Buddhist either could opt to become, for instance, a wandering forest recluse, or could join a monastic community. The distinction between a monk who lives within a monastery and another who lives in the forest is still made in such places as Sri Lanka and Thailand. The practice of renouncing the world became more formal and ritualized at one point of Buddhist history by a rite called *pravrajyā* that comprised the renunciation of one's caste, kinship (family), and social rank. The rite also included the acceptance of robes and a begging bowl, symbols of one's new lifestyle. In summary, by renouncing the world a monk exchanged one social system for another.

When a person renounced the world and joined a monastic community there were two levels of ordination: novice and full. The first level was not a formal affair, but did presuppose being fifteen years old and reciting the three refuges: that is, verbally taking refuge three times in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Then the novice had his head shaved, donned robes, and resolved to live according to the ten precepts. In contrast to the informal ordination of a novice, full ordination (*upasampada*) had eight requirements: one had to be a human being, twenty years old, have permission of parents or wife, be free of debt, be without disease, be a free person, not be employed by the government, and have an alms-bowl and robes. Assuming that one met these basic requirements, one was presented to the assembly of monks. The presenter and ordaining monk must have completed ten years since full ordination. The act of ordination was considered valid if ten monks were present. The senior monk asked the assembled body three times if they favored admission. If there was no dissent, the applicant was accepted. The next step of the new monk was to choose a spiritual guide, who had to be a monk of at least ten years' standing.

Monks were ranked according to three levels of monastic status: newly ordained renunciant (*nava*), a mid-level renunciant (*majjhima*), or a senior or elder monk (*thera*).[5] There were certain forms of monastic protocol that served as guidelines of respectful behavior between younger and senior monks. Proper monkish etiquette included such behavior as greeting elders first, asking them for a meal first, and expecting them to be the first to gather on ceremonial days.[6] Junior monks would defer to elders with respect to sitting, sleeping, and toilet behavior.[7] Elders were consulted on problems that might arise within the community.[8] Junior monks honored elder monks by touching their feet, a part of the

body considered to be especially impure.[9] Elders led junior monks when walking, took the lead with respect to wearing sandals, and deciding on the disposition of the belongings of a deceased member.[10] These monastic practices demonstrated a respect for seniority and experience, which the Buddha emphasized for the benefit of both relationships with the laity and the internal functioning of monastic life.[11] Besides these three levels of monastic status, monks were also divided according to sections of scriptural expertise. There were, for instance, monks expert in the discourses (*suttas*) and others in the monastic rules (Vinaya). During the formative period of Buddhist history, these specialists would commit these works to memory. There were also monks that gravitated around a particular distinguished teacher who was a specialist on specific aspects of the teachings. Sometimes, schools formed around these teachers and were named after them.

All monks were allowed some personal possessions. Among these possessions were three robes, a cord worn around the waist like a belt, a begging bowl, a razor, a needle to mend the robes, and a water strainer. This last item was intended to avoid swallowing any small insects in the water, to protect them from harm and to protect oneself from unintentionally harming living creatures and suffering karmic consequences.

The begging bowl was not only a symbol of the frugal lifestyle of a monk; it was also symbolic of his vegetarian diet, which itself was directly associated with the practice of nonviolence to all creatures. As we have noted, there was no total ban on eating meat, although a monk was forbidden from requesting that an animal be killed specifically for him.[12] The begging bowl and the practice associated with it were a little misleading, because a monk walked silently from house to house asking for nothing. After a householder put some food into his bowl, the monk did not respond to the donation by thanking the householder. He rather maintained complete silence.[13] From the perspective of the monk, he was doing the householder a favor by accepting the food because the monk was granting the household an opportunity to earn merit. The monk was obliged to eat whatever he was given and to be indifferent to the quality of the food, and Buddhist texts suggest that monks suffered from gastrointestinal problems. Since Buddhism represented the middle way between the extremes of sense pleasure and austere asceticism, the Buddha instructed his monks not to eat after midday. He explained that this practice helped to improve one's health.[14]

The personal razor of the monk was intended for shaving his head, a practice that was directly connected to his renunciation of the world. The shaven head was also symbolic of a corpse, and represented the new symbolic status of the monk—a paradoxical living corpse. In ancient India, shaving the hair and cutting the nails were aspects of preparation for a funeral. (Similarly the monk was traditionally fed alms called *piṇḍa*, which were lumps of rice offered to spirits of the dead to placate them and induce them not to harm the living.) After being shaved for his full ordination, the monk was paradoxically both dead and alive. Because he was

symbolically dead to the world, he could not die again. And because he was also alive, he could not be reborn.

From another perspective, hair is a bodily byproduct like nail clippings, spittle, skin, feces, and urine, which are by nature polluting. The mandatory shaven head is therefore symbolic of monastic purity. In contrast to the unrestrained sexuality symbolized by long hair, the shaven head is taken to imply celibacy.[15] The Buddhist notion of celibacy is all-encompassing in the sense that the monk renounces sex totally, and he becomes a sexless or neuter person. Due to the belief in ancient Indian culture that unspent semen circulates through the body and finally becomes located in one's hair, shaving the head represents a symbolic castration, whereas long, loose, matted hair is a denial of castration.[16] By shaving his head, the monk submits to the social control of the monastic institution, and he ritually separates himself from society. From yet another perspective, hair is a form of dirt, which is matter out of place that offends against order. By eliminating dirt, a person is organizing the environment and defending against a type of danger in the form of pollution. In this approach, the monk can be understood as a marginal social being. This observation also points to the monk as a transitional being engaged in an act of purification.

Organization of the Saṅgha

The feature of monastic life that united the community was the Pātimokkha, which means bond. In early Buddhist history, it represented a confession of faith chanted by the monks, a verbal action that declared their bond of brotherhood. This text, committed to memory, was called "clauses to be learned," and comprised all the rules by which monks agreed to live and conduct their monastic lives. There were 227 rules in the Pāli canon, 250 rules in the Chinese version, and 253 rules in the Tibetan monastic code. By periodically chanting these rules, the monks renewed their bonds of unity. The rules were intended to develop a state of mind that was conducive to the norms of doctrine (Dhamma). By transgressing the rules, a monk manifested an undisciplined state of mind. Since these rules did not originate with a divine being, how was it possible to determine their validity? The validity of the Buddhist law was based on results: whether or not these rules led to salvation.[17]

The Pātimokkha is divided into eight parts, each part describing a category of cases (a term that suggests that a given rule is based on a particular incident and the Buddha's response to it). Four cases entail expulsion from the monastery. These include sexual intercourse with a human being or animal, stealing, taking the life of a human being, hiring a killer or desiring the death of another person, and falsely claiming to have attained spiritual insight or powers through meditation. There are thirteen cases that require a meeting of the community of monks. These include such violations as sexual relations short of sexual intercourse, malice toward another monk, erecting a residence in an improper place and without

approval, causing dissension and division within the order, refusing to accept criticism from a fellow monk, and other types of violation. There are other cases that involve contact with a woman that demand clarification; thirty cases that require repentance related to goods, medicines, or money wrongly accepted; ninety-two cases requiring repentance that are connected to using abusive language and causing ill will; four cases related to infractions regarding food, which need to be confessed; seventy-five infractions considered improper; and finally, seven rules associated with the settlement of cases. This complicated collection of rules evolved over a period of time as incidents occurred. It was common for monks to ask the Buddha's opinion when he was alive; he would respond to an incident by making a ruling. These rules took precedence in the subsequent history of the movement.

When the community of monks gathered to chant the Pātimokkha, this afforded them an opportunity to confess their transgressions of the rules. The punishment for violations of the monastic code was primarily confession. The practice of chanting the Pātimokkkha was called the Uposatha service. This had its roots in two lunar sacrifices in ancient Hindu Vedic religion; these were preceded by purification observances called *upavasatha* (a Sanskrit term derived from *upa* meaning near and *vas* meaning to dwell).[18] This term suggested that the gods came down and dwelled with the sacrificing householders. Although the Buddhists were not engaged in sacrifices related to the new and full moons, it was important for them to adopt a periodic practice associated with holiness and purification. Another important occasion associated with the Pātimokkha was called the Pavarana, which took place at the end of the seclusion of the rainy season. The monastic community met at this time to confess offences of the monastic code. After this meeting, the Kaṭhina (literally meaning "hard") ceremony followed, which involved the acquisition of new robes, including a single undergarment, a double waistcloth, and a single upper robe. This ceremony at the end of the rainy season was aptly named because the gift of robes was considered a meritorious deed similar to the hardness of a diamond.[19]

In addition to the Pātimokkha, the monastic community had the *Vinaya Piṭaka* to guide it. The literal meaning of the term *vinaya* means "to lead away from"-presumably from moral and ethical errors and faults.[20] This canon regulating the monastic life of monks and nuns consisted of two major parts: the Suttavibhanga (concerned with the life of the individual monk or nun) was a detailed analysis of the offenses recorded in the Pātimokkha; and a second section called the Khandhaka (concerned with the corporate body of the monastic community) identified and regulated rituals to be performed and specified procedures through which the affairs of the community were to be managed. The code of discipline specified in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* was a systematic assault on the false notion of ego-consciousness. Moreover, the code presupposed that those who violated it were undisciplined. Overall, the monastic rules were intended to bring a person to salvation.

Lifestyle of a Monk

Contrary to some impressions, Buddhism did not forbid monks to engage in manual labor such as cleaning and repairing the monastery. What was forbidden was any work intended to earn a living. Being a monk was a full-time occupation, and begging was the correct means of livelihood for world renouncers, although begging was not mandatory, according to the rules of the Pātimokkha, where no rules specifically required it. Monks were also banned from engaging in trade or barter, and forbidden to accept gold and silver.[21] Even though there was no impurity associated with money, there was a whole range of material values that money symbolized for the Buddhist community. For Buddhism, purity was related to the mind.[22] To accept or possess money was an indication that a person's renunciation was incomplete.

Reference has already been made to the robes given to monks at their ordination. In contrast to the Buddhists, some ascetic groups wore garments made of grass, tree bark, owl feathers, deerskins, and hair, whereas some Jains went totally naked. But the Buddha was opposed to nakedness or bathing in public. Buddhist texts refer to robes that were yellow or ochre (*kāsāya*). During the initial two decades of the movement, the Buddha and his disciples wore discarded rags.[23] Embodied within Buddhist scriptures there is a narrative about the origin of robes: when the Buddha was ill his doctor offered him a robe, and from then on monks were allowed to accept robes from the laity.[24] It may strike some as odd that these clothes had to be cut up and stitched together again.[25] This practice may be connected to an attempt to reduce the value of the robes. Nonetheless, the simple attire of a monk should not be construed as a form of penance, as it was for many Western monks. The Buddhists viewed clothing as a protection against cold, heat, mosquitoes, insects, and the wind. Robes belonged to the person that wore them. The wardrobe of a monk consisted of three robes: an outer cloak, an inner robe worn as a toga, and a final robe used as underclothing. The robe could be made of any number of fabrics (such as linen, cotton, wool, hemp, and coarse linen), although it was forbidden to decorate the robes with gold or silver trim or to color the robes with an alternative shade.[26] The monks also used a strip of cloth that functioned as a belt, which was essentially to keep their undergarment from falling to their ankles and to avoid becoming an object of ridicule.

In addition to their robes, monks were allowed to wear sandals made from a single strand of rope, although they were forbidden to wear them inside the monastery. In some cases, monks who were weak or ill were allowed walking sticks, if they received permission. Others were not, since carrying a stick in public was a sign of power, and the stick itself was an instrument of violence. The end result of the Buddhist attire was a uniform dress code that caused all members to look alike and to be equal.

The ideal lifestyle of wandering never really lost its allure, even when a settled lifestyle became the reality for most monks. A life of solitude was symbolized

by the single horn of the rhinoceros. It was also embodied in the notion of wandering, although solitude was never an obligation imposed on monks. The Buddha was convinced that genuine solitude was interior to the person. The really important thing was to live without attachment. And here a person was instructed to live like a lotus flower with its oily petals to which water cannot cling. This inner solitude did not include a life of silence, which the Buddha expressly forbade because of its connection to extreme forms of asceticism.[27]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, another important aspect of Buddhist lifestyle was celibacy. The violation of this injunction involved "defeat" because the violator failed to conquer sensual desire.[28] The prohibition against heterosexual, homosexual, or lesbian types of sexual relationships was intended to reduce cravings, because sexual experiences increased desires and led to a loss of control over one's body and senses. The monastic demand for chastity implied that monks and nuns renounced any type of biological family. By deciding to join the spiritual family of the Buddha, monks and nuns entered the spiritual lineage of the Buddha and became his sons and daughters. How did such a family survive, if it could not reproduce members? The answer of course, was that the monastic community needed a continual influx of new members from the external society. In addition, it was necessary that economic independence of the community be guaranteed in order to assure its continued existence on the margins of the prevailing society.[29]

Meditation and the Unconscious

The practice of meditation was central to the formative history of Buddhism. It was by means of meditation that the Buddha attained enlightenment, and many monks followed his model of behavior to attain the goal of liberation. The meditating monk can be viewed as a physical and mental athlete because he had to train his body and mind to make spiritual progress toward the ultimate goal of nibbāna. As Buddhist history unfolded, not all monks engaged in meditation; other types of practice engaged their time, such as rituals, festivals, pilgrimage, copying texs, composing commentaries, and reciting scriptures or the names of bodhisattvas. With the development of Ch'an/Zen Buddhism, we witness a return to an emphasis on meditation. This is not to claim that it had died out until revived by Ch'an; in fact, it does indicate that there always continued to be some practitioners within Buddhism who thought that meditation was pivotal to the ethos of the religion.

The discussion of the path of the Buddha in chapter 3 did not tell the entire story about suffering; other features connected to suffering need to be put in the context of a discussion of meditation. And before one can understand meditation, it is necessary to grasp what the early Buddhists mean by mind, unconsciousness, and consciousness.

The mind (*citta*) is a complex aspect of a person in Buddhism. If the mind is untrained and under the influence of craving, it is connected to the senses and

cannot free itself from the cycle of rebirth, which represents a dynamic continuum that extends back in time to earlier births. The cycle of rebirth, grounded in the cycle of universal causality, means that all mental activity is causally conditioned, just like everything else. If we recall the doctrine of non-self and its continual state of flux, it is impossible to conceive of the mind as an abiding and unchanging substance. Since the mind is a dynamic and changing entity that can be influenced by sensory stimuli or impressions, manipulated by craving, and eventually subject to rebirth, it needs to be shaped, trained, and controlled by means of meditation, which makes it possible for the mind to experience higher levels of awareness and freedom from "cankers" (*āsavā*).

It is the objective of the training regime of a monk to eradicate the cankers. There are four of them: sensual desire, craving for becoming or life, false views, and ignorance. The cankers lie buried deep within a person's personality, working to shape the intentions and emotions. The cankers are like an acid that slowly corrodes the mind. They essentially stupefy the mind so that it cannot do anything. With the dawn of spiritual insight, it is possible for a person to destroy them. But they are particularly difficult to eradicate, and represent the final mental dispositions to be destroyed.

Besides the corroding effect of cankers, there are unconscious, latent dispositions that a monk must overcome. There are seven of these proclivities, predispositions, or tendencies (*anusayas*): sensuous craving and sexual drive, anger and aggression, conceit, erroneous opinion, doubt or skepticism, craving for existence, and ignorance. This list overlaps with that of the cankers to some extent, but each group of unconscious dispositions represents a distinct function within the unconscious that renders it unique. Nonetheless, these unconscious dispositions, which are present at infancy, are indicative of inclinations that are latent in a person's unconscious. They are akin to instinctual forces that are ready to motivate and sustain craving. If craving is part of the conscious process of a person, beneath the conscious surface lays these dormant tendencies that provide additional fuel to keep conscious cravings burning. The feeling of excessive pride, for instance, is generated by latent tendencies of conceit that lie deep within the unconscious.

The cankers and latent dispositions do not exhaust the negative aspects of the unconscious, because Buddhism also identifies another unconscious dimension called the unwholesome roots (*akusala mūlā*): greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). These negative roots are obviously connected to immoral action, but they can be countered by their three opposites: generosity, love, and knowledge. Like the latent dispositions, the unwholesome roots feed a person's cravings. It is possible to conceive of unwholesome roots and latent tendencies as motivational springboards for negativity. The root of greed, for instance, feeds an inclination for sensual satisfaction; hatred enhances a drive toward aggression; and delusion leads to more ignorance. In retrospect, it is possible to say that we are not only divided within ourselves into conscious and unconscious tendencies

that mutually feed each other in detrimental ways but we are also engaged in constant conflict with ourselves in part because these unconscious dispositions affect conscious states.

Consciousness and the Practice of Meditation

Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is impermanent for the Buddha because it is a product of various conditions connected to a dynamic causal pattern. Although it is possible to find references to a stream of consciousness in Buddhist texts, it is still impermanent and in continual flux. Even though it is impermanent, consciousness can still carry energy from one life to another unless it is brought under control, made calm, and finally made to stop its flowing. Consciousness is the medium in which empirical existence takes place; this accounts for cognitive or perceptive consciousness. Consciousness is also the medium in which trance states move one forward spiritually. And consciousness is the basis of all conscious and unconscious psychological manifestations of those within the realm of rebirth.[30] In fact, the phenomenal world is shaped to a large extent by consciousness. Consciousness, in other words, has the power to affect the origination or cessation of the world. Moreover, it is indispensable for birth, growth, and the development of existence.

There are two fundamental modes of consciousness: empirical and discriminating. The first mode arises when sense objects stimulate sense organs. This mode has an innate tendency to become attached to objects of sense perception and thus forfeit its freedom and become dependent. The other mode of consciousness has the power of discrimination between opposites such as happiness and suffering, pleasure and pain. Thus it can recognize the impermanence of the world, which suggests that it has the power of transcending itself and even changing the structure of life.[31] Consciousness cannot, however, know the ultimate reality because reality is beyond the senses to which consciousness is bound. In order to transcend this bondage, one needs to acquire spiritual states by refining one's consciousness by means of meditation. A person can begin this process within the context of the Eightfold Path by practicing right effort and progressing to right mindfulness (*sati*), a term that connotes bare attention. Mindfulness is valuable because it helps the mind to know, in the sense of being able to analyze the objects of existence by means of dissection and discrimination, and it helps one to realize the conditioned and conditioning nature of all phenomenal entities. It can also shape a person's life by promoting reflection rather than immediate mental responses. In this way it can assist a person gain freedom from habitual actions and responses. Finally, mindfulness can liberate the mind by producing insight (*vipassanā*) into the true nature of things.

This type of insight is evident in the narrative about Sanmoda, from a royal family, who suffered from a disease that rendered him a cripple (*pakka*). He was known as Pakka even after his recovery. He encountered the Buddha when the

enlightened being visited his family, and he was so impressed that he joined the order and dwelled as a forest monk. While sitting beneath a tree on his way to the village to beg, Pakka watched a kite seize some flesh and be attacked by other birds, which forced it to drop the flesh. After another kite grabbed the flesh, others also attacked it. This incident caused Pakka to reflect on worldly desire and its impermanence, which helped him to gain insight.[32]

The Buddhist scriptures refer to four stages of mindfulness (*sati*). These stages begin with control of the body, and then move to control of feelings; the third stage involves attention to the mind, and finally mindfulness of ideas. Each of these stages is important, and their significance needs to be unpacked for the reader to grasp this process of refinement.

The control of the body begins with an awareness and control of one's respiration, because it enhances one's ability to control one's body and to make one aware of its true nature. This process evolves to contemplating the body internally and externally, and contemplating the various parts of the body (such as hair, heart, blood, urine, and so forth). This reflection upon the body includes its constituent elements-earth, water, heat, and air. The meditating monk is compared to a butcher who slays an ox, cuts it apart, examines the pieces, and displays each part.

The Buddhist texts encourage contemplation of the remains of a deceased person as it goes through decomposition at the cemetary grounds. The monk is instructed to contemplate an abandoned body that is swollen and turning colors, a body partially consumed by wild animals, and finally a body reduced to a heap of bones. These practices are not intended to make a monk sick but are rather intended to make a monk aware of the impermanence of the body and its vile nature, to be aware that it lacks an ego, and ultimately to become detached from it.[33]

The practice of meditating on a corpse is illustrated by the story of Rājadatta, a member of a family of the leader of a caravan. When Rājadatta was old enough he assumed the leadership of a caravan of five hundred carts full of merchandise. He squandered all his profits on a beautiful courtesan. Thereafter, he wandered broke and hungry until he arrived at the Bamboo Grove and heard the Buddha teach. He was converted and entered the order. Meanwhile, the courtesan induced another caravan leader to squander all of his money on her, and she then hired some men to steal a ring that she coveted from the hand of the caravan leader. Some servants told the police about the courtesan, and they killed her. The police threw her body into a charnel field where Rājadatta came to meditate, and he noticed her corpse. Although it was difficult to overcome his emotional reaction when he saw her corpse that had by this time been mangled by dogs and jackals, Rājadatta was finally able to master his feelings of revulsion and gained enlightenment.[34]

During the second stage of mindfulness, the monk becomes aware of his feelings (*vedanā*). By distinguishing between different types of feelings, a monk be-

comes aware that they are transient, which triggers detachment. At the third stage of awareness, the monk concentrates attention on the mind (*citta*) with the purpose of becoming aware of its various modes-lustful, dull, or attentive. The monk wants to restrain, control, and mold the mind in preparation for the fourth state, mindfulness of ideas. A person becomes mindful of the five groups, the first of which comprises the five hindrances (*nīrvaraṇas*): coveting the world, hatred and desire to injure, stupidity and slothfulness, excitement and misdeeds, and doubt. The second and third groups include the five aggregates (*khandhas*) and five spheres of sense (*āyatana*). Next, a meditator moves to the seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, truth, energy, joy, serenity, rapture, and equanimity. Finally, a person contemplates the Four Noble Truths, and how these truths arise and pass away. Besides producing a deep and profound self-awareness and detachment from the world, mindfulness helps one to recognize the impermanence of existence.

Right Concentration, Absorption, and Wisdom

Representing a greater degree of control over the mind (*citta*) than mindfulness (*sati*), right concentration (*samādhi*) focuses the mind by offering a more refined control of consciousness. How does one gain this refined control of the mind. Right concentration means concentration of the mind on a single point. In other words, the mind is pinned down to one item to the exclusion of all extraneous thoughts. There is a variety of subjects of meditation (*kasiṇas*) that one can utilize to fix one's attention, such as earth, water, fire, wind, and colors. The meditator creates, for example, a circle of reddish clay on the ground, sits near it, and concentrates on it. The meditator tries to reach a stage where he can see the sign with his eyes shut or open. Then, the monk begins meditating on it, having locked the mind on it. This process of meditation progresses to mental absorption (*jhāna*, Sanskrit: *dhyāna*).

Mental absorption is sometimes translated as trance. It is the gradual expansion of consciousness to unexperienced dimensions. The Buddhist scriptures identify four of these trance states, which also involve detachment from the sense experience of the world accompanied by reflection and investigation. In the initial stage of trance, desires and unwholesome thoughts are discarded, and the state is characterized by joy and happiness. When observation and investigation are suppressed, the second stage is achieved, in which all intellectual activities cease. With feelings of joy and happiness remaining, tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind are developed. During the third stage of trance, the meditator gains the following: equanimity, a calmness and evenness of mind, mindfulness, self-possession, dispassion, and abiding happiness. Joy disappears at this point, although happiness and mindful equanimity remain. At the final stage of trance, there is pure equanimity and mindfulness.[35] Happiness and joy along with their opposites are abandoned. The meditator reaches a point in which there is total detachment

from the world. Mental absorption preserves two types of knowledge: ecstasy and another type that is a rational and discriminating form of thinking. The two types suggests that knowledge is a power that enables one to control the world of change, and at the same time the power that transforms one into a new being.[36] The meditator is now an arahant, a fully enlightened being, and attains wisdom (*paññā*) and cessation (*nirodha-samapatti*).

By wisdom (*paññā*), the Buddhists mean intuitive knowledge that serves as a flash of insight into the nature of everything. This is "knowing" in a completely new way, an extrasensory seeing that functions as a release and a transformation of one's consciousness. In contrast to the rational and analytical type of knowledge associated with empirical consciousness, wisdom (*paññā*) is nonrational and intuitive.[37] This is defined further as transcendental insight (*vipassanā*). This insight enables one to see, for instance, the nature of things, the truth of impermanence and suffering, and knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. In short, it confirms the truth of the teaching of the Buddha. This freedom-salvation type of knowledge is a new kind of seeing-knowing (*ñāṇa-dassana*), which entails a direct vision of ultimate reality independent of sensory knowledge that is dependent upon objects. It is described as immeasurable, nothingness, emptiness, and signlessness. It is an intuitive insight in the sense that it embodies a direct knowing that enables the meditator to participate directly in reality.[38]

Finally, the meditator reaches cessation (*nirodha-samapatti*). The influential Theravāda thinker and commentator Buddhaghoṣa defines cessation as the nonoccurrence of consciousness.[39] This is the nibbānic experience. Cessation, with neither perception nor nonperception, can be maintained for extended periods of time. There are a number of stories that illustrate this condition. While a monk had attained cessation, the monastic hall caught fire. Other monks fled, and villagers extinguished the fire that encircled the monk. After they had removed the ashes, did repairs, scattered flowers, and stood waiting, the monk finally awoke.[40] Another tale describes a monk who entered cessation in the forest. As the story unfolds, a gang of thieves gathered in the dark and mistook the monk for a tree stump, so they strewed their stolen goods about him. After resting for a period of time, the thieves began to pick up their stolen goods. At that precise moment, the monk arose from his state of cessation. The thieves were so surprised and impressed by this feat that they repented of their evil ways and became monks.[41]

The two stories are instructive because they indicate that the meditator in cessation ceases all bodily functions (including breathing), verbal communication, and mental functions. Therefore, cessation is a condition analogous to death. The only major difference between cessation and death is that the life force becomes exhausted at death. Buddhist scripture makes it clear that it is possible for an apt meditator to predetermine a time when he or she can break out of cessation and awaken.

Abodes of Healing

Buddhist monasteries were places of residence and work, fields of merit, refuges for lay people, centers of learning, places of solitude and quiet for reflection and meditation, in some countries centers of commerce, and finally locations where healing took place. In the Pāli canon, the Buddha is portrayed as a great healer. In fact, the Buddha often used the discourse of medicine, healing, and illness in his teaching. He used two methods to heal others: his teaching and psychic or miraculous healing. The Buddha considered the severity of a disease before he taught. Those with fatal diseases received lessons on impermanence. Those with a chance to be cured were taught to meditate on the seven limbs of enlightenment (*bodhyangas*): mindfulness, investigation of things, striving, joy, tranquillity, meditative trance, and equanimity. These seven limbs of enlightenment are also used as a device for summarizing the teachings of the Buddha. Within the context of healing, they are used, however, as successive steps in meditation. This suggests that for Buddhism meditation was a cure for disease, which is indicative of the notion that disease is connected to mental states gone awry.

It is also possible to discover a few different methods of curing performed by the Buddha. A miraculous cure is evident in the narrative of the laywoman named Suppiyā who secretly cut off a section of her leg to provide a meat broth for an ill monk. Although the Buddha used this opportunity to declare that it is a grave offence to eat human flesh, he healed her leg instantly by restoring it.[42] In another example, the Buddha laid his hands on a sick person to cure him. A third method of healing discovered in noncanonical Pāli texts consists of recitations of various phrases and texts that magically dispel disease, a method attributed by tradition to the Buddha himself. This method is called protection (*parittā*).[43]

Nursing an ill or infirm monk was an important role played by an ordinary monk. Because nursing was such a vital service, the nursing monk received the begging bowl and robes of a monk who died under his care. (These personal items were normally returned to the monastery.)[44] Buddhists made an important contribution to the advancment of Indian medicine, which was taught in the monasteries; they gained acceptance for their teachings in other areas of Asia partly by spreading knowledge about their discoveries in medicine.[45]

Distinctions of Attainment

There once lived a Brahmin named Apalala who ended a terrible drought by means of his magical powers, but the king and the populace failed to compensate him adequately for his extraordinary assistance. Thus Apalala vowed to become a *nāga* (serpent deity) after he died, and he intended to return and ravage their crops in revenge. After Apalala was reborn as a serpent, the Buddha and another monk arrived at his palace. When Apalala saw them he flew into the air and showered them with hailstones and clods of dirt, which became clouds of

sweet-smelling perfumes after being transformed by the *mettā* (loving kindness) of the Buddha. When Apalala attacked with weapons they were transformed into lotus blossoms. The Buddha countered a cloud of smoke by Apalala with an even denser cloud, forcing the serpent to retreat into his palace. Then, the Buddha launched a counterattack that was very destructive and included a massive sea of flames, leaving a small space in front of him right at his feet. Due to the intense heat of the flames, Apalala was forced to seek refuge at the feet of the Buddha. The Buddha grabbed him by the hair, and instructed him that he would be reborn in hell if he did not change his ways. If he did repent, he had a chance to be reborn in heaven. Apalala took refuge in the Buddha and agreed to stop harming others.[46] This story imparts messages about the importance of taking refuge in the Buddha, the importance of the fear of rebirth as motivation to change one's way of life, and about the very high level of attainment demonstrated by the powers of the Buddha.

The historical Buddha taught that everyone possessed the potential to become a Buddha, an "Awakened One," an "Enlightened One." This suggests that the title "Buddha" is a description of a status that one earns by means of one's own efforts. The equivalent of this status for a monk is the attainment of fully enlightened one (*arahant*). But before a person can reach this level of achievement, the individual must pass through three prior levels of attainment: stream enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*), and nonreturner (*anāgāmin*). It is possible to more fully grasp the significance of the arahant if we review the initial three levels of attainment.

The stage of stream enterer represents a person who breaks away from three of the ten fetters of human existence: belief in a self, doubts about the three jewels (that is, Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha), and beliefs in the efficacy of rituals. The overcoming of these fetters is accomplished by insight into the Four Noble Truths. The stream enterer is a novice, in a sense, because such a person is taking an initial and significant step, and this person is assured of no future bad rebirths. In other words, it is implied that a stream enterer will be reborn a human being with the chance to make further spiritual progress in his or her next life, most likely as a human being.

The once-returner represents a further spiritual step achieved by overcoming two additional fetters, identified as lust and hate. This person will be reborn one more time, and such a person is assured of enlightenment within one more lifetime. As the level of attainment suggests, the nonreturner will not be reborn, because such a person is liberated from the initial five fetters. This individual is assured of enlightenment during his or her current lifetime, during which he or she will attempt to conquer the final five fetters. If is successful, he or she becomes an arahant, a fully enlightened being.

The remaining five fetters destroyed by the arahant are: desire for life in the realm of form, desire for life in the formless realm, pride, restlessness, and ignorance. With the overcoming of these final five fetters, the arahant attains nibbāna

(Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*). The arahant is the genuine Buddhist awakened figure in the Pāli tradition. In a sense this figure possesses a dual nature, because he or she is fully a human being and yet is distinct from other people. From one perspective, such awakened beings transcends the ordinary human mode of existence by means of their level of perfection, but this transcendence does not mean that they can act immorally and unethically. Because the roots of immortal action have been destroyed, this person's actions are morally wholesome. Being fully endowed with the four Buddhist virtues and the insight of wisdom, this person is incapable of committing a violent act.[47] The awakened individual's moral and ethical actions arise spontaneously, because this person lacks negative traits that could resist their arising.[48] Because of his or her liberation from the law of cause and effect, this person's actions no longer possess positive or negative karmic consequences. Finally, the arahant becomes a religious figure to imitate and venerate, and a field of merit. By venerating an arahant, a person is engaged in an act of meditation and merit making.[49] It is possible to see the arahant functioning as a model for laity in the narrative of a monk named Vira. During his premonastic life, he was an athletic person who became a warrior, married, and had a son. Seeing trouble in the future if his life continued on its current course, he renounced the world, and he proceeded to acquire the sixfold superior knowledges. After he became enlightened, his former wife tried to lure him back to home life in various ways. But his resolve and determination for monastic life were strong. His wife was moved by his example after a time, and she decided to join the order of nuns.[50]

Besides these four levels of attainment, the Buddhist tradition recognizes other types of holy personages. The later tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism advocates the ideal of the bodhisattva, which will be discussed in chapter 8, and the *siddha* (perfected one), the enlightened ideal person in the Vajrayāna tradition of Tibet. The Pāli tradition refers to the *pratyekabuddha* (enlightened by oneself), who is defined as a solitary figure who lives in remote regions, leading a solitary existence and meditating alone. This figure does not teach, unlike the historical Buddha. There is a literary tradition that claims that a pratyekabuddha is born and attains enlightenment at a time when no Buddha exists in the world, whereas, generally speaking, someone who attains enlightenment during a Buddha period becomes an arahant.

A Tension between Monk and Donor

Embedded in the Pāli scriptures is evidence of a tension between the life of a monk and the life of a layperson. Since the mission of Buddhism is to persuade people living as householders to renounce the world and embrace the life of a reclusive monk, it comes as no surprise to learn from early sources about ordinary people who complain of families losing sons and of men leaving their wives and children. Within the context of ancient Indian society, sons are especially important because they have the responsibility of performing ancestral rites for

deceased family leaders, continuing hereditary lines of succession, supporting often extended families, and inheriting the family wealth. Buddhism challenged these traditional social priorities and even undermined them. It is possible to find in Buddhist texts negative attitudes about the life of a householder, which is described as narrow, dusty, and a pattern of living that makes it difficult to lead a holy life. And whereas monks look negatively at lay life, it is also possible to hear lay people criticize monks for not living according to the highest Buddhist ideals.

If monks are the spiritual heroic figures of Buddhism who according to tradition are expected to live an austere, reclusive, and demanding life of meditation, laity are expected to support the monastic community, observe certain rites and ceremonies, live a life according the Dhamma (teaching) of the Buddha, be reliable social and family members, lead an exemplary moral and ethical life, and take refuge in the tradition. A Buddhist layman is called an *upāsaka* (feminine: *upāsikā*), which refers to sitting down near someone. The basic implication of the term is that one gives respectful attention to the person who teaches.[51] Unable to devote time to the arduous activity of meditation because of social obligations, a layperson's religiosity tends to be devotional in nature. It is common for laypeople to pray and make offerings to the Buddha or holy personages of the religious tradition. In many ways, the essential linchpin of the monastic and lay relationship is giving, which is the reason why the term donor (*dāyaka*) is also used to also describe the layperson.

The Importance of Giving

The virtue of giving has deep roots in Indian culture that extend back to the Vedic period. The Vedic pattern of giving was from individual sacrificer to divine being. Buddhism changed the direction of giving, and support was given from person to person (particular monk or nun), or person to community (monastic establishment). Instead of fulfilling the obligations associated with expectations of hospitality in Indian culture, the donor now operated in Buddhism within a context of voluntary patronage of a dependent mendicant.[52] But like the Vedic sacrificial pattern of giving, the Buddhist method of giving enables a giver to receive merit. Moreover, the Buddhist mode of giving retains the reciprocal character of giving. Lay people give monks or the Buddhist community food, robes, furniture, and medicine, whereas monks give the laity the Dhamma (teachings).

By giving (*dāna*), a person manifests concern for the welfare of others. The act of giving reveals a freedom from attachment to one's possessions, body, and life. If a person constantly performs acts of giving, this creates a firm foundation for personal moral development; it also fosters detachment from possessions. Moreover, it enables one to enhance one's generosity and become increasingly sensitive to the needs of others.

The act of giving is intimately connected in Buddhist thought with the law of kamma. This connection is illustrated nicely by the legend of King Aśoka. Accord-

ing to the legend of this most famous of Buddhist kings, Aśoka was physically ugly, with rough and harsh skin. Due to his unappealing appearance, his father could not stand the sight of him and the young women of the harem refused to sleep with him. He became a fierce king who disposed of his opponents and punished disloyal ministers and unfaithful wives. The story proceeds to relate the reason for his ugliness and ruthless behavior. In a previous lifetime, Aśoka was born as a little boy named Jaya, who encountered the Buddha one day, while playing in the dirt of the road. Within the context of the make-believe world of childhood, Jaya conceived of a pile of dirt as a heap of grain, and he scooped up a handful and placed it into the begging bowl of the Buddha. After accepting the dirt, the Buddha smiled at the boy. Even though the child acted from within a make-believe world, his act was not without significance and consequences.

The act of giving the Buddha dirt is a meritorious action because any act of offering to the Buddha creates merit, which will generate beneficial rewards for the donor in this life or a future life. In a sense, by offering dirt to the Buddha, the child made a gift symbolic of the entire earth. In hindsight, this act is connected to Aśoka's later kingly sovereignty. At the same time, this gift also results in impure kammic consequences, because dirt is an impure substance. In his future life, these impure karmic seeds result in Aśoka's physical ugliness. Just as the Buddha is the model for the life of a monk, Aśoka becomes a paradigm for the generous lifestyle of the laity.[53]

The spirit and intent behind an act of giving by laypeople is important because it affects the merit that can be gained from a generous act. Thus, it is important for a layperson to give without any selfish motivation. It is also important to give freely and ungrudgingly. Moreover, the act of giving must be performed without favoritism or discrimination between one monk and another. And this should be the way to give, irrespective of one's relation to the recipient, even if a monk is biologically related to you.[54] Rather than making a gift to a single monk or nun, it is preferable to give to the entire monastic community. To receive the best possible results, one should be a virtuous person oneself and give to a virtuous monk.[55] These results are, of course, related to earning merit for oneself, and the monastic community makes it possible for lay people to earn merit by functioning as fields of merit in which the laity can plant their seeds.

Merit itself may be recognized as the balance of good kamma produced by positive deeds. For the individual layperson, therefore, merit is the totality of one's accumulated goodness. The benefits of acquired merit manifest themselves in this life with the acquisition of good health, happy family life, and financial success, or it can manifest itself by a good personal rebirth in a future lifetime.

The merit that one accumulates can be shared with others. A person can, for instance, share merit with disembodied spirits (*petas*). There are, however, certain limits to merit sharing. No matter how large your store of merit, it is not possible to help those in hell. You also cannot change the kammic destiny of another person. By sharing your merit, this does not mean that you lose it. In fact, the

sharing of one's merit increases the total quantity of merit in the world. The Buddhists express the sharing of merit with a popular metaphor which affirms that merit sharing is like lighting many lamps from one. Thus built into the Buddhist worldview is an emphasis on the importance of giving and an inducement to be generous. When lay people keep the fundamental Buddhist precepts, this is also considered a form of giving.[56]

From the Buddhist perspective, not all giving is equally meritorious, because the state of mind of the donor and the level of sanctity of the recipient must be taken into account. The amount of merit that a person can gain is much greater if the recipient is a holy and virtuous person. Since there is a genuine concern that they get the best possible result for their generosity, laypeople prefer to give to monks who are paragons of virtue by complying with the regulations specified by the Pātimokkha (code of monastic rules) and the wider Vinaya regulations. Lay pressure encourages monks to excel ethically and morally, or risk losing material support. There is built into the dynamics of this situation a certain amount of freedom for both parties not to give or receive. There are limits on the monks' ability to refuse a gift. Theoretically, they are not permitted to refuse gifts that are properly made to the entire Saṅgha, although it is possible for monks to deflect these gifts from their own use.[57]

As stated previously, giving is not a one-way affair, because monks are obligated to give the Dhamma (teaching) to laypeople. In fact, the gift of Dhamma is considered the most excellent of gifts.[58] Some of the teachings given by monks reinforce the ethos of giving by preaching about the rewards to be gained by giving gifts and observing moral precepts. Often monks can communicate this by telling narratives from the repertoire of the *Jātaka* tales, stories about the former lives of the Buddha, to illustrate their points in a popular and comprehendible way. Monks also teach about the drawbacks and evils of worldly pleasures and the meritorious nature of retiring from the world, which is a way to encourage living a more religious life. Moreover, monks expound on the Four Noble Truths to laypeople, although monks do not expect them to grasp the esoteric aspect of the teachings.

The tension mentioned earlier in the relationship between the laity and monks overlaps with the paradoxical nature of their relationship. On the one hand, a monk or nun is a person who renounces the world and lives apart from it. On the other hand, the layperson makes a conscious decision to remain in the world and assume social responsibilities and ties. The crux of the paradoxical relationship is that the monk or nun is dependent upon society for subsistence and the opportunity to continue his or her way of life. Without social support, the Buddhist monastic way of life would either die out or be forced to become more self-supporting. And yet, lay people need monks to be able to earn merit, to spread their meritorious seeds on fertile ground, and to give merit that benefits them in the long term. In conclusion, both the laity and monks find the Saṅgha a soteriological necessity. It is possible to witness this today in Sri Lanka, for

instance, where public Buddhist rites cannot earn merit for the laity unless monks are present, chanting sacred verses.[59]

In summary, an ideal society is, from a Buddhist perspective, represented by two groups of givers. We have seen the relationship between these two groups as reciprocal. From the perspective of the laity, giving to the monastic community is beneficial not only to the donor but is also good for social welfare. By supporting the monastic community, people are helping to create a society where people of superior moral and ethical conduct can exert influence for the benefit of everyone. This is not so much a political influence as it is a moral influence.

The Notion of Refuge

In the previous chapter, we noted that monastic novices recited the threefold refuge as part of adopting the life of a monk. The notion of refuge also plays an important role in the religiosity of ordinary laity.[60] It is a practice that is easy, does not involve a disruption of one's life, and is considered an efficacious religious practice. Its simplicity belies its power. A person takes refuge by repeating three times the following formula:

I go to the Buddha as refuge

I go to Dhamma as refuge

I go to the Saṅgha as refuge

The meaning of this threefold refuge becomes more meaningful when it is examined more closely.

As a metaphor, the notion of refuge is like a cave that functions as a protective enclosure. It does not represent fleeing from the world or becoming passive. By means of taking refuge, a person is able to destroy fear, affliction, and suffering. As these positive events are occurring, refuge gives rise to pure thoughts. Taking refuge is a simple act everyone can do; in fact, it can be grasped as the first step of entry onto the path of Buddhism.

If we examine each of the particular refuges, the most archaic is the Buddha, because it functioned as a refuge from the beginning of the tradition. In a sense, the Buddha earned his status as a refuge, and the Dhamma and Saṅgha derive their status from the Buddha. The distinctiveness of the Buddha is evident in his attainment of the highest spiritual perfection by means of his insight and wisdom. The Buddha is a self-enlightened being because he did not have the benefit of a teacher, which gives him a special authority within the tradition. By becoming a refuge for others, the Buddha demonstrates his compassion for the suffering of others. A person can approach the Buddha and take refuge with him in four ways: by self-surrender, by accepting the triple refuge as one's highest ideal, by becoming a student or disciple, and by prostrating oneself (that is, lying on the ground fully stretched out with arms extended). Each of these modes is an act of

dedication and humility, ridding oneself of all sense of ego, and a focusing of one's existence away from one's self to the triple refuge.

The Dhamma and the Saṅgha evolve from their basis in the Buddha, because without the Buddha they would never exist. The Dhamma represents, of course, the authoritative teachings of the Buddha and the process of salvation summarized by the Eightfold Path. By learning and living one's life according to the Dhamma, a person gains support from it. The Saṅgha also functions as a support for the person and community. But this is not merely a monastic community. It is what Buddhists call a *sāvakasaṅgha*, a community of noble persons. This is not intended to convey any sense of superiority or social supremacy. It is a designation that rather transcends the ordinary distinction between laity and monastic practitioners. It indicates those who are spiritually advanced and on their way to enlightenment.

In summary, the threefold refuge is obviously an act of faith. But the purpose of this kind of faith is the subordination of the human ego and recognizition of the truth about the non-self doctrine. It is not the final solution to the human situation in the sense of a scheme of salvation by faith alone. The notion of refuge is an act of faith that transforms, reorients, and awakens a person to the path of truth.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter provides evidence that the Buddha insisted on a monastic institution. This decision differentiated Buddhists from other wandering religious mendicants in ancient India. By organizing themselves into an established community, Buddhists were able to shape the local community, obtain its adherence, and gain its material support. The central place of mutual giving between the monastic community and laity reflected the well-being of this relationship, even though there has always been a tension between the two groups of givers. The laity were not merely supporters of the monastic institution, because they comprised a considerable number of actual Buddhists, and it was from their ranks that monks and nuns were recruited. By means of supporting the monks and contributing new recruits to monastic life, the laity was an integral part of the functioning of the Saṅgha. The laity also exercised a modicum of control over the monastic community in the sense that they could demand that monks and nuns maintain high moral and ethical standards so that giving to them would yield the best possible benefits.

Nikāya Buddhism never developed an office like that of a pope in Roman Catholicism or a supreme monastic authority figure. Although the Buddha functioned as an authority figure during his life, the Dhamma (teachings) became the sole authority after his death. This historical development made the Buddhist monastic community democratic in spirit. It was an institution in which everyone was urged to live according to the teachings, be a refuge unto oneself in working

out one's own salvation, and to take the threefold refuge as both an individual and a community. The monastic institution also served as a haven from the distractions of the outside world. It was a quiet place in which a person could meditate and overcome cankers and dispositions in an arduous process of controlling and refining consciousness. Although the historical Buddha is deceased, his persona lives on in the Saṅgha—the Saṅgha represents the continuing presence of the Buddha. In fact, it is difficult to image Buddhism without the Saṅgha.

6

The Feminine Narrative in Buddhism

In a story retold many times, after the establishment of the monastic order the maternal aunt of the Buddha, named Mahāpajātī, approached him about the possibility of creating an order of nuns. Her request was initially refused, so she used an attendant of the Buddha named Ānanda to intervene for her and to press the case for an order of nuns. In pressing the case for women, Ānanda got the Buddha to admit that women were capable of attaining enlightenment. Thereafter, the Buddha reluctantly agreed to admit women to the order, although he did issue a prophecy that Buddhism would only last for five hundred years instead of the one thousand years it would have survived without the inclusion of women.[1] This story exemplifies certain attitudes toward women in ancient Indian culture.

On the one hand, women were seen religiously as just as capable as men at attaining liberation. On the other, women were also viewed as a potential threat to males living a monastic life. In order to maintain the integrity of the monastic institution, the Buddha instituted additional regulations that placed women under the control of males. The cultural assumptions were that women cannot control themselves, and male dominance is necessary for social stability. The story also reflects a reconciliation and compromise negotiated among various factions within the early monastic order.[2] Nonetheless, recent scholars are skeptical about the historical accuracy of this story, because it is unusually misogynist or can be read to support such an attitude.

It is equally plausible that the Buddha intended to establish a Saṅgha for men and women from the start of his religious movement. There is textual evidence that after his enlightenment, the Buddha intended to continue living in order for a monastic community of both men and women to become successfully established with lay male and female supporters.[3] How would this success be measured? When men and women were practicing the discipline rigorously, had thoroughly learned the doctrines, and were capable of instructing others in a dual-gender monastic community—this could be termed a complete success.

In order to understand the types of assumptions and attitudes about women suggested by Buddhist literature, it will be helpful to place these Buddhist attitudes within the wider context of Indian culture of the period.

Women in Ancient India

Buddhism arose during a period when so-called Brahmanism was influential in Indian culture. This type of religious practice, named after the Brahmin priestly caste that controlled its ritual system, was fundamentally patriarchal, ethnic, family-oriented, and life-affirming, with an emphasize on progeny, material and economic prosperity, and a desire for personal longevity. In her role as a virtuous wife, a woman could help her husband achieve these goals of life. And since a male could not perform sacrifices unless he was married, a wife played an important role maintaining the social and cosmic orders.

Prior to the advent of Buddhism, Indian women of the upper strata of society could become scholars, poets, teachers, and complete the rite of initiation. There were also sacrifices and festivals performed only by women to ensure the fertility of cattle, secure good husbands for their daughters, and celebrate the harvest. Although there were exceptions, most women were not given any extensive education, resulting in an ever-widening disparity between the sexes and increasing the differentiation between sexual roles. Nonetheless, a woman was highly respected in her role as a wife, if she was virtuous and fertile. Moreover, a wife possessed the ability to function as an instrument of immortality because she could give her husband sons who would perform rates for the father and his ancestors.

Despite her high standing reflected in her roles of wife and mother, there is ample evidence of negative views about women during the formative period of Indian culture. In the sacred scriptures of the *Rig Veda*, for instance, the mind of a woman is described as uncontrollable (8.33.7), and some women are described as unfaithful (6.75.4). A ritual text claims that there is no friendship with a woman who has the heart of a hyena, whereas the same text lumps a woman with the lowest caste, a dog, and a crow (animals that symbolize uncleanliness), and with elements that signify untruth, sin, and darkness.[4] With the advent of the *dharma* texts around the first century B.C.E., such as the *Laws of Manu*, the status and characterization of women continued to decline, and it was believed to be essential that they remain subordinate to their parents as a child, their husbands as wives, and to their sons when they became widows. Although this is a sketchy portrait of women at about the time of the Buddha, this was the cultural tradition into which he was born and that influenced him.

If we grasp the cultural context and its attitudes toward women around the fifth century B.C.E., we are helped to comprehend the revolutionary and egalitarian nature of Nikāya Buddhism. The truly revolutionary nature of early Buddhism was that it offered women a career choice; it was now possible for women to freely choose to become something other than a wife and mother, although there were

some requirements that needed to be met before becoming a nun.[5] Furthermore, early Buddhism was egalitarian in the sense that the teachings were freely given to anyone regardless of gender, caste, or economic standing within society. When a woman decided to renounce the world and become a nun she followed generally the same path as her male counterparts, though there were small differences. From one perspective, women were the spiritual equals of men because the former could attain enlightenment just like the latter—a radical notion itself within the ancient cultural context. From another perspective, the inclusion of women in the Buddhist path resulted neither in social equality nor the overcoming of cultural bias about gender within the Buddhist community, although Buddhist nuns and laywomen were probably freer socially than other Indian women. Monks institutionalized social assumptions already formed over a period of time concerning the appropriateness of male superiority and authority over females. This could be called a form of institutional androcentrism.[6]

Under Male Dominance

Since it was expected that women needed to be under the control and protection of men in ancient Indian culture, it should not be surprising to find the same attitude expressed in Buddhist literature and monastic rules created by individuals shaped to a large degree by that culture. The more restrictive rules for nuns were intended to protect them from others and themselves, to guard monks from nuns, and to guarantee the integrity and purity of the monastic community. An extra precaution, for instance, was necessary with respect to nuns' clothing. Women were given three robes, like monks, and two extra pieces: a vest (*samakaccikā*) and a bathing garment (*udakasāṭikā*).[7] A tale provides the Buddhist rationale for these extra accouterments: A nun went to beg in a village without wearing her vest, and the top robe was blown up by a strong wind, exposing her breasts. Because of this type of possibility, nuns were forbidden to visit a town or village without a vest.[8] Needless to say, a nun was also forbidden to bathe naked, or even wear dirty robes, which were restrictions that also applied to males.[9]

Although many of the monastic rules for nuns were similar to those for monks, other rules were intended to subordinate nuns to their male counterparts. This subordination was evident, for instance, in the rule that required each nun to treat every monk as her superior, even if a monk was just recently initiated in the order and a nun had a much longer service. This type of subordination was reinforced by the injunction that forbade nuns to criticize or revile a monk of any status. Moreover, it was only permissible for nuns to receive instruction from monks, and it was never permitted for nuns to share the teachings with a monk. During the monsoon season, a nun could not live in a district where no monks resided. After the rainy season, nuns were investigated for monastic violations just like monks, but the guilty nuns were subject to discipline by both monks' and nuns' Saṅghas (monastic communities), which was not the case for monks. More-

over, nuns also had to be ordained by both Saṅghas. Finally, the formal ceremonies of the nuns had to be performed under the supervision of a monk, and a monk was expected to give Dhamma lectures to nuns every fortnight.[10]

Certain women were not permitted to join the nunnery, just as a similar type of restriction was applied to males. A woman was forbidden to join the order if she was pregnant, a mother of unweaned infants, did not have the permission of her husband or parents, was a rebellious individual who associated with males, failed to observe regulations during her training period, or who had observed the regulations without getting approval of the Saṅgha. This suggested that the monastic community was not an open society catering to anyone who wished to join it, although it was possible to leave it without much trouble.[11]

When petitioning for admission to the order, the female candidates were asked a series of questions much like those asked males, although there were some distinctions. There were sixteen questions regarding deformities and diseases. There were also questions about being a free woman, being free of debts, whether or not she was in the service of the king, had the consent of her parents and/or husband, and whether she was twenty years old. She was asked her name and the name of her sponsor, whether she had robes and a begging bowl, and if she was a female—a question asked to ensure against the admission of eunuchs into the nunnery. In contrast to monks, nuns were not asked for any reason for wishing to join or about her educational background, and there were no inquiries about how she had spent her life in the outside world. If a candidate had children, she had to provide for their guardianship before being admitted to the order. Becoming a nun did not involve adherence until death. Thus it was possible for nuns to leave the order, and no nun was forced to remain in the order against her will. While within the order, a nun lived a life of poverty, with the same meager belongings as a monk.

Once a woman gained admittance into a nunnery, her relationship with monks was tightly circumscribed. Even though a monk was considered superior to a nun and could instruct her, a monk was not allowed to teach a nun in private.[12] Needless to say, a monk and nun could never share a private room together, nor could a monk accept a meal cooked by a nun without the help of laity.[13] If a road was considered dangerous, however, a monk could accompany a nun for her protection, although this assumed that a prior agreement had been made between the parties. When traveling by boat over a river, a monk could accompany a nun as long as the trip was not too long or if it was not a pleasure cruise.[14] A nun was forbidden to enter a monk's dwelling or to sit before a monk without permission.[15] Overall, the monastic code restricted contact between monks and nuns and discouraged even a relationship of friendship between them. Built into these types of regulations was the assumption that both males and females had to be wary of each other.

For a nun this meant that her relationship to males outside the monastic community also had to be restricted. A nun was forbidden to stand alone with a

man, to speak to a man in a dark or secluded place, or accept food or drink from a lascivious male. A nun was also forbidden to dispense medicine or treatment to a man for an ailment below his navel.[16]

Ironically, their clothing and the practice of shaving the head made monks and nuns appear to outsiders as unisexual or asexual individuals who were difficult to distinguish by gender. It is also ironic that the folk culture of India included tales of sex-starved and lascivious monks who yearned to take advantage of beautiful young girls. One Indian satirical work serves as a good illustration of a lascivious monk. In this tale, a monk breaks his vow of silence because he claims to see an inauspicious mark on the neck of a beautiful daughter of the householder from whom he is begging. Winning the trust of the family, the monk instructs the father to place his daughter in a basket in the Ganges River. After the father complies with the wishes of the lustful monk, a handsome prince saves the girl and replaces her with a vicious monkey. Unaware of what has occurred, the monk takes the basket with the monkey to the monastery, where he secures all the doors to prevent an escape by his victim. Once the monk opens the basket, the monkey jumps out and mutilates the monk by biting, scratching, and tearing off his nose and ears.[17] The monk is the victim of his uncontrollable sexual instinct.

Extraordinary Early Women

Many women played prominent roles in the early Buddhist movement. Some women decided to become nuns, whereas others served as prominent supporters of the early monastic community. This suggests that there were both a number of women with a streak of spiritual independence and female patrons with enough financial resources to help the early community maintain itself.[18] This type of instrumental support is evident on Buddhist monuments that date from the third century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. These stone engravings contain evidence of a sizable number of gifts made by monks and nuns to the early community. In addition, these inscriptions suggest that monks and nuns did not relinquish personal property and family wealth.[19] And perhaps it was because nuns played a prominent role in the nascent movement that monks added extra rules with the apparent purpose of controling their female counterparts.

Just as Buddhist literature testifies to accomplished monks, it also provides evidence of the outstanding abilities of many nuns. Numerous women attained the status of arahants (enlightened beings). In fact, it is recorded that the chief consort of the king of Magadha, named Khemā, became fully enlightened while she was a layperson and before her entry into a nunnery. This celebrated learned nun even preached before the king, and he honored her by bowing before her, an unprecedented action by a monarch in ancient India.[20] In a narrative that is reminiscent of the Buddha's story, the demonic Māra tempted a woman named Somā, a daughter of the chaplain of King Bimbisāra, and reminded her of the limited

intellectual and spiritual capacity of women and the necessity of submitting to his temptations. Undaunted, she emerged victorious over this representation of death.[21] In one Pāli text, there is a list of forty-one males and thirteen female enlightened beings who are described with qualities like wisdom, power, logical analysis, and skill in interpretation.[22] An important resource for the study of women in early Buddhism is the text called the *Therīgātha* (Psalms of the Sisters), which comprises the poems of enlightenment composed by more than seventy nuns.

Some nuns were renowned for their ability in preaching and teaching, which were directed primarily at the laity. The nun Dhammadinnā is recorded as having taught her former husband, whereas the nun Kajangalā received praise by the Buddha for her preaching ability.[23] After attending a sermon given by the Buddha with other laywomen in a former lifetime, Sukkā was converted, renounced the world, and became very proficient in the doctrine and preaching it. This pattern continued for a few more life cycles until she finally attained enlightenment during the time of the historical Buddha. But during that life cycle, she was converted by hearing the nun Dhammadinnā preach. Sukkā became a leader of many nuns and a great preacher. In fact, her preaching was so effective that it even inspired a female tree spirit who heard her.[24]

While attending a sermon of the Buddha in a prior life, Uppalavaṇṇā saw him assign a nun a high honor because of her mystical powers, and she vowed to achieve the same rank. After she was born the daughter of a treasurer with skin the color of a blue lotus, which placed her in high demand as a prospective bride to competing princes, her father found himself in a quandary because he was afraid of offending the various contending nobles. Her father, therefore, encouraged her to renounce the world, and she agreed. During her career as a Buddhist nun, she attained mystic powers, and the Buddha conferred the highest rank upon her. This enabled her to fulfill a vow that she made in her previous life.[25] This type of narrative suggests that physical beauty can be a trap that keeps a woman confined within the world, although it is possible to overcome such a handicap.

A different kind of expertise is evident in the narrative of a nun named Bhaddā. The tale relates that she and her sister-in-law got into a quarrel because the latter gave alms to a silent Buddha. Bhaddā was jealous of the possible merit to be won by her sister-in-law, so she took the bowl and filled it with mud. Because of public criticism, she became ashamed of herself, retrieved the bowl, emptied it, cleaned it with scented powder, and filled it with food topped with shining ghee (clarified butter), praying that her body would come to resemble the shining bowl. After numerous rebirths, she was reborn the daughter of a wealthy treasurer. But the result of her previous kamma gave her body an awful odor, making her repulsive to others. On one occasion, she offered her gold ornaments at a Buddhist shrine, and this act transformed her body so it became fragrant. In her next life, she was reborn the daughter of a king, who administered to silent

Buddhas. Due to her meditation practices, she was reborn into a heaven and then into a Brahmin family, and eventually wed a nobleman. After her husband renounced the world, she joined him and was ordained by the maternal aunt of the Buddha, named Mahāpajātī, and she became an expert on what occurred in her past lives.[26]

These examples of accomplished women necessarily give rise to questions about their motivation, because certainly many of them could have led comfortable lives and not the austere life of a nun. This was also true of some men, of course. In some cases women encountered a monk or a nun who abruptly changed their lives. The young daughter of a merchant named Sujātā encountered the Buddha while she was returning home from a carnival. She was so impressed by his gentle and friendly demeanor that she decided to become a nun.[27] Wandering aimlessly after the death of her child, a woman named Vāseṭṭrī decided to convert after encountering the Buddha.[28] In another case, Vimalā was the daughter of a courtesan who fell in love with the monk Moggallāna. She decided to stalk him with amorous intentions. After hearing him preach, she was converted to Buddhism and renounced the world.[29] The preaching of Moggallāna also converted a Jain woman to the Buddhist path.[30] Although raised in a wealthy family, a young Jain daughter joined the Nigaṇṭha Jain community after a very unhappy marriage, and proceeded to become a Jain preacher of great renown. After she was defeated in a public debate by the Buddhist monk Sāriputta, she converted to Buddhism, and she later recounted the uselessness of her former extreme forms of ascetic practice.[31] Monks were not the only sources of influence on women to join the Buddhist movement. The Buddhist nun Jinadattā, for instance, preached a sermon that was heard by a woman named Isidāsī, who had experienced a series of unfortunate marriages and mistreatment and was motivated to convert to Buddhism.[32] This type of narrative suggests that some women with teaching skills were able to attract their own followers and lead them to enlightenment.

Other women were motivated to join the nunnery because of a crisis or existential problems within their lives. A Brahmin woman named Muttā was disappointed, for instance, with the hunchback husband she was forced to wed.[33] The loss of a friend caused Sāmā, a wealthy woman, to convert to the path.[34] Princess Ubbirī and a woman named Kisā-Gotamī converted after the death of young children.[35] Becoming a nun after the deaths of her husband, children, parents, and brother, Paṭācārā became a nun and was recognized as one of the foremost teachers of women.[36] Although she was a weak teacher, the nun Uppalavaṇṇā was famous for her supernatural powers gained through meditation, whereas Thullanandā was a respected teacher, although a breaker of monastic regulations.[37] In such cases the Buddhist monastic community appeared to function partially as refuge for women injured by the misfortunes of life. Some might construe the decisions of these women as a form of escape from the world. Even though in individual cases there might be some truth to this observation, it is probably better

to view these conversion decisions as spiritual responses to life crises that threaten to be incapacitating. Nonetheless, it should be observed that Buddhist literature includes many voices-male and female-with various types of concern, depending upon each person's life experiences.

In a text composed during the sixth century, when Buddhism was flourishing in south India, the Tamil author Cīttalai Cāttanār composed a text entitled *Maṇimēkalai*. This is a story about a daughter of a courtesan who renounces the world after the death of her father and rejects her hereditary occupation. The main female character also serves both as a model nun and as a giving, caring, devoted laywoman. The heroine Maṇimēkalai, whose name means jeweled (*maṇi*) girdle (*mēkala*) and is the name of a powerful goddess, must overcome certain obstacles in the form of a prince who cannot understand her rationale for giving up her life as a dancer and becoming an ascetic. As the story unfolds, her namesake goddess takes her to an island where a seat once occupied by the Buddha is able to reveal her past lives and explain her attraction to the prince, because they were married in a former lifetime. The goddess bestows special mantras (magical utterances) that have the power to enable her to change her bodily form, fly, and dissipate hunger. The heroine also acquires a magical begging bowl that enables her to feed hungry people, because the bowl never exhausts its food for the needy after a virtuous housewife places the initial alms into it. Meanwhile, the lascivious obsession of the prince increases and he receives help from the courtesan's grandmother, who is sensitive to criticism heaped upon her community because of the decision of her granddaughter. In order to avoid the prince, the heroine changes form by means of her mantra, but the prince eventually recognizes her and pursues her. The husband of the woman whose form she has adopted becomes jealous because he sees the heroine conversing with another man. Because the man mistakenly thinks that his wife has been unfaithful, he lies in wait at a temple and kills the prince, mistaking him for the lover of his wife. The heroine must now avoid the revenge sought by the queen, who blames her for the death of her son. By means of her powerful mantras, the heroine survives various types of assault initiated by the vengeful queen; eventually the queen acknowledges the heroine's extraordinary nature and begs forgiveness. The heroine's response to the queen is to teach her about impermanence.[38] This story both justifies female renunciation and applauds the role of the devoted and giving housewife. It also indicates the dangers associated with uncontrolled desires as exemplified by the prince; it shows that a person can overcome social destiny, and that Buddhism gives women life-altering choices. Moreover, the narrative embodies a lesson about kammic ripening for understanding the Buddha's teachings, and it anticipates the coming of an unnamed future Buddha, who is usually identified with Metteyya (Sanskrit: Maitreya). By localizing the Buddhist tradition in south India, the text attempts to shape social and religious facts rather than simply reflect them.[39]

Negative Attitudes Toward Women

Even though the early Buddhist tradition included many remarkable and accomplished women, some Buddhist literature clearly manifests strong negative attitudes toward women. Scholars tend to think that these negative attitudes reflect both male cultural attitudes and the attitudes of monks worried about their monastic purity.

Some of the images of women are extreme. Women are compared unfavorably, for instance, to monsters, demons, venomous snakes, a raging fire to be avoided, defilement, poisoned creepers, and caves filled with snakes.[40] In some Buddhist texts women are described as razor blades coated with honey, possessing the power to delude, deceive, immobilize, and destroy unwary males. These types of image carry the unmistakable message that women are dangerous, especially to the monastic purity of monks.

Women, it is said, have the ability to entrap males and reduce them to slavery. Women can ensnare the minds of men with their physical appearance, smile, talk, singing, crying, demure behavior, delicious meals, and caresses.[41] A woman's form is described as enticing, desirable, intoxicating, binding, distracting, and a hindrance to unsurpassed peace.[42] The biography of the Buddha composed by the monk Aśvaghoṣa describes the power of women to entrap unsuspecting males with their beauty and charm, and even provides a list of sagacious seers who have been entrapped by women.[43] Some *Jātaka* narratives refer to devious women who seduce innocent ascetics.[44] Even though women are depicted as able to ensnare males, men can also enslave women, who are portrayed as being obsessed with physical appearance, voice, scent, and caress of a man.[45] Thus the Buddhist monks writing the texts could recognize that sexual entrapment works for both genders. It is also evident, however, that monkish composers were convinced that the vast majority of women were biologically determined to be sexually uncontrollable.

The sexual paranoia of monks with respect to the dangers embodied by women is evident in narratives about women who seduce and sexually assault unsuspecting monks while they are asleep or too ill to resist. Even if a woman is dying, this will not deter her from attempting to take sexual advantage of a monk. In one example, a woman tries to seduce a Buddhist monk but is converted by his talk about the Dhamma (teachings).[46] This suggests that the teachings have the power to overcome the dangerous sexuality of women.

The conviction by monks that women have voracious sexual appetites is further evident in the *Jātaka* tales, which relate the previous lives of the Buddha. In one tale an ancient and blind hag becomes flattered by the words of a young student. In order to run away with her new lover, she attempts to kill her faithful son, who has cared for her during her old age. Another tale informs us about a woman rescued from a dangerous flood by an ascetic. After seducing her ascetic rescuer, she becomes his wife, but later in the story she deserts him for a robber chief and attempts to murder him. Other stories describe women who betray fathers and

husbands for even blind, lame, hunchbacked, and balding paramours. Women are described as having insatiable passions, being faithless, full of faults, and naturally wicked, whereas men are portrayed in these tales as noble, loyal, generous, and holy.[47]

There is a narrative in the collection of female poems that summarizes the Pāli Buddhist position; it relates the tale of the nun Sumedhā and the pressure exerted by her parents to marry the local king. She responds to her parents by characterizing the human body as foul, impure, smelling of urine, a water bag of corpses, full of impure things, food for worms and carrion birds, and repulsive. She continues to argue that at death it is merely thrown away in a cemetery, and the survivors purify themselves after their contact with it.[48]

Such a negative description of the human body can be comprehended within the context of ancient Indian culture and its connection of women with the earth, as evident by the ancient Vedic hymns. During the initial age of the gods, sky and earth were born from a primal mother named Aditi, who gave birth with legs spread apart (*Rig Veda* 10.72.3–4). In another Vedic hymn, the earth is represented as a kind and gentle mother, and she is asked to accept gently the body of a dead person, as a mother wraps an infant son (*Rig Veda* 10.18.10–11). Buddhist references to women perpetuated the cultural connection between women and the earth.

Whereas the lives of all people living on the earth are characterized by suffering, women are perceived as assuming an even heavier burden because they have five additional forms of suffering: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, having to serve men, and being subjected to the authority of relatives.[49] These are connected to a woman's biological nature and her social status as a subordinate figure.

A comparison is also drawn between mother's milk that quenches thirst in only a temporary way and the teachings (Dhamma) of the Buddha, which satisfies thirst forever. The milk of a mother is connected to continual thirst, which suggests a continuation of desire and its link with the cycle of dependent origination. In short, mother's milk leads to rebirth in this world, whereas the teachings of the Buddha represent the elixir of immortality beyond the cyclic flux of the mundane world.[50] When the product of a woman's breast is compared to the Dhamma it is no contest, because biological nurturing cannot compare to the spiritual sustenance provided by the Buddha for his children. Therefore, even when women are depicted in their maternal role—which is, generally speaking, culturally accepted as positive—their motherly role comes up short when compared to the maternal role of the doctrine of the Buddha.

These various types of negative attitude toward women might have contributed to the eventual demise of the order of nuns in India around the twelfth century and in Sri Lanka around the eighteenth century. No one factor caused the decline of the order of nuns, however. The prevailing patriarchal expectations about the domestic and reproductive roles of women and the social pressure to conform to these cultural expectations were factors. These cultural expectations

are even evident in a story of laywomen who criticize nuns. In this story some youthful nuns were bathing in a river, and were mocked by some courtesans on the shore for following a monastic life instead of enjoying themselves during their youth. The courtesans suggested that the nuns should wait for old age to embrace the religious path.[51] Even though male renunciation of the world was accepted as a viable option, it was difficult for Indian culture to fully embrace this lifestyle for women. The special rules for nuns that placed them in a position subordinate to monks also emphasized their relative lack of prestige. Because of the importance of giving to pure fields of merit, laity preferred to give to renowned clerics, which resulted in the lack of economic support for nuns. As the nunnery became weaker economically and the sisters became less educated, it was more difficult to recruit new women.[52]

Nevertheless, nuns demonstrated during the early period a desire to be as independent of monks as possible.[53] It is possible to find hints of this independence in the fact that the Buddha allowed nuns to train probationary females.[54] This independent streak is also evident when nuns complain about poor male instructors. After receiving poor instruction from six monks, nuns complained, for instance, and received excellent lessons from the Buddha.[55] The monk Cūḷapanthaka was also accused of simply asking about the eight important rules without discussing them thoroughly.[56] Another monk appeased nuns complaining about his teaching by displaying his supernatural powers.[57] These kinds of story are indicative of the determination of early nuns to obtain the best teaching and spiritual training. Although they were in a subordinate position to monks, their courageous complaints were not totally ignored.

Women and South Asia

In the Theravāda countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma), the order of nuns does not exist today. The vacuum has been filled to some degree by laywomen who have chosen to don ochre-colored robes and have assumed the vocation of clergy. There may be as many as five thousand of these women in Sri Lanka, for example, even though they are denied the possibility of ordination. There is also a tradition in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar of elderly women donning white robes, shaving their heads, and leading a monastic life on the margins of society after their family responsibilities have been met. Instead of the five precepts incumbent on all Buddhists, these older women observe eight or ten precepts.

What is especially interesting about these women in Sri Lanka is that they do not want to become ordained. Many of them want to be free from the control of monks, which is the situation that they would face if they did get ordained. Today, women who adopt a monastic life want to guard their independence in a country in which Buddhism and nationalism are intertwined, and renunciation of the world was connected in the 1930s with patriotism. Moreover, these lay nuns argue that membership in a monastic community is not a prerequisite for adopting a

monastic life.[58] In contrast to the choice made by such women, the majority of lay Buddhists do not believe today that world renunciation is a viable option for women.

The Sri Lankan situation for lay nuns is ironic for a couple of reasons. For instance, the practice of celibacy, a practice that is not traditionally associated with women, represents autonomy for these lay nuns. For a woman to remove herself sexually from society represents a radical break from cultural tradition, and an equally radical movement toward personal autonomy. Another ironic point is that monks are popularly associated with death, whereas nuns are connected with life as they function as fields of merit by chanting scriptures and preaching doctrine. It is possible to claim that these lay nuns have not internalized a sense that their gender is inferior.[59]

A similar scenario is reported in Thailand, where lay nuns live on the edge of society and practice meditation. Within the confines of the monastery, lay nuns form a peripheral category of inmates, because their living quarters are normally distinct and removed from the residences of monks, in an area that is technically associated with the laity. They can still go through a kind of initiation that includes getting permission from parents and/or husbands, shaving the head, appearing before the abbot dressed in colored lay clothing, asking to be accepted by reciting a Pāli passage, chanting together with the abbot the three refuges, receiving the eight precepts, and finally changing into white clothes.[60]

There is a report of small groups of lay nuns in Thailand taking residence at five monasteries. The interviewed nuns acknowledged receiving donations of both money and food from relatives. They also admitted to receiving occasional surplus gifts from monks and novices in the monastery.[61]

The situation for nuns in Myanmar is very similar to that in Sri Lanka and Thailand. Present-day nuns have a marginal status in Myanmar society because they cannot receive full ordination. Those that become nuns are differentiated into two categories: those who were previously married or widowed, and those who were young and unmarried when they become nuns. The latter category allows for better education and a higher status, because the distinction is basically between virgins and nonvirgins. A nun is called a holder or observer of the Buddhist ethical or moral code. She is distinguished from a devout laywoman because she lacks a socially productive role. The nun is conceived more as an almswoman dependent on lay generosity. From a legal perspective, the nun remains a member of the secular world, and she can still inherit wealth and property. Her civil status is similar to that of a monk, however, which means that, like a monk, she is denied certain civil rights such as the right to vote or engage in political activities. Nuns feel inferior and dependent on lay benefactors. They also feel at a disadvantage in the exchange of generosity because they have nothing with which to reciprocate gifts from laity.[62]

The marginal status of nuns in Myanmar means that they have a very limited public role. It is rare for a nun to preach publicly because this role is reserved for

monks. Nonetheless, nuns teach and preach, mostly in private. A growing public role for nuns is the chanting of magical prayers (*paritta*) for newborn infants; at initiation ceremonies for sons, weddings, and funerals; and for serious illness or injuries. Since most nuns only observe eight precepts instead of ten, they are not prohibited from handling money, which they do for monks by serving as treasurers for monasteries. For many young village girls at the present time, the decision to become a nun is viewed as a way to acquire an education and a religious career.[63]

The numerous examples of negative attitudes toward women raise the following question: Were the Buddhist monks historically misogynist? Some scholars make a distinction between the teachings of the Buddha, which tend to be devoid of gender bias, and the monk-dominated institutional Buddhism that exemplifies attitudes suggesting misogyny—and not merely male dominance.[64] Although monks wanted to retain power within the monastic institution, one scholar argues that sexist attitudes were due to Buddhism's traditional androcentrism and male dominance that were given expression by monks and not a misogynist attitude toward women.[65] Other scholars interpret the monkish literature as reflecting an unmistakably misogynist attitude, discrimination against renunciant women, and a break from the earlier tradition and its teachings about salvation.[66]

The negative attitudes toward women reflect cultural biases and prejudices of the historical period in which Buddhism developed. But the situation is more complex than this, because of the early Buddhist attitudes toward the human body that are generally negative with regard to both genders. There are, of course, exceptions in the Buddhist tradition, which we will consider when we look at Buddhist Tantra and the significance of the body in meditation with a Zen master like Dōgen.

7

Stories from Buddhist Villages

If monks and nuns are the royalty of Buddhism, lay people are the foot soldiers that support the royalty. In many introductory surveys of Buddhism, the everyday lives and contributions of the laity are neglected in favor of the monastic viewpoint, with its scholastic traditions and abstract philosophical musings. Throughout this book, I have injected material about the role of the laity where it seemed appropriate to provide balance in the presentation of this rich and complex religious tradition. In this chapter, I continue to look at the contributions of rural laypeople to Buddhism, focusing on three major countries of South Asia: Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand, and Sri Lanka. These countries are excellent examples of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, and this chapter calls attention to the folk element of Buddhism that has been a part of that tradition from its inception in India.

Village Pantheon

A primary aspect of folk Buddhism is animism, a belief in supernatural spirits or powers. Belief in spirits does not contradict the Buddhist tradition, because such convictions have been part of the religion since its origins. Using the skills of ritual specialists, villagers often attempt to enlist the benevolent powers of these spirits or attempt to avoid their malevolence. On the village level, these spirits often form complex pantheons. An excellent example of this complexity can be found in Myanmar.

The pantheon in a typical Myanmar village is populated with *nats*, a wide indigenous category of supernatural beings that are more powerful than humans and can affect the lives of ordinary mortals in both negative and positive ways. There are three major types of nats: nature spirits, *devas* (deities), and the group of the thirty-seven nats. The nature spirits are associated with natural phenomena, and the deities reside in the various Buddhist heavens. The nats, on the other

hand, are potentially punitive spirits that represent deceased human beings. The nature spirits tend to be amoral, with the ability to cause suffering; the deities are protectors of the Buddhist religion and are benevolent, moral figures that alleviate suffering; and the thirty-seven nats are amoral and cause suffering, like the nature nats.[1]

As their name implies, nature nats have jurisdiction over a specific area like a forest, field, or hill. Because they are arbitrary, amoral, and easily offended, it is incumbent upon villagers to protect themselves by making offerings and petitions to them. Other types of precautionary measures would include, for instance, not urinating on a tree or refraining from obscenity in their orbit of influence.[2]

The "thirty-seven" nats is a number that should not be taken literally. Villagers characterize them as evil, and acknowledge that they take offense quickly. In contrast to the nature nats, these nats live in a house or village. In fact, there is a single house nat for the whole of the country, but there are also many village nats that must be placated. If they are properly propitiated, they will use their power to protect people, and if they are not, they can cause harm ranging from accidents to death. There is a report of a villager who lost thirty cows because he urinated in front of a nat shrine. Generally speaking, there are five types of the thirty-seven nats: personal, house, village, parental, and public works.[3]

Little is known about personal nats, and there is no cult associated with them. In contrast, the house nat's presence is marked by a coconut that hangs from the southeast pillar of the house, serving as both a representation of its presence and an offering. It is believed that the cool juice of the coconut relieves the suffering of this nat, who died of burning. If the house nat is properly propitiated, it will protect the house from thieves and enemies. When it is offended it can cause illness, poverty, and domestic squabbling. In order to avoid offending the house nat, it is important to remove the coconut during periods of pollution in the house, like childbirth and death. Because sexual relations are considered polluting, it is offensive for a couple to have sexual relations on the southeastern side of the house, where the coconut hangs.[4]

Located near the entrance to the village is the village nat shrine, which is shaped like a hut and attached to a tree or to a long pole. Within the structure, there is a cup of water, bits of feed in a dish, a flower, and a bundle of leaves, which represent offerings to the thirty-seven nats. There are times when the hut contains a wooden, doll-like white horse that is a symbol of one of the thirty-seven nats called the Lord of the White Horse. The shrine itself is intended to protect the village from external enemies. It does not protect the village from internal enemies, however, and it does not protect it from natural calamities like heavy rainstorms or lighting strikes.[5] There are certain rites of passage (such as the vows of a monastic novice and marriage) when the village nat is propitiated.

The final two types of village nats are the mother's side/father's side nats and the public works nats. The former type is inherited from a villager's mother and father, although it is usually the father's nat that is inherited.[6] The latter type is

related to an ancient belief that any human being buried alive under the foundations of construction site is transformed into a guardian spirit of the building. In ancient times, human victims were buried alive at the four corners of a city to protect the location from evil spirits and human enemies.[7]

The nat cult in Myanmar resorts to religious specialists other than Buddhist monks, such as shamans, exorcists, and witches. A shaman is called a nat wife, although a few are men, and very few villages are without one. Shamans are responsible for the village nat cults and also perform private rites for clients. Acting as a medium who cures illness, a shaman operates by invoking her nat husband, who possesses her in a trance state, informing her that a particular patient offended a particular nat. A woman is usually recruited to become a shaman by a nat when the nat falls in love with her and wishes to marry her. There is a belief that shamans have sexual relations with the nat, so they are viewed as sexually immoral and promiscuous, which is merely confirmed when they dance in public like immoral women. It is important to note that the actions of shamans are exclusively animistic and devoid of Buddhist content or symbolism.[8]

The exorcist, on the other hand, possesses a different type of relationship to Buddhism because he or she works as a devout Buddhist and uses Buddhist elements such as reciting precepts and performing worship of the Buddha. Because the exorcist can either protect or harm people, he or she is a morally ambiguous figure who deals with supernaturally caused illness and possession. The exorcist interacts with a nat by asking it to possess a patient. While the patient is in a trance state, the exorcist functions as the nat's medium, and he or she also talks to the nat. The exorcist is known to invoke gods of the Hindu pantheon for assistance because these deities are also part of the Buddhist cosmological system.[9]

In sharp contrast to the shaman and exorcist, the witch possesses innate power to harm others. In Myanmar village culture, witches are both male and female, although the former tend to be less vicious than the latter, and more powerful. The power of the witch is associated with acquired knowledge, and it is a coercive type of power. In order to acquire power over nats, the witch makes an offering that consists of contrary elements of profane and sacred substances. Witches are credited with various powers such as the ability to cause illness and death, fly at night without their heads, assume the forms of bats or vultures during the day, and transform inanimate into animate objects (such as a stone into a dog). Witches are believed to be fond of human excrement. In order to satisfy their craving, they remove their heads from their bodies, and the detached heads search along the ground until they find their desired prize and consume it.[10] Witches operate by means of four major techniques: uttering a curse on food given to a victim, introducing a foreign body such as a hair into the food, transforming excrement into beef curry, and feeding a victim a fish transformed from a palm plant. A way to counter witches on the village level is to practice Buddhism and wear sacred amulets on one's body. Exorcism is also available to counteract a witch.[11]

In contrast to village Myanmar, in rural Thailand there are two mutually opposed supernatural categories. There are benevolent, divine angels (*thewada*) that reside in heaven, and there are malevolent spirits called *phii* that float freely in the human world or are condemned to hell. There is a connection between these spirits and human souls. On the one hand, there is the life soul (*kwan*) that resides in the body of a person, although it can leave the body. When the body is frightened, sick, or troubled it is possible that the life soul will leave a person, with observable effects on a person's behavior. It is possible, however, to recall it and to restore the health of the body. The life soul is singular, but it is fragmented into thirty-two separate essences associated with various bodily parts that die with the physical demise of the body. Another type of soul that resides in the body and leaves it at death is called the *winjan*.[12] After it leaves the body at death, it continues to live a separate existence.

The worldview of villagers in Thailand connects these dual souls with the supernatural spirits. At death a winjan soul becomes a phii, although it is impossible for a human soul to become a thewada, which is never reborn. After a winjan soul of a human becomes a phii, it can punish the living by causing illness or misfortune. Thus villagers must take precautions to keep this from happening.

In contrast to Thailand, a more fluid scenario is evident in Sri Lanka. Even though it is a predominately Buddhist country, it contains a strong Tamil Indian influence in the north of the island. The divine pantheon of contemporary Sri Lanka is changing and incorporating Hindu gods and goddesses. The principal deity is Vishnu, a major Hindu deity who protects Buddhism. The other four guardian deities are any of five other gods: Nātha, Pattini, Saman, Vibisana, or Kataragama. The deity Nātha is associated with traditional royalty, but he became obsolescent with the destruction of the monarchy in 1815. Pattini is a goddess connected with heat, who can cure infectious diseases and drought, which are two social malaises traditionally associated with heat. We shall discuss her more fully in a moment. Kataragama is a war god capable of unethical and immoral actions. Students attempting to pass final exams and people trying to find success in business or simply trying to find employment pray to him. We shall also discuss the Kataragama cult more fully below.[13]

The cults of Kataragama and of other divine beings in Sri Lanka encounter a paradoxical problem: If a deity is too good, and is promoted on the basis of its good deeds, it can become obsolescent. That is, when the deity becomes promoted beyond the sphere of mundane affairs, ordinary people cannot encounter it.[14] Thereby, the deity becomes distant and irrelevant to worshipers.

This is one example of the flux characteristic of the Sri Lankan pantheon; another is the case of the former demon Hūniyam, who rose to the status of a deity by becoming a personal guardian of exorcists and then becoming a popular urban deity. In order to reconcile its benevolent and malevolent aspects, a theory was invented that Hūniyam is a deity during the waxing of the moon, and becomes a demon during the waning of the moon.[15] The changing nature of the pantheon is

also evident in the demotion of the Hindu goddess named Kālī, who proved to be too bloodthirsty and ghoulish for the Sinhala Buddhist divine hierarchy and was reduced to the position of a demoness. Kālī's major centers of worship are in Tamil Hindu temples that are patronized by Sinhala Buddhists. Her shrine is usually located outside the sacred area of the temple and controlled by non-Brahman priests because of the pollution associated with animal sacrifices that characterize her worship. The cult of Kālī fills a cultural vacuum created by the decline of the goddesses Pattini, especially with relation to cursing and sorcery.[16]

Historically, Pattini is a Buddhist and Jain deity. Her cult was not, however, an integral aspect of the orthodox doctrine of either religious movement.[17] The goddess Pattini exemplifies purity, chastity, and virginity, even it is said that she is married to Pālanga. Pattini is the result of three consecutive births: the tear of a nāga (serpent) king, a blue lotus, and a mango located in the king's orchard. According to her myth, her husband Pālanga is falsely accused of stealing a jeweled anklet. Although the queen absolves him of guilt, the goldsmith testifies against him and urges the king to execute the alleged thief. Pālanga is hacked to death by a professional executioner. Searching for her lost husband, Pattini crosses the Kāvēri River by throwing her ring into it and parting the waters. She encounters children who show her where her husband has been killed. In response to this horrific discovery, she weeps and laments. By means of the power of her chastity, she resurrects her husband. Then she complains to the king and queen that the court peacock stole her anklet by swallowing it. The bird is brought before the king and is made to regurgitate the anklet. In a rage, according to some traditions, Pattini takes her remaining anklet and her breast and throws them at the city. This ignites a fire that spreads rapidly and consumes all sinners and liars in the city, but spares the good, the Buddhist temples, monks, and relics.[18] Pattini and the divine beings discussed above suggest some important lessons about the Sri Lankan pantheon.

The Sri Lankan pantheon functions dynamically: that is, the more favors a deity grants, the more compassionate it must be and the more worship and attention it deserves. Thus a deity moves up the scale of human affection and attention when it actively intervenes to help someone, and it drifts downward on the scale of perceived divine value when it does not respond to the needs of humans and loses contact with them. A change occurring now is that the authority structure of the pantheon is breaking down. This development is symbolized by the rise of the personal guardian deity (*iṣṭa devatā*) of each individual, with whom there is an intimate and personal relationship.[19]

Another feature of the Sri Lankan pantheon is that all the deities are defenders and protectors of Buddhism and its monastic order.[20] These various divine beings are mostly benevolent figures that can create a moral order in the world. They cannot stop demons from causing harm, however, although they can punish and control demons. Nonetheless, the power of the deities is subordinate to the power and authority of the Buddha. This subordination is evident in rituals that

begin with a priest seeking permission of the three refuges (Buddha, Saṅgha, and Dhamma).

The Buddha is, in fact, the world ruler by virtue of his status as an enlightened being, founder of the religion, and teacher. He represents the paradigm of all that is spiritual. Although the laity views the Buddha as a kind of deity, a wheel-turning monarch, he operates as a world renouncer, quite unlike a worldly monarch who is involved in the world. The Buddha is primarily involved in the pantheon.[21]

Village World

Although villages are different throughout South Asia, they tend in general to represent to their residents, a self-enclosed world within a much wider Buddhist universe. The village is a safe haven that is threatened from the outside by hostile spirits and forces that need to be placated by the inhabitants, but it is also potentially threatened by antisocial forces from within the village that have to be successfully encountered and overcome.

In a rural Thai village, houses are built on stilts or pillars, and they are accessed by ladder. Although it is physically all on one level, the house is conceived hierarchically as a series of levels of auspiciousness. The washing place is considered at the lowest level, due to its association with dirt. The entrance platform and kitchen are on the same level, whereas the guest room is considered more auspicious, but still below the family sleeping room, which is at the highest level. The entrance to the house is located toward the south, the family sleeping room is located in the north, and the kitchen and washing place are located in the western area of the house. The locations of the rooms are significant, because the east is considered the most auspicious direction, which also signifies life and what is sacred. It is also the direction associated with the right hand and represents the male sex. The western direction is considered inauspicious because it symbolizes death, impurity, and the setting sun. In contrast to the east, the west represents the left hand and the female sex. The north is another auspicious direction associated symbolically with the elephant, which is considered an auspicious animal, whereas the south possesses a neutral value.

The threshold of the rural Thai house is represented by the entrance platform, which is a place for washing one's feet before entering the house. A particularly private and sacred place is the kitchen; adjoining it is the wash place, a platform with water jars. This area is where only family members wash and bathe, and it is considered unclean. The guest room is for receiving and entertaining guests, who are not allowed to enter the family sleeping quarters unless they have entered into a marriage relationship with a member of the household. The reason for this is related to the sacredness of the room. The family sleeping quarters are divided by an invisible partition, with the room of the parents located in the eastern half and that of the married daughter and son-in-law in the western half.[22]

Within the context of the village world, a pious Buddhist in Thailand or Myanmar begins and concludes the day with devotions performed before a small shrine. In Myanmar, the shrine is always located on the eastern or auspicious side of the house, and above head level, a traditional sign of respect. The pious Burmese villagers often conclude their devotions by reciting their Buddhist rosary, which consists of 108 beads, a sacred number with an ancient ancestry in India. The Burmese interpret the number as referring to the markings on the feet of the Buddha, which refer to his 108 reincarnations.[23] Such body symbolism plays an important role in common worship.

Body symbolism plays, for instance, an important role in Buddhist worship of an image. At the entrance to a pagoda or a monastic building, all visitors must remove their shoes or sandals. Before an image of the Buddha or a monk, worshipers must sit on their haunches in order for their head to be lower than that of the image or monk. It is considered an insult and very poor etiquette to sit with one's feet pointing toward the sacred object; feet must always be turned away. When one recites a prayer or listens to a sermon it is important that one's hands be in the proper position, with palms touching each other. The correct form for a man is to hold his joined hands to his forehead, whereas a woman should hold her joined hands at her chest. An integral part of devotional worship is physical prostration: the worshiper kneels with hands clasped, and touches the floor three times with the forehead. This type of obeisant body symbolism suggests subjection, reverence, taking refuge, and homage to the image of the Buddha.

Before an image of the Buddha can be worshiped, it must be consecrated in a formal ceremony that brings it to life. The initial part of the consecration involves training the image much as if it were a monk, in a series of actions that includes chanting the sacred scriptures, taking the three refuges, taking precepts before it, and chanting of protective verses (*paritta*). The reciting of sermons and chanting of scriptures serves to both instruct and empower the image. During the consecration, the image rests on a raised platform during the night with its head covered by a white cloth and its eyes sealed with beeswax, symbolizing its unenlightened condition. At dawn, a monk removes the white hood and beeswax, signifying its enlightened status and empowerment. In addition, three mirrors that had been facing the image are now turned outward. These mirrors represent three forms of knowledge gained by the Buddha about his former births, the impermanence and rebirth of all beings, and the cause and destruction of suffering.[24] At the conclusion of the ceremony, the image is prepared for worship. In a sense, the image experiences an initiation, empowerment, and enlightenment, much like a monk.

Village Cultic Activity

Cultic activity in villages is connected to the belief system of villagers. In Myanmar, the public nat cult is expressed in a ceremony in which the nat is propitiated

and its presence is evoked. The ceremony requires an orchestra, a singer, and a shaman. The singer invokes the nat, the orchestra plays music associated with the nat, and the nat's presence is signaled when the shaman becomes possessed. These ceremonies can be voluntary and sponsored by a private person—that is, they do not depend on the calendar and are noncyclical in nature. In contrast to this voluntary type of ceremony are the local, regional, and national calendrical and cyclical ceremonies.

At the regional ceremonies, an orchestra plays a repertoire of nat music, while banana offerings are placed into the nat shrine until it is full. Some celebrants dance before the shrine, and some of the dancers become possessed. A part of the regional ceremony includes the removal of nat images from the shrine and carrying them to the riverbank, where they are ritually bathed. Then the images are placed on a raft and taken to the middle of the river, where a tug-of-war ensues between two separate teams of men and women who pull on long ropes attached to opposite ends of the raft, vying for its possession. It is common for the two teams to splash water on each other in this competition between the sexes.

An example of the nat cult on the national level is the Taungbyon festival held at the end of August, which is a celebration of two brother nats. This festival is characterized by overindulgence in food, drink, gambling, and deviant sexual behavior that is not normally accepted by the community. It is common to witness public drunkenness, sexual banter, teasing, and fondling, especially of female backsides. After making offerings to the nats, many villagers dance to entertain, soothe, and calm the nats. The nat participates when a dancer wearing a nat costume personifies it. Again, there is a ceremonial bathing of nat images at a river. Young men engage in sexual banter and shout obscenities at girls in other boats. On the fifth day of the festival, a hare-offering ceremony occurs, and the festival ends with the destruction of a nat tree, whose pieces are carried away by participants because they are believed to bring good luck.[25]

Like villagers in Myanmar and their nat cults of various kinds, the villagers in Thailand maintain a cult of guardian spirits (*phii*) of communal property and interests. It is important to observe that Buddhist monks do not participate in this cult. A wooden shrine located at the border of the village represents the guardian of the Thai village, which functions as the community disciplinarian. If communal norms are transgressed, such as the violation of sexual roles and dietary rules, various types of suffering from death to fever could occur. The guardian spirits of the village are offered non-Buddhist offerings of pork, chicken, and liquor, whereas the guardian of the village monastery (*wat*), in its representation as a wooden statute on an altar next to an image of the Buddha, is offered only vegetarian fare.

A different type of cult more closely associated with Buddhism in Thailand is associated with amulets, objects having sacred or supernatural power. Amulets are miniature figures or busts of the Buddha or a famous Thai monk. These figures are attached to necklaces and chains worn around the necks of ordinary men and women because they offer protection and prosperity to the wearer. Treated

with respect, the amulets are often, for instance, worshiped with palms pressed together, propitiated with offerings, or purified with holy water. It is common for individuals to wear the necklace with the amulet in the morning while reciting a sacred formula to the amulet. Using both hands, the wearers then transfer its virtue and power to their heads. Over the course of time, amulets lose their potency, which can be restored if a famous monk or holy person touches them. These repositories of power are reminders of the virtues of the Buddha and saints of the tradition.[26]

In Sri Lanka, the Kataragama cult represents a Hindu-Buddhist syncretism. Buddhist laity have adopted Tamil Hindu ritual forms, even as monks have assumed control of formerly Hindu sacred areas. The cult involves the procession of the deity Skanda or the Tamil goddess Valli Ammā for fifteen nights, which celebrates the consummation of their illicit love affair. In order to commemorate the washing of the deities' clothes polluted by sexual intercourse, participants sport in the water by splashing each other, and they perform the ritual of "water cutting" with an exuberant and cathartic display of emotion. This activity celebrates the god Skanda's passion and sensuality, which glorifies sensual existence, a definitely non-Buddhist element.[27]

Another aspect of the Kataragama cult is the *kāvidi* dances performed by dancers who wear peacock arches on their shoulders and dance ecstatically to drums and flutes. As the dancers perform, they become lost in ecstasy, combining elements of devotionalism with eroticism. From one perspective, the dance can be seen as a protest against the domination of Protestant Buddhism, which is often expressed by self-inflicted torture before the god.[28] It is not unusual to witness participants in Buddhist devotional rites sticking pins through their tongues, cheeks, the flesh of their arms, and upper bodies, while others may walk on shoes studded with nails with the sharp end pointing upward, and some individuals walk on fire.

Fire walking is performed within a devotional context, which is essential for its success. Prior to the event, a trench thirty feet long is dug, and wood is staked four feet high in the trench. Attendants continually brush off the layer of ash that accumulates on the top of the wood, which keeps the surface red hot. The walkers proceed one at a time according to their own pace and style. There are a variety of reasons for choosing to fire walk, which include fulfilling a vow after recovering from an illness; devotion to the deity from whom the walker received a divine authorization, in order to validate an experience of divine possession; or to acquire new power, which may include the capacity to become possessed, utter prophecies, cure the sick, and banish evil spirits.[29]

Village Festivals

The observance of festivals stands in sharp contrast to the first Noble Truth about suffering, because they tend to be life-affirming events. Despite suffering, failure,

and death, festivals affirm life, gaiety, emotions, and feelings of joy. Festivals represent a special time when ordinary work is set aside and people celebrate some event. Festivals also establish a basis for both stability and change, and form or reestablishes a bond between devotee and deity. Festival time tends to be repetitive in the sense of reenacting the actions of divine beings, and it often represents a reenactment of the birth of the cosmos. Excess tends to accompany festivals: there is destruction and waste, along with exuberant dancing, singing, overeating, and drinking. These features are all manifestations of revelry and joy.

The festivals of rural Thailand are closely interwoven with the cycle of the village agricultural calendar, as would be expected in farming communities. A good example of such a rite is the four-day-long Songkrān festival that forms a New Year celebration, because the first day of the festival marks the end of the old year.[30] During each day of the festival, villagers give gifts of food to the monks in the morning. Since this is a time for beginning anew, people clean their houses, burn trash, and wash their hair and clothing. The first day also includes igniting firecrackers and bathing the image of the Buddha, which is an act of respect and a way for villagers to purify themselves of negative karma. The second day of the festival is a time for preparation for the third day, when food is prepared, an enormous sand *stūpa* (memorial mound) is built, dead ancestors are commemorated and merit transferred to them, and young people use perfumed water to bathe their elders' feet to wash away their bad karma. This last feature is also a way to seek the forgiveness of elders and to receive their blessings in return.

The third day of the festival falls on the first day of the New Year, which is considered the most auspicious day of the year, and it is a perfect time to perform positive actions such as dedicating a house or ordaining monks and nuns. Crowds of villagers give food to monks, and gather in the main hall of the monastery for a service of chanting and a sermon. By this time, the sand stūpa is completed, and three flags, symbolizing the three refuges of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, top it. The stūpa is empowered by being attached to the image of the Buddha in the temple by a white cord, which symbolizes the regeneration of the person and the reordering of the world. Young people engage in water sports that can get rowdy with splashing and throwing of water on each other in a celebration of the casting away of the old and the engendering of the new.

The fourth day is marked by informal activities. Villagers pay their respects to the Buddha image and to leading monks of the monastery by pouring water, for instance, over the Buddha image or the hands of the abbot. The practice of paying respects represents the seeking of forgiveness. People may also purchase fish or small caged birds to free them in order to gain merit. A number of themes intersect with this festival, including merit-making actions, promotion of fertility, washing away negative karmic residues, and purification and rejuvenation of venerable objects for the New Year.

Another important Thai festival is the Rocket festival (Bunbangfai; literally, "merit of firing rockets"). This festival is connected to soliciting rain, on which the

lives of villagers depend.[31] The rockets are made of bamboo sections, packed with black powder, that are reinforced with rope. The festival includes three major sequences: ordination of monks, ecstatic procession in which monks do not participate, and firing of the rockets. A distinction is made between a "wishing rocket," which foretells the outcome of wishes made to the spirit named Tapu Byng in northeast Thailand, and a "paying respect rocket." Villagers look at the flight of the former type of rocket to determine if the spirit will grant their wishes. If a rocket flies straight and high, the omens are auspicious. The firing of a second rocket marks the beginning of ritual license enhanced by the large quantities of liquor consumed by participants, causing uninhibited behavior. If a rocket fails to fire, the person in charge of the rockets is, for instance, hit with gobs of mud from the participants, who also participate in other forms of ritual license like cockfighting, buffalo fighting (that is, young men impersonate bulls), and other types of mischievous behavior.

In September, Thai villagers observe the Bun Khaw Saak festival (meaning "merit with puffed rice"), which is connected to the cult of deceased relatives and ancestors. While monks chant, villagers leave packages of puffed rice, cooked rice, and vegetables near the village. The dead like puffed rice because it cannot be planted to grow again, whereas raw rice is connected with life and fertility and is used in marriage rites. When villagers pour water on the ground, merit is transferred to dead relatives.[32]

In addition to these Thai festivals, there are a number of celebrations of a more strictly Buddhist origin and nature. In the month of May, Thais celebrate a combination of the Buddha's birthday, enlightenment, and death called Bun Wiska. Villagers feed monks in the morning, and at night there is a procession with lighted candles and joss sticks. The participants circle the village three times in a clockwise direction, which is the same way that one would circumambulate a stūpa (memorial mount). During the month of July, an observance called the Khaw Phansa marks the beginning of a period of three months in which monks go into retreat during the rainy season. This is considered a time of piety and asceticism. Besides feeding monks and giving them bathing cloths at this observance, lay village elders recall the *khwan* (spirit essence) of the monks and bind the wrists of the monks with a cord, which causes the spirit essence to be united to their bodies before they go into retreat. In return the monks give blessings, preach a sermon on merit, and chant to offer the village protection and blessings for the next few months. This rite represents an excellent example of the reciprocal nature of giving. The observance of Ong Phansa in October and the chanting of monks mark the end of the rainy season. Villagers gather at the monastery to feast the monks and to present them with robes, and then the villagers eat a communal meal. Other important actions include the igniting of firecrackers, throwing puffed rice at the statute of the Buddha, and a candlelight procession at night. Another such procession marks the observance called Makha Bucha in February, around the time of harvesting, that marks a day in commemoration of famous deceased Buddhist saints.[33]

There is a sporting aspect to some Thai festivals. The horn game of Sri Lanka, for instance, involves active audience participation in honor of the goddess Pattini. The ritual game involves the interlocking of two horns by two teams, with one horn tied to a huge pole while the other pivots in a hole in the ground. The two teams are called the lower team, representing the goddess Pattini, and the upper team, representing her consort. The objective of the game is for each team to pull on their ropes in order to break the horn of the other team. Once a horn snaps, the winners express their joy and humiliate the losers. The ridicule hurled at the losers makes it evident that the broken horn represents the broken penises of the defeated team. This interpretation tends to reflect the dominance of males in the worship of the goddess (although women who are possessed by a spirit do make pilgrimages to her central shrine to transform the spirit's influence into something less demonic, like granting the gift of prophecy). Nonetheless, the goddess Pattini supports both teams, and is honored by a procession around her shrine and a procession to the village.[34] It is important to observe that Buddhist clergy never participate or even witness this type of performance.

The combination of religious piety and boisterous fun is also evident in the month of April in Myanmar, when villagers celebrate the New Year in a four-day celebration that is connected to two myths. In the first myth, the king of the gods descends to earth for two days to record the good and bad deeds of people in two separate books. His return to heaven on the third day marks the beginning of the New Year. A more gruesome myth relates the tale of a debate in which a chief defeats and decapitates a god. The head of the deity can not be buried in the earth or in the ocean without dire consequences. The chief gives the head to seven goddesses to hold, in turn, each year. At the end of the year, the goddess in charge of the head at that time washes the head and passes it to the next goddess. The New Year begins when the head is passed from the old to the new goddess.

The initial two days of the New Year celebration involves a water festival in which water pots are offered to elders and water thrown at all passersby, along with insulting remarks. This part of the festival is marked by clowning, disrespect for authority, aggression, sexual banter, transvestism, and rowdy, drunken behavior. Overall the water festival represents the washing away of physical and moral pollution.[35]

Relationship between Villager and Monastic Community

In the village culture of Thailand, the monastery is called a *wat*, an area for the worship of the Buddha by both monks and laity. The inner part of the monastery, where both monks and laity worship, is called the Buddhavāsa, whereas the so-called Saṅghavāsa represents an area restricted to the monks' quarters. The center of the monastery is the Buddha relic, surrounded by the two concentric circles formed by the inner Buddhavāsa and the outer Saṅghavāvasa, which consists of three types of building: living quarters, classrooms, and ordination hall. The

monastery serves a number of functions; it is religious center where worship and major ceremonies are performed, an educational institution, and an administrative center for the village.

During the formative period of Buddhist history, renouncing the world implied a lifelong vocation or profession, but becoming a monk in village Thailand is not such a commitment. Because the monastery no longer has a monopoly on education in Thai culture, few young boys now become novices. During the ages between twelve and eighteen, Thai boys may be ordained a novice for a few weeks or months to earn merit for a dead relative. This brief period of monkhood is followed by a resumption of lay life, marriage, and family life, and no odium is attached to leaving the monastery. Before doing so, the novice informs the abbot and then his parents, and he presents flowers and candles to pay his respects to those who officiated at his ordination. After the offerings are made to the monastery and the novice asks for permission, the abbot removes his robes and he changes to lay clothing. The former novice approaches the abbot again to receive the five precepts, and he stays in the monastery for one to three additional nights working to clean the monk's residence to remove any negative kamma that he may have committed as a monk. This scenario creates a close bond between village males and the monastery over a long period of time, and it creates a bond among the young men that have had the same experience.

On certain occasions, villagers will organize and sponsor a rite for honoring a monk, investing him with titles. This is a way for the laity to show their appreciation for the piety and services rendered by the chosen monk. From another perspective, it is also a way for the laity to encourage a field of holiness that increases the merit gained from their gifts to the monastery.

The ceremony is often held in conjunction with the annual ordination of village youth. There are eight grades of titles, the lowest being Somdet, which is also the name of the ceremony.[36] The gift from the laity on this occasion consists of a strip of silver, whose length depends on the degree of the title, inscribed with names of the honoring village and the monk being honored. The monk is carried on the shoulders of villagers, and holds the end of a stick held by the chief priest, who leads the procession. As the monk is led to an altar, male villagers lie flat on the ground for the monk to walk over them. Those who are lucky enough to be treaded upon earn merit and are cured of illness. Once at the altar, the monk kneels on a stone slab, which covers seven symbolic leaves from the tree of enlightenment. Upon the altar is a long hollow piece of wood shaped like a water serpent, and while monks chant blessings three candles are lit and placed on the serpent's head. Other monks and villagers pour water into the groove of the hollow serpent, and it then falls on the monk's head. Then the monk is carried into the preaching hall and presented with eight articles of ordination. The honored monk removes his wet robes and dons new ones. After a villager recites a verse and hits a gong three times, the lay sponsor of the monk reads the inscription on the piece of silver, and finally, the honored monk chants a blessing for all.

It is obvious that this ceremony is full of symbolic import. The water pouring, for instance, allows the laity to pay their respects to their superiors; it also symbolizes a transfer of merit, and is also a symbolic purification of the honoree. The water serpent, which is considered a friend of the Buddha, symbolizes rain, coolness, and fertility. It is believed that the water poured on the monk seeps through the serpent's poison bag, which is symbolically akin to milk, a symbol of fertility. This suggests that the honored monk is cleansed and paradoxically fertilized.

The rite of honoring a monk is indicative of a close relationship between the monastic community and the villagers in Thailand. Because the sons of villagers typically join monastic life for at least a brief period of time, the monks represent symbolically and actually the sons of the elders of the village. However, a monk keeps his visits to the village to a minimum, and he does not socialize with villagers. With the educational role of the monk declining, the monk's role in village society is primarily a ritual one. Nonetheless, the monk possesses a status in village life that commands respect.

In contrast to Thailand, the situation in Myanmar villages is more rigid. With the exception of the three-month monsoon season when monks are restricted to the monastery, Buddhist monks can travel anywhere. But they do not frequently go into the village except to perform religious duties. The village and monastery are spatially separated, because the monastery is invariably located outside the village fence.[37] This spatial separation and lack of encounter between monks and laity in formal and informal ways keeps the monks separated from the pollution of the world. The monks tend to be sons of the Buddha more than sons of the village in Myanmar.

There are a number of interesting changes occurring in Sri Lankan Buddhism that are often paradoxical. Since Sri Lankan monks embody the values of the whole of their society, they are habitually addressed as lords. There is simultaneously a general belief that there is an institutional decay of Buddhism accompanied by a general decline of the religion, in part because there is a perception that monks can no longer attain enlightenment. The public perceives monks as ordinary unenlightened beings who are not even assured of attaining liberation within their next several lives. Most villagers do not associate monks with meditation.[38] It is not unusual to hear ordinary people make distinctions between authentic and inauthentic monks.

There is also in Sri Lanka a large increase in recent times of lay preachers, who assume symbols associated with a more ascetic lifestyle such as rejecting alcohol, becoming vegetarians, and wearing white clothing. The choice of white clothing is especially interesting, because the color is associated with death and mourning. White also signifies purity, chastity, and sterility. Within the social context of lay preachers, donning white clothing denotes a renunciation of sexual activity. The lay preachers practice meditation, and they often attend meditation centers. This makes it appear that monks are becoming more like the laity, and lay people are making religious choices that are closer in spirit to the lifestyles of

traditional Buddhist monastic life. It will be interesting to see how this develops in the future.

There is one aspect of traditional Buddhist life that is being revitalized presently in Sri Lanka. This is the *bōdhi pūjā* (worship of the Buddha), although its meaning has changed, and it now functions as a bridge between Buddhism and spirit religion. The leader of the worship service is also a member of the congregation and sits with the other members humbly facing the image of the Buddha. The service begins at 6 p.m. with offerings of flowers, lamps, and incense before images of twenty-eight Buddhas, recalling the prior twenty-seven figures and Gautama, the historical figure. The leader uses the local Sinhala language, whereas in the past Pāli was used exclusively. Another innovative aspect is that the service gives people an opportunity to express their emotions, especially their love. The Buddha is referred to in emotional language, with expressions associated with fatherhood and motherhood. The rite also includes honoring the tree of enlightenment, a holy object present in virtually every temple. The cult surrounding the Bōdhi tree can be traced to Sinhala chronicles that record a cutting taken from the original tree of enlightenment in India and its transportation to Sri Lanka. Cuttings of that original tree were planted in temples throughout the land. There is an ancient custom of ritually watering the tree with scented milk or water. This rite of devotion to the Buddha represents the apparent ascendance of the role of the laity within contemporary Buddhism.[39]

Monks, Laity, and Death

Even if it is possible to identify changes at the popular level in the Buddhist tradition in the twenty-first century, the Buddhist monk's monopoly on death in village life is still evident. The close association between monks and death goes back to the early period of Buddhist history. In chapter 5, there was a reference to the monk's meditation on death as part of his monastic discipline. Such a form of meditation helps a person become detached from his or her body, the body of the opposite sex, and the world in general. From the viewpoint of ordinary villagers, Buddhist monks are experts in death, and they are the best possible people to conduct funeral rites.

It is possible to discern two overall purposes for death rites in a village in Thailand. They represent a rite of passage for the deceased in the transition from life to death. Many religious traditions reflect beliefs about the danger associated with this period of transition and the need for rituals to assist a person to cross it successfully. The second purpose of Thai rites is to secure a good status for the dead in the next world, which is accomplished by merit making and the transfer of merit. Thai villagers make a distinction between normal death and abnormal death, and the form of death is vital for determining the fate of the spirit (*winjan*). If the death is normal, the living have much less to fear, whereas an abnormal death, such as that caused by childbirth, accidents, homicide, and disease, gives

rise to concern because the spirit could become angry and malevolent. The Buddhist monks then function as mediators between death and rebirth, and they also absorb and neutralize the dangers and pollution of death.

The initial phase of mortuary rites includes preparing the corpse for the ceremony by bathing, dressing, and laying it out; tying hands and feet together with a thread; and placing a coin into the mouth and closing it with beeswax. The coin is believed to enable the deceased to buy his or her way into heaven and purchase a house and land there. The body is placed on its back on a mat with its head on a pillow facing west, the direction of the setting sun. Villagers place flowers and a pair of candles into the hands of the deceased. Other visible bodily orifices are closed with wax, articles associated with the deceased during life are placed nearby, and a white cloth is hung from a string above the body; it is used later to cover the coffin. White is a color that signifies death, whereas red is associated with life. In fact, there is also a red cloth that is used to cover the coffin, and the survivors take it home after the cremation. Monks later purify the red cloth, and it becomes representative of normal life and its continuation.

The corpse lies in state at the center of the sleeping room, which is considered the most sacred in the house, bridging a barrier between the parent's room in the east and the room of the married daughter and son-in-law in the west. This arrangement signifies that death obliterates normal taboos connected with these rooms; the most sacred part of the house is now open to all mourners. As the corpse lies in the room for viewing purposes, there is a reversal of normally auspicious directions, because the deceased lies with its head to the west and its feet toward the east.

When the funeral procession takes place, the coffin is carried with the feet of the deceased leading and facing west. The jars of water in the house and ladder leading up to the house are turned upside down, which is symbolic of the way that death overturns life. Flowers and candles are distributed to the nearest of kin, and are used to pay final respect to the deceased at the cemetery. Monks lead the procession to the cemetery, holding a long cord attached to the coffin, because villagers believe that monks lead the way to heaven. During the procession, puffed rice is thrown on the ground so that spirits (phii) will be induced to come and welcome the deceased, not enter the coffin and render it heavy, and rice lures the spirits away from the village.

Upon arrival at the cemetery, mourners circle the funeral pyre with the coffin three times in a counterclockwise direction. This action is intended to scatter the body to its destiny. The white and red cloths are removed, while monks chant and then receive gifts. Scented water is poured on the corpse by relatives and villagers, and monks pour coconut juice on its face. Thereupon, a cord is fastened to its head. After the funeral pyre is ignited, participants return to the monastery to be immunized against the dangers connected to death before returning to the village. After the cremation, monks visit the home of the survivors for three nights to chant for protection and blessings for the surviving family members.

The second phase of the mortuary rites begins on the third day after cremation, when villagers create a house within which the deceased can live in the afterlife. Gifts are placed in this house and given to monks to create merit for the deceased. Then, the bones of the deceased are collected from the cremation ground and are placed in a pot. The ashes are raked to find the coin, which is used to counter phii spirits. The bones of the deceased are washed. From the ashes, siblings create a human figure of the deceased and place it with its head facing east, which signifies rebirth. The pot of bones is covered with a white cloth with a hole made to allow the winjan spiritual essence to escape; it is then buried. The rite concludes with villagers making food offerings to the monks, another merit-creating aspect of the funeral service.

In the case of an abnormal death, there is a fear that the winjan spiritual essence might become a malevolent phii spirit. Thus the corpse is quickly buried after death, even if the death occurs at night, because village Thais believe that the earth is able to contain dangerous powers within it. The corpse may be left buried for a couple of years until the dangerous powers of its spirit are immunized. After this time lapse, the remains are ready for normal mortuary rites, and the bones are retrieved and cremated.[40] Whether death is considered normal or abnormal, Buddhist monks play a central role by performing funeral rites.

In addition to the chanting of sacred verses, further protective measures are taken by placing a mixture of molasses and rice in a bowl at the cemetery for the ghost to eat. When the actual burial occurs, the bowl is placed inside the coffin with the body. While the corpse is laying in state, its thumbs and big toes are tied together with hair cut from the head of an offspring. A coin is placed into its mouth, which is known as the ferry fare. In addition, a vase with a flower is placed near the head of the deceased for the ghost to use to worship the Buddha. Prior to these actions, a surviving family member invites the ghost to observe the proceedings. Other prefuneral activities include feeding monks every morning, if the people are financially able, and receiving visitors, although these never offer condolences.

In Myanmar, on the day of the funeral, the body is taken from the house by removing it through the back door or window. Then there is a single-file procession to the funeral ground, with women in the rear. Most people in Myanmar are buried, but pious people, monks, and parents of monks are cremated. When the body is buried, there is an additional ritual performed to prevent the ghost from returning to the village. The ghost (soul) is separated from attachment to the living by placing pieces of string in the coffin for every living member of the family, with each piece of string measuring in length the height of the surviving relative. Before the actual burial of the corpse, the grave diggers must get permission of the spirit of the earth to bury it. On the seventh day after the funeral, monks are invited to the home of the deceased to chant *paritta* (protective verses). This functions to drive the ghost to its new abode, and confers merit on the living that they transfer to the deceased to improve its chances for a better rebirth.[41] Thus a

Myanmar funeral rite serves as a good example of folk beliefs intertwining with Buddhist beliefs in apparently conflicting ways.

Concluding Remarks

Looking at some examples of Buddhism as practiced on the village level in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar helps us to recognize the complex nature of the religion. From the viewpoint of the villagers, this complexity should be seen as a single system of religiosity. Folk Buddhism should not be viewed as a later degenerate form of normative, textual, or monastic Buddhism. It is more accurate to recognize that folk Buddhism injected vitality into traditional Buddhism. It also injected it with a dynamic nature that created a wide variation between different countries and even between villages within those countries.

By appropriating folk religious elements, Buddhism often subordinated the indigenous symbols, beliefs, and practices without a radical change in their meaning. It is possible, for instance, to find folk sprits functioning as protectors of sacred Buddhist locations. Simultaneously, Buddhism experienced a transformation by appropriating folk elements and adapting to the cultural milieu of folk culture. A good example of this process is the belief in a soul or spirit associated with the individual within folk culture and appropriated by normative Buddhism. Likewise, the practice of exorcism uses major notions of Sri Lankan Buddhism, for instance, to support its logic and to express anti-Tamil attitudes that reflect ethnic tension and violence. At the same time, the middle class of Sri Lanka views exorcism as unorthodox, and it operates as an indicator of inferior social and political status. Even though middle-class Sri Lankans view exorcism negatively, it provides the working class and peasantry a degree of control over their lives.[42]

Whereas the normative tradition is concerned with release from the world, folk Buddhism is primarily concerned with improving one's kamma in order to improve one's chances for a better rebirth. This type of Buddhism tends to stress theistic beliefs in the existence of benevolent superhuman beings that can assist and protect a person as well as beliefs in malevolent beings that can attack and harm a person. Folk Buddhism is chiefly concerned with protecting oneself from danger. The popular use of chanting sacred scriptures is a good example of this type of Buddhism. Other examples would be reciting prayers, making offerings to images, utilizing talismans, and releasing animals. In a sense, it is contradictory to have a religion that promotes release from the world while at the same time its practitioners observe various kinds of life-affirming festivals and other practices. But the average villager perceives no contradictions with these scholarly distinctions; an ordinary villager views all the elements of Buddhism as interrelated and coherent.

PART THREE

Major Mahāyāna Movements and Schools

China and the Far East

8

The Bodhisattva's Path to Perfection

While the Buddha was alive, his voice was considered authoritative. When a problem arose with respect to monastic discipline, for instance, his monks would simply turn to him for a ruling. In the formative period, the monastic order recognized the right to schism and protected this right. Even though in principle the intention to create a schism was not condemned by the early tradition, the dishonest intention to produce a split in the order was condemned. Therefore, the right to produce a split in the order was a moral and not a legal right.

A valid schism could be initiated by a minimum of nine qualified members of the monastic order. A smaller number, it was said, only created disunion. During the early history of Buddhism, it was not uncommon to have schismatic groups residing within the original monastery, although the groups would hold separate assemblies. It was possible for a schismatic group eventually to develop into a school (*vāda*), which would sometimes necessitate a new edition of the scriptures according to their dissident doctrines and discipline.

Early councils and schisms marked the early history of Buddhism. According to tradition, the first council was allegedly held at Rājagṛha after the death of the Buddha, in order to establish the authoritative teachings and discipline. At this time the tradition was divided into two "baskets" (*piṭakas*), and eventually a third was added. These collections included the discourses of the Buddha, monastic rules, and the Abhidhammma or higher teachings. The third and final collection of teachings probably represents an attempt over a long period of time to systematize philosophically lists and summaries of topics for discussion and analysis.

Approximately one hundred years after the Buddha's death, a second council was held at Vaiśālī because of disputes about monastic rules. This council resulted in a split of the community into two sects: Sthavīras (Elders) and Mahāsaṅghikas (Great Assembly). The former group claimed to preserve the genuine teachings and discipline of the Buddha, and emphasized the importance of monastic life for genuine practice of the religion and eventually enlightenment.

Correspondingly, they stressed the authority of monks within the Buddhist community. The Mahāsaṅghikas were lay-orientated in the sense that they allowed lay followers into their meetings and were sympathetic to popular religious values and practices. They depicted the Buddha not so much as a historical person as a supermundane and pure being. A number of groups split from these two sects, which eventually resulted in eighteen identifiable schools. It is not necessary to delve into this complex history in this study, but only to be aware that there are now two major divisions of Buddhism: Theravāda and Mahāyāna.[1] The remainder of this book focuses on developments within Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in China, Tibet, and Japan. (Since the terms used in Mahāyāna come from Sanskrit rather than Pāli texts, the spellings here will reflect those sources.)

It would be incorrect to view the Mahāsaṅghikas as simply developing into the Mahāyāna school, because the latter evolved from several heterogeneous sources, although it did draw on some of the ideas of the Mahāsaṅghikas when it arose between 150 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. Moreover, it would be erroneous to trace its origin to the laity.[2] It might be best to conceive of its origin as a loose union of diverse groups. There are references to the worship and study of particular texts, and it is likely that Mahāyāna grew from a number of book cults that were centered on specific texts.[3] Because Mahāyāna arose as a loose confederation of groups, without a specific human founder or a direct link to any particular early sect, its historical origins are obscure. A person could join this nebulous movement by simply accepting one or more of these newly inspired visionary texts as representing the authoritative teachings of the Buddha and incorporating the aspirations of lay people. It was thus unnecessary for monks and nuns who joined these cults to reject the monastic discipline of the older schools, and it was possible to continue to live in community with monks and nuns of other schools within the same monastic institutions.

As we will witness in the next few chapters, various sects and texts produced different versions of Mahāyāna. Thus it should come as no major surprise that Mahāyāna texts expressed often radically different viewpoints. These differences of philosophical perspective were rooted in diverse intellectual, cultural, and historical stimulation.[4] Therefore, the term Mahāyāna is an umbrella reference for a wide variety of thought and practice.

The Mahāyāna movement did represent, however, a new religious spirit that is expressed in a new cosmology, originating in visualization practices; a different interpretation of the path to enlightenment, incorporating the figure of the bodhisattva; new philosophical systems, including Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, and Vajrayāna with its emphasis on the sacred power of words; and finally a new pantheon of buddhas and bodhisattvas. The term Mahāyāna means great or large (*mahā*) vehicle (*yāna*), suggesting that the old way is made wider to accommodate more people. The term "vehicle" is used synonymously with path (*magga*), implying that the Mahāyāna path is broader and more inclusive than that of the school referred to derogatorily as Hinayāna (lesser vehicle). Even though the Mahāyāna

movement originated in India, it reached its greatest influence in other countries after Buddhism declined in the land of its birth. It is possible today to view Mahāyāna as the predominant form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan.

A Secret Literature and Other Types

Since Mahāyāna Buddhism developed five to six hundred years after the death of the Buddha, members and groups within the movement felt a cultural pressure to explain its new literature and its origins. Almost invariably, it was claimed that this literature represented the true and secret message of the Buddha, which could not be revealed previously because people were not prepared to understand it. Many of the texts used the literary fiction of the phrase "Thus have I heard." The first-person personal pronoun was assumed to be Ānanda, because Buddhist tradition gave him credit for preserving and reciting from his memory all the texts that he heard directly from the mouth of the Buddha after the death of his enlightened master. There was also a tradition that the texts were born from the visionary experience of a buddha or bodhisattva that reigned on a Buddha field or pure land.[5] There were associated notions about the texts as products of perfect wisdom or hidden teachings.

The corpus of Mahāyāna literature is vast, because it includes anonymously composed texts called *sūtras* (meaning the thread that ties the pages together), treatises written by a known author, and a vast commentarial literature. The literature encompasses texts composed in India, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, and other East Asian countries that utilized native languages or translated texts into them. It was often explicitly asserted or covertly implied that this new literature represented a deeper level of teaching as well as a second turning of the wheel of the Dharma (teaching). For the sake of simplicity, the Mahāyāna sūtras (texts) can be divided into the four following collections: Prajñāpāramitā, Mahā-ratnakūṭa, Buddhāvataṃsaka, and the Mahā-saṃnipāta. Unfortunately, not much is known about the context and circumstances under which these works were composed, with the possible exception of the first body of texts.

The Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) literature began to be composed around 100 B.C.E. and continued to be written until the twelfth century C.E. The title of this body of literature consists of wisdom (*prajñā*) and perfection (*pāramitā*); the Sanskrit for the term "perfection" meant literally the other side or beyond (*pāram*) plus gone (*itā*), suggesting gone beyond this world or gone to the other side. The earliest examples of Mahāyāna writings, many of these texts were given titles according to the number of lines in the text. Probably the earliest such text was the *Eight-Thousand Line Sūtra*, which dated from around the second century B.C.E. Around the historical period of 100 C.E. to 300 C.E., there was an increase in these types of text, with works like the *Perfect Wisdom in Eighteen Thousand Lines*, *Perfect Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*, and *Perfect Wisdom in One Hundred*

Thousand Lines, which were for all intents and purposes the same book. These huge, unwieldy texts were difficult to grasp and repetitious, and the different arguments within them were difficult to discern. This suggests in part that these texts were often disjointed treatises composed at different times by diverse authors. In a sense, these longer texts invited something shorter, more manageable, and easier to understand.[6]

The two most influential and important texts of this body of literature were relatively short, namely, the *Heart Sūtra* and the *Diamond Sūtra*, which were composed between approximately 300 and 500 C.E. There were other texts of this type, like the *Perfect Wisdom in Seven Hundred Lines* (composed approximately 600–700 C.E.), *Perfect Wisdom in Twenty-five Hundred Lines* (composed before 500 C.E.), and *Perfect Wisdom in Fifty Lines* (composed in the sixth century C.E.). The *Abhisamayālankāra* (A Treatise Explaining the Perfection of Wisdom) represented an exegetical work and summary of the philosophy that was a fourth-century text credited to Maitreya, a celestial bodhisattva. Finally, there was the *Adhyardhaśatikā* (150 verses) *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom). The format of these texts was a continuous dialogue among the Buddha and various disciples, gods, spirits, and men, with an occasional dialogue among disciples. The texts were not philosophical in the Western sense of using reasoned argumentation to reach a conclusion, because the Buddhist texts exhibited simple dogmatic affirmation. What, then, gave these texts their authority? They were considered to be the word of the Buddha, who was the source of authority and veracity for all Buddhist teachings. A reader must keep in mind two things about these texts: they were composed to promote salvation, and they presupposed a philosophical position based on the personal experience of the authors. This experience was verifiable by anyone who was willing to practice meditation to achieve insight into reality.

At the very beginning of the *Heart Sūtra*, there is an indication of the authoritative experience on which the text is grounded. The text goes on to discuss the ultimate facts of reality (dharmas) and that there are two types: conditioned and unconditioned (the latter includes only two, space and nirvāṇa). It proceeds to discuss the three ways to view dharmas that are essential for liberation. The first step is an act of mental differentiation of the apparently unified personality and its experiences; the second is an act of depersonalization and elimination of all references to the self; and finally there is an act of evaluation that the Buddhist position on the self and things (dharmas) is more insightful than ordinary ways of knowing these things. The text goes on to discuss both how dharmas are empty of their own being and the implications of a philosophy of emptiness. Later in this brief text, the three ways to view things (dharmas) are enhanced by the three stages of a dialectic of emptiness that includes an unpacking of its significance and implications. In the initial stage, a person realizes that it is a transcendent and immanent reality; the second step enables one to become aware that it is the essential and exclusive mark of all things (dharmas); and finally one realizes that the initial stage is denied at this third stage, because all entities (dharmas) are

completely empty, suggesting that entities do not in fact exist in the sense of having a separate mode of existence.

Another very popular text from this body of literature was the *Diamond Sūtra*, which also gave expression to the philosophy of emptiness. It also covers other topics such as the threefold classification of human beings, which depends on the mode of conception (such as egg, womb, humidity, or miraculous birth), whether they are material or immaterial, and whether they can perceive or not. There is also a discussion of merit as an indispensable condition for all spiritual progress, eight types of misconceptions, and a review of suchness (another way to express emptiness). A more complete discussion of emptiness will occur in the next chapter.

In addition to the long, short, and summaries of the literture, the fourth and final phase of the Perfection of Wisdom literature began after 600 C.E. with the spread of Tantric ideas. The new teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom literature were adapted to Tantric notions. The process of adaptation resulted in compressing the message of the perfection of wisdom into very short verses similar in form to spells. The prestige of the Perfection of Wisdom literature became a source of wonder-working and ritual magic in the hands of Tantric practitioners.[7] An early example of Tantric literature was the short magical formulas (*dhāraṇīs*) that were attached to famous Mahāyāna texts. This type of literature originated around the third century C.E. By the end of the seventh century, texts dealing with Tantric ritual and doctrine made their appearance, such as the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* and the *Vajraśekhara*. Some Tantric texts focus on ritual procedures, esoteric and magical practice, and secretive sexual practices and symbolism. A large body of commentarial literature was associated with these texts.

The next major body of Mahāyāna literature is the Mahā-ratnakūṭa, which now consists of forty-nine texts (sūtras) in the Chinese canon. Bodhiruci, a south Indian monk, edited the texts around the beginning of the eighth century in China; otherwise its history is obscure. Some scholars think that the collection was shaped in central Asia, developing from an informal and more modest assembly of texts. A monk named Dharmarakṣa translated the texts into Chinese in the third century C.E.

Most chapters of the Buddhāvataṃsaka, the next major collection, circulated for centuries as independent texts before being unified into a single work in two Chinese recensions of thirty-four and thirty-nine chapters. The first reference to this work dates from the beginning of the fifth century C.E. The text reflects a turn toward Yogācāra philosophy, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Probably the two most significant texts of this collection are the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*. The latter text appears to have an earlier date of composition, and it presents a description of the progress of the bodhisattva through ten stages of the path.

Finally, the Mahāsamnipāta consists of seventeen texts without much religious or philosophical unity. The earliest reference that we have to this collection

is in the second century C.E. Buddhist textual scholars have had a difficult time attempting to discern the rationale that guided this collection.[8]

In addition to the texts already mentioned, the Mahāyāna corpus of literature contains a number of important independent texts. The *Lotus Sūtra* is certainly high on the list because of its popularity and because it serves as the principal scripture for sectarian movements such as T'ien-tai in China and Tendai in Japan, the Nichiren sect of thirteenth-century Japan, and the Soka Gakkai sect of the twentieth century. The title of the text has important implications. The lotus flower represents the essence of beauty, much like the rose in the West, and it functions as a metaphor for the growth process that begins in the mud at the bottom of a pond and rises to the surface of the water; the bloom is attached to the bottom by a long stem, suggesting the symbolism of ascent from the world to a place beyond the pollution associated with the world. This text appeals to a popular and not very philosophically inclined audience. A possible reason for its popularity is that it proclaims universal salvation. The text contains reference to popular practices such as relic worship, stūpa (memorial mound) devotion, gaining merit, and the use of dhāraṇīs (protective charms), which are elements that probably originated with monks and became popular with the laity. A central teaching of the text is the importance of *upāya* (skillful means), which is a way for a buddha or bodhisattva to convey a religious message, especially by means of parables and even miracles.

The *Lotus Sūtra* advocates faith as the path of salvation; it also proclaims that it is the only true Dharma (teaching), whereas others are false or counterfeit. The Buddha protects the person who keeps this text, guards such a person from decline and worry, enables him or her to gain tranquillity, and does not let anyone take advantage of him or her.[9] There is a strong emphasis on keeping, reading, and reciting the text, because these devotional activities bring earthly benefits such as not craving worldly pleasures or other texts; not associating with evil people; maintaining a straight and honest mind; gaining merit; being free of envy, conceit, and pride; having fewer desires; attaining nirvāṇa; and being able to turn the wheel of the Dharma (teaching).[10] In the final analysis, the text becomes the object of worship instead of the Buddha, because the text states in the first chapter that buddhas come and go, whereas the Dharma (teaching) is eternal.

Other texts did not necessarily become objects of devotion like the *Lotus Sūtra*, although they were also influential. A text composed about 100 C.E. that was to provide rich ontological resources for the Mādhyamika school was the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* (Text Expounded by Vimalakīrti), which has been given credit for establishing the lay bodhisattva as a Buddhist saint. The text exalted the role of the layperson, because the leading figure of the text was a rich layman who had a profound grasp of Buddhism. A basic message of the text was that the path of the bodhisattva was open to the laity and not merely to monks, and the attainment of this status was superior to that of the arhat (enlightened being) of the

Theravāda school. Whereas this text was historically important to the Mādhyamika school, the *Lankāvatara Sūtra* (Text on the Descent into Lanka) served as an important resource for philosophical notions of the Yogācāra school. Composed around the fourth century C.E., this text teaches that dualism leads to attachment, that meditation can help one to discern how reality becomes misperceived, how the mind can escape its misperceptions, and how to gain enlightenment. It also investigates the role played by the mind in creating a false dualism between the self and world. Another source for abstract philosophical notions is the *Sandhi-nirmocana*, whereas the *Bhadrakalpika* contains a plethora of mythical narratives. There are also texts that contain mostly legendary material. In addition, there is a vast corpus of commentarial literature connected to all of the Mahāyāna texts mentioned.

Besides the bodies of literature surveyed so far, there are a few groups of more popular texts. The *Dharmapada* in Sanskrit (or the *Dhammapada* in Pāli) are short stanzas on a variety of subjects that number a total of 423. The *Jātaka* tales have long been popular with lay audiences; they relate narratives about the former lives of the Buddha. Buddhist monks have used these tales to enhance communication and circulate their ideas among ordinary followers. The *Avadāna* represents another collection of stories. By widening its concept, the Mahāyāna tradition added semi-historical works to the canon. The narrative of King Aśoka, entitled the *Aśokāvadāna* was composed around the second century C.E., along with the *Avadāna-śataka*; later works of the genre included the *Bodhisattvāvadāna-kapalatā* and the *Nandimitr-avadāna*. Many of these works are found in the Tibetan canon.

The body of texts that constitute the Tibetan Buddhist canon is divided into two major divisions: Kanjur (Word) and Tenjur (Treatises). The former consists of thirteen volumes of rules of monastic discipline, twenty-one volumes of teachings concerned with the perfection of wisdom, and forty-four volumes of Mahāyāna sūtras (texts), and twenty-two volumes of Tantric texts. The Tenjur section of the canon consists of works composed by individual Indian masters, and do not represent the word of the Buddha. These works are further divided into two sections, commentaries on the sūtras and commentaries on the Tantras.

Path of the Bodhisattva

The Mahāyāna monk named Ārya Śūra captures the self-sacrificial and giving spirit of the bodhisattva in his *Jātakamālā*, a fourth-century C.E. text that contains stories about the prior lives of the Buddha. In one such narrative, the Buddha is born as a revered and wealthy Brahmin, but he could not enjoy his life because he is torn between urges of renunciation and his legal studies. Finally, he renounces the world and goes to a solitary retreat. His presence has a calming effect on the wild animals, which ceased preying on each other to live more like hermits. Over time, he gains pupils and renown as a teacher. He decides to travel one day with a disciple. While passing a mountain cave, he sees a tigress overcome by birth

pangs and physical weakness to such an extent that she could not nurse her cubs. The bodhisattva is calm, compassionate, and concerned that the starving tigress would eat her own young offspring. The bodhisattva sends his disciple to find something for her to eat, while he stays behind to keep her from committing violence. After reflecting on the situation, the bodhisattva decides to offer his own body as food for the tigress by hurling himself from the mountainside and landing near the tigress, which devours the lifeless corpse. Unable to find any meat, the disciple returns to find the tigress feeding on the body of the master.[11] The ideal virtues of the bodhisattva embodied in this type of narrative represents a process of selection and experimentation by monks over a period of time. This process was influenced by the growth of devotional religion in India and the idealization of the figure of the Buddha.[12]

The bodhisattva is a paradigm of religiosity in Mahāyāna Buddhism, even though the notion dates to at least the second century B.C.E. and possibly even earlier, because it is a term that the Buddha applied to himself at times.[13] The designation "bodhisattva" means literally an enlightened being, but the translation does not convey the full spirit of the ethos of this figure. From the Mahāyāna perspective, the significance of the bodhisattva can be understood in comparison to that of the arhat (fully enlightened being) and the *pratyekabuddha* (a person who is self-enlightened). The pratyekabuddha is someone who gains enlightenment by him or herself, and does not teach or proclaim the truth to others in the world. He or she is thus considered a nonteaching Buddha, which is considered selfish and narrow-minded by the Mahāyāna school. The arhat is a person who works for his or her own liberation and does not think of others, even though such a person may teach. The Mahāyāna school thinks both of these ideals are selfish, egotistical, cloistered, placid, and inert. According to one influential Mahāyāna text, the arhats and pratyekabuddhas can be considered to be fearful, to possess traces of rebirth nature, to be impure, and not to be finished with karma.[14] In contrast to the arhat and pratyekabuddha, the bodhisattva works both for his or her own liberation and that of others. He or she also strives to help others gain happiness and welfare in the world. When working for salvation, the bodhisattva goes to the brink of nirvāṇa, but refuses to enter full liberation because he or she is committed to work for the welfare of others. Thus the bodhisattva has the dilemma of indicating the path to liberation while remaining in the world to assist others. In a sense, his or her fundamental orientation is both within the world and beyond it. This orientation is illustrated by a passage in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* which affirms that the bodhisattva can chose to reincarnate voluntarily—a position that will have important implications for Tibetan Buddhism.[15]

This scenario does not explain, however, the rationale for helping others. Why not just gain enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of causation? Is not liberating oneself what Buddhism is supposed to be about? To respond rather simply before getting into greater depth with the philosophies of some of the schools, the Mahāyāna argument is that there is only one reality, however one might

define it. Everything that exists is a part of that one reality, whether one defines it as emptiness, consciousness-only, no-mind, or Buddha nature. Moreover, all beings are tied together and interrelated as part of this one reality, which is why a person must help others. This simple philosophical background also forms the context for the fundamental four vows of the bodhisattva: to save all beings, to destroy all evil passions, to learn the truth and teach it to others, and to lead all beings toward Buddhahood or salvation. How, then, does a person actually become a bodhisattva? The Mahāyāna texts expound a number of perfections (*pāramitās*) that need to be developed and practiced by the bodhisattva. Each of the perfections possesses three degrees, from ordinary to extraordinary to supremely extraordinary. The perfections are arranged in a hierarchical order in the sense that one must cultivate the preceding perfection before one can make progress with the next one. All of the perfections can be discovered in earlier Buddhist literature. What makes them special here is the way that they define a new religious paradigm.

The first perfection to be practiced is generosity, giving, charity (*dāna*), which is a basic ancient Indian cultural virtue. Giving can assume many forms. There is material giving of food to someone who is hungry. A mental and spiritual form of giving can take the form of educating a child, writing or copying a book, and counseling a person in trouble. It can mean being sympathetic toward others in their joys and sorrows as life twists and turns through its own labyrinth. A person can give life or limb for the good of others in a sacrificial act of extreme generosity, as illustrated by the narrative of saving the starving tigress. But a bodhisattva is warned not to sacrifice his or her life for an insignificant purpose, because it is important to combine compassion with wisdom. When one practices giving, one should attempt to do it without selfish motives. This point is stressed by *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*:

> When he has given a gift, he does not make it into a basis or support.
> And he does never expect any reward from it.
> Having thus renounced, he becomes a wise renouncer of all.
> The little he has renounced becomes much and immeasurable.[16]

In other words, a person should not think about receiving a reward, and practice generosity absolutely disinterestedly. A bodhisattva should exert himself or herself only for the good of others. From a philosophical perspective, the ultimate form of giving is a nondual kind. For instance, when a person gives a gift thinking "I give this gift" or "I give gifts to others," this is imperfect giving. According to *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom*, the bodhisattva informs the deity Śakra that "Here a Bodhisattva, when he gives a gift, does not apprehend the gift, the donor, or the recipient; this is called the perfection of giving."[17]

A consequence of giving in an unselfish, disinterested, and detached manner is that it inexorably leads to the creation and accumulation of merit (*puṇya*) because merit results automatically from righteous action. The merit accumulated

by the bodhisattva can be transferred to someone else for his or her good. The bodhisattva can apply merit in two ways: toward his or her own enlightenment or for the welfare and spiritual progress of all beings. Distributing merit to others does not diminish what the giver bestows but rather increases the supply of merit throughout the entire universe.

The second perfection is moral (*śīla*). It is grounded in self-control, the examination of oneself to discover faults and shortcomings, and is attained by extinguishing passions. From the Mahāyānist perspective, morality is not passively refraining from action; it is rather actively doing in the spirit of knowing that what a person does morally affects others. Controlling principles of morality are conscientiousness and shame. The guidelines for action reflect the fundamental precepts of Theravāda Buddhism that we reviewed in chapter 4, including such practices as nonviolence, not stealing, chastity, not telling lies or uttering harsh speech, and abstaining from malice and heretical views. In comparison to the Theravāda teaching about morality and ethics, the Mahāyāna tradition allows the bodhisattva to violate any of the precepts if he or she is moved by compassion for others. Imagine a situation in which someone is about to kill a person's parent or friend. In such a context, a person is allowed to commit a violent act to save the life of another person who is in danger of being fatally harmed. The bodhisattva acts from a position of compassion for both the intended victim and the perpetrator of the violent action, and basically concludes that one is better off going to hell for committing a violent action than allowing the assailant to go to hell for transgressing the ethical precepts. In short, the bodhisattva sacrifices his or her karmic destiny in order to save both the victim and the perpetrator.

In the fourth-century text entitled the *Jātakamālā* of Ārya Śūra, the practice of morality can embody an act of truth. In one tale in this narrative, the bodhisattva is born as the lord of fish in a small lake where he practices altruism and kindness to other fish. By fostering mutual affection, all fish live a nonviolent lifestyle. At one time, a severe drought occurs that causes the lake to shrink in size to a pool of water, reducing the fish to a condition of despair because they could easily become food for birds of prey. Perceiving the imminent danger to his community of fish, the bodhisattva performs an act of truth by asserting the following: If I have never intentionally harmed a living creature, may god send rain by the power inherent in this speech. Because he states the truth, the god Śakra sends the rains, and the fish are saved.[18] This narrative illustrates that truth possesses the power to influence both the material and spiritual worlds.[19] This tale also embodies the spirit of Śāntideva's fundamental guideline with regard to moral and ethical action, which is not doing anything that is not for the benefit of others, either directly or indirectly.[20]

The next perfection to be mastered by the bodhisattva is forbearance and endurance (*kśānti*), which is also defined as freedom from anger and excitement. It is the exact opposite of hatred, repugnance, anger, and malice. Again, the *Jātakamālā* illustrates this perfection with a narrative in which the bodhisattva is

a great ape that manifests great patience, living in a verdant jungle. According to the tale, a man is lost in the jungle while searching for a stray cow. He falls into a mountain gorge in which he begins to fear death, cry, and lament his fate. After he is trapped in the gorge several days, the great ape sees him and rescues him out of pity. The ape helps the man by carrying him toward his home. Growing tired, the ape sleeps. The man is overcome by evil thoughts and hunger, and decides to kill the ape with a rock while it sleeps. The ungrateful man only wounds the ape on its head. In addition to acknowledging to itself its own physical pain, the ape also sees itself as the cause of the man's evil deed. Moreover, the ape feels powerless to expiate the man's transgression because of the inexorable nature of the law of karma. Nonetheless, the ape helps the man find his way home and returns to its home in the jungle. The story ends with the wicked man contracting leprosy as punishment for his crime.[21] In this story, the ape patiently endures pain to help an ungrateful person, and does not respond to the man's attempt on its life with more violence.

More specifically, this perfection reflects the ability and habit to endure and pardon injuries and insults inflicted upon oneself. The bodhisattva is cautioned never to become angry or impatient over actions committed by ignorant people. In the face of pain and hardship, therefore, the bodhisattva must practice patient endurance. The *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* enjoins the bodhisattva to respond to harsh and offensive language, for instance, with ease and contentment. The same text instructs the bodhisattva not to retaliate if someone pours a basket of sandalwood power or live coals over his or her head.[22]

The fourth perfection emphasizes the proactive nature of being a bodhisattva: it is energy, vigor, or exertion (*vīrya*). Since being a bodhisattva is a full-time commitment in which one will experience hardships, it is absolutely necessary to be energetic in order to avoid giving in to physical and mental weakness and feelings of disappointment when one's efforts fail. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* describes vigor as analogous to becoming a submissive servant toward others.[23] It is important that a person be fully awake and aware of what he or she is doing at all times, in contrast to moving through life by acting habitually. The energy that needs to be perfected by the bodhisattva is tied to the notion of resolve.

The spirit of exertion is exemplified by a tale from the *Jātakamālā* in which the bodhisattva lives in the forest as a beautiful and compassionate woodpecker that lives on a vegetarian diet. One day, he comes to the aid of a lion with a bone caught in its throat. The woodpecker takes a stick to prop open the mouth of the lion, and he goes into its mouth to extricate the bone caught crossways in its throat. After he relieves the lion's suffering, the two creatures part company. At a later time, the woodpecker is suffering from hunger, when he sees the lion feeding on the flesh of a fawn. The woodpecker reminds the lion about what he did for it, and asks for a share. But the lion will not share its meal, and he threatens the woodpecker with violence if he does not leave. Observing the encounter and

its result, a wood sprite asks the woodpecker why it did not blind the lion with its beak and take its prey. The woodpecker responds to the wood sprite that it would be wrong to react with anger and recrimination.[24]

Another perfection tied to energy is the fifth perfection, meditation (*dhyāna*). This perfection does not demand a state of isolation in the forest or a remote cave in which to practice. It rather involves meditation within the context of a complex social web of interrelationships that enhances a bodhisattva's chances to reach an awareness of the sameness of everything. This perfection is also connected to meditating on what is called the *brahma-vihāras* (divine states of mind), which consists of cultivating four feelings: *maitrī* (loving kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekṣa* (equanimity). These virtues are not to be simply meditated upon, like some kind of sacred diagram used to enhance a meditator's concentration, but they are also to be cultivated and practiced in a pragmatic way for the benefit of others.

In the eighth chapter of his work the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the monk Śāntideva informs readers about two techniques for generating compassion as a method of putting meditation (*dhyāna*) into practice. The first technique is called equalizing self and other, and the second is the exchange of self and other. The initial technique establishes the equality of the other and the self: "Therefore, in order to allay my own suffering and to allay the suffering of others, I devote myself to others and accept them as myself."[25] Ultimately, of course, there is no permanent self or other. In the second technique, a person transfers or inverts the self and other. Śāntideva expresses it this way: "Acting as the other person, take away from this body every useful thing you see in it, and use that to benefit others."[26]

From the standpoint of the overall path of the bodhisattva, the sixth perfection is the most significant because it represents the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*). This is the supreme virtue for Mahāyāna Buddhism; its complete possession is equivalent to attaining nirvāṇa. It represents the direct insight into reality, or seeing things as they really are. This mental event is a state of consciousness that involves analysis and investigation of things. Wisdom is not an intellectual knowing that is conceptual in content, like having a conception of beauty, justice, freedom, or abstract truth. Although wisdom is an understanding that derives from analysis, it is also at times described as a meditative absorption that is directly connected to the results of analysis. Wisdom is also directly connected to liberation. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* explains the integration between wisdom and liberation as consisting of being motivated by the great compassion and thus of concentration on cultivation of the auspicious signs and marks.[27]

This implies that things are empty and without any distinguishing marks. This means that wisdom is related to a nonconceptual experience, because it is impossible to conceptualize emptiness. Wisdom is also a nondual awareness because it is an awareness of emptiness, which is nondual. In other words, wisdom is a nondual awareness because its content (emptiness) is nondual. We will

see in the next chapter that the precise definition of this perfection differs according to schools of Buddhist thought.

With the advent of wisdom, all discursive thinking becomes calm and genuine peace arrives for the bodhisattva. In addition, ignorance is overcome. *The Awakening of Faith* compares the condition of ignorance to an ocean and its waves that are stirred by the wind of ignorance.[28] Nonetheless, an enlightened way to speak about emptiness is to refer to it as suchness (*tathatā*), which refers to experiencing things as they are without superimposing views, concepts, preunderstanding, or biases upon them. Instead of viewing things as independent entities, an enlightened being views the suchness of things as empty of independence, and sees them as arising dependently.

When the bodhisattva views entities as suchness or empty, he or she is enlightened. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* teaches that enlightenment represents the eradication of all marks of existence. It is free of fundamental presuppositions concerning objects, free from intentional modes of thinking, devoid of all convictions and discriminative mental constructions. With the dawn of enlightenment, the bodhisattva is free of vacillation, commitments, habitual attitudes, and arrives at complete detachment. Enlightenment is the nondual realization of reality. It is neither born nor destroyed. It is unconstructed and without transformation. It is unadulterated, free of passions and instinctual drives. Enlightenment is devoid of dimension or location. It is radiant, pure, without subjectivity or objectivity. Finally, it is undifferentiated, incomparable to anything else, subtle, and all-pervasive, like space.[29]

As the Mahāyāna school developed, it added four additional perfections to the original six. Skillful means (*upāya*) becomes the seventh perfection. Upāya is the ability to teach according to the needs of others. Before one can teach others, a bodhisattva must have access to their needs and their levels of ability to understand. There is a pattern of skillful means (*upāya*) that begins with the recognition that humans are in a condition of ignorance. The pattern involves next the appearance of a compassionate being who arrives to dispel the ignorance. Because this compassionate person is sensitive to the needs of those being taught, he or she may present them with tangible objects or creations of fantasy. As the followers mature, they begin to realize the limitations and unreality of the objects and the fanciful creations. This awareness motivates them onward toward enlightenment (perfection of wisdom). A good example of this process is the fanciful creation by the leader of a group of men in a parable from the *Lotus Sūtra*. In this parable, a group of men are proceeding through a forest to their destination. They become weary and despair of ever reaching their goal. In order to distract the group from their desperate situation, the leader creates a magic city in order to make it appear as if their goal had been achieved. After weariness and despair are overcome, the magic city fades away, and the group is refreshed and ready to proceed to their goal. In this parable, of course, the Buddha functions as the leader while the sojourners are ordinary human beings in bondage to the world

because of their lack of insight into the nature of reality. If one reflects on this pattern, it becomes obvious that once a correct determination is made, the bodhisattva will have greater success in conversing with and converting others. In summary, the perfection of skillful means presupposes that there is only one truth, but that there are many ways or means of reaching that singular truth.

Although upāya (skillful means) assumes metaphysical status in Tibetan Buddhism, the remaining perfections never reach that kind of status, with the possible exception of the last. The eighth perfection is the vow of resolution (*parnidhāna*), which the bodhisattva manifests by deciding to help others gain salvation and making a personal vow to accomplish this. The ninth perfection is power or strength (*bala*), which is demonstrated by the bodhisattva when he or she strives to increase such virtues as wisdom and patience. Finally, the tenth perfection is knowledge (*jñāna*), which is very similar to wisdom (*prajñā*), although knowledge refers more precisely to intellectual ability, whereas wisdom (*prajñā*) refers more directly to intuition. The intellectual ability associated with knowledge (*jñāna*) enables a person to know things directly as they really are in fact.

These ten perfections presuppose that the aspiring bodhisattva is an unpolished, unformed, and unfinished figure who needs nurturing and development in order to become a fit vehicle for the highest knowledge. What is also occurring here is that the various perfections are a symbolic process of purification that renders one fit for the intuition of the absolute nature of reality. Finally, the perfections are a process of self-culture that assists one to reconstruct oneself so as to be better prepared to help others. As *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom* makes clear, however, in the final analysis the bodhisattva is empty. This point is not intended in a positive or negative way; but it is how the bodhisattva should stand in perfect wisdom.[30]

Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva

The ten perfections (*pāramitās*) represent a path that parallels the ten stages or *bhūmis* (a term that means earth, place, or region) and can be translated as stages of the path of the bodhisattva. The term *bhūmi* implies a firm place on which to stand. Unfortunately, the bhūmis are often neglected when the way of life of the bodhisattva is discussed. They are important because the bodhisattva cultivates one of the perfections (*pāramitās*) in each stage of bhūmi, according to the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* in the twenty-sixth book of the *Flower Garland Sūtra* (*Avataṃsaka Sūtra*).

The initial stage is the joyful one (*pramūdita*) that is entered after the thought of enlightenment dawns. A person feels that he or she is the refuge of all creatures. In this so-called joyful stage, one practices charity and self-sacrifice. Once the bodhisattva completes this stage, there is no danger of regressing to a lower stage. The person is inevitably bound to become an enlightened being. The aspirant works on the perfection of giving, which involves a nondualistic mode of giv-

ing, as discussed previously. Being filled with joy, the person makes ten vows: to worship all the buddhas; observe discipline; to review the earthly career of the Buddha; to realize the thought of enlightenment; to bring all beings to maturity and establish them in Buddha knowledge; to purify all Buddha-fields; to enter the path; to create common purpose and thought among all bodhisattvas; to make useful all body, speech, and mental actions; and finally, to achieve enlightenment and teach the doctrine.[31]

The second and third stages are, respectively, the pure (*vimalā*) and the luminous (*prabhākarī*). The pure stage signifies becoming free from the pollution of evil conduct; in this stage a person gains self-control, calm, incorruptibility, and freedom from desire, all connected with the second perfection of morality. By overcoming impure actions and developing good actions, a person reaches an inner equanimity that continues to increase as one's actions, mind, and speech are purified. The aspirant gains the ten positive paths of action: the three physical modes of action are nonviolence, no stealing, and celibacy; the four good speech actions are not lying, avoiding slanderous speech, not insulting another person, and abstaining from frivolous language; finally, the three positive mental actions are avoiding greed, desire, malice, and false views.[32] In the luminous stage, a person's thoughts are pure, constant, unworldly, dispassionate, and resolute. Being supported by the third perfection of forbearance, an aspirant practices self-examination and meditation, cultivates endurance, and promotes the good of everyone. A person is capable of overcoming hatred, anger, and reaction to the annoying actions of others. An aspirant grasps the nature of impermanence, perfects patience, obliterates duality, and gains five supernatural powers.

The fourth through sixth stages are the radiant (*arcismatī*), the difficult-to-conquer (*sudurjayā*), and the face-to-face (*abhimukhī*). In the radiant fourth stage the bodhisattva perfects his or her knowledge and faith in the three jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha), and realizes that nothing is permanent in the world. Developing the perfection of vigor enables one to terminate mental and emotional afflictions, while also cultivating the thirty-seven elements of enlightenment and ceasing attachment to the self. In the fifth stage the person regards all principles of Buddhahood with pure thought and equanimity. He or she comprehends the Four Noble Truths, realizes that all things are empty, and cultivates perfection of meditation.[33] Being unconquerable by demons or ignorant people, the aspirant achieves the perfection of meditation and his or her mind becomes one-pointed. As compassion increases, one also learns secular knowledge like mathematics, medicine, music, and history. At the sixth stage, the bodhisattva understands the ten aspects of equality and the sameness of all things, in the sense that there is nothing with definite characteristics as one practices the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*). At this point, one encounters reality directly and sees it as empty and without distinguishing marks. Being totally detached from the world, the bodhisattva decides not to enter final nirvāṇa because of a commitment to the welfare of others.

The seventh and eighth stages are, respectively, the far-going (*dūrangamā*) and the immovable (*acalā*). At the seventh stage, the bodhisattva acquires great wisdom in the choice of means for helping others by perfecting skillful means. This individual conquers all passions and transgressions. The *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* states, "They become ultimately calm and tranquil due to removal from the fires of afflictions, yet they undertake to accomplish the extinction of the flames of afflictions of lust, hatred, and delusion of all beings."[34] With pure thoughts, words, and deeds, the bodhisattva cultivates skillful means (*upāya*), and thus goes beyond the arhat. Progress to Buddhahood is now irreversible. By the eighth stage, the bodhisattva is not contaminated by any karma and false concepts, because the aspirant is well established in Dharma and thus immovable. Such a person understands the processes of the universe, acquires ten powers, and cultivates the perfection of resolution. The bodhisattva practices the way without effort. With the simultaneous perfection of vows, the bodhisattva can assume a variety of bodies in the universe in order to teach the doctrine.

Knowing all phenomena and principles, the bodhisattva also knows the hearts and minds of others with respect to good and evil actions in the ninth stage of good insight (*sādhumati*). Now, the bodhisattva becomes an effective communicator, and grasps all paths of Buddhism with perfect facility. Possessing a lucid insight into the bondage of others within the world of suffering, the bodhisattva teaches with more perfected skill and masters the perfection of power. The bodhisattva achieves analytical knowledge of dharmas (elements of existence), meaning, grammar, and exposition.[35] With little effort, the bodhisattva enters the stage of the cloud of doctrine (*dharma-meghā*), which represents experience of trance states and the perfection of knowledge. By mastering concentration and living within it, the bodhisattva also resides in the cloud of doctrine, which suggests rays of wisdom that emanate from previous enlightened beings. The bodhisattva now acquires a glorious body, emits rays that destroy the pain and misery of others, and can perform various types of miracles. It is, however, no miracle that the bodhisattva is now able to utter the lion's roar of awakening and liberation. Finally, the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* imagines the ten stages to be like water flowing from a lake to the ocean. As the water flows toward the ocean, it benefits many beings on its way to the ocean of omniscience.[36]

Celestial Bodhisattvas

Part of the new spirit introduced by the Mahāyāna movement was represented by the addition of celestial bodhisattvas to the pantheon. Among the most important were Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, and Mañjuśri.

Avalokiteśvara's name is composed of the terms lord (*iśvara*) and a term meaning to observe or look down upon (*avalokita*), suggesting that he is someone who observes the world and responses to the painful cries of living beings. Like the Buddha of the Pure Land, Amitābha, he is known for his boundless light, and

he functions by escorting the dead who are to be reborn in the Pure Land. And he also functions as an intermediary between humans and Amitābha. By the third century C.E., Avalokiteśvara appears prominently in chapter 24 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, a chapter that also circulated as an independent text. In the text, Avalokiteśvara is depicted standing to the left of Amitābha and fanning him. Besides possessing all necessary virtues, he is portrayed in the text as omnipresent, omnipotent, a savior figure, not subordinate to anyone and, probably most important, the epitome of love and compassion. Moreover, he is capable of assuming any form or body in order to help his devotees gain salvation.[37] According to epigraphic evidence, his cult dates to around the fifth century. Avalokiteśvara assumed the role of the Buddha in the past and will play that role in the future. To those who recite his name he grants benefits, and he saves people from lust, hostility, and folly. Women who worship him are granted children. His melodious voice is compared to aspects of nature such as a cloud, thunder, wind, and the tides.

This portrait of Avalokiteśvara as a male bodhisattva lasted as late as the tenth century. But long before then a popular or folk Buddhist tradition had introduced a new dimension. Avalokiteśvara began to appear in northern Buddhism as a beautiful slender female figure called Kuan-yin, giver of children. Around the eighth century, this female figure assumed a prominent position in China. Scholars of the subject think that this change from a male to a female figure was possibly the result of Tantric Buddhist influence.

Kuan-yin's name appeared in some Mahāyāna texts during the late Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) in China. With the translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa of Western Chin in 276 C.E., the public's exposure to this goddess became more widespread. Kuan-yin's cult gradually rose to even greater prominence with the composition of testimonial records concerning her miracles. Around this time, Kumārajīva translated the *Lotus Sūtra* again into Chinese. But this time the twenty-fifth chapter circulated as a popular, separate text known as the *Kuan-yin ching* because of its emphasis on the female bodhisattva.[38] During the Six Dynasties (the fifth through tenth centuries C.E.), her cult began to stress devotion to her for benefits in this present world and looked to her as a savior figure in the future. Kuan-yin hears the prayers of her faithful from atop Mount Poṭalaka, her residence in the Pure Land cosmology. This is also where she waits to join her devotee at the hour of his or her death. Afterward, she conducts the devotee to the Pure Land, which exemplifies the protection that she offers the faithful. In order to function as a compassionate savior, she can assume a wide variety of apparitional forms. Within the Chinese tradition, she has appeared as Princess Miao-shan, who willingly sacrificed her eyes and hands to save her dying father, and incarnated herself as the Fish-basket and the Wife of Mr. Ma.[39] Kuan-yin is depicted in statues carrying a lotus flower in one hand and a water bottle used to cure people of illness in the other. She is also depicted holding a water bottle and a willow branch. A Tantric-influenced Kuan-yin was introduced into China with a thousand hands and eyes.

In northern Buddhism, cultic practice involved visualization of Kuan-yin and Amitābha at the hour of a person's death. This type of practice at this crucial juncture assures a dying person birth in the Pure Land. By chanting her name, a person is assured that any calamity or misfortune will be eliminated. Furthermore, the chanting of Kyan-yin's name ensures material, psychological, and spiritual benefits for the faithful. In addition, she functions as a mediator and fertility goddess that bestows children.

In Sri Lanka, rather than evolving into Kuan-yin, Avalokiteśvara became associated with a local deity called Nātha Dēvīyō. At an early period, Avalokiteśvara was depicted as an ascetic and compassionate figure on the island. From the seventh through the tenth centuries, Avalokiteśvara maintained a cultic presence in Sri Lanka. During the fourteenth century, he was incorporated into the Buddhist cosmos when his identity was transformed into that of Nātha, which is an abbreviation of Lokeśvara Nātha, a deity of the Kandyan region of the island. In addition to being a savior deity, Nātha became one of the four national guardian deities and a powerful divine being associated with political legitimation. Sri Lankan kings projected themselves as a combination bodhisattva, king, and god acting for the welfare of the people.[40]

The development of the celestial bodhisattva Maitreya takes it own historical developmental twists. The Sanskrit root of Maitreya's name ("Kindly One") suggests benevolence. Maitreya is the earliest cult bodhisattva. In the Pāli tradition, he appeared as a future Buddha, waiting to be reborn on earth to purify the religion. Meanwhile, he lives as a bodhisattva in the Tuṣita heaven. According to Buddhist tradition, there is a prediction that he will have thousands of disciples. The Theravāda school has held that there is no other bodhisattva in the present age. It is stated that he is alive, which suggests that he can respond to prayers. This ability overlaps with his compassionate nature, which willingly grants help to those in need. As early as the fourth century C.E. in China, it is possible to find a Maitreya cult that appealed to those desiring to be reborn in the Tuṣita heaven to see their deity. After the seventh century, the cult declined in China only to reappear in the thirteenth century with Maitreya in the guise of a fat, laughing monk called the Pot-bellied Maitreya or the Laughing Buddha, Mi-lo-fo. This figure is based on legends of the life of a tenth-century monk who was popular with the local people, and who was regarded as a barometer for the local weather. Everyone knew that rainy weather was imminent when he wore wet sandals, whereas when he wore wooden sandals with nails under the soles or slept on a local bridge in a squatting posture, warm weather was on the way. This manifestation of Maitreya is depicted carrying a hemp cloth bag (*pu-tai*, a term that also means glutton) that he carried on a stick over his shoulder as he wandered begging for food. For the Chinese living in premodern times, his rotund stomach denoted prosperity. When this fat bodhisattva is depicted playing with children, this image signifies the Chinese ideal for a large family.[41]

Maitreya functions as a mediating figure in the sense that he connects the

past and future Dharma (teaching). He is also involved in the cycle of regeneration and renewal. Maitreya makes himself accessible to a devotee through the medium of meditative trance and rebirth.[42] He functions from two bases of operation, one in heaven and the other on earth. He plays a minor role in Chinese popular literature during the sixteenth century, when he assumes the role of a messenger to earth, a symbol of divine compassion active in the present, and functions to save humans by rendering them presently enlightened.[43]

The bodhisattva Mañjuśri is also a preeminent figure around the period of 300 C.E. Mañjuśri's name suggests gentle or sweet glory. He is often depicted as youthful and as a crown prince, suggesting the prince of the Dharma (teaching, law). He is known for his great wisdom, which he sometimes uses to destroy a person's ignorance and awaken knowledge. He often appears to humans in dreams. By hearing his name, many eons are subtracted from one's cycle through rebirths. Those who worship him are protected by him and are born into the family of the Buddha. In a similar fashion, those that mediate on his statute and teaching will reach enlightenment. It is this feature of his nature that contributed to his place of prominence in many Ch'an/Zen Buddhist monasteries in China and Japan.

These celestial bodhisattvas were only a part of a new pantheon that also included countless buddhas, Indian gods and goddesses, Indian saints, Tibetan lamas (teachers), *ḍākiṇīs* (female tutelary spirits), guardian and local deities, personal and household deities, and demonic figures. It is not unusual to find the historical Buddha, a disciple, or any of the previously mentioned bodhisattvas giving a sermon to a large assembly of supernatural beings and humans. It is difficult for readers not to realize that Mahāyāna texts represent a different religious ethos. Not all Mahāyāna texts give the same impression, however, because many of them are subtle and abstract works of philosophy.

A less philosophical work like the *Lotus Sūtra* affords a reader an excellent opportunity to glimpse one example of the new Mahāyāna cosmology. The *Lotus Sūtra* refers to the sixteen sons of the Buddha. Two of these sons are located on each of the eight compass points, beginning with the east. The specific identity of each of the sixteen sons and his exact location are less important for us than the overall impression, which is that it depicts a *maṇḍala* (sacred diagram) of the buddhas of the eight directions. The father, the Buddha, symbolizes the center of this diagram. This sacred diagram suggests the coexistence of buddhas. There is a rule that there cannot be two buddhas in a single space, which means that in the sacred diagram each son possesses his own space. Moreover, the sixteen brothers exist simultaneously in space and time. And since they belong to the same family, they share wisdom by way of the father. This means that wisdom is singular and nondual. Within this cosmology, time collapses in the sense that the father lives on in his sons. Moreover, wisdom lives on by surviving the *parinirvāṇa* (final nirvāṇa) of the Buddha. This type of sacred diagram is captured artistically in Tibetan *tankas* (paintings of sacred diagrams) that are hung on walls of homes and temples and even hillsides.

Continuity and Change

The gradual development of Mahāyāna Buddhism did not result in a complete break with sects and schools that preceded it. There are certain features of the earlier tradition that Mahāyāna continued to share with it. Although the central figures of the arhat and bodhisattva are different, the theme of a spiritual journey to a specific goal is maintained. The formative and later Mahāyāna traditions shared an emphasis on virtues such as compassion and nonviolence. The central importance of wisdom and the goal of nirvāṇa are maintained, along with continued beliefs about impermanence, suffering, and rebirth. The role of the historical Buddha continued to be significant, and the importance of a role for the laity continued and even increased with Mahāyāna. The formative tradition and Mahāyāna also shared a conviction that consciousness is innately clear and pure.

Nonetheless, there are important differences between Mahāyāna and earlier Buddhist movements. Mahāyāna Buddhism offers an expanded vision of the universe that includes countless buddhas residing in various Buddha realms. With developments such as the Pure Land schools that will be discussed in chapter 10, Mahāyāna increased and more fully developed the potential for devotional practice for both lay and monastic members. With Mahāyāna schools such as Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, and the texts that influenced these schools, there developed an emphasis on wisdom and realizing emptiness.

Within the context of the broad sweep of Mahāyāna history, it is also possible to discern geographical, social, historical, and cultural differences with earlier schools. Mahāyāna represents the spread of Buddhism beyond the borders of India north to Tibet and eastward to China, Korea, and Japan. From a social perspective, Mahāyāna gives Buddhist history a new religious paradigm in the bodhisattva, who is conceived as a figure with a social conscience, and who contributes to an increased role for the laity. Throughout its historical development, various Mahāyāna schools responded to different types of crisis in religiously creative ways that will be explored in chapters 10, 11, and 12. Moreover, Mahāyāna Buddhism opened the way to a creative cultural explosion of new literature, abstract philosophy, translations of Sanskrit texts into native languages, expansion of artistic creativity, and the adaptation of Buddhism to new cultural contexts. From a cultural perspective, Mahāyāna Buddhism contributed to significant cultural changes in countries beyond India, was influenced by the cultures that it encountered, and was itself changed. Its continuity with past Buddhist schools and its ever-changing nature demonstrate that Mahāyāna Buddhism is dynamic, not a static phenomenon.

9

Secret Narratives: Philosophies of Emptiness

According to his biography composed in the Sanskrit language and eventually translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva, a Tripiṭaka master of the later Qin Dynasty (384–417), Nāgārjuna was born into a Brahmin family in southern India. He was a person with a remarkable memory, very intelligent, and versed in other disciplines: astronomy, geography, divination, prophecy, and other arts and skills. With three learned friends, he conspired to amuse himself by indulging in sensual pleasure. Being Brahmins and scholars, they acknowledged to themselves that they did not have the financial means to truly savor pleasure like a noble person or king. The friends agreed to learn from a sorcerer the art of becoming invisible, with the hope of increasing their pleasure. Fearing that the friends would not need his services after learning his secrets, the hired sorcerer was reluctant to reveal his secrets completely. He gave each of the friends a blue pill with instructions to grind it with water and smear the lotion on their eyes, and promised them invisibility. But the sagacious Nāgārjuna smelled the pill when he was grinding it, and he was able to identify each of the seventy ingredients. The sorcerer was so impressed by Nāgārjuna's discovery that he told Nāgārjuna the secret of his art. With this knowledge, the four young men entered the king's palace frequently and sexually enjoyed its women. After a time, the maidens were discovered to be pregnant, and they reported this situation to the king.

A minister of the king thought that this must be the work of a ghost or a sorcerer. Orders were given to spread fine grains of earth at the gates and post guards to keep watch. Although a ghost would leave no footprints, creatures associated with a sorcerer would leave identifying marks. Once the footprints of the four friends were seen and reported to the king, warriors were summoned to the palace and its gates closed. The warriors were instructed to hack and strike at the air with their weapons, and three of the friends were killed. Nāgārjuna survived by holding his breath and standing silently near the king, in whose vicinity weapons were not allowed. This violent and tense situation enabled Nāgārjuna to

gain an insight into the nature of desire, and he vowed to become a renouncer if he survived. After leaving the palace, he was true to his vow. He journeyed to some mountains were he was instructed by an old monk on the Mahāyāna scriptures. Unable to benefit fully from the scriptures, he continued his journey to other countries. Finally, he decided to become a teacher rather than a student of scriptures.

Once as Nāgārjuna was staying alone in a quiet crystal chamber, the Mahānāga (Great Serpent) Bodhisattva felt pity for Nāgārjuna, and took him to his palace under the sea. It was there that the serpent bestowed upon Nāgārjuna wonderful scriptures. After extensive reading and attainment of bodhisattva status, Nāgārjuna was sent by the serpent to southern India to propagate the teaching (Dharma). Thus Nāgārjuna's name is explained by his connection to the serpent (*nāga*) that gave him the secret teaching (plus his birth under an arjuna tree).

Before gaining complete success, Nāgārjuna had to defeat a sorcerer who created a large pool in which there was a thousand-petaled lotus on which the sorcerer sat and from which he challenged Nāgārjuna. In response to this challenge, Nāgārjuna created a six-tusked white elephant that walked on the water in the pool, uprooted the flower with its trunk, and dashed it on the ground, injuring the sorcerer, who apologized to Nāgārjuna for overrating his own powers and denigrating the monk. Nāgārjuna was equally successful in correcting the king, ministers, and priests of southern India after he was able to produce visible proof of gods defeating demons in the invisible realm.[1]

This biography of a famous Buddhist monk contains important implications for the origins of the Mādhyamika School of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its founder, who lived in the second century C.E. Because people were not prepared to hear and comprehend the subtle and difficult teachings of the Buddha, they were kept secret in the depths of the sea and guarded by a serpent. When the time was right they were revealed to Nāgārjuna, according to the legend, in order to correct the erroneous knowledge of humankind. Nāgārjuna's seminal text was entitled *Fundamentals on the Middle Way*. It would be misleading to affirm that he founded the school called Mādhyamika, since there is no evidence for such a designation for this particular school until the work of another monk called Candrakīrti, in the seventh century C.E.[2] This school and the Yogācāra school, which we will discuss later in this chapter, exerted a broad influence on Buddhist schools in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan.

Scholars have been able to discover little about the early history of the Mādhyamika school. It was influenced by the early body of Mahāyāna texts called the Perfection of Wisdom literature, and it attempted to present in a systematic way the philosophical implications of this literature. From a related perspective, Nāgārjuna's basic work is interpreted as an attempt to respond to the philosophy of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma school and its classification of dharmas (categories of existing entities), which it assumed represented the nature of reality.[3]

We will examine Nāgārjuna's criticism of their understanding of the dharmas subsequently. Other scholars have viewed Nāgārjuna's work as a commentary on the teachings of the Buddha in order to refine the original message.[4]

The Middle Way of Nāgārjuna

Like the historical Buddha, Nāgārjuna defined his philosophy as a middle path between the two extremes of *is* (eternalism) and *is not* (nihilism). The first position is represented by Hindu philosophers who argue for an immortal self that is reborn until it achieves liberation and is released from the cycle of causation, whereas the nihilist position denies that there is anything eternal. By a middle path between two extremes, Nāgārjuna suggests that his position entails that nothing in the world exists absolutely and nothing perishes completely. The middle to which he is referring is not located within the realm of language or concepts; it is transcendental and thus beyond language and concepts. It is implied that this middle way means rising above clinging to either existence or nonexistence. His philosophy suggests that no specific philosophical position is ultimate or limitless. Therefore, the ultimate truth is not expressed by a specific viewpoint.

Even though Nāgārjuna depicts his thought as a path, it must not be construed as a way to some final truth or definite goal. That is, it is a path that does not lead to a particular type of knowledge. The path that he envisions represents rather the termination of all knowing and therefore all theorizing. By embodying knowledge without being a means of knowing something specific, this path is more precisely the practice of the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāparamita*). This implies that a person with this wisdom is an enlightened bodhisattva.

To help us understand the perfection of wisdom and its implications for grasping the world, Nāgārjuna makes a distinction between two kinds of truth: conventional truth and ultimate truth, a distinction that can be discovered in the dialogues of the Buddha when he uses personal pronouns to refer to people, in contrast to his philosophy that denies an enduring self. The former is valid and useful for everyday living. It is useful to know, for instance, that if you hold a match after lighting it for too long that you will eventually burn your finger. This type of example illustrates a truth that is dependent upon accepted social standards of common sense. But the problem with this type of truth and knowledge is that it ultimately becomes illusory because, if we push it too far, it becomes self-contradictory. This point can be illustrated by examining a concept like time. From a conventional viewpoint that is grounded in human perception and conceptual formulation, time appears as a series a moments composing the past, present, and future. We arrive at this concept of time and measure it by clocks and other devices by assuming that it possesses a self-substantial reality. This type of erroneous assumption on our part binds us to current and future conceptual habits learned from infancy, in which we have an emotional and habitual stake. Of course, we can use this concept to help us get to class, work, or the theater on

time. But we are thinking and conceptualizing within a realm of ignorance (*avidyā*)—that is, we exist fundamentally in error with respect to conventional truth. What is wrong with living in ignorance and still being able to get to places that we need to be on time? In short, there is nothing wrong with it except that it will not lead you to liberation from the cycle of causation, rebirth, and suffering. As we normally live, we tend to mistake relative things (such as wealth, automobiles, or fame) with the absolute, or we accept what is fragmentary as somehow complete. From Nāgārjuna's perspective, human beings sell themselves short by accepting something considerably less than the all. Human beings cannot see this because their ignorance obscures the real nature of things, and it constructs false appearances. But if we push what we ignorantly believe, or any concept, too far, we discover that it is unreal (*māyā*). Although conventional truth or knowledge is characterized by ignorance and illusion, it can suggest its own inherent limitations and consequently point us in the direction of freedom.

By ultimate truth, Nāgārjuna envisions a nondual type of knowledge, an intuition devoid of content that stands in sharp contrast to the previous level of awareness. If we return to the example of time, a person viewing its nature would not see a linked series of moments but would be able to view it in its entirety. In other words, a person with nondual knowledge sees the whole of time and not simply its parts. Such a person comes to recognize that the present moment is entirely interrelated to the past and future, which makes time a dependent set of relations and not something in its own right. By analyzing a category like time in this way, a person discovers that it is not independent of certain conventions and the characteristics that one attributes to it.

With analysis of this kind, it becomes evident that ultimate truth is a state beyond ordinary knowledge and reason, and represents dissolution of the conceptual function of the human mind. This accompanies the dawning of freedom and release from the turmoil and ignorance of the world, although it does not entail the complete rejection of conventional truth, because it is still good to know that a lighted match will burn your finger. Attaining ultimate truth is the same as realizing nirvāṇa, a realization that involves a total transformation of a person's self-awareness. This is a realization that all distinctions and all entities are empty (*śūnyatā*). What can it possibly mean to see everything as empty? Why does this realization represent wisdom? Could it be that Nāgārjuna ingested hallucinogenic agents before he started to do philosophy? Actually, emptiness makes perfect sense, if you make an effort to realize it.

The Emptiness of Emptiness

The Sanskrit term for emptiness is *śūnyatā*. It comes from a root (*suī*) meaning to swell. When a person, for instance, blows up a balloon, the flat piece of rubber begins to swell. If a person continues to blow it up until it extends beyond its maximum capacity, it will explode, revealing absolutely nothing. A person is left hold-

ing pieces of rubber that previously had been the balloon. The point is that the swelling of the balloon represents in a sense a swelling of emptiness by using human breath. When the balloon breaks, there is revealed nothing but emptiness. As revealed by its Sanskrit etymology, emptiness is not a thing; it is neither something that a person can point to and say there it is, nor is it something that one can grasp and hold in one's hand. To assert that entities are empty means that they lack inherent existence or essence. When a thinker identifies the essence of something, this implies that it is eternal, fixed, and independent. Nāgārjuna denies that anything possesses an essence, a permanent independent basis. This position has important implications for the notion of difference, because without particular essences there are no substantial differences. In other words, if things have no intrinsic nature, they cannot be essentially different.[5] Moreover, emptiness means that everything is radically relative and nothing exists in its own right.

Emptiness is not a superior view that a person can hold in order to judge other views, because emptiness is intended to oppose all views. What about the view of emptiness? Emptiness is even opposed to the view of emptiness, because emptiness itself is empty.[6] An imaginary opponent objects that if everything is empty, then the Four Noble Truths do not exist, and there is consequently no elimination of ignorance. In response, Nāgārjuna shows that if things are not empty, then the elimination of ignorance and reaching the final goal are impossible.

Nāgārjuna's response to his imaginary opponent sounds odd. But on closer inspection, it makes sense. We have to ask ourselves the following type of question: What are we doing when we use concepts like existent or nonexistent? Nāgārjuna's answer is that we superimpose a character on something that is not already there. Thus notions like existent and nonexistent exist only in our minds. Since this is the case, emptiness has a deconstructive function by working to destroy naïve, uncritical, blind beliefs.[7] This argument possesses major implications for the discipline of philosophy because it means that the field of ontology (what does exist and what does not exist) must be considered a dead end for philosophical inquiry and should simply be abandoned by a discerning thinker.

If emptiness is intended to deconstruct our erroneous viewpoint and enable us to see things and events as they truly are, emptiness cannot be some self-substantiated reality that stands opposed to nonemptiness. Therefore, we should not under any circumstances become attached to emptiness itself, since it is not anything substantial onto which we can cling. We must also become detached from our mental and emotional fabrications, which enables us to transcend our personhood.[8] By following this line of argument, Nāgārjuna wants to free us from becoming attached to any single idea or experience. This includes the idea and experience of emptiness. If you were to ask Nāgārjuna "What is the essence of emptiness?" his answer would be that emptiness is empty. This response tells us nothing. But that is precisely the point. This suggests that emptiness is a pointer to ultimate truth rather than the ultimate truth itself.

Nāgārjuna does not think that emptiness is a philosophical position that can be defended because it is precisely *not* a philosophical position. The philosophy of emptiness is intended to end all questions, all theorizing, and all philosophy. In other words, the philosophy of emptiness is a nonphilosophical point of view. Moreover, it is intended to terminate philosophy; this nonphilosophical position is the end of philosophy. This is exactly the point of stating that emptiness is emptiness. There is nothing more that can be said. But if everything is empty and this is true of emptiness, does this not mean that nirvāṇa is without existence?

A consideration of nirvāṇa is instructive about how Nāgārjuna is philosophically consistent and how he applies his argument to the ultimate. He uses the principle of contradiction, the law of the excluded middle, negation and, most important, his dialectic called the tetralemma, which is a method also used by the Buddha. Due to the spare limits of this book, we will review his dialectic only briefly. Each part of his dialectic forms a step in an ascending series in which each part except the first is a counteragent to the prior step. That is, as the series unfolds, each part negates and cancels out its predecessor. An example of this method would be something like the following:

All x is A

No x is A

Some x is A, and some x is not A

No x is A, and no x is not A

A cursory look at this example enables a reader to see that the argument moves forward to the negation of the final part.[9] By affirming something and than negating it, the method suggests that no proposition is valid except within a set of validating conditions. This means that no proposition is valid in an absolute sense. Is this not a self-defeating philosophical procedure? This dialectical method is intended to dispose of all philosophical views, which makes it successful and not self-defeating. What good is it from a practical viewpoint? In part, Nāgārjuna uses his method as a therapeutic device, with the intention of curing us of our suffering. That is, the method works to force us to terminate our mental and emotional attachment to phenomenal and conceptual entities in preparation for genuine insight into the nature of things.

With this brief discussion of dialectical method, it is now possible to understand better Nāgārjuna's comments about nirvāṇa. If all phenomenal elements are empty, Nāgārjuna argues consistently that nirvāṇa is also empty. This suggests that it is devoid of all discriminations, particularities, and definitions. Nirvāṇa is the calming of all representations and verbal differentiations.[10] Moreover, if nirvāṇa and the phenomenal world (which also represents the cycle of *saṃsāra* or rebirth) are empty, this means that they can be equated with each other. The equation of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra represents the former without reification, without attachment, and without delusion.[11] If nirvāṇa and the phenomenal world of

rebirth are both understood as empty, this awareness has important consequences for the bodhisattva, because such a person does not have to flee the world in order to attain nirvāṇa. The bodhisattva can remain within the world to work for the ultimate salvation of everyone.

These remarks still do not tell us anything about the ultimate goal. If an inquiring reader could go back in time to ask Nāgārjuna about what nirvāṇa represents, he would say that it is the cessation of all discrimination and dualism. In short, it is the end of the representational mode of thinking, in which we create an image of a notion like "tree" or "table," for instance, as part of our mode of thinking about it. Nirvāṇa represents an intuitive realization that nondual emptiness is the only truth, which means the realization that everything is the same, that is, empty. This intuitive awareness that metaphorically cleanses our false views and enables us to see things as they are in their genuine nature does not deny commonsensical reality to things. Although the tree, for instance, is ultimately speaking empty, if you run into the tree at a high speed, you will most likely injure yourself seriously.

Elements, Categories, and Wisdom

As mentioned above, Nāgārjuna's philosophy can be interpreted as an attack on the dharma (categories of existing entities) made into lists of classification by the Abhidharma schools. Nāgārjuna objects to the way these lists of existing entities become definitive classifications that are accepted for reality. Thus Nāgārjuna proceeds to launch his dialectical method against these identified elements and categories. It is important to keep in mind that Nāgārjuna argues from the standpoint of ultimate truth and emptiness.

If we look at the conventional world, we recognize a network of concepts (such as justice, beauty, God, love) and conventional entities (such as trees, automobiles, houses), which are all forms of mundane truth. From the perspective of the philosophy of emptiness, all of these things obscure the truth of things, which is that everything is empty. That is, the world of convention is a product of one's ignorance. By living in ignorance, people dwell in a milieu of concepts and words (*nāma*) and what these concepts and words designate, their content or sign (*lakṣaṇa*). A typical example of this relationship is the following: where there is smoke there is fire. Fire (*nāma*) is a word that designates flame (*lakṣaṇa*). Likewise, smoke (*lakṣaṇa*) is a sign of fire (*nāma*). Nāgārjuna's point is that name and sign are mutually dependent. Ultimately speaking, they are nothing more than thought constructions that are devoid of substantiality. This implies that the world of convention that corresponds to conventional truth lacks any substantial reality.

Within this distinction between name and the sign that it designates in the background, Nāgārjuna proceeds to examine elements of Abhidharma classification. The crux of his attack is that none of the elements has an independent existence, because they are all dependent on something else for their existence. If

you consider the clothes that you are wearing, each of them owes its existence to animal wool and leather, a synthetic process, a manufacturing process, distribution, and sales procedures. The various items of clothing that you are wearing possess no inherent nature of their own; Nāgārjuna would say they are not self-existent (*svabhāva*). That is, they lack an essential nature by which something is what it is and not something else. The essential question for Nāgārjuna is this: Is there anything that is self-existent? To answer this question positively you need to find something within the conventional world that is not dependent upon or conditioned by anything else. If we return to the example of fire, the answer to the proposed question will become evident. Flame is never, for example, encountered apart from fire. This necessarily means that flame is created, and it is not self-existent, that is, noncontingent and without relation to anything else. Certainly, this cannot be asserted for fire and its by-product flame, or anything else within the conventional world. Since a total lack of self-existence (*svabhāva*) is all that one can encounter within the world, this can be affirmed to be the nature of things; all elements are without substantial reality and thus empty. From another perspective, it is possible to affirm that entities within the world are conventionally real, but they are not ultimately real because they lack independent existence.

A similar line of argument is applied to categories (such as cause, motion, time). Nāgārjuna does not deny the categories themselves. What he denies is the allegedly absolute nature of them.[12] Let us return to the category of time briefly mentioned above, because it has important implications for liberation. Every phase of time possesses an element prior to it and an element after it. Since neither the present nor past nor future can be grasped as absolute, they only have significance relative to each other, which implies that they are relational concepts. In other words, there is no such thing as the present, past, or future in itself (*svabhāva*), although time is certainly pertinent to this world. From the perspective of ultimate truth, there is no past, present, or future. In other words, since there are no individual entities of time, it is a derived notion, which suggests that it is a mental construction. If time is created by the human mind, it is not something from which one can escape, because there is simply no place from which to escape.

But did we not learn that we are subject to the cycle of causation over time and the law of karma? Needless to say, Nāgārjuna sees things differently. From the viewpoint of conventional truth, causal relations are true. But from a higher perspective, the causal process is mentally fabricated, in the sense that the relationship between cause and effect is a relation of dependence.[13] There is no independent reality in a cause or an effect. A cause and its effect are nothing more than a set of conditions that are themselves conditioned. Therefore, there are no such things as origination (no first cause), duration, or cessation. For example, the phenomenon of fire does not exist in the fuel, and it is not independent of the fuel. Moreover, if fire and fuel are considered as self-sufficient entities, they cannot exist. Likewise, there is no reality to the law of karma, which like causation is

a mental construction.[14] What Nāgārjuna wants us to see is the mutually conditioned and conditioning nature of mental activity and physical entities that are devoid of any independent substantial nature or essence. He also wants us to recognize that what we encounter every day is a continual process that forms an interdependent network.

This deconstruction of time and causation has important implications for liberation. Because everything is empty, there is no such condition as being in bondage. Conversely, there is no ultimate liberation. This means that release is not distinct from illusion.[15] When discussing the law of karma, Nāgārjuna states that if karma does not exist, then it is impossible for true reality (dharma) or false reality (adharma) to exist; it is also impossible for the individual, a product of karma, to exist, as it is impossible for there to exist a path to salvation and final release.[16] We witness here Nāgārjuna arguing that emptiness must exist before phenomenal causes and conditions can produce entities, yet it is also the condition that denies the ultimate reality of them. Likewise, emptiness is the condition for both mundane action and release.[17] This does not mean that emptiness is something in itself, and it does not represent ultimate reality from the perspective of ultimate truth.

If there is no person, no path, no release from the cycle of causation, and no ultimate reality, what is the point of the philosophy of emptiness? It seems like a nonstarter and a dead end all in one. The point of intuitively realizing emptiness is the attainment of wisdom (*prajñā*), which is the ultimate perfection for a bodhisattva. When a person becomes intuitively aware of emptiness, this awareness is not an expression of something or a philosophical proposition about something. Gaining awareness of emptiness is akin to a power, even though there is no independent reality behind the awareness. If there is nothing behind the awareness, wisdom frees one from attachment to things and enables one to realize that one can attain nothing. In a profound sense, wisdom speaks to the bodhisattva, and its message is conveyed by the sound of silence. The sound of silence expresses volumes, because it bestows upon us the message that ultimate truth is beyond being and becoming, beyond emptiness and nonemptiness. But in the final analysis, silence suggests that ultimate reality is inexpressible and inexplicable. By permitting one to see things as they really are, or as empty, wisdom destroys illusion and gives one true freedom. With the awareness of emptiness and the wisdom connected to it, there grows a continual process of detachment that also removes hatred, fear, greed, and anxiety. This scenario unfolds not because a person discovers a solution to the problems of life, such as pain and suffering. It is because a person's problems have ceased to be problems.

The Aftermath of Nāgārjuna's Radical Perspective

In his classic work of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, Nāgārjuna warned readers not to cling to emptiness as a view about the nature of ultimate reality.[18] The later

Mādhyamika philosopher Candrakīrti gave a similar line of advice when he warned readers not to reify emptiness. He compared such a violation to a shopper who is informed by a merchant that he has nothing to sell. The shopper asks if he or she could buy the nothing.[19] The point of this anecdote is that Candrākīrti, like Nāgārjuna, was opposed to any metaphysical absolute.

The Mādhyamika school exerted a large influence in Buddhist circles until Buddhism disappeared in India. Later interpreters of the philosophy included figures such as Bhāvaviveka (c. 500–570 C.E.) and Candrakīrti (c. 600–660 C.E.), whose influence extended to Tibetan Buddhism. The former thinker gave impetus to the Svātantrika Mādhyamika through his conviction that the truth of emptiness needed the use of independent (*svatantra*) argument. Bhāvaviveka's thought demonstrated the influence of the great Buddhist thinker Dignāga (480–540 C.E.) of the Yogācāra school and his insistence on a Buddhist establishment of independent means of knowledge. Dignāga, who is given credit for establishing Buddhist logic, argued that Buddhism could give a person an accurate insight into reality. From this insight into reality true meaning could be produced. During the seventh century, the philosopher Dharmakīrti would develop in a more systematic way Dignāga's notions about cognition and meaning. Dharmakīrti was convinced that logical arguments could provide certainty about the truth, and the insight gained by enlightenment could create new meaning.

The Svātantrika Mādhyamika school was criticized by the Prāsangika Mādhyamika school that was shaped by Candrakīrti, who argued that establishing the truth of emptiness was only possible by an argument of reduction to absurdity (*prāsanga*). From his philosophical position, Candrakīrti recognized his job as a Buddhist philosopher to be to undermine the positions of opponents by attacking them internally, using their own presuppositions and philosophical inconsistencies against them. Instead of syllogistic arguments, Candrakīrti wanted to move gradually by a series of steps to an awareness of the inherent contradictions present within any logical and rational attempt to support the truth of emptiness. With the efficacy of reason itself at the crux of the debate, Candrakīrti was not as optimistic as Bhāvaviveka about the powers of reason to accomplish its task. Moreover, the use of reason risked undermining the path to salvation and becoming instead a dangerous trap. Although rational thought is an effective tool, it cannot establish the actualization of emptiness. This debate between the Prāsangika and Svātantrika schools of Mādhyamika Buddhism played itself out from the sixth through the eighth centuries.

The Prāsangika school eventually experienced a period of decline until Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) revitalized it. During his life, his peers and critics viewed his philosophical position as heterodox. Tsong Khapa grasped the Prāsangika theory of two truths in both an epistemological and ontological way. This meant that an object like a jar possessed a conventional reality for both an enlightened being and an ordinary person, whereas the emptiness of any inherent existence of the

jar was its ultimate reality. This position meant that Tsong Khapa accepted both perspectives: conventional and ultimate. These were two distinct dimensions of the same world. Therefore, the mode of being of all things and events was emptiness, but this did not mean that emptiness existed in and of itself. If it did, this would mean that it was an absolute. Tsong Khapa insisted that emptiness existed on the conventional level, even though it was not a conventional or absolute reality. He intended to leave everyday reality intact, while he also wanted to claim that there was something ultimate, even though nothing existed ultimately. If the everyday world of phenomenal beings was only apparent, this did not mean that it was an illusion. It was more accurate to affirm that it was like an illusion in the sense that unenlightened humans project illusion onto the world, whereas it was really empty of intrinsic existence.

Tsong Khapa's philosophy of emptiness was beyond absolutism, nihilism, and relativism. For Tsong Khapa, emptiness was not a mere nothingness because it represented a real mode of the being of things, although this was not meant as having any intrinsic reality. The existence and identity of a particular thing was contingent on other factors within a complex, interconnected world. Like Candrakīrti, Tsong Khapa wanted to avoid any kind of reification, which would mean that something existed ultimately. With respect to a person, Tsong Khapa depicted individuals as devoid of essence and like an illusion. This position placed Tsong Khapa beyond nihilism, because such a standpoint would deny the conventional reality of a person; and it placed his thought beyond absolutism because he did not claim that a person existed with an eternal and intrinsic nature. Therefore, Tsong Khapa's philosophy did not destroy the validity of a person's ordinary experience of the world.

In addition influencing thinkers like Tsong Khapa in Tibet, the teachings of Nāgārjuna and his school also extended to China through the translations of two of his texts (*Treatise on the Middle Doctrine* and *Twelve Gates Treatise*) and another text by his disciple Āryadeva (*One Hundred Verses Treatise*). This latter text was translated by Kumārajīva (344–413), a gifted translator and man of catholic interests, sympathetic to the spirit of Mahāyāna thought and the centrality of emptiness. There is no evidence that Kumārajīva attempted to establish his own lineage.[20] Nonetheless, these texts gave impetus to the so-called Three Treatise School (San lun) with advocates such as Seng-chao (384–414) and Chi-tsang (549–623). After the death of Chi-tsang, the school went into a period of decline and eventually perished as an independent school during the ninth century, although it did contribute to the development of Ch'an (Zen). Chi-tsang argued that his school refuted false philosophical views without holding a view of its own. This lack of a view held true for emptiness, which should be understood as a therapeutic device. Chi-tsang also reinterpreted Candrakīrti's notion of the two levels of truth. Rather than natures possessed by all things, as they are for Candrakīrti, Chi-tsang interpreted the two truths as levels of teaching akin to a dialectical ascent culminating in a nonconceptual state of wisdom.

The Way of Yogācāra

According to a Sanskrit biography translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva, the great Yogācāra philosopher Vasubandhu came from northern India, from a location named "land of the hero," where he was born into a Brahmin family consisting of three sons all with the same name: Vasubandhu (heavenly kin). The youngest son joined the Sarvāstivādin school of Buddhism and gained enlightenment. The eldest son followed the same pattern, but he was not fully satisfied and contemplated emptiness (*śūnyatā*). An arhat (fully enlightened being) named Piṇḍola helped him to gain insight into emptiness, but he did not think that truth ended with this insight. By means of his extraordinary powers, he went to the Tuṣita heaven where he asked the bodhisattva Maitreya to help him. After receiving the needed instruction, the eldest brother returned to India and attained enlightenment, which triggered earthly vibrations. On attaining enlightenment, he adopted the name Asaṅga ("without attachment"). Asaṅga made other trips to the Tuṣita heaven for instruction on Mahāyāna texts, and he returned to India to explain these texts to others, without complete success. Thereupon, he prayed to Maitreya to come to earth to teach others. Maitreya responded to his prayers and descended to earth to share his teachings, causing people to understand them.

The second son, who retained his original name, followed the example set by his brothers. Vasubandhu achieved fame by philosophically destroying in debate the position of a Sāṃkhya dualist heretic. The king rewarded the victor, and Vasubandhu used the money to build a nunnery and two monasteries. Thereafter, he composed heterodox texts to expound the correct Dharma (teaching) and overcome other texts, often risking his life if he failed to refute his opponents. After emerging victorious and being rewarded by kings, he used his gifts to build more monasteries.

Meanwhile, Asaṅga feared that his brother would discredit Mahāyāna with his heterodox beliefs. Asaṅga sent an urgent message to his brother claiming to be near death. When Vasubandhu arrived, Asaṅga said that he was sick at heart because Vasubandhu did not believe in Mahāyāna and always attacked it. After explaining the Mahāyāna position, Asaṅga converted his brother, who wanted to repent of his former errors, and who vowed to cut out his tongue. Asaṅga dissuaded him from harming himself. Instead, the older brother convinced Vasubandhu to use his verbal talents to spread the teachings of Mahāyāna. After the death of his brother, Vasubandhu composed treatises expounding the Mahāyāna position until he himself died at the age of eighty.[21] The two brothers are given credit by historians for establishing the Yogācāra school as a vibrant alternative to Mādhyamika.

The Yogācāra school means the practice of yoga (ascetic techniques for the control of breath, body, and mind in preparation for the practice of meditation). The school is also called Vijñānavāda (literally, "holders of the doctrine of consciousness"). The school was preceded by some idealistic texts (*sūtras*) around the

third century C.E., such as the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (Entering into the Dharma Realm), the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, and the *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra* (Freeing the Connections or Knots). These texts were not systematic philosophical works. The second text offers something of historical interest that it calls "the third turning of the wheel of the Dharma." This phrase suggests that each turning of the wheel of the Dharma offers a more explicit manifestation of the teachings of the Buddha than what preceded it. Again, we witness the revelation of a secret and more truthful teaching of the Buddha. Each turning of the wheel of the teaching reveals something more complete, and it suggests that the Buddha continues to be present in history and that he actively continues to teach.

These Yogācāra school was involved in systematic efforts to present the idealism of these texts. It was necessary to elucidate more fully, for instance, how it was possible to deny the commonsense view that objects exist independently of the human mind. The Buddhist monks Sthiramati and Dharmapāla were important figures in Yogācāra in the sixth century C.E. This school, which was influential in Tibet and China, represents in part a reaction to the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and his failure to resolve certain philosophical questions such as accounting for the nature of error, explaining how the mind creates and objectifies fictions, accounting for memory within the flux of time, making sense of suffering, and explaining what or who experiences ultimate truth devoid of discrimination. As noted earlier, Nāgārjuna denied the possibility of essence, but from the Yogācāra perspective he did not fully elucidate existence. By clarifying the position of subjectivity, the Yogācāra thinkers cleared a path for existential thinking.[22]

The Human Condition and Reality

According to the teaching of the Buddha, human craving lies at the root of suffering. But for craving to occur, there must be a subject who craves an object. This subject/object dichotomy is the ordinary way in which we know. If a person attempts to experience consciousness directly, it becomes an objectified entity for a perceiver. The Yogācāra school agrees with Nāgārjuna that ultimate reality cannot be discovered through such a way of knowing, because it cannot be found in any particular objectified entity or group of world objects. The other root problem of the human condition, besides craving, is ignorance (*avidyā*), which exists because humans uncritically accept the objectifications of their minds as a world that is independent of their minds. What is the solution to these fundamental problems? If craving exists in part because of desirable objects, and if ignorance exists because humans objectify images in their minds, it is incumbent upon humans to realize that their minds are the source of all objectifications. Not only is the root problem of ignorance located within consciousness but we will also see that the solution (enlightenment) finds its locus in consciousness. Moreover, it is the transition that occurs within the consciousness of the Yogācāra meditator that helps to explain the transformation from an ordinary condition of ignorance to liberation.

The Yogācāra thinkers argue that our external objects are merely ideas that we project outward from their source in our minds and objectify. In the case of a mirage, we know that there is no real water because the idea of water is created by the hallucinating person, who projects a wish for water. If this kind of mental gymnastics can be true for a mirage, it can also be true for other kinds of objectifications. If I can imagine, even while I am sober, for instance, a pink elephant wearing a white tutu and ballet slippers dancing on lily pads in a rustic pond, I am obviously capable of making things appear to consciousness. When you dream of being attacked by a furious and voracious tiger because you look like a tasty cheeseburger to him, this is a kind of dream projection. But when you awaken afraid and sweating, you realize that it was just a dream, it was not real, and yet it caused an emotion of fear to arise. The Yogācāra point is that our dreams and delusions can help to create objects that we perceive but that are not really there. When we dream or delude ourselves in various ways, our mental apparatus is fabricating objects. This can also be true for the way ordinary sense experience operates.

Like the creation of the water of the mirage, the external world is produced by the mind itself or, more precisely, by consciousness-only. That is, the only reality is consciousness, because the objects of the world are nothing more than products of our consciousness. This helps to explain ignorance and why our knowledge of the external world is characterized by ignorance. In short, we fail to be cognizant of the origins of apparent objectivity. What we assume to be the objective world does not exist outside our consciousness of it.

The doctrine of consciousness-only means seeing an object as it really is. But what does this statement mean? It suggests that consciousness does not see anything as an object except the perceiving consciousness itself. This must not be confused with consciousness seeing itself as an object by means of a process of objectification, because the only true object is consciousness itself. What happens when consciousness sees an automobile moving down the street as it really is? Consciousness does not see the moving automobile as an object, because the dichotomy between subject and object is extinguished from the perspective of consciousness-only. There is no object other than consciousness because there is an identity of consciousness and object. In the normal state of ignorance, the seer and object operate without question, but consciousness-only is a philosophical position that negates the seer and its object. Once this occurs, the seer is called no-mind, and the perceived object is referred to as nothing-grasped (a position that will later influence Ch'an/Zen Buddhism). The Yogācāra school thus concludes that when consciousness sees a thing as it truly is in fact, it is consciousness seeing itself as it really is. This is the enlightened way to see. Therefore, when an enlightened person sees a moving automobile, such a person's consciousness sees it from within. To assert that everything is consciousness-only means that one's thinking is devoid of conceptualizing and objectifying types of thinking. This is the culmination of wisdom (*prajñā*) and what it means to be a bodhisattva for this school.

Needless to say, as long as a person can conceptualize an object and a subject, this person is in a condition of bondage to craving and ignorance. But once a person stands firmly in consciousness-only, the object disappears, and this results in the absence of both the subject and craving.[23] In other words, without an object, there can be no craving and no opportunity for it to arise. The end result is that there is nothing to crave and no one to do the craving. The destruction of craving leads to liberation. As a person progresses on this path, pure consciousness arises, a consciousness without objects and without even a subject being conscious of consciousness. There are no longer any objective residues of consciousness that are left to disturb its peace and tranquillity. This pure consciousness is defined as pure emptiness; this represents a redefinition of emptiness.

In order to be able to gasp the Yogācāra position, it helps to understand the distinction it makes between three kinds of reality. The initial kind of reality is mentally constructed and thus false; it reflects a tendency to reify human experience by giving sense impressions an independent existence that is not genuine from a higher level of awareness. The second type of reality is interdependent or relative, in the sense that this level of reality gives rise to momentary elements that are dependent on each other, on a process of causation, and on a perceiving subject. This level is characterized by relative knowledge and a duality between perceiver and the object perceived. Finally, there is the fulfilled state, a condition of perfect knowledge, which represents enlightenment and the ability to see things as they truly are. This level of reality is beyond all error, false attributions, and the dualism that results from discrimination based on a distinction between one thing and another.[24] On this level, there is a complete absence of names, categories, and concepts superimposed on perceived objects. It is precisely from this level of reality that the Yogācāra philosopher stands and expounds this philosophy. But many questions remain unanswered about the nature of consciousness.

The Nature of Consciousness

The Yogācāra school identifies eight types of consciousness. Six types consist of the five sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and the mind (*mano-vijñāna*). There is also an internal sense-center that organizes these six types of consciousness and is integral to the working of the mind; it processes all sensory experiences and creates a coherent image of reality from the various sources of sense consciousness. Even though the mind possesses the ability to discriminate, it becomes afflicted by four defilements that act to create a false picture of reality: a sense of the ego or self, confusion with regard to the self, self-pride, and self-love. These defilements are conditioned by personal proclivities, attachments, and inherited karma. In addition, the mind depends on the crucial "storehouse consciousness" (*ālaya-vijñāna*), a foundation for all other types of consciousness.

For the Yogācāra thinkers, the storehouse consciousness is centrally important because it explains why there is a variety of ideas and impressions in the

mind, how states of consciousness are not limited to a single person, and how memory works. As the name of this type of consciousness implies, the storehouse consciousness is a repository for all ideas and impressions experienced by humankind since the dawn of history. One basic characteristic of the storehouse is that it receives and stores the results of actions and perceptions in the form of seeds (*bījas*).[25] In other words, every thought or deed performed by humankind leaves behind a seed that is deposited in the storehouse. What you think of this text, for instance, is deposited there, as well as what you write on the final exam in response to questions asked by your professor. Your negative or positive assessment of your professor, friend, lover, or whoever will also be deposited there. Your friends, neighbors, and relatives as well as folks on the other side of the world, although totally unaware of what they are doing, are also making their own contributions to the collection of the storehouse. Once these seeds have been deposited in the storehouse they influence future actions, perceptions, and cognitions. A negative experience associated with a particular smell, noise, taste, or perception, for instance, might trigger a similar negative experience because of your prior experience and the seeds already deposited from that experience. You react to a situation depending on previous experience and how it shapes your reaction.

There are two basic kinds of seeds: universal and private. The former reside in all beings. From these universal seeds, we get commonly accepted ideas like mountains, lakes, rivers, trees, wind, and rain. It is true that the terms for these things are different in different languages, but the terms indicate the same things cross-culturally. The private seeds, on the other hand, account for differences in the bodies and senses of each individual. What makes each of us distinguishable from those around us is due to these private seeds.

There is also another distinction made by the school between pure and impure seeds, which are also deposited on the storehouse consciousness. This process is called perfuming, in the sense that these seeds perfume or influence the other types of consciousness. If I am an axe murderer, a child molester, a liar, a sexual predator, or a white-collar criminal, I deposit impure seeds that affect in a negative way the seeds already deposited. Or if I believe, for instance, that I possess an enduring self, this illusory conviction is caused by the impure seeds of the storehouse consciousness working on the mind and obscuring it. While treading the path to enlightenment by the practice of yogic meditation, a person both creates pure seeds and eliminates impure seeds.

It is important to be aware that perfumed seeds are momentary, although they give rise to a series of other perfumed seeds. This results in an intersubjective phenomenal world.[26] This intersubjective world is the outcome of seeds that are common to all aspects of consciousness, which represents previous experiences dating back to a period without beginning.

An important feature of the storehouse consciousness is its singularity, although it arises as individual consciousness. As the storehouse consciousness

arises, it differentiates itself into a variety of ego centers. This is analogous to the waves (particular egos) on the ocean (storehouse). The waves are many, but the ocean is one vast body of water that underlies all the different waves. We do not want to push this analogy too far, because the individual ego centers are neither completely distinct nor wholly identical with the storehouse consciousness, although the storehouse supplies the ground for the particular ego centers. Therefore, the storehouse consciousness represents the foundation for the consistency of experience of the world. This explains why we can recognize each other as fellow human beings and not zebras.

But is it possible for us to know other minds, if consciousness is singular? Vasubandhu's answer is that normally the knowledge of one's own consciousness is defiled because it involves a distinction between one's own mind and that of another subject, which represents essentially a subject/object kind of distinction. Nonetheless, Vasubandhu draws a distinction between a yogin and a Buddha. The yogin does possess knowledge of other minds in the sense of having representations of the representations that occur in another person's mind. But this does not represent the mind, only because it is not possible for one to have a representation of it. A Buddha can, however, possess nondual knowledge that is devoid of representations of the contents of another mind.[27]

We have seen that for the Yogācāra school reality is consciousness-only, which can appear as constructed, dependent, or perfected. When the storehouse consciousness reaches its perfected state, it attains a condition of pure consciousness. It is this pure consciousness that represents nirvāṇa. By reconsidering our analogy of the waves on the ocean, it is possible to recognize that nirvāṇa represents the cessation of waves on the surface of the storehouse consciousness, whereas there is normally a continuous change and transformation of it. We previously noted that Nāgārjuna stated that there is only emptiness. This is problematic for the Yogācāra thinkers, because they want to know who or what realizes the truth of emptiness. The Yogācārins' response is simply that storehouse consciousness recognizes emptiness, although they have additionally redefined emptiness and equated it with pure consciousness. Sometimes, Yogācāra thinkers connect the notion of the three natures (imagined, other-dependent, and fulfilled) with an analysis of emptiness (emptiness of nonbeing, thus-being or not-thus-being, and essential emptiness), with the result that emptiness synthesizes all three natures.[28]

From the perspective of the historical development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is an important connection and equation made by the Yogācāra school between the storehouse consciousness and the *tathāgata-garbha*, which is a term whose meaning and significance needs to be analyzed. The term *tatha* means thus and *āgata* means come, whereas *gatā* means gone. Thus the *tathāgata* can be translated as one who has come or has gone, with the implication that such a person has arrived at enlightenment or passed on to final nirvāṇa. The second term, *garbha*, has a twofold meaning: a womb or inner room, and the contents of a

womb (that is, an embryo). Within the context of early Yogācāra thought, the term signifies that the purified storehouse consciousness is the womb where the tathāgata is conceived, nourished, and brought to maturity. Therefore, the tathāgata-garbha evolved historically to refer to the embryonic buddha that develops with one's storehouse consciousness. The following types of similes are used of the hidden embryo: like honey covered by bees, like a kernel of grain in the husk, like gold in the ore, like a treasure hidden in the earth, and so forth. It is possible to translate the term as Buddha seed or Buddha nature. Consequently, the seed or germ of Buddhahood is innate to all living beings, since everyone possesses the storehouse consciousness.

The Doctrine of the Three Bodies

The doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha (*trikāya*) that is found in various Mahāyāna texts owes its systematic development to the Yogācāra school. Somewhat analogous to the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology (although the Christian doctrine must not be confused or equated with the Buddhist notion), the doctrine of the three bodies attempts to make intellectual sense of the various roles of the Buddha. The superficiality of its resemblance to the Christian doctrine becomes obvious when one examines each of the bodies and what they signify.

The first body is the *nirmānakāya* or body (*kāya*) of transformation. This refers to the historical Buddha who lived as a mortal human being with the same shortcomings as other humans. This is the man who attained enlightenment, taught, shared his message with others, and eventually died. It is his duty to lead others to liberation. As the body of transformation, he manifests the perfection of humanity. The texts testify to his wisdom, intelligence, strength, generosity, beauty, and purity, among other virtues and characteristics. As an emanation of the body of bliss, the Buddha is a manifestation of the Absolute within the world.

The body of bliss or enjoyment is called the *sambhogakāya* because it represents the full enjoyment of the truth of Yogācāra. This body emphasizes the Buddha's appearance as a supreme god. It necessarily exists in a heavenly realm that will continue to exist until the final resolution of all things in the body of essence. This divine Buddha is often called Amitābha (unlimited or infinite light) or by the name of a personal deity that maintains a constant interest in the worldly plight of human beings. It is emphasized that this body is visible to a bodhisattva. This body is a symbol of transcendental perfection, and it personifies infinite wisdom.

The final body is the *dharmakāya*, which means the body of law or essence. Since this is considered a cosmic body, it is often referred to as the Ādi Buddha, or primeval Buddha. This body penetrates and permeates the universe. Because this is the ultimate body, the other bodies are emanations of it, which suggests that they are less real. Representing the true body of the Buddha, the dharmakāya is identified with the essence of knowledge and compassion. In summary, the

Buddha is singular and not three: the three bodies represent three aspects of the one Buddha. The Yogācāra school equates the dharmakāya with the tathāgata-garbha, which is also synonymous with the storehouse consciousness, giving the school a nondualistic position.

Further Developments in China

The nature of emptiness espoused by Nāgārjuna was reinterpreted by the Yogācāra school and equated with pure consciousness. The reinterpretation of emptiness was continued as Buddhism spread into China. The Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai schools of China were examples of this trend. The former found its inspiration in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Flower Ornament or Garland Sūtra), and Hua-yen was the Chinese translation of the title of this text. The text was probably composed in central Asia or maybe even China, in Sanskrit, and was translated into Chinese by Buddhabhadra around 420 C.E. Important historical figures were the second and third patriarchs of the tradition named Chih-yen (602–668) and Fa-tsang (643–712). The latter figure was given credit by many scholars for founding the school that referred to itself as the one vehicle, because according to it there is only a single path leading to liberation. In contrast to the Hua-yen tradition, the T'ien-t'ai school found its inspiration in the *Lotus Sūtra*, which it took to represent the apex and essence of Buddhist teachings. This school was established by Chih-i (538–597) and named after a mountain whose name can be translated as Heavenly Terrace. The school recognized all forms of Buddhism and found no antagonism between different traditions; it tried to include all periods and schools of Buddhism within an all-comprehensive system. This school was adopted in Japan as the Tendai school, and it become very powerful and influential during the medieval period of Japanese history. Both of these schools were to influence Ch'an/Zen Buddhism.

The worldview of the Hua-yen school envisions the cosmos as a self-creating, self-maintaining, and self-defining organism. This means that there is no theory of the beginning of time, no concept of a creator, no cosmic hierarchy, no cosmic center, and no purpose to the world. It is, rather, a cosmos of identity and intercausality. What affects one item in the cosmos affects every other item therein. Moreover, since nothing truly exists in and of itself, a single thing requires everything else to be what it is. All things in the universe thus exist only in interdependence and not in their own right. The school calls this emptiness. Within the context of this totalistic worldview, emptiness means that things are absolutely lacking in self-nature, whereas their existence derives from interdependence, giving the philosophy a somewhat distinct emphasis.[29]

An important implication of Hua-yen thought is that by knowing, for instance, a single phenomenon, I know all of reality. Although it may sound strange, the school claims that the whole universe is contained in a single grain of sand. This worldview ushers in a new attitude toward the natural world that is characterized

by respect, profound gratitude, and even ecstatic appreciation. Among members of this school, there is a tendency to reinterpret the Buddhist goal of enlightenment as a return to naturalness.

From the perspective of the Hua-yen school, emptiness is originally a negative philosophy because entities (dharmas) lack inherent existence. Hua-yen reinterprets this philosophy to mean that emptiness signifies an interdependent and interpenetrative nature of things. The Hua-yen position stresses that the identical nature of things signifies their static nature, whereas their interpenetration indicates their dynamic nature. What makes interpenetration possible is the nonsubstantial nature of things, which allows them to interpenetrate without the slightest obstruction. The jewel net of the Hindu deity Indra illustrates the spirit of this theory. Imagine the heavenly abode of Indra, in which there is a net that stretches out infinitely in all directions. There is hanging in each eye of the net a glittering jewel. By examining a single jewel, you will notice that it reflects all the other jewels in the net, and each of the jewels reflected in the single jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels. This infinitely reflecting process symbolizes a universe in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the aspects of it.

The T'ien-t'ai school, with its inspiration derived from the *Lotus Sūtra*, explains emptiness within the context of its doctrine of the threefold truth. To assert that all things are empty implies that they are also empty of the subjective notions that we superimpose upon them. With emptiness established as the initial truth, the second truth is identified as temporary or conventional, which suggests that things have a temporary existence as phenomena because they are in a constant state of flux. Third, the "middle" truth means that things are both empty and existent; that is, they represent simultaneous intersections of the particular and universal. Moreover, although particular things remain distinct, they are identical on the basis of their common emptiness, rendering things both empty and temporary. It should be noted at this point that "middle" does not mean between emptiness and temporary, but rather connotes over and above the other two truths. In summary, the three truths doctrine indicates that truth is actually singular and nondual because all things are part of one organic unity. The school expresses the unity of everything by its doctrine of three thousand Realms, which means that one knows three thousand realms in one instant of consciousness, because they are immanent within the single moment of consciousness. Consequently, the whole and its parts are identical, which enables a person to claim that it is possible to discover all the buddhas in a single grain of sand. The question is: How can we know this?

We can know that reality is an integrated unity by means of the procedure called the threefold contemplation. Chih-i gives an indication what this is like when he writes: "Contemplation is like a lamp, and calming like a closed room; they are like washing and rinsing clothes; or grasping and cutting grass."[30] In short, a person contemplates three things: emptiness, conventional existence,

and the middle. This threefold contemplation presupposes a preliminary process that empties the mind of all deluded thoughts, passion, and other obstacles to clear understanding, and it provides insight into the true nature of reality. The initial contemplation involves entering emptiness to negate the existence of independent substantial being; this eventually destroys deluded views and attitudes. Second, from the standpoint of emptiness, one enters conventional existence to obtain a correct understanding of and acceptance of objective phenomena as both interdependent and conditional, that is, mutually arisen. Success on this level destroys ignorance and attachment to the notion of emptiness. The highest contemplation is the middle, in which one simultaneously grasps intuitively the validity of both emptiness and conventional existence. Where does this realization leave a person. Chih-i answers this question in a metaphorical way: "Through the bending of the root and the snapping of the twigs Buddha-nature comes to be revealed."[31] In other words, it leaves a person with the realization that the truth is integrated, nondual, and synonymous. In short, this represents wisdom, the highest perfection, and the destruction of ignorance, which dawns suddenly in a single instant.

The T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen creatively reworked the philosophies of emptiness to construct a distinctly Chinese vision of reality. In part, this occurred because both schools used indigenous Chinese presuppositions that were largely derived from Taoist notions, and used to interpret Indian Buddhist ideas. In comparison to the Indian Sanskrit tradition of Buddhism, some Chinese innovations were reflected in a more positive interpretation of causality in their stress on the interdependence of things and the positive value attributed to nature. These innovations are manifested historically in Japanese Zen Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism conceived of emptiness as the genuine mode of existence of the phenomenal world, whereas Indian Buddhism grasped emptiness as a device to undermine concrete existence. We will witness in chapter 12 that Zen Buddhism also emphasizes the concrete.

10

Devotional Voices of the Pure Land

Imagine that you awaken in a rich and fertile land, filled with gods and humans who are without evil or pain. There are fragrant odors, various beautiful and exotic birds, sweet sounds, and many lotus flowers. The land is also filled with jewels. There are jewel trees and diamond bodies all over the place. The message of the Buddha is heard everywhere. If you get hungry, you simply wish for a meal. If you get thirsty, you can wish for a glass of hot or cold water. You can also wish for pleasant odors and sounds, and they will be there. If you awaken in such a place, you are located in the Pure Land (*Sukhāvati*). You will notice that in this land there are no perishable things like food or organic matter. Hunger is satisfied merely by wishing, and jewels are durable and pure in comparison to matter, which is subject to decay.

The Pure Land is a paradise that around 100 C.E. became a desirable destination for faithful Mahāyāna Buddhists. What is the origin of this notion? We have noted that bodhisattvas are beings of infinite compassion, who have taken vows to become fully enlightened beings and to work for the salvation of others. On the bodhisattvas' path to perfection, they perform many good deeds that result in the creation of an infinite supply of merit. From this excess merit, the bodhisattva creates a Buddha land in which such a being can reside. Those who have faith in the bodhisattva and actively serve him are reborn in this realm when the bodhisattva transfers a portion of his merit to the devotee. Anyone who is reborn in a Buddha land is reborn with perfect mental, physical, and spiritual capacities; these enable one to hear, understand, and practice the Dharma (teaching). This prepares and empowers a person to attain nirvāṇa, which remains the goal of all Buddhists despite the paradisiacal surroundings.

The primary text of Pure Land Buddhism is the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* (Pure Land Sūtra). There is both a long and a short version of the text. The former version emphasizes that rebirth in the Pure Land is a result of meritorious deeds plus faith and devotion to the Buddha Amitābha, whereas the shorter version states

that only faith and prayer are necessary. According to the longer version of the text, the Pure Land, which is located in the west, is the direct result of a compassionate vow made by Amitābha to lead sentient beings to enlightenment. By being reborn in the Pure Land, a person is guaranteed the attainment of the stage of nonretrogression and eventual awakening.

It is significant that Amitābha's name in Sanskrit suggests a direct connection to light and life. In the *Pure Land Sūtra* (composed around the late second century C.E.), he was originally a king who was converted to Buddhism, renounced his kingship, and became a monk named Dharmākara. After receiving an education in the basic Buddhist teachings, he vowed forty-eight times not to become a completely enlightened Buddha until he gained the power to produce a pure Buddhaland and to gather there everyone who wanted to be reborn in such a blissful place. As part of this process, he surveyed all the existing lands in all the universes and recorded their perfections. For many eons, he performed good deeds for others, and he eventually became Amitābha, who is conceived as a Buddha sitting on a lotus and emitting golden rays of light. He possesses eighty-four thousand auspicious and distinguishing marks that are material manifestations of his many virtues.

Within some Mahāyāna contexts, Amitābha is called Amitāyus, which means Infinite Life. In China, Amitābha is called A-mi-t'o (Infinite or Unlimited Light). In Tibetan Budhdism he is depicted as red in color, richly ornamented, wearing a crown, and surrounded by 108 emanations. His attendants are the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprapta. Amitābha's cult, which dates to around 100 C.E., conceived of him as a savior figure who functions to promote virtues, bestow material benefits, serve as an object of love, and provide favorable conditions for the attainment of enlightenment. The Pure Land movement represented two traditions: one devoted to Amitābha and the other centered on Maitreya, a messianic bodhisattva figure coming in the future. The latter tradition flourished in China earlier than the former, but it was eventually overtaken by the tradition of Amitābha.

The Pure Land Movement in China

Early leaders of the Pure Land movement, whose identities have not survived, developed a theory of history to explain the development of their teachings and practices. In the initial historical stage, they wrote, there appeared seven buddhas before the death of the historical figure. This theory of the seven buddhas is an attempt to account for the historical Buddha's achievement of nirvāṇa during his life, an accomplishment that was increasingly viewed as extraordinary by members of the Pure Land movement. The second stage of historical development saw an expansion of the Buddhist worldview. This stage was connected to a vision of transcendent buddhas existing simultaneously in other world-realms, where a single buddha governs each world. The cosmos was now populated with countless

transcendent buddhas that dispense benefits to those on earth from their immense stock of merit.

These multiple contemporary buddhas residing over transcendent realms converged, according to this theory of history, to form a specific cult focused on a single figure. The emergence of Amitābha as the central focus of the Pure Land movement represented the third stage, as expressed in the long and short versions of the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*. The fourth stage was characterized by the adoption of the practices of recitation and visualization. In the former practice, a person recited the name of Amitābha, which resulted in the eradication of karmic consequences for his or her actions. The latter practice involved visualizing the features of the Pure Land, Amitābha, and his attendant bodhisattvas, which helped a person gain spiritual tranquillity. A text that influenced later Japanese reformers was the non-Indian text called the *Visualization Sūtra* (*Kuan-ching*), which discussed the importance of having a vision of Amitābha on one's deathbed and the nine possible statuses of rebirth from low to high levels of comprehension in the Pure Land. Finally, during the fifth stage, there developed the critical commentarial tradition.

During this fifth historical stage, the doctrine of T'an-luan (476–542 C.E.), who was the first master of the Chinese Pure Land lineage, was developed. Historians think that he may have originated the practice of reciting and meditating on the name of Amitābha. T'an-luan organized societies for this purpose, and he attempted to spread his teachings and practices within the larger society. He was fond of saying that he lived in an age without a Buddha present, which suggested the need for his approach to religion. He drew a contrast between a self-powered person and an other-powered person. The former practiced Buddhist discipline and meditation to gain divine powers, because such a person feared being reborn in an unhappy condition; this was a course of action based on a dualistic view of reality. The self-powered person thought that he or she could construct a bridge to infinity by rigorous practice—an attitude of arrogance and pride. Even though such people claimed to be conquering ego, therefore, they were actually cultivating it. In contrast, the other-powered person was grounded on nondualism because this person relied only on Amitābha. Instead of nurturing the arrogance and pride associated with practicing discipline and meditation, the other-powered person simply recited the name of Amitābha. A fundamental presupposition of T'an-lun's position was that there was a power inherent in the name of the Buddha that was creative and could purify one's mind and person of sin, which functioned to secure rebirth in the Pure Land.

This path of Buddhism did not exclude an evil person from the Western Paradise, according to T'an-luan. Because all beings possessed the Buddha-nature, one only had to have a sincere desire to be reborn in the Pure Land and rely on the power of Amitābha for salvation. The only people who were truly excluded from the Pure Land were those who reviled its teaching. In fact, the punishment for blasphemy was repeated rebirth in the lowest and most awful hells.

T'an-luan's contributions to the conceptual and practical aspects of Pure Land Buddhism were followed by those of Tao-ch'o (562–645). This leader of the movement saw two basic human dilemmas, which he expressed in the parable of "The Two Rivers and the White Path." In this parable a person was traveling on a path toward the west. Located to the south of the path was a river of fire, while to the north was a river of water. Between these two deep and wide rivers, the white path was only four or five inches wide. The traveler could not stop and rest because fire and water threatened to overwhelm or inundate the path all along the way. Except for numerous wild animals and robbers who threatened to kill the traveler, the place was desolate. Athough it was possible to turn back, the traveler concluded that going either backward or forward would result in death. Because death appeared certain, the traveler decided to journey toward the west. After making this choice, the traveler heard a voice urging him or her onward and confirming the wise decision, and also heard a voice from the west pledging protection and comfort. Robbers attempted to plant doubts in his or her mind, but the traveler proceeded and escaped evil on the western shore. The meaning of the parable was not difficult to comprehend. The danger surrounding the traveler, the uncertain road being traversed, and the importance of decision were all features that represented the initial human dilemma seen by Tao-ch'o. The second human dilemma was being bound to the cycle of rebirth and being unable to discover the two excellent teachings: the Holy Path and the Gate of the Pure Land.

The Holy Path was difficult to practice in this current age, because this was a time far removed from the time of the Buddha and the doctrines were too abstruse for the small intellects of this age. Moreover, it was a very difficult struggle to progress from the status of a mere mortal to that of a sage. The Gate of the Pure Land, however, represented a chance to gain salvation at a time of the decline of Buddhism in the world. By means of the recitation of Amitābha's name, one could gain admittance to the Pure Land where one could progress to sagehood without any hindrances and attain Buddhahood.

The thought of such individuals as T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o helped spread the popularity of Pure Land Buddhism to the common people and made it a religious movement of broad popular appeal. Instead of the having to renounce the world and embrace the rigors of meditation and monastic life, common people were offered an opportunity to become more fully involved without rejecting social ties, livelihood, and the world. The doctrine and practice of Pure Land Buddhism were simple, easily learned and practiced, and suited to the everyday life of people. A person who practiced diligently would be richly rewarded for positive practice in a blissful, utopian paradise. From one perspective, Pure Land devotionalism represented a reversal of the traditional Buddhist position, in the sense that the religion was now considered from the point of view of the unenlightened individual. It also marked a movement to a new type of existential religious discourse and away from an emphasis on abstract metaphysics.[1]

Later additions to the Pure Land movement in China included voluntary societies such as the Non-Action Movements, which were grounded on the teachings of Lo-ch'ing (1443–1527), who sharply criticized monastic Buddhism. Lo-ch'ing simplified religious practice by eliminating all enjoined religious activities, including such practices as vegetarianism, meditation, good works, maintenance of temples, belief in either deities or hell, ritual, image worship, intellectual activity, and popular practices like fortune-telling and exorcism. Instead of these types of practice, Lo-ch'ing advocated retaining only a kind of spontaneous introspection by the devotee.[2] Eventually, Pure Land Buddhism was transported to Japan where it became the most popular and widespread form of Buddhism, after overcoming opposition from the Tendai sect founded by Saichō (767–822) and the Shingon sect established by Kūkai (774–835), which had established powerful political connections in Japanese culture.

The Pure Land Movement in Japan

Pure Land Buddhism developed in Japan during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), a very turbulent time in the history of the country. There were natural disasters such as drought, the earthquake of Shōka that in 1257 leveled large sections of the city of Kamakura, famine, and epidemics; and there were attempts by the Mongols in 1274 and 1281 to invade Japan, which created widespread social anxiety and uncertainty. Various Buddhist temples engaged in war with the imperial court and each other, using mercenary monks who plundered, set fires, and killed victims. There were over a hundred riots that spanned the Heian and the Kamakura periods. Besides the violence, powerful temples played prominent economic roles as overlords of huge estates. Moreover, their alliances with state political centers of power gave them a large social and ideological influence. The period was also marked by a major shift in political power away from the royal court to ruling feudal groups lead by *shoguns* (generals). The period began with the victory of the Minamoto clan over the Taira clan in the Genpei War (1180–1185). This victory represented a challenge by provincial warriors to the imperial center at Kyoto and its courtier-administered system of land tenure. In competition with this older system, the leader of the Minamoto clan established the so-called "tent government" in Kamakura, which essentially functioned as a competing center of military and political power that became interconnected with the royal court.

These developments had important consequences for Japanese Buddhism, because the decline of the royal court and nobility led to a withdrawal of patronage and financial support for the major sects of the time, namely, the Shingon and Tendai. The uncertainties of human existence during turbulent times fed a sense of urgency for an immediate solution and response to problems associated with religion and questions of salvation. The unstable political and cultural situation created an opening for the development of new sects offering more inventive and creative responses to the dire threats of the period. In hindsight, the paradoxical

aspect of this situation and its aftermath was that Buddhism became a mass movement that transcended social and sexual distinctions for the first time in its history. It would be too simplistic to draw the conclusion that Pure Land sects represented a distortion of Buddhism. We suggested earlier the role of devotion in the formative period of Buddhism, even during the lifetime of the historical Buddha. Thus a thread of devotionalism has been a vital aspect of the religion from its inception, and it is possible to view the Pure Land sects as emphasizing these particular Buddhist principles over others.

The initial major figure of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan was Hōnen (1133–1212), the founder of the Jōdo (Pure Land) school. The ironic aspect of this development was that Hōnen never intended to alienate the preexisting schools of Buddhism or establish an independent school. He conservatively adhered to the basic Buddhist precepts, and he equated the Pure Land with the paradise of Amida Buddha (Sanskrit: Amitābha). Hōnen created, however, a new paradigm in which every believer accepted his or her status as an ordinary individual. This ordinariness included male and female, lay person and monastic, commoner and aristocrat. And yet his position was radical in the sense that it rejected the Buddhist assumption that the path to salvation must be based on difficult forms of practice.[3]

Hōnen's birth name was Seishimaru, and his father was a police chief responsible for order in his region. He witnessed the assassination of his father in their home when he was nine years old. This action was precipitated by an act of disrespect by his father against a government representative. Because his mother was connected by birth to the Hata clan of silkworm workers, who were considered to be in an unclean occupation pursued by members of the lower class, Hōnen experienced social discrimination during his life. His biographies do not mention the fate of his mother, but we do know that Hōnen was sent to live with his maternal uncle, a Tendai Buddhist priest. After four years, his uncle sent him to Mount Hiei, where Hōnen was identified by his wisdom as a future candidate to become an abbot. Turning his back on such a promising expectation, Hōnen secluded himself in a *bessho* (separate place), a location for hermits to congregate and practice meditation and various forms of asceticism such as fasting, chanting, and more extreme practices such as burning oneself and using one's limbs as candle stands.[4] In 1175, when he was forty-three years old, Hōnen had a conversion experience that was connected to an encounter with a text. In response to his religious activities, political authorities exiled Hōnen, his disciple Shinran, and six others, and sentenced four of them to death in the so-called Ken'ei Persecution of 1205.

A major factor shaping the worldview of Hōnen was the theory of the decline of the law (*mappō*), meaning the teachings of the Buddha. The basic theory of the deterioration of Buddhist law began in China in the sixth century and taught that there was a tripartite pattern of degeneration. The first era was that of the true law, when teaching, practice, and results coexisted. The second phase was that of

counterfeit law, when the results were lost, suggesting that it was difficult to achieve nirvāṇa. The last days were characterized by only the teachings. In Japan, there developed a general consensus that the final days began in 1052 with the conflagration of the Hasedera temple. Hōnen and others often referred to a text by a monk named Saichō (767–822) that forecast the impending arrival of the last days, which increased a sense of impending crisis.

Like the Chinese theory, Hōnen's notion identified three major ages of progressive degeneration of the teachings. There was first an ideal age, when people followed the teaching and could attain enlightenment. Then there arose the period of counterfeit doctrine, when people practiced the teachings of the Buddha even though they knew that enlightenment was impossible. Finally, there arrived the current degenerate age, when no one bothered to practice the teachings and Buddhism totally disappeared. During this final age, people feared an imminent end of the world as they witnessed evil gaining a firmer grip on the world. During this period, humans were governed by neurotic cravings and desires. Within the context of this doctrine, one should be aware that mappō was not a part of human nature like original sin; it was something external to a person that contributed to one's present dire spiritual condition. It was dire because it prevented a person from doing what was necessary for salvation. The law of mappō thus enhanced Hōnen's emphasis that ordinary people populate the world.[5]

Within this bleak context, Hōnen distinguished between two paths of religion: a Holy Path (*shōdō*) and Pure Land path (*jōdo*). The former was referred to as *jiriki*, meaning reliance on one's own strength, whereas the latter was called *tariki*, suggesting reliance on another's strength. The jiriki path was considered a difficult option, but the tariki was viewed as an easy path and the best choice within the context of the current degenerate age in which individuals cannot be expected to achieve salvation by means of their own efforts. In the current situation, it was preferable for people to recognize their imperfections and simply throw themselves upon the mercy of Amida. Thus the only real hope for a person was to be reborn in the Pure Land by means of the grace of Amida.

If this was the solution, the problem was finding a way to trigger this grace. The solution Hōnen proposed was framed by the so-called Hōzō myth. In this narrative, Amida was a bodhisattva named Hōzō in a prior lifetime. As Hōzō, he vowed to postpone liberation until everyone could be saved by the practice of *nembutsu* (chanting the name of a bodhisattva). The fact that Hōzō had actually become Amida was incontrovertible proof that everyone was guaranteed salvation. With this myth as his model, Hōnen recommended invoking or chanting of Amida's name. Hōnen made his position clear: "The rightly established act is reciting the name of Amida Buddha. Those who recite the name will unfailingly attain birth because it is based on Amida's original vow."[6] A person was instructed to chant "namu Amida"or "namu Amida Butsu," which means "I put my faith in Amida Buddha." Again, we witness the conviction that the name of the Buddha

was the mysterious embodiment of his saving power. Hōnen emphasized fervent devotion and the endless repetition of Amida's name.

Since everyone, regardless of social status, gender, ability, knowledge, and conduct could be saved by faithfully chanting the name of Amida, it was possible for everyone to reach the Pure Land. But a person did not actually attain the Pure Land until the moment of death. Because Hōnen made salvation simultaneous with death, death became an experience of transcendence beyond the ordinary distinction between life and death. An important implication of this line of thinking, especially in uncertain times like the Kamakura period, was that accidental deaths were not to be feared because death was by implication salvation.[7]

This easy method promised salvation for everyone who practiced chanting. Moreover, the repetitive nature of the chanting fostered the growth of belief. Like the Buddhist practice of mindfulness (*sati*), chanting focused the mind on a single thing, and the chanter's consciousness became absorbed (*samādhi*) in Amida. This represented a creative reinterpretation and transformation of a Buddhist meditative method. In an autobiographical reflection, Hōnen compared chanting to the reflection of the moon in water, where the image could rise freely upward or shine down on the water.[8] By adopting this method of practice and devotion, a person took a step with radical ramifications because it meant rejecting the traditional schools of Buddhism. From a political and social perspective, this made such a person marginal at that period of Japanese culture.

The New School of a Disciple

A close disciple of Hōnen was Shinran (1173–1262), who went into exile with his master. He was to eventually establish the Jōdo Shinshu (True Pure Land) sect, which was to grow into the largest Buddhist sect in Japan. Shinran was the son of a lower-level Kyoto aristocrat. He received a thorough education in the Buddhist classics, and joined the Tendai school. Throughout his life, dreams and visions played a momentous role in his religious development. Experiencing personal religious turmoil, he became distressed over his fate in the next life, and was tormented by sexual impulses. The year 1201 marked a turning point in his life, when he relinquished all hope of achieving salvation by way of the Tendai teaching. He renounced monastic life and converted to Hōnen's teachings. Between 1204 and 1207, he was married and started a family. Eventually, he became a close and trusted disciple of Hōnen. Shinran adopted the pejorative title "Bald-head," a term that referred to monks who had broken the precepts without any sense of remorse.[9]

Like his mentor Hōnen, Shinran's religious thinking was shaped by the mappō doctrine (decline of the law). Due to the degenerate nature of the age, it was impossible for a person to perform a single good deed because, Shinran thought, all so-called good deeds were self-centered and involved in passion. He concluded that no one could perform an act that could bring salvation. If a person

attempted an act to win salvation, he or she necessarily had an ulterior motive, such as a desire to be saved. Thus one must throw oneself on the mercy of Amida and rely solely on the power of his saving grace—although this attitude did not preclude nembutsu, chanting Amida's name.

Shinran interpreted the practice of nembutsu to reflect his own religious struggle and convictions. The initial word of nembutsu, *namu*, means "I take refuge in." From Shinran's perspective, this term did not represent a calculated decision on a person's part. Rather, the practice of invoking Amida's name was due to the magnetism of the principal vow (*namu*), which had the power to elicit the nembutsu from people, and did not mean that the vow originated with the believer. Instead, the vow originated with Amida; it was a creation of the Buddha that he extended to the believer.[10] However, Shinran considered the continual invocation of Amida's name that Hōnen's position seemed to suggest as the wrong kind of practice, because it implied that one could do something to win salvation, which suggested a tendency to rely on one's own power. Thus, Shinran claimed that nembutsu was not a practice or a good deed because a person did not contrive it; it was due entirely to other-power and was free from self-power.[11] Shinran argued that a single, sincere invocation was sufficient. If a person made additional recitations of Amida's name, this was merely an expression of thanksgiving.

Shinran radicalized his religious position by claiming that a wicked person might have a better chance to be reborn in the Pure Land than a good person.[12] Shinran wanted to suggest that wicked persons might be more acceptable to Amida than good ones because the former would be more inclined to throw themselves entirely on the mercy of the Buddha, whereas the latter might be tempted to think their chances of salvation could be improved by their good deeds. By being intentionally provocative, Shinran emphasized the importance of faith.

For Shinran, genuine faith existed only in conjunction with the nembutsu, which cannot be truly invoked without faith. If the invocation lacks true faith, it is not a genuine practice. In his writings, Shinran isolated three elements of faith: a sincere mind, trustfulness, and a desire for rebirth into the Pure Land. The active cause of faith is the name of Amida, whereas the passive cause is the light of Amida. This light is equivalent to wisdom, and it refers to the religious experience of being illumined. In the final analysis, faith is a gift from Amida, a product of his mind implanted in the believer.[13]

For Shinran, faith was the achievement by a believer of the Buddha-nature, which he defined as a state of egolessness. This state involved an awareness of one's evil nature and the need for Amida's grace. For Shinran, wherever faith existed Buddhahood was imminent and truly assured. Once this state was reached, there was no retrogression because faith represented an indestructible state of mind.

Salvation was universal because Amida had promised to forsake no one. Therefore, no one was excluded from the gift of faith. Nevertheless, individuals in

whom faith arose were extremely rare. And in the final years of his life, Shinran emphasized just how rare and precious a gift faith was. During the periods of 1255 to 1257, he stressed that faith rendered a person equivalent to the Buddha. This did not mean that faith was the same as enlightenment, but rather that faith gave an assurance of it. By rediscovering Shan-tao's reference to an independent practice of recitation and the traditional Buddhist understanding that in the end enlightenment can only occur by itself, Shinran coined the term *ekō* to designate a process of enlightenment that arrived externally to the self. The term *ekō* (turning of merit) embodied two meanings. On the one hand, it stood for a spontaneous religious transformation that he termed "yielding" or "entrusting" (*shinjin*) to the reality of Amida. On the other hand, the term referred to a process of redefinition and revalorization of the concepts. This meant that Amida and the Pure Land referred, respectively, to perfect enlightenment and partial insight of enlightenment. From a historical perspective, Shinran's concept of ekō recalled the traditional Mahāyāna dialectic concerning the interrelationship between enlightenment and ignorance, which meant that enlightenment was distinct from conventional consciousness.[14]

During Shinran's lifetime, his movement lacked any formal organization because he had not envisioned himself as the founder of a new religious school. He understood himself as belonging to the Pure Land school of Hōnen, and he was apparently convinced that his teaching was identical to that of his master. Reportedly, he was also unconcerned with organizational matters, and he denied having any disciples. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there developed what was called the *dōjō*, a meeting place, which was to emerge as the basic unit of religious organization the Pure Land school. The local congregation affiliated with the meeting place became known as nembutsu members or religious companions. The central place of worship had a large inscription of Amida's name hung over a simple altar. The meeting place (*dōjō*) was distinct from a Buddhist temple because the former was secular and diverse. Buddhist priests were understood to be superior to lay believers, and temples operated according to a hierarchical order of priests. The meeting place, on the other hand, was a local and independent self-governing organization that operated collectively. Initially, the meeting place was maintained by voluntary contributions, but these dues later became an obligation of membership. In contrast, Buddhist temples were supported by endowments from provincial estates. Thus the meeting place was a private religious association operated and supported by its members, whereas the temple was a public institution.

Later, the Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land) of Shinran did develop temples. Shinran's grandson Kakunyo (1270–1351) led the Honganji or temple tradition, which it reached its historical apogee with the eighth lineal head named Rennyo (1415–1499), who was the son of a servant girl working at the temple, born out of wedlock. During his adult life, Rennyo synthesized and popularized doctrine by stressing that faith was the genuine cause of birth in the Pure Land. The

recitation of nembutsu, which was a confirmation of salvation and a symbol of it for both saver and saved, was an expression of gratitude, which arose from faith and represented an extension of it.[15] Rennyo also advised followers to be discreet and prudent in order to protect the school from external criticism and to be humble in their faith. Rennyo instituted the practice of composing pastoral letters as a way to follow up his preaching; in these he blended together simple folk stories and indoctrination. The centerpiece of devotional service was the annual Hōonkū ceremony in memory of Shinran. Rennyo placed his children, male and female, in leadership roles of regional temples in order to extend the authority of the temple. He had plenty of clerical talent to draw on because he fathered twenty-seven children with a series of five successive wives.

In retrospect, the Pure Land schools of Hōnen and Shinran experienced a remarkable success and an ability to attract large numbers of adherents by appealing to nonaristocratic and non-samurai elites. Part of their success can be traced to their gaining solid bases among the lower classes of the countryside, which were excluded from the social and political connections of the predominant forms of Buddhism. Faith-based congregations emerged as rallying points for the promotion of the interests of village society, giving rural folk a means for voicing their concerns. The reach of the Pure Land schools was aided by Buddhist evangelists who extensively disseminated the message of the path. After his passing, Shinran's followers created a sectarian doctrine, and they devised methods and means for communicating his message to the common people. The later followers of Shinran were emboldened enough to engage in a number of peasant rebellions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

If we compare Hōnen with his disciple Shinran in terms of doctrinal differences, we see that for Hōnen, there was a connection between Buddhist ethical precepts and salvation, and he conformed to accepted standards of morality during his life, whereas Shinran thought that salvation was guaranteed even if the precepts were broken, and he proceeded to do this by getting married and eating meat. Another major difference between them was their interpretation of nembutsu (reciting Amida's name). Whereas Hōnen emphasized repetitive recitation, Shinran declared that a single, faith-centered, chant was sufficient for salvation. With respect to their understanding of salvation, Hōnen equated physical death with salvation, whereas Shinran made faith absolute and redefined death to mean the demise of the self that depended on its own power and the rebirth of a self grounded in faith from the gracious benevolence of Amida. Regardless of their differences, Hōnen and Shinran were instrumental in turning Buddhism into a popular and widespread mass movement.

It is common to view Pure Land as a deviant form of Buddhism or a new form of the religious tradition. It is probably more accurate to view it as an emergence of a trend that was latent within Buddhism from its inception in India, which represents the growing of a seed planted many centuries in its past. To claim that it is deviant neglects its historical context and the way that it responded to a tumul-

tuous and dangerous period of Japanese history. It gave the hopeless and powerless some hope and relief from feelings of despair. If one looks at the movement in context, it represents the most fully developed form of lay Buddhism, achieved by idealizing the lay dimension of the religion.[16] From a historical perspective, Pure Land Buddhism advocates the lay path over the path of the monk.

The Voice of a Prophetic Figure

During the tumultuous period of the Kamakura period, another voice arose to address the difficult times and to offer a solution. This was the voice of Nichiren (1222–1282), who came from humble family circumstances—although it might not have been as humble as he claimed later in life, because his father was probably a manager or official who administered fishing rights in a village in Awa Province at the tip of the Bōsō Peninsula. Nichiren received a Buddhist education at Seicho-ji in the mountains of Kominato in present-day Chiba Prefecture, and was ordained a monk in the Tendai sect by his teacher Dōzen-bō, who also taught him how to chant nembutsu, which he was to reject later in his life. Nichiren had a lifelong attachment to his teacher, who also taught him to revere the *Lotus Sūtra*. Nichiren was concerned to discover what writings embodied the true teachings and intention of the Buddha. After praying before an image of the bodhisattva Kokūzō (Sanskrit: Ākāśagarbha) to become the wisest man in Japan, he received a vision of this figure in the guise of a monk, and was given a jewel of wisdom, a gift that gave him an understanding of the other Buddhist schools. He set forth on a personal pilgrimage that lasted for twenty years, to visit various Buddhist centers of learning. During some point of his journey, he became convinced that the *Lotus Sūtra* represented the true teachings of Buddhism. During his life, he composed more than five hundred works that testify to his wide knowledge of not only Buddhist thought but also Confucian classics.

On April 28, 1253, Nichren spoke to a group of monks—a speech that represented the founding of a new sect and a revival of focus on the *Lotus Sūtra*. There is no evidence that he thought at this time that he was establishing a new doctrine. He appeared to believe that he was reforming the Tendai school. According to hagiographical literature, he climbed a hill that morning in April at sunrise to chant for the first time and at noon preached his sermon, although in reality events may have unfolded over a longer period of time. A political leader tried to have him arrested for causing dissension, but he escaped with the assistance of his former teacher. Returning to the area eleven years later, he was almost killed in an ambush. This attack did not deter him from attracting followers of the Tendai sect and middle- and lower-ranking samurai warriors.[17] His thought was still undeveloped at this point of his career, although he began to recommend chanting the *daimoku*, or the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*. He was the first person to "define the *daimoku* as an exclusive practice and to provide it with a doctrinal foundation."[18] He later became convinced that it was important to be

prepared to surrender one's life for this text because it was the only means to salvation.

Nichiren arrived in Kamakura in 1254 to witness several calamities associated with drought, storms, famine, epidemics, fires, and earthquakes. What he saw disturbed him, and he consulted the scriptures to understand what was occurring. He came to the conclusion that Hōnen's pernicious teaching of the nembutsu was the cause of the various calamities. Eventually, his criticism triggered a strong response that caused a mob to attack him. Finally, he was arrested and exiled to the Izu peninsula for his outspoken criticism. His exile forced him into an adversarial role that also motivated him to define his religious path.[19] During his exile, he referred to himself as a practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra*—a testimony to its central place in his religion.

On February 22, 1263, Nichiren was pardoned from his exile. After traveling for some time, he returned to Kamakura in 1268, at a time when Japan was being threatened by an invasion by the Mongols, who were now in control of the Yüan Dynasty in China. Nichiren and his community were emboldened by his prior prophecy about a foreign invasion, which appeared about to occur. Nichiren now began to challenge political officials and major temples, which created more enemies for him. Again, on September 12, 1271, he was arrested and sentenced to exile on the island of Sado in the Sea of Japan. Hagiographical literature recounts that he was nearly beheaded, but a bright object streaking through the sky saved him from his terrified executioners. During his second exile, he lived in a hut in a graveyard and suffered from cold and hunger during the winter months, along with some loyal disciples. Nichiren interpreted his sufferings as karmic retribution for slandering the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* in previous lifetimes. In fact, he compared his suffering to that of the bodhisattva Never Despising in chapter 20 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, who was mocked and tormented when he preached the message of universal Buddhahood but became Śākyamuni in another lifetime.

Nichiren viewed himself as the Buddha's messenger sent to propagate the *Lotus Sūtra* in the final age and to substantiate the validity of its teaching. Nichiren began to identify his efforts with the bodhisattva Superior Conduct in chapter 15 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, who was entrusted with preaching the text in the age after the nirvāṇa of Śākyamuni. Superior Conduct and other bodhisattvas were originally disciples of the original, primordial Buddha, who has been enlightened since an inconceivably remote time in the past, and not of the historical figure who attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The purpose of Nichiren's position was to claim a direct connection to this original, primordial Buddha, who preceded the historical figure. During the Sado exile, Nichiren articulated his own teaching in distinction from that of the Tendai school.

On February 14, 1274, he was pardoned and returned to Kamakura. Authorities asked him when the Mongol attack might occur, and he replied within a year, which proved to be an accurate prediction. Moreover, he preached that only reliance on the *Lotus Sūtra* could forestall the disaster. But he refused to add his

prayers to those of other sects for the protection of the country. After two months, he left Kamakura for the last time to become a solitary pilgrim. He ended his life training disciples and continued to write, spending nine years near Mount Minobu. He fell ill in 1282, and he died on route to the hot springs of Hitachi.

Teachings of a Japanese Prophet

The importance of the *Lotus Sūtra* to Nichiren's thought has been alluded to several times. According to Nichiren's interpretation, this text reflected the victory of the oppressed, a group in which he included himself. The bodhisattva Superior Conduct mentioned in chapter 15 of the text was the leader of a vast army of bodhisattvas that emerged from below the earth to worship the Buddha—a scenario that inspired Nichiren to see a symbolic representation of the lowly winning release from injustice.

The *Lotus Sūtra* was so central to Nichiren's religious ethos that he established it as an object of veneration. In Nichiren's conception, it assumed a metaphysical importance beyond that of an ordinary text. From his perspective, the text contained the seed of Buddhahood. It was something that everyone could understand and everyone possessed an innate capacity to achieve salvation by means of it. The *Lotus Sūtra* taught that other Buddhas are mere emanations of Śākyamuni, or the historical Buddha. The historical figure of the Buddha has always been present in the world and has precedence over all other awakened beings. When the Buddha entered into nirvāṇa, this was an act of skillful means (*upāya*) intended to motivate people to want his teaching. He urged others: "Carry through with your faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*."[20] And he promoted a connection between the people and the text.

According to Nichiren, a specific people inherited the island of Japan as a reward for their accumulated good karma. This karmic recompense connecting the people and the land suggested that they were nondual, which meant that Japan was related exclusively to the *Lotus Sūtra*. Not only was there a close connection between the text and Japan, the text was intended by the Buddha to be spread at this final, degenerate age. Along with his contemporaries, Nichiren believed that this final age began in 1052. But unlike other religious thinkers who perceived the final age to be dark, sinister, and gloomy, Nichiren asserted that we should rejoice and celebrate because the dawn of the final age was the best possible time to be living.

It has already been mentioned that the *Lotus Sūtra* contained the seed of Buddhahood, which provided the condition for realization. The metaphor of the seed recalled the preaching of the Buddha, which sowed the initial seeds of enlightenment. But this must be understood as a simultaneous process of sowing, maturing, and harvesting. What helped to fertilize this seed was daimoku (chanting the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*), which itself was referred to as a seed. For the practice of daimoku, Nichiren drew on a Chinese tradition of title interpretation which

believed that the title of a text contained its entire meaning. Since the *Lotus Sūtra* was the single true vehicle for the final age, it was considered to be all-inclusive, in the sense that its five characters in the Japanese language contained every teaching and all phenomena. Nichiren failed to stress observance of moral and ethical precepts because he was convinced that the merit associated with the precepts was already present in the chanting of the title of the text.[21] Moreover, the daimoku contained the entirety of the Buddha's enlightenment, which became accessible to a person when he or she chanted it. When the title of the text was chanted, a person embodied a mind of all-inclusive faith, which was a substitute for the traditional Buddhist disciplines of ethical precepts, meditation, and wisdom.[22] Within this moment of faith, everything became nondual.

The chanting of the title of the *Lotus Sūtra* was verbal action, which was complemented by a visual object of worship (*honzon*). Nichiren introduced a physical icon in the form of a calligraphic maṇḍala (sacred diagram) that visually represented reality. This was not merely representational, because it was something that actually participated in the sacred power or reality it depicted. The icon represented and participated in the reality of the Buddha, implying that the Buddha was both immanent and transcendent, and encompassed all things. Even though the object of worship was an insentient form, it still was able to manifest Buddhahood because everything was nondual in a single thought-moment. The intention of verbal chanting and visualization was to gain a direct access to the enlightenment of the Buddha.

Nichiren often expressed this access as realizing the three thousand realms in one thought-moment that was equivalent to the thought-moment of the original Buddha, an insight that he equated with the central message of the *Lotus Sūtra*. This realization was nonlinear in the sense that awakening occurred in the moment of practice in a timeless state in which the various realms and Buddhahood exist simultaneously, which was always accessible in the act of chanting the title of the text. Within this original, nonlinear time, the distinctions between the three moments of time dissolved, which implied that a person did not progress from ignorance to enlightenment. Rather everything was realized in a single thought-moment. Therefore, a person who aroused the mind of faith by chanting the title of the text realized in his or her body identity with the Buddha. This implied that a person realized the Pure Land in this world. Thus this world became the Pure Land. This nonduality depended on a nondual practice and a nondual condition of faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*. In conclusion, Nichiren offered a new paradigm of enlightenment for his historical time and place.[23]

Later Developments

At the present time, Nichiren's emphasis on the *Lotus Sūtra* is advocated by a religious organization called Soka Gakkai, or the Value Creation Society, which was founded by Tsunesaburo Makaguchi (1871–1944), who was born into a poor family

in a village in northwestern Japan. As an adult, he worked for educational reform, and he worked as a teacher and administrator in Tokyo schools for a couple of decades. Makaguchi combined different secular sources such as cultural geography, the pragmatism of John Dewey, and sociology. These sources helped Makaguchi to envision an educational system that would promote personal happiness, material and spiritual gain, and social responsibility to create new values and a harmonious community. In addition to his secular sources of inspiration, Makaguchi drew strength from the religious dimensions of the Nichiren movement. The wartime government of Japan banned the society he founded, incarcerated the entire leadership, and charged them with treason for their resistance to government efforts to consolidate the various sects of the Nichiren movement and for their opposition to state-supported Shintoism and its cult of the divine emperor. Makaguchi died of malnutrition during his imprisonment. He refused to the end to recant his allegiance to Nichiren Buddhism and the society Soka Gokkai.

According to Makaguchi's thought, the two operative notions were truth and value. Truth was constant and unchanging. It possessed benefits for humans, and it was not created by them. In contrast to truth, value was subject to change depending on space and time. Value was created by humans and presupposed a subject-object relationship, whereas truth revealed simply what was the case. The truth could be expressed as the statement, for instance, "There is a lion," whereas value could be expressed as "The lion is beautiful." When a person made the latter statement he or she created value. It was possible for a person creating value to find happiness by pursuing it. In other words, happiness could be defined as an ideal state that was realized by the possession of values.

After Makaguchi's death, Josei Toda (d. 1958), a long-time assistant, friend, and fellow prisoner, succeeded him. He introduced a less secular and more religious emphasis to the movement. His most important innovation was the *shakubuku*, a form of street proselytizing, preaching, and teaching. The motive behind the practice was the intention to achieve personal happiness. Toda accepted the priestly authority of the Nichiren hierarchy. These priests performed weddings, rites of passage, and memorial services for the laity, which also adhered to the religious doctrines of Nichiren. Toda's strong religious turn eventually resulted in a split of the movement between the laity and Nichiren priests.

Concluding Remarks

The historical development of Pure Land Buddhism represented in China and Japan a response by adherents to periods of uncertainty, instability, and suffering. The unstable historical situation created a need for a path of religion that could meet the psychological, social, and existential needs of ordinary people. Because it responded to these kinds of needs, Pure Land Buddhism represented a path of personal hope and empowerment. In contrast to a path grounded on faith, the

practice of meditation was not considered a sufficiently immediate response. Meditation was also rejected because it was a difficult form of practice that implied renouncing the world and a life of solitude. The faith-based Pure Land movement appealed to ordinary, nonelite folk who were seeking a path of religion that was less arduous and demanding. Moreover, people wanted to be good Buddhists without renouncing the world and joining a monastic community.

The Pure Land movement did not represent a deviant form of Buddhism that was far removed from the original message of the Buddha. Even during his lifetime, ordinary people reacted to the Buddha with devotional types of behavior. Therefore, Buddhism embodied devotional aspects from its inception. The Pure Land movement developed these early tendencies within the religion. It also more fully developed the lay potential of the religion. The Pure Land movement enables one to see that Mahāyāna Buddhism is more than a path for those willing to follow a strictly monastic life. This type of devotional Buddhism is for everyone.

11

Tales of Lamas: Tibetan Buddhism

After rising from the primordial waters, the only inhabitants of the earth were a monkey, who was an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and an ogress. The ogress was a creature of uncontrollable emotion and sexual impulses, whereas the monkey was a peaceful and contemplative figure. Because the monkey practiced his meditation alone in a cave, the ogress believed that she was completely alone on the earth, and she wept profusely for a mate. Overhearing her cry of emotional and sexual distress, the meditatively inclined monkey was moved by compassion to comfort the ogress, and they engaged in a sexual union that produced six offspring who were born without tails, little hair on their bodies, and walked upright.[1] These binary opposites were thus the mythological original inhabitants of the earth and ancestors of the Tibetans, long before the advent of Buddhism. The location of these inhabitants was often called Kangchen (meaning Land of Snows). Some scholars think that the name Tibet originated from the Mongolian term Thubet. However, we know very little with certainty about the early pre-Buddhist history of Tibet.

The origin of Tibetan history is associated with a king who allegedly came from India, who was born with strange physical attributes that included long blue eyebrows and webbed fingers. Possibly because of his unusual physical appearance, his people rejected him, and he wandered north and eventually arrived in Tibet. In another version of the tale, the king was a refugee from the war between two families, as recorded in the great Indian epic the *Mahābhārata*, who fled north disguised as a woman—a disguise reminiscent of the heroic warrior Arjuna of the epic. When people inquired about his native place, he pointed toward the sky. Assuming that he had descended from the heavens, the people made him king, carrying him on their shoulders to their village and calling him the "Neck-Enthroned King." Thereafter, the newly appointed king built the first house in which people could live instead of the caves in which they had lived previously, and he began to introduce elements of Indian culture. When this original king

died he ascended to heaven by means of a sky-rope. Generations of his successors followed his example of ascent until the period of the seventh king, when the rope was severed, leaving the eighth king on the earth in the Yarlung Valley near the Tsangpo River, which had served as the capital of the country since the original king.

The legend of the king and the sky-rope formed the background for a cult of divine kingship, with the son of the king representing the continually reborn essence of the previous divine monarch. Although the king possessed a magical power, the so-called encompassing "body spirit" that protected his person and power, nonetheless the king did not rule alone, even though he was considered divine. The monarch formed a trinity of power with the head priest and chief minister, two figures who represented the active power of government. When a new king assumed the throne, a new trinity including priest and minister was also instituted.[2]

Although there are some elements of history within these myths and legends, it was not until the sixth century C.E. that we begin to find more reliable historical evidence about Tibet. The Yarlung Dynasty in the early sixth century C.E. united most of the warring tribes of Tibet and built itself into a military power in the region. Initially, the Tibetan military forces invaded northern India, ransacked Buddhist monasteries and libraries, and killed many monks, although Buddhism would eventually transform its culture. Tibet was powerful enough in 635 to invade China and conquer Kansu, much of Szechwan, and northern Yunnan provinces. The Chinese emperor agreed to pay a yearly tribute to the Yarlung king. When the Chinese emperor decided not to pay tribute in 763, the Tibetans invaded and sacked the Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an. Prior to this invasion of China, the initial transmission of Buddhism into Tibet took place during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (c. 618–650), who was believed to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara for the purpose of spreading the Buddhist Dharma (teaching).

In order to cement political and military alliances, Songtsen Gampo married the daughter of the king of Nepal named Bhṛkutī, who brought an image of Akṣobhya Buddha to Tibet. He also requested the daughter of the Chinese emperor in marriage, and when he was refused the Tibetan king applied military pressure, forcing the Chinese emperor to send his daughter Wen-ch'eng to Tibet in 640. This bride also brought a statue of the Buddha with her, and this one was later to become a sacred national image. According to Tibetan lore, the two wives were white and red incarnations, respectively, of the goddess Tārā, who provided appropriate mates for the king. It is probable that these two Buddhist wives disposed the king to act generously toward Buddhism. Besides establishing his capital in the city of Lhasa, the king built the first Buddhist temple in Tibet, ordered the development of a Tibetan alphabet and grammar, created a legal code based on Buddhist principles, and sent scholars to India to study. From a mythological perspective, the erection of Buddhist temples at different locations was intended

to pin down a demoness beneath the beneficial impact and civilizing force of Buddhism. According to legend, when the king died his two Buddhist wives were absorbed into a statue of Avalokiteśvara that was installed in the main temple in Lhasa.

Another important king was Trisong Detsen (c. 740–798), who was believed to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. He promoted Buddhism and suppressed the native cult and its priests. The king invited a great Buddhist scholar at Nālandā University named Śāntarakṣita (c. 705–798) to Tibet, but his presence angered the local spirits, who created many natural disasters that the priests interpreted as signs of displeasure. It is possible to understand this episode as a period during which Buddhism and the monarchy were being consolidated and a time when the local folk religion was being suppressed. In the aftermath of the natural disasters, the learned monk was forced to leave Tibet, but he requested that the king invite a Tantric master to Tibet to subjugate the dangerous local spirits. This Tantric master was the famous Padmasambhava, who was to be known as Guru Rimpoche (Precious Teacher). Although Padmasambhava's reputation grew as a miracle worker and he was viewed as a second Buddha, some scholars think that he played only a minor role in the early development of Tibetan Buddhism.[3] Another scholar thinks that he was a refugee from Arab military expansion who was able to rise to a position of influence by means of his intellectual ability, until he became a victim of Tibetan antiforeign sentiment and was asked to leave the country.[4] At about the same time as the alleged triumph of the Tantric master, Samyē Monastery was consecrated in 775, which was further evidence that Buddhism was gaining at least a shaky foothold in Tibet. Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava symbolized two aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. The former was associated with an emphasis on a strict monastic code and scholastic study, and the latter with mystical/erotic experience and ritual exercises to magically coerce demonic powers.

During the reign of Trisong Detsen, a doctrinal controversy erupted between the Indian party and a Chinese party of Ch'an monks over the question of whether enlightenment was a gradual or sudden process. The king served as judge of the debate, and declared the gradual position of the Indian representative the winner; the king also declared that the middle-way school of Mādhyamika would be followed in Tibet. Some modern scholars doubt that the issue was settled by a single debate, and it was likely that a series of debates took place.[5] Because of the political struggles between China and Tibet, it is very possible that political considerations influenced the decision. And from the perspective of Chinese sources discovered in the cave temples at Tun-huang in the strategic location of northwest China, the Chinese party won the debate.

A much less glorious king was Relbachen (reigned 815–836), who was nonetheless believed to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. Because of his political ineptitude and financial failures, he was assassinated by two of his exasperated ministers. The demise of this third religious king prefigured a decline

of Buddhist fortunes in Tibet; the initial dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet ended with its persecution by King Lang Darma (reigned 838–842), who closed monasteries, returned monks and nuns to lay life, and severed contacts with Buddhists in India. Due to the persecution, Buddhism went underground, and eventually the king was assassinated by a Buddhist monk named Belgyi Dorje—an event that led to political chaos, collapse of the dynasty, regional fragmentation, and the demise of the Tibetan power in central Asia. It is probably an overstatement to claim that Buddhism was a total failure after its initial introduction into Tibet, and more accurate to view this early period as preparing the ground for its eventual triumph in the country.

The so-called second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet was to have profound and lasting consequences. With the return of political stability around the end of the tenth century, kings renewed their interest in Buddhism and sent monks to India to study, with the hope of revitalizing the religion in Tibet. The monk Atīśa (982–1054), who was born into a noble family of Bengal, played a major role in this revival. He was a student of the Indian tantric master Nāropa (1016–1100), and eventually became one of the four directors of prestigious Nālandā University. He attempted to synthesize Abhidharma, Mahāyāna, and Tantric forms of Buddhism. His teaching stressed that achieving Buddhahood could be speeded up by Tantric practice. Moreover, he supported Vinaya monastic rules, and built up the Prāsangika school of Mādhyamika philosophy. According to legend, he had a vision of the goddess Tārā instructing him not to journey to Tibet because his life would be shortened, but he decided to work for the welfare of the Tibetan people and caused the teachings to flourish, as also predicted by the goddess. Atīśa's disciple Dromten (1008–1064) founded the Kadampa school.

During this period, the development of Tibetan Buddhism was enhanced by the appearance of various gifted figures. Among these was Marpa (1012–1096), who received monastic training in India with Nāropa, a leading scholar of Nālandā University. After his training, Marpa returned to Tibet to marry and inspire such disciples as the famous Milarepa (1040–1123), a sorcerer and later hermit. An important successor of Milarepa was Gampopa (1079–1153), a founder of the Kagyupa school.

After submitting to the Mongols in 1207 and paying tribute to Genghis Khan, the Tibetans attempted to cease payments with his death, only to be defeated. Monasteries were looted and hundreds of monks killed. An important development occurred around 1274, when the Godan Khan decided to have a Tibetan representative at his court. The leader of the Sakyapa school of Tibetan Buddhism agreed to serve in this post. The monk's name was Günga Gyelsten (1181–1251), who was also known by his Sanskrit name of Sakya Pandita. After the khan was converted to Buddhism by the monk, he agreed to protect the religion. The monk also persuaded the khan to agree to make him the regent of Tibet. This political agreement began a patron-priest relationship, with the Sakyapa school providing

the spiritual teachers of the khan. This agreement was to have enormous importance for Tibetan history because it began the custom of monastic leaders assuming responsibility for the social and political welfare of the Tibetans. This relationship flourished under Kublai Khan, who conquered China in 1260 and founded the Yüan Dynasty; he made Phagpa, a nephew of Sakya Pandita, the imperial tutor and ruler of Tibet.

By the late fourteenth century, Tibetan Buddhism had fallen into decay, when Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), whom we have met in chapter 9, arrived on the scene. Trained as a member of the Kadampa school, Tsong Khapa began to preach a reformist doctrine that stressed strict monastic discipline and scholastic study. His reformist movement became the Gelugpa (Order of Virtue) school. This school ushered in a spiritual revival in Tibet, as evident in the construction of the Ganden Monastery in 1409 near the city of Lhasa. Yellow hats and robes differentiated the new monks from the unreformed red-clad monks. Disciples of the great reformer were responsible for the building of Drepung (1416) and Sera (1419), which were the two largest Gelugpa monasteries, and the disciple named Gendün Druba (1391–1474) built the famous Tashilhunpo Monastery (1445). Gendün Druba was believed to have reincarnated as Gendün Gyatso (1475–1542), who in turn reincarnated as Sönam Gyatso (1543–1588) and was invited to the court of the Altan Khan, who bestowed the title of Dalai Lama upon him. In the Mongolian language, the term *dalai* means ocean, suggesting the depth and vastness of his wisdom. The two successors of Sönam Gyatso received the title posthumously. When Sönam Gyatso died, his reincarnation was identified as the great-grandson of the Altan Khan, which intensified the close association between the Gelugpa school and the Mongols.

Around the end of the sixteenth century, aristocratic Tibetan warlords began to persecute Buddhist monasteries. The fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617–1682) asked the Gushri Khan for assistance, and the Mongols destroyed the coalition of warlords. With the consolidation of political power by the Dalai Lama and support by the Mongols, the fifth Dalai Lama ruled over a unified Tibet for the first time. His reign is also remembered for the building of Potala Palace in Lhasa, which from now on became the home of the Dalai Lamas. The name of the palace was derived from Potalaka, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's island home. Besides identifying himself as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, the fifth Dalai Lama confirmed his own teacher to be an incarnation of Amitābha, Avalotiteśvara's teacher, and gave him the title Panchen Lama (*pan* meaning "wise one" and *chen* meaning "great"). This created a new line of incarnations, with its monastic seat of power at Tashilhunpo Monastery. During his reign, the fifth Dalai Lama also entered an alliance in 1653 with the Manchus, a people from north of Korea that had established the Ch'ing Dynasty in China. The Manchus acknowledged the spiritual and political authority of the Dalai Lama, who recognized the Manchus' control over Manchuria and China and their role of protectors over Mongolia and Tibet. With the death of the fifth Dalai Lama in 1682, the weakness of the reincarnation

system became evident when the sixth figure, named Tsayang Gyatso turned out to be a famous libertine who rejected the role of celibate religious leader.[6] In contrast, the seventh Dalai Lama, named Kelsang Gyatso (1708–1757), was an exemplary monk renowned for his religious poetry and other works. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Tibet became a British protectorate, and then lost its independence in March of 1959 when the Communist Chinese invaded the country, causing the fourteenth Dalai Lama to flee into exile in India.

The Nature of Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism represents an intertwining of four religious and philosophical traditions: Mādhyamika, Yogacāra, Tantra, and the indigenous folk religious tradition. In order to avoid redundancy, the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools will not be discussed in this chapter, which will focus instead on the Tantric aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. Before proceeding to discuss Tantra, however, we will pause to consider the indigenous religion, which was a form of inner-Asian shamanism, magic, ritual, and animism.

Shamanism takes it name from its central figure, the shaman, who is an expert in ecstatic trance.[7] The shaman's function is to analyze a person suffering from some malaise and to offer a solution or cure. Since the shaman often concludes that the patient suffers from the loss of his or her soul, a solution requires the shaman to go into an ecstatic trance state, leave his or her body, journey to find the soul of the patient, retrieve it, return to the world with the soul, and finally replace it into the body of the person suffering. In other cases, illness may be due to the invasion of some foreign object into the body of the patient. In such a situation, the shaman must extract the substance, which is often something hard like a small bone, by sucking or pulling it out of the sick person. There are also occasions when the person becomes possessed by a demon or spirit, in which case the shaman functions to exorcise or placate the demon or spirit. Tibetan shamanism is closely associated with adoration of nature and the spirits that are believed to inhabit mountains, rocks, meadows, and waters. This indigenous shamanism should not be confused with the later Bon religion, which was heavily influenced by Buddhism in the eleventh century.

As Tibetan Buddhism developed, it split into two major divisions: the Red Hats (unreformed) and Yellow Hats (reformed). As noted previously, the designations reflect the color of the clothing that the monks of the respective schools wear. The four major sects of the older Red Hat division are the Nyingmapa, Kadampa, Kagyupa, and Sakyapa. Each of these schools traces its lineage back to a different founder. A review of these sects will help to clarify the diversity of Tibetan Buddhism, although they split into many subdivisions that this overview will not consider for the sake of simplicity.

The Nyingmapa sect is the oldest of all Tibetan schools of Buddhism. Its name means "unreformed way of the ancients" or "old school." This school developed

without any central leadership or organized hierarchy. With its small and scattered orders, it can be understood as a reaction to the other traditions, which were involved with political machinations. The Nyingmapa school traces its lineage to the advent of Buddhism in Tibet, a time before the so-called Second Diffusion, and has adopted as its original teacher a primordial Buddha named Samantabhadra and his emanation Vajradhara, along with Padmasambhava (Lotus Born), who was elevated to the status of a second Buddha.

Padmasambhava was a north Indian tantric yogin who lived during the eighth century and was believed to be an emanation of the Buddha Amitābha. His name reflected his birth from a multicolored lotus flower marked with a sacred syllable that originated from the heart of Amitābha. At the time of birth, he was physically developed like an eight year old, with auspicious marks on his body that identified him as a great person. He was adopted by a sonless king and lived a life of pleasure within the confines of the palace. In a scenario reminiscent of the life of the Buddha, the adopted son did not want to succeed his father as king because he was religiously inclined toward Buddhism, but his father refused his request to renounce the world. The young son performed a dance in the palace with a trident, which resulted in the death of the son of a minister. This unfortunate action got Padmasambhava exiled from the kingdom; he was ordered to live in the cremation grounds, where he encountered tantric ascetics and gained insight and powers. He traveled to many locations where he continued to learn and gain powers. For a period of time he performed Tantric rites with his consort, and he was able to transcend the cycle of life and death. He also converted a king who attempted to immolate him by transforming the funeral pyre into a lake of sesame oil, where he sat on a lotus. The residents of the city where he killed the son of the minister recognized him and tried to have him and his consort burned, but he again used his power to create a lake, and converted the king. Other adventures depict Padmasambhava converting kingdoms to the path of Buddhism.

The Nyingmapa school traces its oral teachings to Padmasambhava and its transmission to visions, which consist of either mind-transmissions of a deceased master or individual pure visions. Another important form of transmitting teachings is called *terma* (treasure), which assume the form of rediscovered texts or objects that can be discovered by gifted persons called *tertöns* (treasure finders). The treasures are protected by spells from discovery by other people. This type of transmission is connected to a legend that Padmasambhava, anticipating the persecution of Buddhism, hid numerous texts in various places with the intention that they would be discovered at an appropriate time in the future. Thus the terma phenomenon builds the possibility of periodic revival into the ethos of the school.

The transmission of teachings reached its apogee with Longchen Rabjampa (1308–1364), who developed works known as the *Seven Treasures* and the *Great Perfection*, which provided the doctrinal foundation for the sect with a collection of esoteric teachings and practices that are traced back to an eighth-century figure named Vairocana, an alleged disciple of Padmasambhava.

The Kadampa (Bound by Command) school traces its lineage to the reformer Atiśa. The primary center of the school is at the Reting Monastery founded by Dromten, chief disciple of Atiśa. Following a strict monastic code, this school practices celibacy and abstains from intoxicants and wealth. The need for a capable and truthful teacher is stressed, along with oral instruction. The school also emphasizes the purification of the mind and the realization of emptiness (representing absolute truth), and compassion (signifying conventional or relative truth). The school declined around the fifteenth century and was absorbed by a new school established by the reformer Tsong Khapa.

The Kagyupa (Teaching Lineage) school is austere because it adheres strictly to Buddhist rules of discipline. It traces its spiritual lineage back to an Indian tantric sage named Tilopa (988–1069), who passed his teachings to Nāropa (1016–1100). The first Tibetan member of the lineage was Marpa (1012–1097), a disciple of Nāropa. Also adopted by other orders, an important feature of this order was the six doctrines of Nāropa, the first of which dealt with basic yogic techniques. The second doctrine explained visualizations that led to becoming aware of the illusory nature of one's body. The illusory nature of dreams and related states was represented in the third doctrine, whereas the fourth doctrine was concerned with the pure light of reality. The final doctrines related to the transference of consciousness to a chosen deity at the moment of death, or dissolving it into universal light (the fourth and fifth doctrines are somewhat similar), and finally, knowledge of animating dead bodies, although this teaching was discontinued after the sudden death of Marpa's son.

Marpa's most important disciple was Milarepa (1043–1123), who started out as a wizard and practitioner of pernicious magic. According to legend, Milarepa's father died when he was seven years old, and the family property was entrusted to his uncle until the boy was old enough to inherit it. Unfortunately, the uncle kept the property and forced the boy, his sister, and mother into slavery and finally drove them away. The boy and his mother devised a scheme of revenge that included making Milarepa into a powerful wizard. After acquiring considerable magical powers, Milarepa returned to his village when his uncle was celebrating the marriage of his son. By exercising his powers, Milarepa caused the roof of the house to collapse, killing all the occupants. This horrific act triggered a conversion experience in the young man, and he vowed to channel his powers only toward good deeds in the future. Eventually, he found a teacher named Marpa, who severely tested him and finally initiated him into Buddhism. Milarepa proceeded to become a beloved Tibetan saint who wrote beautiful poetry. Oddly, Milarepa and his teacher Marpa were never officially ordained as monks. Their lineage goes back to the *siddha* (accomplished ascetics) tradition of India and its esoteric practices. The historical founder of the school was a disciple of Milarepa named Gampopa (1079–1153), who taught that the Buddha-nature was within all sentient beings, but that human beings were better situated than others to realize this.

The Sakyapa (Gray Earth) school traces its origin to Virūpa, a resident of Bengal who adopted the name Dharmapāla at his ordination. A monk named Drokmi, who studied for several years in India and was additionally initiated into Tantra, however, established the school in a formal sense. He translated the *Hevajra Tantra* text into Tibetan, and it became a central text of the school. In addition to the monastery founded by Drokmi after his return to Tibet, a disciple founded the monastery at Sakya in 1073; its name was adopted by the entire order. This school maintained a long connection with the Khön clan through its chief disciple. Following an uncle-to-nephew pattern, this clan provided a line of a succession of abbots who observed celibacy while brothers and close relatives propagated the family line and executed the affairs of the school.

The primary example of the Yellow Hat division of Tibetan Buddhism is the Gelug pa (Virtuous School), an order that encourages monastic discipline and learning, and traces its lineage to the major reformer named Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) and beyond him to Atiśa. In a prior incarnation, Tsong Khapa was a young boy who offered the historical Buddha a crystal rosary and received a conch shell in return. The Buddha predicted that the boy would be born in Tibet and would achieve great things. According to legend, Tsong Khapa's mother had a dream in which a statue of Avalokiteśvara appeared before her and entered her body through the top of her head. As a young man, Tsong Khapa studied with numerous great teachers, and mastered Buddhist texts with little effort.[8] An author of numerous texts, he advocated a return to the traditional Buddhist way of life, which included such observances as celibacy, prohibition of wine and meat, and rigid monastic discipline. His emphasis on scholarship was marked, for instance, by the *geshe* (spiritual guide) degree that a student can earn by taking examinations and debating; it can take anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five years to finish. He also advocated restricting Tantric magical practices and postponing them until the end of a long course of study. This sect is most famous for its development of the theory of incarnation initiated by a nephew of Tsong Khapa.

The context for the theory of incarnation is the notion of the bodhisattva, who vows to save all beings. The incarnation is called the Dalai (Great Ocean) Lama (teacher). The theory holds that he cannot die as long as his mission is incomplete. In fact, however, the Dalai Lama does die, and at death his body returns to the heavenly field. It is believed that he will return to continue his mission until it is completed by assuming a new human body. Once an individual Dalai Lama dies, it is the task of the sect leaders to find and identify the baby in whom he is currently incarnated. The system of selection for the new Dalai Lama combines a hereditary principle with an elective system. The actual method of selection begins at the death of the Dalai Lama with the initiation of a search by the sect leadership. They look for signs given by the deceased as to his next identity. This evidence can take the form of a word, gesture, a written note or line, an object kept around him. The leadership also consults the oracle at Nechung Monastery, which might reveal, for instance, the names of the new parents of the

Dalai Lama, or might indicate the identity of the house in which the child is to be discovered. A five-day journey south of the capital city of Lhasa enables one to reach a lake that is famous as a favorite haunt of the patron goddess of the Dalai Lama, and she is also consulted for a possible vision and indication of the identity of the reborn figure. When an infant is identified, it is tested to verify the search. This test might include placing objects intimately associated with the former Dalai Lama along with some objects unrelated to him in any way before the child, who then chooses among the objects. If the choices are correct, this is a good indication that the search has been successful. The infant is then enthroned and his education commences. Regents run the country until the boy is old enough to assume the mantle of leadership as both spiritual and temporal ruler of the country. When the Dalai Lama is old enough, he presides over an essentially priestly state.

In addition to the person of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism embraces the notion of the incarnate lama (teacher, spiritual guide), who is technically an enlightened being. Because lamas are free from the cycle of time and rebirth, their rebirth is a completely voluntary act of compassion. Lamas are able to control their rebirth and choose their parents, type of body, mental ability, place, and time of birth. A particular lama represents both a Buddha emanation and a reincarnation of his or her predecessor. A reincarnated lama is also called a *tulku* (emanated body). After the death of a lama, a search is instituted to discover the new incarnation. The institution of the incarnate lama provides Tibetan Buddhism a method by which religious authority and charisma can be passed to successive generations.

Tantric Buddhism

The exact nature of Tantra is difficult to determine. Some have called into question whether or not it is, strictly speaking, an Indian category or a Western one; its broad, diffuse, and diverse groups, traditions, and texts make it difficult to differentiate Tantric from non-Tantric movements. If one takes the use of sexual practices or metaphors to be characteristic of Tantra, this would be a misconception because not all Tantric traditions make use of sexual practices or imagery.[9] Tantra can be defined simply as the philosophy of two-in-one. This implies in the Buddhist context that what appears to us as dualities are actually nondual (for example, male-female, saṃsāra (rebirth)-nirvāṇa (liberation), right-wrong, activity-passivity, high-low). In Tantric Buddhism, the sexual union of male and female deities in what is called *yab-yum* (literally, father and mother) symbolizes the highest truth. The female symbolizes the passive principle of *prajñā* (wisdom), whereas the male represents the active principle of *upāya* (skillful means). If we look at the root meaning of the term, Tantra comes from a verb suggesting "to weave," and when used as a noun it means "thread." What is implied is a weaving together of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra, male and female, and wisdom and skillful

means. Within the context of Buddhism, Tantra is called Vajrayāna (diamond/thunderbolt vehicle) and Mantrayāna because of the central role of mantras (sacred formulas) in religious practice.

As suggested earlier, Tibetan Buddhists traced their early roots to religious siddha (perfected) figures from India. The gradual development of the movement was, however, a very complex process that involved both internal factors within the monastic community and the external sociopolitical situation. Reflecting the influence of society upon its development with respect to its language, literature, and community, Tantric Buddhism became acculturated to its historical milieu. The Buddhist monk's use, for instance, of a maṇḍala (sacred diagram) was metaphorically understood as his assumption of the role of a lord controlling vassals. In fact, maṇḍalas were models of royal palaces, even if they were located invisibly within the human body.[10]

The siddha movement was rooted in Hindu Śaiva ascetic sects in India such as the Kāpālikas and Pāśupatas. The first clear evidence of Buddhist siddhas is from the early eighth century. These individuals sought to gain power and authority by means of practicing asceticism, and they tried to provide services to kings such as prophecy, spirit possession, demonic control, developing love potions, creation of wealth, and magical killing. Although they argued and fought with each other, Buddhist siddhas provided a new type of social group outside of Hinduism, even though only a few sects established temples or monasteries. At the same time, their literature with its sexual and erotic imagery was inherently destabilizing due to its direct challenge to established Buddhist institutions.[11] It was a challenge to Buddhist moral values and monastic practices, and it was secret, obscure, and deceptive, while its genuine meaning was buried within the text.

This radical new literature was wedded to already established modes of philosophy associated with the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools around the eighth century in India. This gave it the authenticity and authority that it needed to win over conservative members of the monastic community. From a historical perspective, Tibetan Buddhism was undeveloped, fluid, and flexible enough to incorporate the new literature without irreparably disrupting and harming the Buddhist monastic establishment.

A shamanic-yogic component formed a major feature of Tantra. Another essential feature was the worship of female deities, especially those with a fierce and threatening nature. The impetus of goddess devotion was historically connected to the group of deities known as the seven mothers or Mātṛkās.[12] These mothers were sometimes innumerable, and were considered very dangerous. Early descriptions referred to their being angry, carrying a spike, having a red complexion, and living on blood; other descriptions referred to long nails, large teeth, protruding lips, dark color, and the ability to inspire terror. They were wrathful and dangerous, primarily to children. These mothers probably originated in village goddess cults, which have been a major component of village religion in India for centuries.

One presupposition of Tantra is that the human body represents the abode of all truth, which implies that the body is a microcosm of the universe (the macrocosm). This means that everything that one can find in the universe one can also find within the human body (such as sun, moon, mountains, and rivers). Therefore, the human body represents the truth of the universe.

Another fundamental presupposition is that one must use saṃsāric (worldly) means to reach the goal of nirvāṇa. This is considered both very dangerous and a way to effect a more rapid form of liberation. In practical terms, this means that it is possible to use one's instinctual passions and transform them from being a hindrance to freedom into forces for assisting in the attainment of liberation. The *Hevajra Tantra* (2.3.51) expresses this as follows: "By passion the world is bound, by passion too it is released, but by the heretic Buddhists this practice of reversals is not known." If passionate desire becomes the mechanism for overcoming desire, this is analogous to rapidly rubbing two sticks together and creating a fire that burns the sticks. It is maintained by practitioners that Tantra is not to be explained to the uninitiated.[13]

Another presupposition of Tantra is that things are not what they appear to be. A bottle of water may appear, for instance, to be pure, but this appearance can be deceiving because our distinctions between what is pure or impure, good or evil, are based on preconceived ideas. If we can free ourselves from our preconceived notions, we can use any action to our spiritual advantage, whether we are walking, talking, eating, or even sleeping. Our preconceived notions of gender are grounded in false preconceptions that are devoid of any inherent substantiality. Moreover, the goal of Tibetan Tantra is the same as that discussed in conjunction with Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness—that is, the full realization of the non-differentiation of saṃsāra (rebirth) and nirvāṇa, although the individual schools have distinctive practices.

Tantric thought makes a distinction between two kinds of body: material and innate. The first type represents the gross physical body that a person can see and touch, constituted by the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) and their derivatives. The second and more religiously significant body is the innate (*māyā*) body, which consists of some 72,000 channels within the material body. This innate body is supported and sustained by the material body. It is possible to image it as a psycho-physical complex that consists of fine breath power (or winds) and serves as a vehicle of mental energy. From a metaphorical perspective, consciousness rides on these winds (breaths) like a person riding a horse. The center of this innate body is the spinal cord, called the Meruḍaṇḍa, which analogous to Mount Meru, the center of the Buddhist cosmos. There is a series of four centers/wheels (*cakras*) in the innate, subtle body located along the spinal cord of a person; they represent centers of energy. At the navel region is located the *nirmaṇa-kāya*, while in the area of the heart is the *dharma-kāya*. The juncture of the spinal cord and the medulla oblongata is identified with the *sambhoga-kāya*. Students of Yogācāra thought will recognize a new application for the triple

body doctrine (transformation, essence, and bliss) of the Buddha discussed in chapter 9. Located in the region of the human head is the seat of great bliss (*mahāsukha-kāya*).

Interconnected with these major centers of the subtle body is a complex network of interlocking nerves. For the sake of simplicity and illustration, we can reduce the nerve system to three major avenues. The *lalanā* nerve is located on the left of the human body, and it is symbolically identified with wisdom (*prajñā*) that carries the female egg or energy. On the opposite side is the *rasanā* nerve, which is identified with skillful means (*upāya*) and carries the male sperm or energy. Located in the center of the nerve system is the *avadhūti*, which passes through the center of the heart (symbolically the lotus area) along with the energy of the mind, which leads to bliss. This bliss experience represents the union of wisdom (female principle *prajñā*) and skillful means (male principle *upāya*). This means that the mind (*bodhicitta*) is a mixture of sperm and egg.

The twofold distinction in the body is paralleled by two kinds of mind: mental body and innate mind (meaning transcendent conscious). On the one hand, the mental body contributes to the creation of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), and it is considered contaminated, in part because it experiences pleasant and painful sensations. Although it is free to do good deeds, it tends to be in a condition of bondage due to the force of the law of karma. On the other hand, the innate mind creates what is beyond the cycle of rebirth, and it is free from any kind of defilement. This type of mind is, however, imperceptible to an ordinary person. And unlike the mental body, the innate mind can perform good deeds and accomplish positive personal and social results. Tibetan Buddhist texts sometimes compare these two types of mind to clay and a jar. Since the jar is made from clay, it has the clay as its material basis, although the jar is not identical with the clay and functions differently from clay. Then an analogy is drawn between the innate mind and breath. They are stated to be identical in nature, and they coexist in everyone. Moreover, the innate mind represents a unification of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). Emptiness is called wisdom (*prajñā*) because it represents perfect knowledge. Wisdom is defined as a passive, feminine, universal principle that underlies the diversity of the phenomenal world. It is identified with the lalanā nerve, symbolized by the lotus flower, and called the female organ because it represents the abode of all pleasure. Compassion is called skillful means (*upāya*) because it brings the mind down to the world of particulars, and it acts like a dynamic force in the mind in the mode of a positive and active principle. Furthermore, it is identified with the rasanā nerve, conceived as masculine, and called the thunderbolt (*vajra*).

If one examines further the relationship between wisdom (*prajñā*) and skillful means (*upāya*), it is obvious that they form a unity. Just as a light cannot exist without a lamp (that is, a source of light), a lamp is meaningless without a light. In this nondual unity, compassion is equated with existence, and wisdom is identified with emptiness. What this implies is that emptiness loses its meaning

without the world of existence. If all existence is empty, everything is connected to everything else. We called attention to this type of philosophy in chapter 9. The individual Tibetan monk strives toward a nondual union (*yuganaddha*), which represents the synthesis of all dualities called the supreme bliss (*mahāsukha*). Once this nondual knowledge is achieved, the person is at that moment a thunderbolt-being (*vajra-sattva*) or perhaps more accurately an empty-being. If this nondual union represents the goal of the aspiring monk, there is a path that can be followed to get an aspirant to the destination, and practices that can be used to assist in the effort.

Tibetan Tantric Methods and Practices

Tibetan Buddhism resembles other types of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice in the recitation of three refuges, accepting the vow of the bodhisattva, obtaining a teacher, undergoing initiation, practicing yogic techniques, and meditation. Tibetan Tantric method involves control over the body, speech, and mind, much like the methods of meditation we discussed in chapter 5. Here we will focus on those aspects of Tibetan practice and method that are unique, before turning to its most esoteric and secretive practice.

Bodily exercises include ritual offerings, sacred hand gestures (*mudras*), and body prostrations. Rituals are like threads that bind the monk's career together, and also bind the monastic community to the lay community. Individuals or groups within the lay community can sponsor rituals. This scenario suggests that monasteries function as service organizations to the laity by providing rituals. Because of the monk's role as ritual specialists and providers of services, there is a concern among the laity that monks guard and maintain their moral character in order to insure the success of the rituals. Many rituals share common features, such as beginning with an act of purification by contemplating Vajrasattva and reciting the name of this bodhisattva. Three sacred components of every ritual include awakening to an awareness of enlightenment at the beginning, a contemplation of emptiness during the main part, and a dedication of meritorious karma at the conclusion.[14]

An integral part of rituals are hand gestures (*mudras*). There are two functional categories of mudra. The initial category includes stereotyped gestures of reverence, threat, welcome, or farewell. An example of reverence is joined palms, whereas holding out one's extended palms represents the gesture of farewell. By crossing arms over one's chest, a person indicates the absorption of the deity within oneself. The second category of mudra refers to those that accompany the giving of ritual offerings. These gestures are intended to function as mimetic representations of ritual objects offered to deities.[15]

Bodily prostrations are acts of humility, ego destruction, and triumph over negative physical karma. The practitioner stands with feet together, for instance, and raises joined palms to the head. With thumbs tucked in and a space within the

middle of the palms, the hands are arranged in such a way that the palms and tips of the fingers touch. The folded hands are raised above the head, and touch successively the crown of the head, forehead, throat and heart—a sequence that symbolizes a wish of ultimately attaining the mind of a fully enlightened being. Then, one bends down and places hands, knees, elbows, and head on the ground in a partial prostration, or one can extend the entire body on the ground, with arms fully extended. Whichever type of prostration one performs, the contact of one's body and head with the ground is an ego-shattering exercise. Often, a confessional prayer and a mental reciting of faults and wrongdoings precede prostrations.[16]

The focus on speech involves the use of sacred formulas (*mantras*). The most famous Tibetan example is "Oṃ Maṇi Padme Huṃ," which is sometimes called the Maṇi formula. The term *Oṃ*, which can serve as a mantra by itself, represents the totality of sound and existence. It can also be written AUM, with the initial letter representing consciousness of the external world, the second letter signifying inner consciousness, and the final letter standing for nondual consciousness of unqualified emptiness. The term *maṇi* signifies jewel and is equated with the diamond (*vajra*), from the Tibetan perspective a nonsubstance that is perfectly void and thus impervious to change. The maṇi is symbolic of the highest value within a person's mind. The term *padma* means lotus, and it serves as a symbol of spiritual unfolding whereby the maṇi is finally reached. The final term, *huṃ*, is untranslatable, although it represents the infinite within the finite and expresses a person's potential enlightenment. Finally, a possible translation of the mantra might be: "O you who hold the jeweled [rosary] and the lotus, [have mercy on us]."[17]

In addition to speech practices, there are three major mental practices. One such is the whirling *dhāranīs* (protective charms), which are written mantras (sacred formulas). They are often visualized in the form of a circle. It is possible to visualize one whirling, for instance, around the heart of a deity of the Tibetan pantheon. If a person visualizing such a whirling in the heart of a deity merges with that deity in his or her mind, a person can then see it also whirling around in his or her own heart. This whirling produces the limitless stillness of the void or emptiness.

A second type of mental practice is the use of the maṇḍala (sacred and circular diagram), which the *Hevajra Tantra* (2.3.27) equates with the *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind) and the great bliss itself. It also represents a miniature cosmos or a celestial palace of a Buddha. The outermost circle represents the periphery of the cosmos, whereas the middle circle symbolizes buddha or deity figures. The buddhas are equated with the type of wisdom inherent within each emanation. The buddhas are also symbolically connected to concepts and symbols such as impulses, perception, feeling, consciousness, and form. Each of the circles is also associated with color, location, a gesture, and a symbol such as the crossed *vajra* that emerges from a sacred syllable, lotus, jewel, vajra, and wheel. The gestures refer to hand positions that indicate meditation, preaching, earth touching,

bestowing, and dauntlessness-gestures that one can find depicted in images of the Buddha. These sacred diagrams are used for purposes of meditation in order to focus the attention of the meditator. The core of the diagram is the swastika, an ancient symbol of motion and eternity, which can be abbreviated to four dots that are considered emanations from the central point at which the arms of the diagram intersect. The arms of the diagram indicate the void from which the emanations have sprung.

The third type of mental practice is using seed-syllables (*bija-mantras*, such as Oṃ, Huṃ, Svaha) for purposes of meditation, because visualizations of deities spring from these seed-syllables. In order to illustrate the process of visualization, we will use the Nyingmapa classification. The indwelling deity is called the *yidam*, a Sanskrit term meaning "thought guarantee." This deity represents a person's innate Buddha-nature. Normally, a person can choose it on the basis of his or her own inclinations, or a teacher assigns it. It functions as an idealized self. The deity can be actualized by four basic practices: worship of the deity (*yidam*), visualizing one's teacher as the deity, visualizing the deity itself, and achieving complete union with the deity, which represents the attainment of enlightenment. The deity (*yidam*) is sometimes depicted as a fierce Tantric figure clasping his consort in a yab-yum (copulating father-mother) pose. A wrathful deity named Yamantake is depicted, for instance, with the head of a bull, dancing on corpses amid a sea of flame. Herukas (blood-drinkers) are described as having bloodshot eyes, an angry glare, dark blue skin, wearing a tiger-skin bound by a snake-belt, and bones and skulls as jewelry. A more benign deity is the beautiful goddess Tārā, depicted in images of various different colors, whereas the Vajrayoginī, a female Buddha, possesses red skin and flowing black hair, wears bone ornaments, and holds a skull-cup. She is depicted soaring in the sky or trampling corpses with her feet. With the plethora of deities in the Tibetan pantheon, the possibilities for visualization of divine beings are very wide for the yogin.

The actual process of visualization involves six steps. In the first step, the deities are visualized as external to a person (*kriya tantra*). In the next stage, the deities are visualized as identical with the practicitioner (*carya tantra*). The power of the deities is recognized as arising from nonduality in the third step (*yoga tantra*). The fourth step (*mahāyoga*) represents the purification of the body, speech, and mind of the person doing the visualizing. Thus the person attains three levels of meditative concentration: knowledge of emptiness, compassion toward all phenomena, and causation. It is this step that opens psychic channels and makes possible the visualization of deities.

The next step represents the union of male and female (*anuyoga tantra*). This can be accomplished by means of visualization by seeing oneself and one's partner as specific divine figures or as engaged in physical sexual congress. According to the *Hevajra Tantra* (2.3.28), union is described: "By the union of *vajra* and lotus its bliss is experienced." In either case, the orgasmic experience is combined with techniques to draw the breath (winds) into the central channel, which leads to a

blissful experience and a direct awareness of emptiness. In a profound sense, one's partner is the seal for the realization that everything represents a union of bliss and emptiness. At this point, all thoughts and forms are perceived as being empty, which is identified with the feminine aspect of the divine. Finally, the intuitive vision (*atiyoga*) dawns, in which all that appears as pure consciousness is recognized as mind, which in turn is equated with emptiness. This emptiness is described as a bliss that transcends all thought. Tibetan Buddhist teachers refer to this as the great perfection (*dzogchen*). Tibetan teachers compare the mind of ordinary experience to the rolling waves of the ocean. Once perfection is achieved, the waves of the mind cease because one reaches the innate calm and blissful wisdom of the mind of pure awareness or the mind itself.

Secretive Tantric Practice

A fundamental problem blocking the attainment of liberation for a tantric Buddhist is a series of knots that obstruct the energy channels or nerves. These knots are caused by emotional and cognitive problems that become lodged in the innate body and block the flow of energy through the channels. By unlocking the nerve channels, energy is released to flow into the central channel. A secret and dangerous way of unlocking the nerve channels in Tantric Buddhism is through the practice of a sexual technique that is believed to ignite an inner heat or fire that untangles the knots and clears a path through the central channel. The additional energy of the sexual partner is utilized to enhance and speed up the process in order to bring it to a successful conclusion. The area of the heart is where the most intransigent knots are located. It is important to indicate that sexual congress is not blatant or wanton promiscuity or some kind of Dionysian orgy. It also does not represent the exploitation of the female partner, because both partners benefit by using each other's energy within the depths of their beings. As the metaphor of the union of lotus and diamond scepter suggests, sexual congress should be comprehended as a union of wisdom and compassion, or one could say bliss and emptiness. It is important to be aware that this practice is believed to be superior to solitary meditation because it adds the energy of a partner to that of the meditator, speeding up the process and improving a person's chances for success. It should also be noted that this practice takes place within a disciplined ritualistic context, and that it is a series of practices and not a single action.

In order to engage in this secretive tantric practice, a meditator obviously needs a partner (since tantric texts assume that the meditator is a male figure and the partner is female, I will follow the lead of Tibetan thinkers). A common way to emphasize the necessity of a partner is by stating that a person without a partner is trying to churn water to make butter—a totally useless and hopeless endeavor. In fact, Tsong Khapa, a major reformer, states essentially that the male figure uses his diamond scepter to churn the female partner, functioning as the efficient cause of the nectar of Buddhahood. The process is analogous to rubbing

two sticks together to kindle a fire. What the churning process ignites is bliss, which leads to enlightenment and the realization that everything is emptiness, including sexual union.

The ritualistic element of the sexual union is evident in the worship of the female partner, which is also secret because of its esoteric nature. According to tantric texts, the male and the female view one another as divine, and they make offerings to each other.[18] After this preliminary step, the meditator creates a sacred diagram (*maṇḍala*) in front of himself, into which the female enters. While she is seated in the sacred diagram, the male worships her with flowers, incense, butter lamps, and makes offerings to her such as clothes, ornaments, or perfume. After prostrating to her, he circumambulates her clockwise with his right, auspicious side always toward her, in the same way that one would circle a stūpa or memorial mound containing holy relics. The ritual includes acts of service for the female such as additional prostrations, rubbing her feet, cooking for her, and feeding her. These acts of service express the subservience of the male to the female. Actions such as rubbing the feet of the female are indicative of the male's inferior and subordinate position in the relationship, because he touches the lowest part of her body in an act of humility. There are some striking similarities between this practice and the Hindu devotional practice of *pūjā* (worship, offerings, and service rendered to deities in a temple or home).

What the actions of the male partner suggest is worship of the female sexual organ. In order to do this explicitly, the partners seclude themselves, gaze at each other, and gain single-minded concentration. Falling at her feet, the male presses his palms together in a gesture of reverence. The male overtly declares his devotion to her, and she draws him closer for a kiss, which then leads to more intimate contact. During this explicit sexual action, the male must be liberated from lust, remain controlled at all times, and maintain a lucid, nonconceptual state of mind. The worship of the female sexual organ terminates when the female is fully satisfied. From one perspective, the partners are engaged in a kind of erotic playfulness that is free of ordinary desire, sexual lust, and ego. Within the context of tantric practice, passion is transformed into a vehicle for realization and self-transformation.

The goal of this erotic play is to stimulate (recall the metaphor of churning) the female's sexual fluid (*madhu*, meaning honey, nectar, or wine), which is equivalent to the male's seminal fluid. Tantric texts often refer to the aroused desire of the partners as a form of intoxication. While intoxicated by pleasure, the partners mix together their sexual fluids for spiritual illumination. The texts depict this fluid as nectar that confers the omniscience of enlightenment. In sexual congress, the partners absorb each other's fluids. The partners are supposed to assist each other to concentrate energy to a point where it can be drawn into the central channel. With pleasure as a foundation, the partners move toward more rarefied states by meditating upon emptiness. Once this occurs, the partners give up

attachment to pleasure and concentrate on emptiness. Therefore, sexual union is a means to a higher goal, and it is not an end in itself, that is, pleasure. From this scenario, it is possible to conclude that Tantra is not a hedonistic lifestyle and certainly not a precursor of such a life. It is, however, a very radical form of religious practice in which ordinary things are turned upside down and common ethical norms are violated in a symbolic way.

It is possible to illustrate the radical nature of the path by summarizing a practice on the basis of a classical Tantric text. According to the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra* (6.20–180), the practice of sexual congress should be secret. With the woman seated before the man, each partner should gaze steadily at each other. The man should fall at his female partner's feet with palms pressed together. They should identify each other imaginatively with family members such as mothers, father, sisters, and brothers. This transforms the relationship into an incestuous one. Next, the woman kisses her partner repeatedly, and places three syllables on his head and saliva in his mouth. The male figure must suck her lotus (vagina) and press his heart with her breast. She responds by pinching him on the chest and telling him to eat her Vairocana (feces). She also tells him to drink the water of Akṣobhya (urine). If one is repulsed by such behavior, one is missing the Tantric point, which is that the mind of the male does not conceive of any distinction between food and bodily waste.[19] If a male makes such a distinction, that person is still in a state of ignorance and bondage. The female informs her partner that she is his slave, wife, mother, and source of refuge. Asking for the pleasure of his vajra (penis), she commands him to look at her lotus (vagina).

The next series of commands leads directly to coitus, when she tells him to recline on her body, place her two feet on his shoulder, and look her up and down. Then, she commands him to enter her lotus (vagina) and give a thousand to one hundred million strokes with his male organ. During this exercise, the yogin should practice one-pointedness of mind and be motionless, meditating on the pleasure with a fixed mind. With this type of mental concentration, the yogin performs sexual intercourse by means of various sexual positions. The male is also instructed to suck her tongue, drink her saliva, and consume the waste in her teeth. Moreover, he is also instructed to pinch her tongue and lips with his teeth, and use his tongue to clean her nostrils and corners of her eyes. Then, he is to clean her vagina with his tongue by eating the white (semen) and red (blood) of the lotus. Finally, the couple should stand, kiss, and hug. Thereafter, he eats meat, fish, and drinks wine (all normally forbidden foods and liquids for a Buddhist) in order to increase desire.

As if this scenario is not ethically radical enough, another part of the text instructs the yogin to visualize entering the top of the head of the Buddha Akṣobhya and the womb of the goddess Māmakī in the form of a sperm. Next, the yogin is to visualize killing his father Akṣobhya with a sword and then eating his father. He should also visualize making love to his mother. The radical nature of this

practice embodies a combination of murder, cannibalism, and incest.[20] In summary, these ethical violations represent a transcendence of ethical distinctions between good and evil.

Tibetan Buddhist Ritual Activity

The lives of many monks, nuns, and ordinary citizens are punctuated by ritual activity. In a typical home it is not unusual to find a home altar on which there are small votive images that are often made from ashes and pulverized bones of the dead and then consecrated for ritual use. The images are carried in charm boxes that are sealed in larger *chortens* (stūpas, funeral mounds). By molding these images from sacred substances, it is believed that the deceased is purified and released from undesirable rebirths. These ritual practices have been typical of Tibetan Buddhism for centuries and continue into the present.

Tibetans use a variety of other types of ritual aids such as prayer wheels, flags, and rosaries. The initial two examples are evidence that Tibetans have invented some ingenious ways to mechanically express, for instance, prayers without verbally reciting them. A person can write a prayer on a slip of paper in Tibetan script, place the paper into a cylinder of a prayer wheel, and twirl the cylinder attached to a handle. The revolving action twirls the inscribed prayer within the cylinder, and each complete revolution of the cylinder counts as a recitation. This practice is prefigured in Buddhist history by the injunction "to turn the wheel of the Dharma." A person can also write a prayer on a piece of cloth attached to a handle, forming a flag. When the wind waves the flag it is equivalent to reciting a prayer. A rosary consists of 108 beads, a sacred number with a long history in Hinduism (such as the 108 Upaniṣads, 108 names of a deity, and so forth). It functions to assist a worshiper keep track of the number of times a prayer is recited.

Many rituals have a magical function that is often connected to protection from powerful demons, harm, or disease. By invoking the protective power of a deity, the Chöd rite, for instance, protects a person from being poisoned or from leprosy. The Chöd rite involves a number of features that begin with visualizing a dancing goddess to destroy erroneous beliefs, and identifying one's passions and desires with ones' body. Then, one offers one's body as a sacrificial feast to *ḍākiṇīs* (wrathful female deities) though visualization this event. Next, one visualizes one's body as a fat, luscious-looking corpse before mentally withdrawing from it. In a strange scenario, one watches a goddess sever the head and convert the skull into a container into which the goddess tosses chunks of bone and slices of flesh. By reciting mantras (sacred formulas), one transmutes the entire offering into pure nectar, and calls supernatural beings to devour it. Rather than have the deities become impatient while cooking pieces of the person's body, the individual begs them to eat it raw. This unusual visualization process helps the performer become aware of the emptiness of the body, and it demonstrates compassion to all hungry beings by willingness to become a sacrificial offering.

Visualization plays a role in other types of rituals. In order to subjugate an evil king or demon to oneself, a yogin creates a wax effigy of the person to be subjugated and dissolves the object contemplatively into emptiness and then recreates it as a visualized image. The yogin makes the victim enter into the effigy by sewing a syllable such as a bright-colored red "A" into the womb of the effigy by reciting a sacred formula. Then, the yogin takes the effigy at dusk and torments it by roasting it over a fire made of a particular type of wood, while reciting the mantra. Finally, the yogin takes the effigy and tramples it underfoot. Thereby, the yogin subjugates the victim.[21] This entire scenario is intended to gain power and protection for oneself at the expensive of another person. The magical link of visualization between victim and effigy and yogin and effigy is also evident in a more aggressive type of ritual.

Such a ritual, used to counteract certain spirits, is initiated by calling upon the goddess Tārā in her form as Kurukullā. The practitioner dons red garments, contemplates himself or herself in the body of the goddess, recites her mantra ten thousand times during each of three or four contemplative periods each day; gives her offerings of red garments and flowers, and maṇḍalas (sacred diagrams) of red sandalwood; prays to her to subjugate spirit or person; and makes a burnt offering to her. After these preliminary steps, the practitioner visualizes the goddess and the victim bound with a noose around its neck. Next, the practitioner visualizes inserting an iron hook into the heart of the victim if it is a male, or into the vagina of a female. Finally, the spirit or person to be subjugated is visualized in a nonobjectifiable realm by means of contemplation on emptiness. When this contemplation is repeated, the victim becomes faithful and devoted to the practitioner.[22] Again, this practice can be partly grasped as the achievement of power.

Tibetan Way of Death

On the path of Tantra, there is a close relationship between sex and death. This connection is very evident in the *Buddhadkapāla-yoginī-tantra-rāja*, a text from the ninth century or later. The narrative informs its reader that an enlightened being placed his vajra (male organ) into his consort's lotus (female organ) and immediately entered final nirvāṇa. In other words, the yogin died in the vagina of his consort. Needless to say, all the bodhisattvas and yoginīs were astonished and wondered how this was possible.[23] In Tantra virtually anything becomes possible, even the union of sex and death, *eros* and *thanatos*.

Tibetan Buddhists have created a body of knowledge to help a person become aware of the approach of death, to prevent death, and to assist a person make the transition to a new mode of existence. There are, for instance, various external signs of death that a concerned person should consider, such as loss of appetite, bodily pain, unsteady thoughts, disturbed dreams, or fading of flesh color. There are certain omens that function as external signs, such as having one's nails turn bloodless or lusterless, which is a sign of death in nine months. And there are

other external signs connected to a person's emotional condition. There are also internal signs that are discerned through the interpretation of a person's breathing or dreams. If a person's breath passes simultaneously through the mouth and two nostrils, such a person is given half a day to live. Or if a person dreams of riding a tiger, a fox, or a corpse, it is a sure sign of death. There are also secret signs of death, distant signs, near signs, and a number of miscellaneous signs. Among the last type would be such events as casting no shadow, leaving no footprint on soft earth, or snapping one's fingers without hearing a sound-all signs of impending death.[24] These various types of sign are warnings to which one needs to respond in order to avoid death.

A person can respond to a threat of death by a variety of procedures. One example is the thread-cross, which consists of two crossed sticks whose ends are connected with colored thread to form a diamond-shaped cobweb. Pre-dating the Buddhist period in Tibetan history, the thread-cross originally functioned to trap demons. The idea is analogous to catching flies in the web of a spider. As part of the trap, a portrait of the person to be protected is made, with the portrait functioning as a substitute or ransom to induce the evil spirits to accept it as a scapegoat. When the demons approach the portrait they are fooled and trapped by the thread-cross, which is then taken to an isolated place and left.[25]

Another method of cheating death is to create a dough image of the person who is the focus of the rite. The dough is colored for the particular demonic beings that you want to influence: black for *dü* demons, red for *tsen*, and yellow for *lu* serpents. The dough is mixed with some of the person's excrement, pieces of clothing, mucus, saliva, tears, hair, and fingernails. Then, the figure is empowered by six sacred formulas (*mantras*), and the figure is thrown into a river. The objective is to get the demons to chase or accept the substitute. It is believed that this rite will avert death for three years.

When a person does die, there are in traditional Tibetan culture five means used to dispose of the corpse, depending on a person's social and religious status. The practice of embalming is restricted to Grand Lamas (teachers), and cremation is reserved for high priests. The third method of disposal is consumption by animals. The body of the deceased is stripped of clothing, placed face-down on a slab of stone, and tied to a stake. The corpse is cut up and the flesh is exposed for vultures and other animals to eat. The remaining bones are buried after the flesh is consumed. A fourth method is similar to the third method except that the bones of the deceased are grounded into a fine powder that can be consumed by animals. The final method of disposal is the fate of the poor, whose bodies are simply discarded in a waste area or thrown into a river after being unceremoniously dragged by a rope and deposited. Some of these practices might seem gruesome to Westerners, but one must remember that the ground in Tibet is frozen during long periods of the year, which makes burial a difficult task, and wood for cremation is often scarce. Thus Tibetan methods of disposal of cadavers are an adaptation to the environment.

The death of an average Tibetan involves the coordinated efforts of an astrologer, relatives, friends, and Buddhist priests. Only members of the family of the deceased or others indicated by favorable horoscopes are allowed to handle the corpse. The astrologer's function is to discern an auspicious date for the funeral. In preparation for the funeral, the body of the deceased is tied with ropes in a crouching posture, with the head located between the knees and hands tied under the legs. If rigor mortis occurs before this is done, the bones of the deceased have to be broken to get the desired posture. The body is then covered with the clothes of the deceased, and the remains are placed into a sack. During the period that the corpse is in the home, priests chant prayers, while relatives sit in another room and offer food to the deceased. For the actual funeral, the corpse is placed into a square coffin. If the chief mourner is a wife, she does not accompany the funeral procession. Instead, she walks around the coffin three times and also prostrates before it three times before returning to her dwelling. Buddhist priests lead the procession to the location of disposal of the corpse, chanting mantras (sacred formulas), blowing horns, beating drums, or ringing bells. Relatives of the deceased follow the priests, then friends, and finally the coffin, which is led by the chief priest holding a long scarf tied to the coffin.

There is a conviction that the soul of the deceased remains in an intermediate state (*bar-do*), between death and rebirth, for a period of forty-nine days. During this period, the consciousness of the deceased wanders. It is an especially dangerous time for the deceased and the surviving relatives because the deceased could cause harm to survivors if it does not reach its destination safely. A key text for such a problem is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bardo Thödol*), a practical manual about death. In order to help the wandering consciousness of the deceased, a priest reads from this text and whispers words into the ear of the corpse. The intention is to give directions to the deceased to help it finds its way to the Western Paradise of Amitābha, to escape the intermediate state, and to find repose and tranquillity in the next life.

Concluding Reflections

The mountains and desert plateaus of Tibet served as formidable natural barriers for the country. In part, this geography and the difficulty of travel in Tibet helped to account for its unique linguistic and religious developments. The Tibetan language developed independently from Indo-European or Chinese languages. This linguistic independence was reflected in its religious development, even though religious influences and figures arrived from India. In short, Tibet's geographical isolation allowed it to develop its own unique version of Buddhism.

The political theocracy of Tibet, based on its belief on a reincarnated lama, contributed to its uniqueness. The Tibetan pantheon has been enormous and complex because it included indigenous, Indian, and Mongolian figures. As mentioned in chapter 9, Tibetans made important contributions to Buddhist philosophy in

general and logic in particular. They creatively weaved together philosophies of emptiness with Tantric thought and practice. Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhists helped to preserve scriptures for future generations. And they introduced significant ritual innovations and artistic creations to Buddhism.

As implied by the discussion of Tibetan ritual activity, there is no sharp distinction between folk religion, represented in part by shamanism and magic, and monastic Buddhism. Not only do monks participate in rites that extend beyond monastic life; there are also beliefs shared by monks and laity that have no foundation in Buddhism. Rather than attempting to draw rigid distinctions, it is best to view Tibetan Buddhism as a beautifully painted sacred diagram that forms a unity of Buddhist and folk elements.

12

The No-Narrative of Seated Meditation: Zen

The origins of Zen Buddhism are obscured in Buddhist lore and legend. But as is common in the religious tradition, this school traces its origins to the historical Buddha. It is possible to find the key narrative in the sixth case of a text entitled the *Mumonkan*. In this story the Buddha is giving a sermon to a group of people assembled before him. Rather than giving a verbal discourse on this day, the Buddha holds up a flower before those who have come to hear him. The group of listeners are confused and sit there silently, but the face of a monk named Kasyapa breaks into a smile. Whether this episode ever occurred is impossible to determine. But the story is informative about the nature of Zen Buddhism, because it tells us that the truth cannot be expressed verbally and that the transmission of the truth must be nonverbal. This tale also suggests that the transmission of the teachings of the Buddha is exterior to the corpus of Buddhist scriptures. The emphasis in Zen is on the transmission of the truth from the mind of the enlightened master to the student. If this is the case, it helps us to understand why Kasyapa smiled when the Buddha raised a flower: he was responding directly to the mind of the Buddha.

Any search for the historical origins of Zen is a difficult because the legendary founder, Bodhidharma, is probably a composite figure rather than a single, identifiable, historical teacher. According to the biographical legend, Bodhidharma was born into a Brahmin family living in southern India. For some unknown reason, he traveled to China during the sixth century, and he allegedly had a personal audience with the Emperor Wu (502–550). In response to the emperor's question about the value of his munificent generosity to Buddhists, Bodhidharma replied that construction projects and reciting of scriptures lacked real merit, and implied that they were a waste of time and resources. Finding the atmosphere in the capital inhospitable, Bodhidharma allegedly crossed the Yangtze River on a reed, found a mountain cave, and remained seated for nine years meditating before a wall until his legs wasted away. There is also a legend that he cut off his

eyelids in order to enhance his concentration. After he threw his eyelids out of the cave, they grew into the first tea plants in China—a dubious but colorful tale. While Bodhidharma was absorbed in mediation within his cave, an aspiring student, repeatedly tried to gain his attention, without success. According to legend, the student once waited in a raging snowstorm, hoping to get the attention of Bodhidharma, who finally felt a sense of sympathy for the persistent young man and asked him what he wanted. When he was further rebuffed by the meditating master, Hui-k'o used a knife to cut off his left arm at the elbow, and presented his bloody limb to the meditator. Finally convinced of his seriousness, determination, and sincerity to learn, Bodhidharma accepted him as a student and gave him a new name, Hui-k'o. A former student of Taoism, Hui-k'o (484–590) was forty years old when this encounter occurred. This legend is important for subsequent Zen history, because it begins to establish the pattern of transmission from master to disciple in an unbroken line that extends to the historical Buddha.

It is impossible to determine with certainty whether or not the encounter between Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o was an actual occurrence. We do know, however, that some remarkable, courageous, and adventurous monks such as Lokaksena, who arrived in China between 168 to 188 C.E. and translated the *Prajñaparamita Sūtra in Eight Thousand Lines*, preceded Ch'an/Zen in China. Dharmarakṣa, who was another great translator of Indo-Scythian background, followed him. These monks were eventually followed by such figures as Kumārajīva (344–409 or 413); Buddhabhadra (359–429), a extraordinary meditation master famous for his miraculous powers; Seng-chao (384–414), a brilliant disciple of Kumārajīva; and Tao-sheng (c. 360–434), another capable follower of Kumārajīva who composed commentaries on many Mahāyāna texts.

The translations into Chinese of texts that were brought from India were influenced by Taoism, an ancient Chinese religion dating to around the fourth century B.C.E., because Chinese translators turned to Taoism and its vocabulary to find notions equivalent to the abstract Buddhist notions expressed in Sanskrit. Unlike some areas to which Buddhism spread, in China it encountered a well-established cultural tradition that it could not dominate. It rather had to adjust to Chinese culture, and it became deeply influenced by it. Chinese Ch'an Buddhists, for instance, conceived of enlightenment as an awakening to the Tao, the source of all things and an eternal, universal principle. Ch'an was also influenced by the Taoist method of meditation, in which the philosopher Chuang Tzu emphasized quietly sitting and forgetting everything. Taoists referred to this practice as casting away limbs, discarding intelligence, becoming detached from both body and mind, and becoming one with the Tao. There were also references to "fasting of the mind," which seemed to suggest purging the mind of false notions. Although there are similarities between Taoism and Ch'an with respect to meditative techniques, Taoist meditation tends toward a more passive, quiet, and natural method, whereas Ch'an stresses a more dynamic and spontaneous method. Another Taoist emphasis found in Ch'an understands the path as a way of rever-

sal, of unlearning bad habits and ideas. A final important Taoist influence was its notion of nonaction (*wu-wei*), which embodied an injunction not to do anything that was not natural and spontaneous. From a practical perspective, this involved taking no artificial action and supporting things in their natural state. By letting things take their own course, one acts without action. This does not mean that a person should become a vegetable and do nothing; it is, rather, acting in accord with the Tao. The ultimate advantage of nonaction for a person is that it leads to nondifferentiated knowledge, in contrast to the normal accumulation of knowledge that leads one away from the Tao. Therefore, to know the Tao, a person must unlearn—a process of reversal.

In addition to Taoism, Ch'an was also influenced by preexisting strains of Buddhist thought such as the Prajñāpāramita texts and their philosophy of emptiness; Mādhyamika and Yogācāra philosophical schools; and the Chinese Hua-yen school of the thinker Fa-tsang (643–712), who argued that everything in the cosmos exists only in interdependence. Using the metaphor of a golden lion, Fa-tsang showed how it was possible that principle and phenomenon were interfused, and each individual thing embraced all other individual things, making all phenomena mutually identified. And since each individual thing embraces everything else that is embraced by every one of those individual things, all phenomena are manifestations of the universal principle. This abstract philosophizing simply means that everything in the cosmos is interconnected. This type of philosophical speculation of the Hua-yen school and other strains of Buddhism historically shaped Ch'an.

The leadership of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch, represented a watershed for Ch'an development. According to the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, composed by followers after his death, Hui-neng came from humble social circumstances, but one day he heard someone reciting the *Diamond Sūtra*, an experience that awakened his mind. He decided to seek out the Fifth Patriarch, Hung-jen, but his chosen teacher asked Hui-neng how a mere barbarian could hope to become enlightened. The precocious aspirant responded that there was no difference in the Buddha-nature, although there were differences with regard to physical natures. Seeking to find a worthy successor, the Fifth Patriarch instructed his students to retire to their rooms, to look within themselves, to seek intuitive wisdom, and to express this wisdom in a verse. While working as an acolyte in the monastic complex, Hui-neng encountered a verse written on a wall by a senior monk named Shen-hsiu (600–706), and he asked an associate to read it to him because of his own illiteracy. Hui-neng could tell that the composer of these verses had not achieved true enlightenment, a conclusion also reached by the Fifth Patriarch. In response to the verses of Shen-hsiu, Hui-neng dictated his own verses that demonstrated an enlightened state of mind, which was confirmed by the Fifth Patriarch, who invited Hui-neng to his quarters where he expounded on the *Diamond Sūtra*. By giving the teaching and further awakening him, the Fifth Patriarch gave Hui-neng a set of robes and transmitted the teaching to him, transforming

his status into the master's chosen successor and acknowledging him as the Sixth Patriarch.

This narrative reflects a split between the northern and southern schools of Ch'an Buddhism in China in the seventh century. At issue were whether Shen-hsiu was the rightful patriarch of his school, and whether enlightenment was to be reached gradually or suddenly. The southern school stressed the suddenness of gaining enlightenment. Shen-hui (684–758), who had received the seal of teaching from the dying Hui-neng, launched an attack on the northern school, claiming they diverged from the genuine tradition of transmission of the teaching, cultivated false practice, and mistakenly believed in gradual enlightenment. His attack on the northern school also publicly promoted the Sixth Patriarch. Although the emphasis of the southern school on sudden enlightenment would eventually gain wider support and acceptance, the northern school was a religious force for several centuries in China.[1] After Hui-neng, Ch'an began to spread across China and down to common folk in a broad process of enculturation.

During the T'ang Dynasty (618–906), there was a flowering of great teachers who were revered in later historical periods. There was, for example, Ma-tsu (709–788), who introduced a dynamic form of Ch'an that stressed shouting as a pedagogical method. Other luminaries included Chao-chou (778–897), who emphasized spontaneity and the importance that everyday actions can have in realizing enlightenment; Pai-chang (729–814), famous for his monastic rules pertaining to the importance of work; Huang-po (d. c. 850); and the dominant Lin-chi (d. 866), who was famous for using physical beatings to trigger enlightenment experiences. Along with these outstanding religious figures, Ch'an's internal structure, practices, and location helped it to survive government persecutions.

The more self-sufficient structure of Ch'an monasteries and their distance from internal imperial politics enabled them to survive with greater success than other Buddhist schools during the persecutions initiated by Emperor Wu-tsung (841–846), an ardent follower of Taoism. Starting in 842 and continuing in phases into 845, imperial decrees dictated the confiscation of Buddhist properties, the forcing of monks and nuns back to lay life, the obligation to pay taxes, and other measures designed to destroy Buddhism. Ch'an survived and continued to develop into the so-called "five houses," representing family traditions with some differences of style, methods, and teaching. From two of these houses there evolved the two major Zen branches in Japan: Rinzai and Sōtō.

During the eighth century, Chinese Ch'an masters arrived in Japan, but Ch'an did not make great advances there until Myōan Eisai (1141–1215) made a second trip to China and was exposed to and transformed by Ch'an. Later generations gave him credit for establishing Ch'an in Japan—now translated into Japanese as Zen. Eisai founded the Rinzai line (based in the Lin-chi House in China) of Zen. After experiencing some opposition and finally securing support of a shogun in Kamakura, he was able to establish a temple and then another called Kennin-ji where Tendai and esoteric practices were woven together with Zen practice. After

his own trip to China, the monk Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253) returned to this temple, but he became dissatisfied with the commingling of the different traditions of Zen, Tendai, and Shingon forms of Buddhism. Dōgen intended to offer a purified Zen. When he settled at the Eihei-ji temple he established the Sōtō school (called Ts'ao-tung in China).

The Nature of Zen

Ch'an, which becomes Zen in Japan, is a term that represents a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word for meditation (*dhyana*). As suggested by the biography of Bodhidharma, it is possible to conceive of Zen as a tradition specializing in meditation. And it is possible to grasp it as a reform movement in the sense that its leaders wanted to return to what they understood as the essence of early Buddhism, devoid of magical accretions and devotional types of practice. If Buddhism was drifting away from its foundations in meditative practice, it was necessary to recapture the primitive tradition that dated to the historical Buddha. This stress upon the centrality of meditation was combined with an emphasis on the importance of manual labor. The Chinese master Pai-chang has traditionally been given credit for stressing the importance of work with the words, "One day no work, one day no food." But manual labor was more than a matter of subsistence. It became an integral part of the path to enlightenment, and there have been numerous stories that connected manual labor with an awakening experience. A democratic spirit pervaded the work ethic, and jobs were rotated to different monks. Besides doing jobs related to cooking and cleaning around the monastery, monks planted rice, cut bamboo, and developed tea plantations. These were practical activities that made the monks less dependent on donors, more self-sufficient, and less open to charges of being social parasites. Manual labor had an additional and more personal benefit for monks because it helped them counteract muscle tension, physical lethargy, boredom, mental depression, and other problems that can arise from sitting in meditation for extended periods of time. Labor could also function as a form of meditation.

As noted previously, Zen narratives emphasize the directness of its teaching in the sense that it represents a transmission of the truth from one mind to another. This direct transmission tends to be outside doctrine and scriptures, although this does not mean that Zen was devoid of doctrine or lacked scriptures. In fact, the importance of the *Diamond Sūtra* has already been mentioned within the narrative of the Sixth Patriarch. The Zen emphasis on mind-to-mind transmission of the truth stressed two things. First, it emphasized the primacy of the master-student relationship and the avoidance of anything that might hinder that relation. Second, it stressed the importance of avoiding the tendency for scriptures or doctrines to become icons to be revered. The Zen position is that virtually anything can become an idol. This includes not only scriptures and doctrines but also such items as one's ego, miracles, gods, goddesses, and even the Buddha.

In response to the question of a monk about the identity of the Buddha, Yun-men replied "A wiping stick of dry dung." And Lin-chi, a paradigm of an iconoclast, stated, "When you meet a Buddha, kill the Buddha, when you meet a Patriarch, kill a Patriarch. Only then will you obtain absolute emancipation from any attachment."[2] The problem with icons is that there is a tendency to rely on them and to become attached to them. This is just another form of bondage. It is absolutely essential that an aspirant for enlightenment rely upon no one and nothing else.

This self-reliance, free from any kind of icon, does not mean that one must suspend oneself in some kind of transcendental zone beyond the everyday world. To the contrary, Zen emphasizes the common and mundane. Zen is convinced that what is ordinary embodies inexhaustible significance and mystery. A common flower, a dirty melon, the faint cry of a bird, a piece of grass—all contain a deep, mysterious element that awaits our discovery. There are anecdotes in the Zen tradition that tell of a student asking a master for preliminary instruction about the truth of Zen, and the master indicating that it can be learned by becoming more aware of nature and what is commonly at hand. This attitude is connected to the Zen emphasis on the importance of naturalness. The great Chinese master Lin-chi probably expressed this best: "Followers of the Way, the Dharma of the buddhas calls for no special undertakings. Just act ordinary, without trying to do anything particular. Move your bowels, piss, get dressed, eat your rice, and if you get tired, then lie down. Fools may laugh at me, but wise men will know what I mean."[3] Lin-chi's basic message is: Do actions naturally, do them without straining, and do them spontaneously. It is possible to detect an ancient Taoist influence here, in its teaching about the counterproductivity of striving arduously and straining vigorously, because overly exerting oneself fails to accomplish one's intentions. It is better to flow with things and events than strive or fight against them.

The Zen preference for acting naturally and spontaneously extends to its relationship to nature. From the Zen perspective, human beings have a very close relationship to nature because a person is not only in nature, but nature is also in the person. A master once asked his students where they had been, to which the students replied that they had been talking together on a rock. The master asked them if the rock responded by nodding, or not. Since the monks were a little confused, the master replied, "The rock has been nodding indeed even before you began to talk."[4] This anecdote is about finding depth and mystery in what is ordinary and about a person's relation to nature. A rock is certainly an ordinary object that people assume to be inanimate. They do not give it a second thought, and they do not ordinarily assume that it can respond in any way. But rocks are not objects without life, because they possess *ch'i*, a vital energy, which makes them alive. All nature is alive and vital. Not only can a person enter into a relationship with nature; it is probably more accurate to say that a person already is nature. Nature is not something out of which a person emerges, and it is certainly not something that a person feels that he or she must conquer. We already are nature, even before we become aware of it or realize our relationship to it.

It is important to have the right understanding not only of nature but also of logic, reason, and language, and to avoid their traps. A tendency of logic and reason is to create conceptual categories. Zen rejects this tendency because concepts and the language that expresses them are inadequate. Language and concepts cannot express a person's direct experience, as it is actually experienced. When we attempt to put our experience into words or to conceptualize it, we tend to reify it. An enlightened individual would never attempt to try to express his or her experience because such a person is aware of the limits of language and concepts. It is the intention of Zen to terminate our dependence on categories because they obstruct the directness and immediacy of direct experience. Zen wants to return to pure experience, a nonreflective form of consciousness that does not reify our direct experience of reality and turn it into something static. Zen wants us to live in the present moment with complete awareness, being, presentness, unity, and spontaneity.

This does not mean that we should be completely serious. In fact, Zen allows considerable room for comic behavior. In part, the humorous nature of Zen is rooted in its conviction that seriousness is an obstacle to realizing the truth because it can become a form of attachment and thus bondage. The Zen message is basically: Lighten up! Do not take yourself too seriously, because this can lead to craving, anxiety, and clinging to self. This does not mean that you cannot be serious about your purpose in life, but it does mean do not be so serious that you lose perspective about what is really important. It is wise to cultivate a sense of humor that enables you to see your folly. Such a stance does not teach you anything new or novel, but it does focus your attention on the ambiguity of everything; it also reminds you that everything is impermanent, finite, and fallible. Humor enables you to witness the absurd, which points to the inadequacy of reason without falling into despair or alienation. The Chinese master Chao-chou asked, for instance, "What is the essence of wisdom?" After repeating the question to imitate an echo, he burst into laughter and walked out of the room. The next day Chao-chou was sweeping the yard, when the other master demanded to know the answer to the question. In response, Chao-chou dropped his broom, burst out laughing, and clapped his hands in delight because the other master had been carrying around his original question in his head for an entire day.[5] From the Zen perspective, absurdity celebrates life and accepts everything as it is, without adding something extraneous or artificial to it. By playing with absurdity, humor revels in irrationality. Master Pao-ch'e was asked, for instance, about the nature of Zen. He stood up, pivoted around the stick in his hand, raised a leg, and then asked in return, "Do you understand the message?" When the monk did not respond, he struck the monk with his stick.[6] The absurdity of this anecdote suggests unexpectedly coming to grasp a different way to perceive or to respond to life with new understanding, insight, and freedom.

There is a direct connection between humor and the iconoclastic spirit of Zen. It is possible to see this connection in the narrative about the master Ikkyū

when he presided over an eye-opening ceremony for a statue of the bodhisattva Jizo, a ritual action that represents the final stage of the consecration of the image that renders it alive. Due to his fame and status, Ikkyū, an enlightened master and poet, was invited to perform the final part of the ceremony. The simple villagers greeted him with enthusiasm and anticipation of witnessing a memorial event. As the monk climbed the stairs to the platform on which stood the new statue, the crowd of villagers pressed forward and stood on their toes to watch the ceremony. After making the appropriate bows, Ikkyū calmly stood before the statue, lifted his clerical robes, and proceeded to urinate all over the valuable and revered statue.[7] The villagers were stunned and outraged by the sacrilegious act of the monk. Ikkyū's gross gesture was intended to separate these simple folks from their attachment to their statue, although the villagers failed to grasp the thrust of the monk's intention and humor.

To be able to laugh at such absurd behavior is to be able to participate spontaneously and immediately in the present moment. If Ikkyū's incredulous villagers could have laughed at the event of the crazy monk, they would have entered the path to enlightenment, overcome their attachment, maybe lost their pride, and overcome their dualistic condition and ignorance. This scenario is reminiscent of a monk who asked the founder of the Sōtō school what he thought was the most prized thing in the world, to which he replied "A dead cat!" In further response to the monk's eagerness to know why it was so prized, the master replied, "Because no one thinks of its value."[8]

Zen Teaching Methods

The life of a Zen monk is characterized by meditation, poverty, and discipline within a monastic context. We will discuss meditation in the next section. The emphasis on poverty necessarily means that begging is an important part of monk's life. Begging teaches a monk about humility and self-denial. A monk's possessions do not include more than one set of robes, a razor, a book or two, a set of bowls, and some money to be used for his burial in case of his unexpected demise. The life of discipline includes labor, which was previously mentioned, and adherence to strict monastic rules concerning permission to leave the monastery; not speaking or laughing loudly; frugality with respect to the use of water and food; regulations about eating, rising, and going to bed; limitations on reading material; and guidelines about daily consultation periods with the master (*roshi*). Overall, it is a demanding and rigorous lifestyle designed to enhance a monk's chances to realize enlightenment (*satori*).

In an often-repeated story, Lin-chi, as a novice, lived with master Huang-po for three years without ever speaking to the master. A leading monk of the community prompted Lin-chi to approach the master. With his newfound courage, Lin-chi asked about the essence of the Buddha-law; he was physically beaten and sent away. Undaunted, the novice approached the master twice more with the

same result. Lin-chi, who was confused, forlorn, and dejected, finally bid farewell to his master, and was sent to Ta-yu to receive the right guidance. When Lin-chi told Ta-yu what had happened to him, the reply was that Huang-po had treated him with consummate kindness. Thereupon, Lin-chi was suddenly awakened, and he said, "There's nothing special about Huang-po's Buddha-law." After Ta-yu struck him for mocking his former teacher, Lin-chi countered with three blows to Ta-yu ribs.[9] The use of violence became a standard pedagogical device by Lin-chi during his career. Examples of physical abuse appear to be meaningless actions, but this would be an erroneous conclusion. Those who were struck failed to give a response that would have indicated their enlightened state of mind, and thus their answers were inadequate. The understanding that Zen masters were trying to elicit was beyond mere words or a discourteous gesture. The use of violence was intended to make something happen, to trigger an enlightenment experience. The ethical ramifications of using violence as a pedagogical device, in violation of the ethical injunction for nonviolence, will be addressed shortly.

Other teaching methods used by Zen masters were shouting or simply raising a finger. Ma-tsu was probably the first master to use shouting as a teaching technique, whereas Chu-ti was famous for his one-finger method. Whenever Chu-ti was asked anything, he would just raise one finger; Ma-tsu would shout "Ho!" to a question. These physical and verbal responses appear on the surface to be nonsensical and meaningless. If one penetrates below the surface, it is possible to discern that raising a finger or shouting something nonsensical is intended to shock and awaken the other person by leaving that person no chance to reason. By cutting off one's reasoning process, these methods enable one to avoid rational entanglements and confusion. The shouts are also a manifestation of what is in the mind, and it seems meaningless because the truth cannot be captured in words. Moreover, it is a manifestation of ignorance to view a shout as a meaningless noise or a finger as a physical appendage of the human hand. The shout and the finger are indicative of something that points to enlightenment and not at the sadism of the master or the masochism of the student. Although these methods may appear to be crude or a form of punishment, they are intended as an incentive and practical means for comprehending reality.[10] The Zen literature testifies to the success of these methods. Hsueh-feng, for example, had an insight into reality after his master struck him.[11] While away from Chu-ti's hermitage, a servant related to another that his master taught by simply raising one finger. When the servant recounted this episode to the master, Chu-ti took a knife and cut off the youth's finger; as he ran out screaming, Chu-ti called to him. When the servant looked back, the master raised his finger, and the servant attained understanding at that precise moment.[12] This is an especially good example of letting the finger speak to you, asking what it is saying, and then penetrating beyond it to the truth.

Sometimes what appears to be arbitrary violence can be very revealing about the nature of Zen. According to a narrative from China, some monks were

quarreling over the possession of a cat within the monastery. The master Nan-ch'uan seized the cat, and said to the monks, "If any of you can say the right word, the cat will be spared." When no one answered, he ruthlessly cut the cat in half. When Chao-chou returned in the evening, the master told him about the whole incident. Chao-chou did not say anything. Instead, he removed his sandals from his feet and placed them on his head and walked out of the room. The master said, "If you had been here, you would have saved the cat!"[13] The stunning use of arbitrary violence and the blatant violation in this case of a fundamental ethical precept of nonviolence are difficult to fathom. First, the action of the master was intended to shock the monks out of their attachment to the cat, because true monkhood involves cutting all social ties. The master was trying to use gratuitous violence to get the attached monks started on a path of freedom from their present state of bondage. It is true that the master violated a basic ethical precept, but it is sometimes permissible for a bodhisattva, which he was considered to be, to commit an evil deed when there is a higher purpose to be achieved. In other words, he accepts the negative karma as a means of achieving a greater good. With respect to Chao-chou's placing his sandals on his head, this seems to be a silly, arbitrary act. However, it is intended to indicate that in the realm of reality, the values of this world are turned upside down. Chao-chou also gives a spontaneous response that reflects the spirit of Zen. Moreover, the actions of Nan-ch'uan, Chao-chou, and other masters who use shouts or raise a finger suggest different forms of *upāya* (skill-in-means). These various techniques are all examples of teaching devices that are grounded in the wisdom of the master for the benefit of his aspiring students.

Zen masters also used less violent teaching methods that concentrate more on the manipulation of language. Yün-men was famous for his single-word responses to questions. After being asked, "What is the right Dharma-eye?" The master replied, "All-comprehensive." As a response to the question: "What is Tao?" he replied "Go!"[14] Since the master was convinced that a logical response was inadequate, and he wanted to unlock the spiritual condition of the questioner, he gave a single-word response to a question because it was itself empty of any substantial nature. A similar usage was evident in the method of simply repeating what the other person asked or repeating an utterance by oneself in an odd way. Master Ma-tsu, for instance, had been ill for some time when he was asked by a temple administrator about his current state of health. He responded by saying: "Sun Face Buddha, Moon Face Buddha."[15] The master used repetition in this incident to pervert and subvert language with the intention of disrupting the questioner's normal mode of being and thinking.

One-word answers, repetition, and cryptic statements were all signs that indicated nothing in particular. Responses by masters were not rational, thought-out, or contrived; they were rather spontaneous reactions to a specific situation, because the spiritual condition of the person asking the question, could not be unlocked by a logical response. But what made these responses special from the

Zen perspective? In short, they were "live words" as opposed to "dead words." The former type of words could accomplish the opening of the mind, whereas the latter represented ordinary discourse, analysis, or explanation. Live words are comprehended as turning words because they have a transformative power, even though they are devoid of inherent meaning. To put it simply, dead words are dualistic, whereas live words are the opposite.[16] The speaker of the live words does not attempt to control them, but rather such a person flows with the words and follows them in whatever direction they take the speaker.

The language technique for which Zen is most famous is the *kōan*, which literally means public document. The Chinese term is *kung-an* (case record), suggesting a table or bench of a legal authority and something public and unbiased. For Zen Buddhism, it implies a case that accords with the Buddha and Patriarchs of the tradition. A Zen master embraced these kinds of connotations when he compared himself to a legal magistrate with the power to bind legally and to dispense necessary punishment for the guilty. Being declared guilty within the Zen context implied, moreover, that a person was deluded, whereas those deemed innocent were equivalent to the awakened.[17]

Within the Zen context, a kōan refers to a statement (often brief) made by an old master, or an answer given to a question by a master. For instance, a monk asked Chao-chao, "What is Chao-chou?" His reply was, "East gate, west gate, south gate, north gate."[18] A monk asked Tung-shan, "What is Buddha?" And he replied, "Three pounds of hemp."[19] A monk asked Yün-men, "What is talk that goes beyond Buddhas and Patriarchs?" And he replied, "Cake."[20] A popular form of kōan often included the name of Bodhidharma, like the following: "What was the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?" Tung-shan answered, "It is as big as a rhinoceros whose horn often frightens chickens."[21] It is readily apparent that the answers given have no connection to the question. Since the responses make no sense with respect to the question, the kōan terminates ordinary understanding. The answer does not need to be verbal, because any action can have the desired effect. For instance, when master Kuei-shan and Yang-shan were picking tea leaves, the master said, "All day I have heard your voice as we picked tea leaves, but I have not seen you yourself. Show me your real self." Yang-shan responded spontaneously by shaking the tea bush.[22] The important thing is that the answer points toward enlightenment. This direct type of pointing functions like a rhetorical act that communicates immediately without reflection, or it does not communicate anything at all.[23]

Within the context of Zen methodology, the kōan functions to examine one's mind. If the responder is an enlightened being, that person's response will indicate that fact. It is important to be aware that there is no connection between the response and the content of the kōan. By using the kōan, the master holds up before the mind of the student an unsolvable problem that functions to help the student to fix his or her concentration on a single point. In order to find an answer to this incongruous problem, one must throw one's entire being, mind,

and body into its solution, which will ultimately change one's way of viewing the world. Arduously working on the kōan in mediation eventually helps one to realize that all intellectual attempts to reach enlightenment are futile. Once the intellect recognizes that it can only go so far, it is stimulated by the impenetrability of the kōan to discover a new direction, which suggests seeing one's Buddha-nature and achieving an enlightenment experience (*satori*).

From another perspective, the kōan is a like a paradox, an ontological absurdity. Hakuin invented the following kōan: "We all know what the sound of two hands clapping sounds like. But what is the sound of one hand clapping?"[24] The sound of one hand clapping cannot be conceived or experienced. Thus, the kōan is not about factual information, truth, or falsehood. In fact, it is outside of the being of everyday existence. The kōan operates by using language as a tool to destroy the surface level of understanding or one's common understanding of the world, and to reveal a deeper ontological structure. This shift in one's understanding resolves the paradox, although it does not solve it. The incongruity remains, but it is resolved by the clarification of its paradoxicality. Moreover, enlightenment does not occur from mastering the paradox, but by grasping the nature of the paradox.

Before the kōan can help an individual to understand in a completely different way, the novice must meditate on it. This is ideally done in a meditation hall (*zendo*), where one practices seated meditation (*zazen*) on a raised platform on which one also eats meals and sleeps. Meditators in the Rinzai school sit facing a meditator on the opposite side of the room, whereas in the Sōtō school the monks sit facing the wall with their backs to the person directly opposite them. Within the Rinzai school, two attendants walk up and down the aisle between the raised platforms holding a *keisaku* (warning stick) that is rounded at one end and flat on the other, like a cricket bat. When a monk is falling asleep while meditating, is sitting incorrectly (an isosceles triangle is the ideal form, with the spinal column gently curved, waist pushed forward, weight of the body concentrated in the lower abdomen and navel, face slightly turned down, neck slanted forward and motionless, and chest and shoulders lowered), or asks for it, an attendant will stop in front of the meditator, bow, give the meditator an opportunity to bend at the waist exposing his back, and then vigorously strike the meditator a couple of times on each side of the monk's shoulder. This practice is obviously connected to the pedagogical use of violence in the earlier tradition. The blows to a monk's shoulder can function as a massage that relieves the stiffness in one's back that can occur when one meditates for long periods of time. This practice helps the meditator to concentrate on the task at hand and to get the most from his or her efforts, and therefore should not be construed as a form of punishment. It is within this context that a monk will work on the resolution of his kōan by doing what is a form of language samādhi (concentration). This is accomplished by reciting the kōan to oneself, exerting mental energy on it, taking it word by word and syllable by syllable, dwelling at length upon each word and syllable, saying it

attentively, and coordinating this with the control of one's breath. This entire process of working on the kōan is called *kanna*, which means seeing into the topic (that is, the kōan).

In order to improve a meditator's results and to intensify the process of reaching enlightenment (*satori*), there are periodic weeklong meditations (*sesshin*) once each month during April to August and October to February. During these periods, the monks are exempt from work. They practice seated meditation (*zazen*) from early morning (3:30 a.m.) until evening (9:30 p.m.). In addition, the *roshi* (master) gives a lecture or discourse (*teisho* or *kōza*), often on a text, each day for about an hour. Along with intervals for eating, exercising, and relaxation, consultations (*sanzen*) with the roshi about the kōan occur four or five times a day, in contrast to the normal consultation that occurs once a day. During the meeting with the roshi, the monk gives his response to or views on the kōan in a brief period of time. Whether a monk meets with the roshi once or more times a day, it is the latter who plays the role of the midwife who allows the aspirant to awaken. The crucial turning point in this relationship occurs when the roshi, playing the role of the mother hen, picks on the shell of the egg from the outside, and the monk, like a baby chick, picks on the shell of the egg from the inside. When each party performs their picking in perfect accord, the baby chick (that is, the enlightened monk) will hatch.

Doctrine of No-Mind and *Satori* (Enlightenment)

Zen equates the vital principle of a person with his or her self-nature or self-being. Without this vital principle, a person cannot exist. Furthermore, Zen connects self-nature with self-knowledge; they form a unity of being and knowing, which is constituted by a person's Buddha-nature, a nondual reality. Returning to a consideration of the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, we see that this classic Zen text defines self-nature as wisdom (*prajñā*) and meditation (*dhyāna*). The relation between meditation and wisdom is analogous to that of a lamp and its light; Hui-neng states, "As there is a lamp, there is light; if no lamp, no light."[25] Another way of grasping this is to understand that meditation is the substance of wisdom and wisdom is the function of meditation.[26] In other words, meditation is the foundation and gives rise to awakening, and wisdom comes through the practice of meditation. When meditation and wisdom are united, this represents the ability to see into the Buddha-nature. Once a person becomes enlightened, he or she realizes that meditation and wisdom are always united. A common way for Zen Buddhists to express this is by claiming that before enlightenment a mountain is a mountain, while meditating a mountain ceases to be a mountain, and with the realization of enlightenment a mountain becomes a mountain again. What precisely do you see when you intuitively see the Buddha-nature? The intuitively insightful person sees emptiness. Such a person grasps intuitively that all things in their self-nature are empty, as is the Buddha-nature.

From a slightly different perspective, seeing your Buddha-nature/emptiness is also to see and understand your original mind, which is equivalent to seeing your original nature. Zen Buddhists refer to this as no-mind. Again, if we return to the narrative of the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, the verse composed by the head monk Shen-hsiu goes as follows:

> The body is the Bodhi tree
> The mind is like a clear mirror
> At all times we must strive to polish it
> And must not let the dust collect.[27]

This verse depicts the mind as a standing mirror, a passive entity that must be continuously wiped clean of the metaphorical dust of the obscurities and passions that originate with desires, images, and thoughts. The basic objective of meditation is to restore the mind to its original purity, to become a spotless mirror. That is, the basic function of meditation is to purify a person's mind. This does not, however, represent genuine understanding or the attainment of enlightenment.

As we noted above, the monastic acolyte Hui-neng, who became the Sixth Patriarch, dictated a couple of verses in response:

> Bodhi originally has no tree,
> The mirror has no stand.
> Buddha-nature is always clean and pure;
> Where is there room for dust?

> The mind is the Bodhi tree,
> The body is the mirror stand.
> The mirror is originally clean and pure
> Where can it be strained by dust?[28]

If we compare the verses, we notice that Shen-hsiu conceives of the mind as a mirror on which dust destroys its representation, whereas Hui-neng's position is more iconoclastic because he wants to know to what the dust can cling. The Sixth Patriarch views the mind as pure and self-transparent. A person can dust forever without being able to approximate enlightenment, because the mind is already enlightened. On the one hand, Shen-hsiu confuses representation and original consciousness, because the bright mirror metaphor indicates a reflected image of consciousness and does not represent consciousness itself. On the other hand, the Sixth Patriarch does not deny consciousness or its object. Thus Hui-neng is convinced that original consciousness cannot be represented, whereas Shen-hsiu assumes uncritically that consciousness can be represented. Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch advocates no-thought (Chinese: *wu-nien*) or no-mind (Japanese: *mushin*).

The philosophy of no-mind does not suggest that humans are without a mind or consciousness. It does, however, mean that the mind adheres to no object. The person who has achieved no-mind, which is equivalent to gaining enlightenment,

perceives objects within the world as neither real nor unreal. Such a person does not try to determine if one object is large or small, heavy or light, near or far away. This person does not attempt to determine the specific identity or nature of objects. The person of no-mind does not name an object a tree, a rock, a person, a bus, or whatever. Such a person simply lets the objects be. Moreover, no-mind is described as motionless, yet it is perpetually active. As suggested by the verses dictated by the Sixth Patriarch, the brightness of no-mind reflects continuously. For instance, once upon a time, the winds caused the temple flag to flap, and two monks argued about whether the flag was in fact moving or whether it was the wind moving. Arguing back and forth, they could come to no agreement. Overhearing the argument, the Sixth Patriarch interjected, "It is neither the wind nor flag that is moving. It is your mind that is moving." The two awe-struck monks did not know how to respond.[29] This story suggests that no-mind precedes the genesis of meaning. In other words, before there is any meaning in the world, there is no-mind.

The two monks arguing about the flapping flag were engaged in conceptualizing their perceptual experience because they were unenlightened beings, and they argued about this or that being the case, whereas no-mind is a nonconceptualized experience. This implies that the content of each experienced moment forms the entire content of that moment's thought. In other words, at the precise moment of thought there is just that instant of thought and nothing less or more. Once a person of no-mind has a thought, that person simply experiences it directly and then lets it go. You do not cling to the instant of thought. You simply wait for the next instant of thought. This suggests directly manifesting no-mind. This means that no-mind is an active, responsive awareness of experience without conceptualizing that experience. Zen is suggesting a fundamental reorientation of consciousness, a kind of unlearning of accumulated bad thinking habits. A person aspiring to become enlightened must get rid of all the excess mental stuff, conscious and unconscious tendencies, and thinking habits and patterns ingrained in a person since infancy.

No-mind is not something that people can attain, because it is already in their possession. It is, however, something that a person can realize. When this happens, a person who realizes no-mind gains the nonthinking mode of consciousness. Such a person breaks free from a dichotomous way of thinking in which there is a subject that thinks and an object that is perceived. The Zen way is a path of nonthinking free from the dualism of subject and object, mind and body. Since no-mind and Buddha-nature are equivalent by nature of being empty, the Zen position represents a radical monism of emptiness. There is only one reality, and a person cannot reach it by thinking dualistically. A good example of this dualistic type of thinking and its limitations are evident in the following Zen anecdote: A monk asked Ts'ao-shan, "When a snake swallows a frog, should you save the frog's life or should you not?" The master answered, "If you save it, it means that both of your eyes are blind. If you do not save it, it means that both

your body and your shadow are not visible."[30] The monk asking the question is thinking in terms of either/or, subject/object, right/wrong. The master's response is intended to get him to change his mode of ordinary thinking and to view the situation from the perspective of no-mind, a nonthinking mode.

No-mind is absolute and universal, like the Buddha-nature. The Sixth Patriarch equates it with the entire world, the totality of all things. A person can recognize this when experiencing satori (enlightenment), which is also called *kenshō* in Zen. This is seeing into your original nature, a time before you had a face. It is not possible to grasp the significance of satori by talking or writing about it, because it is something that one must experience for oneself. The Sixth Patriarch describes his awakening this way: "It is like the great sea, which gathers all the flowing streams, and merges together the small waters and the large waters into one. This is seeing into your own nature. Such a person does not abide either inside or outside; he is free to come or go."[31] Before this moment occurred for the Sixth Patriarch, he passed through three phases of consciousness. In the initial phase, consciousness looks outward in a subject/object kind of knowing process. The second phase is a consciousness that is aware, recognizes, and reflects on the preceding phase. The third phase integrates all prior thought impulses into a stream of consciousness. Finally, absolute absorption dawns, making the previous phases of consciousness disappear. This moment represents pure existence, when one realizes one thought (*ichinen*), the shortest possible unity of time. This is a moment of no durability, an absolute present moment, an eternal now. At this absolute point of time, there is no past behind you and no future waiting ahead of you. There is only now. It implies that satori (enlightenment) is here and now; it is immanent.

The event of enlightenment and its immanence are illustrated by a Zen story: "Once when master Ma and Pai-chang were walking together they saw some wild ducks fly by. The master asked, 'What is that?' Chang said, 'Wild ducks.' The master said, 'Where have they gone?' Chang answered, 'They've flown away.' The master then twisted Pai-chang's nose. Chang cried out in pain. The master said, 'When have they ever flown away?' At this moment Pai-chang attained satori."[32] This episode suggests that when Pai-chang looks at the ducks, he puts himself into a space-time relationship. If he is in this type of relation, this means that he is not in the absolute present, which necessarily implies that he is not free and is in a state of bondage to the world. When master Ma twists his nose, this action is intended to redirect the student's focus away from the ducks to the present moment of pain. When Chang realizes the present moment, he is in the absolute now. This means that time for him disappears, as does space. He is now free from the cycle of causation, and he is able to experience the oneness and interrelationship of all things. He sees his no-face, the one prior to the formation of his physical face; or his original nature, his Buddha-nature. This is a seeing that is a not seeing; it is seeing neither subject nor object. It is just seeing in the here and now. In summary, this pure experience is prior to thought, to theory, or discursive experience.

A final aspect of the nose-twisting anecdote worthy of mention is the suddenness with which enlightenment occurred. The suddenness of awareness suggests three aspects: fast, absolute, and immediate. The speed of awakening is obviously connected to temporality, to immanence, to uniqueness, and totality. To claim that it is immediate implies that it arises without any intermediary. In contrast, gradual enlightenment suggests notions like plurality and accumulation—temporal and spatial determinations. Although this represents the crux of the historical controversy between the so-called northern (Rinzai) and southern (Sōtō) schools of Zen, they are not very different in practice, for two reasons. They both are sudden with respect to being fast and absolute, and they both are gradual with respect to being immediate. This means that the difference between the two schools is related more to style than to substance.[33]

Zen and Japanese Culture

In subtle and profound ways, Zen Buddhism has shaped Japanese culture. This is also, of course, true of the indigenous Shinto religion and Tendai, Shingon, and Pure Land movements of Buddhism. We find the Zen influence in numerous ways: tea, painting, poetry, flower arrangement, calligraphy, swordsmanship, and archery. All of these artistic ways (*dō*) mirror the way of Zen in the sense that they represent a progression from the mastery of certain rules and techniques to the realization of no-mind. By achieving full awareness, clarity, spontaneity, an awakened condition, being able to flow with events, unattached, the enlightened master possesses full artistic creativity in both his art and life. The influence of Zen on these various ways suggests that there is a parallel between the artistic path and the religious way. Zen also contributes to the unity between life and art, whereas the various arts reveal truths about Zen. Although it is not possible to go into great detail, it is useful to suggest aspects of these arts in which Zen exercises its influence.

The essence of the tea ceremony is simply to boil water, to make tea, and to drink it. The simplicity of this ceremony belies the mastery of more than 350 steps. Nonetheless, the tea ceremony stresses a serene, natural, and purposeless human activity, without intention, end, or goal. Ideally, the tea ceremony takes place in a tearoom or hut on the grounds of a person's home. The room is simple and modeled on a monk's room in a monastery, which gives the room an aura of conspicuous poverty. The uneven, porous, cracked tea bowl, the ancient rusty kettle, the ten-foot-square room are expressions of what in Japanese aesthetic categories is called *sabi*, evoking the dignity of old age that is full of vigor and substance. The tranquil deportment of the tea master expresses the aesthetic of *wabi*, which also suggests the self-transforming beauty of the impoverished and the natural. The single flower in the art alcove can evoke a feeling of *aware*, a pleasant emotion that comes unexpectedly from the external flower and one's response to it. Sitting within a tea room surrounded by a world of flux, it is

possible to have an experience of *yūgen* (deep reserve), by which one catches a brief glimpse of the eternal, mysterious, obscure, and unknowable. Besides tranquillity and any of these aesthetic feelings, the ceremony attempts to create a feeling of harmony.

The basic aesthetic elements of the tea ceremony can also be discovered in ink landscape painting, in which the artist seeks to penetrate beyond the limits of the rational mind and demonstrate the essence of nature, not just its surface. The artist finds black ink more expressive than color because it allows the mind of the viewer to supply the colors. The use of empty space is symbolic in the sense that by marking the very absorbent rice paper with figures or strokes it becomes empty, whereas a blank sheet of paper is simply what it is. Rather than asking the artist to attempt to copy nature, an impossible task for the greatest of talent, the use of black ink allows the viewer the freedom to supply what is missing. Mountain peaks, mist, falling water, leaves, and tree branches suggest the mystery and depth of the painting. The depth of these often three-tiered landscape paintings means that a viewer can see the painting several times and see something different each time. With respect to the art of calligraphy, there are no straight lines, no round circles, and nothing ever seems to be centered. This kind of art is attempting to break through the ideal of perfected form. When we gaze at an ink landscape or a work of calligraphy, we are invited to expand our imagination to a freedom beyond form. Ink landscape painting and calligraphy must be performed naturally, spontaneously, impulsively, instinctually, purposelessly, and effortlessly. These artistic ways must not be performed in a manner that is thought-out, contrived, or artificial. The artist must enter so completely into his or her artistic way that there is no conscious effort.

The haiku poet shares with the painter and calligrapher the Zen conviction that the transient is merely part of the eternal. The poet uses words instead of a brush to paint a static picture in poetry. The itinerant monk Bashō, who is generally acclaimed as the greatest modern haiku poet, expresses a static scene in this poem:

> On a withered branch
> A crow has settled—
> Autumn nightfall

Anyone with a modicum of life experience can imagine this scene. We find in this poem the interweaving of the eternal and the transient. The transient is expressed by withered branch and the crow (or in other poems, by the chirps of insects, songs of birds, and scents of blossoms), whereas the eternal is expressed by enduring elements of nature like autumn and nightfall (or, elsewhere, water, sunshine, and the seasons). These kinds of poetic elements enable the reader to learn the truth of Zen. Moreover, the haiku poet does not describe anything that gives meaning; he gives the names of things and simply presents them to the

reader. An excellent example of this seventeen-syllable haiku technique is the following poem by Bashō:

A single butterfly
Fluttering and drifting
In the wind

Again, it is possible to witness the transient butterfly drifting in the eternal element of the wind. This type of poem also enables a reader to recognize that the poet is in harmony and unity with the world around him.

In contrast to haiku poetry, the art of rock gardens can be used as a visual kōan that can be used for meditative purposes. In Japanese religious tradition, the Shinto path believes that rocks are inhabited by *kami* (spirits, divinities). Sometimes, rocks are piled to attract these spirits to a particular place. Rocks are also microcosmic mountains that possess cosmic energy.[34] The rocks, arranged in groups of 7s, 5s, and 3s, represent volcanic islands or islands surrounded by ocean. The odd-numbered rocks represent the *yang* or male factor as opposed to the even number *yin* or female factor. The number five is significant because it represents centrality, and is thus a symbol of the center or axis of the cosmos. The waves are represented by raked sand, which also are symbolic of emptiness. Within the context of Zen, rocks have pedagogic and salvific dimensions because they can teach us lessons such as emptiness, and they can act to help us attain liberation by meditation upon them. In a sense, rocks are sources of wisdom for Zen.

It may seem strange to someone outside of Japanese culture, but the martial arts, namely swordsmanship and archery, are artistic paths to liberation. The way of the sword emphasizes instinctive action, in the sense that one does not think logically about one's actions. The Zen warrior masters a series of techniques that finally merge fighter and sword into a harmonious unity that reacts instantaneously to any danger. The art of archery is conceptually a bit different in the sense that the archer becomes detached from the weapon, because the archer must concentrate completely on the target. Thus the archer must forget technique, bow, arrow, and draw. At the same instant, he or she does not strive for accuracy, which is rather a result of intuitively applying correct form, or more precisely a non-form. With the mind of the archer focused entirely on the target, to the extent of becoming one with it, the archer draws the bow and releases the string that sends the arrow toward its target without any deliberation. In a sense, the arrow is guided theoretically by no-mind. In summary, these various ways of art suggest that artistic way and the religious way form a harmonious unity.

Concluding Remarks

Zen Buddhism was given impetus for its historical development by some extraordinary leaders. It stood opposed to the devotional surge of Buddhism and other

schools that emphasized metaphysical speculation and esoteric or magical practices. From one perspective, Zen was a reform movement within the Buddhist tradition that attempted to recapture a pristine form of the religion grounded in meditation and strict monastic discipline. The extent to which Zen was able to achieve this goal remains an open question, because it embraced other Buddhist elements from the Tendai and Shingon schools, for instance, during periods of its development, and it also became interconnected and compromised by its political involvements in Japan.

From the perspective of Buddhist history, Zen introduced some innovative pedagogical devices such as violence, physical gesture, kōan, rock gardens, and labor. Its emphasis on direct transmission of the truth, iconoclasm, and the mysteriousness to be discovered in the ordinary; its naturalness, spontaneity, perceived closeness to nature, presentness, unity, and comic—all are possible explanations for Zen's attractiveness to people. Finally, the influence of Zen upon Japanese culture has been extraordinary for a single school. Zen indicated a way to combine the religious way with the artistic way. By practicing a way of art, a person could gain liberation while living within the world.

Unlike some schools of Buddhism that are no longer vital contributors to Japanese culture, Zen has not become a museum artifact to be studied by scholars. Zen remains a creative and dynamic force within Buddhism and Japanese culture. Its vitality can be witnessed in more recent times by its spread to the West. The journey of Buddhism westward will be reviewed briefly in the final chapter.

13

New Narratives: Recent Paths of Reform and Revival

From the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, the most important external influence on Buddhism was colonialism and Western domination of traditional Buddhist lands. In the island nation of Sri Lanka, for instance, the British rulers introduced economic, educational, and religious changes. From an economic perspective, the British introduction of a plantation economy and its commerce provided new possibilities for social mobility that eventually led to a new social elite. The rise of commerce opened up a way to gain status and power over those whose privileges were associated with caste and kinship. The British educational system became the primary means of social mobility and success.[1] This educational process resulted in the displacement of the traditional Sinhalese education controlled by Buddhist monks. One negative result was that the newly educated laity became alienated from their cultural heritage. Their traditional educational role displaced, and their wisdom and rituals called into question by imported Western values, the monks experienced a decline in prestige in the eyes of the laity. Without the traditional support of the king, the monastic community also became dependent upon a foreign source of support that did not share its values or worldview.

The British and other colonial powers repeated this pattern of domination and change in other countries. The subjugated cultures reacted in a variety of ways. In addition to reviewing some responses to colonialism, this final chapter will also examine the spread of Buddhism to the West.

Responses to Colonialism

In Sri Lanka, the response to British colonial domination took a variety of forms, starting with early reformers who tried to revive Buddhism by paradoxically reacting against and also imitating Christianity. Scholars have labeled this early response Protestant Buddhism, because its perspective and organizational forms were borrowed from Protestantism, and still it represented a reaction to Christianity.[2]

Emblematic of this reaction is the myth of Diyasena, a Buddhist hero figure that originated during the period of British domination in Sri Lanka. This apocalyptic myth told of a messianic figure who will kill all Christians and nonbelievers, and will restore the glory of Buddhism. With the restoration of a righteous Buddhism and its ethical and morally uplifting way of life, economic progress and national prosperity will follow.

The leading figure of this revival movement was Anagārika Dharmapāla. The first name is a Pāli term meaning homeless and represents a classical epithet for a Buddhist monk. His last name means "Defender of the Buddhist Doctrine." In 1891, Dharmapāla established the Mahā Bodhi Society with the primary goal of regaining control of the site of the Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gayā in India, which served also as a symbol uniting the members. Dharmapāla linked Buddhism and nationalism, criticized the worship of Hindu deities, and rejected the notion that nibbāna was unattainable in this world. A consequence of being able to attain enlightenment in this world was that it allowed the laity to participate more fully in religion, and it encouraged them to practice meditation.

Dharmapāla reinterpreted certain aspects of traditional Buddhism by teaching, for instance, that attaining enlightenment was characterized by individualism and pragmatism.[3] The individual was responsible for his or her liberation, a position which denied that the monastic life was the only way to gain salvation. Along with his spiritual egalitarianism, Dharmapāla privatized and internalized Buddhism, in the sense that what was really significant occurred within a person's mind. At the same time, he made the religion more comprehensive, in the sense that he taught that it should permeate a person's entire life, and that its injunctions apply to everyone at all times and in every conceivable context. It was now everyone's responsibility to make Buddhism permeate the whole of society. He also gave the doctrine of karma a more positive interpretation by affirming that it inspired people to work for the good of all beings and to be devoid of any sense of fatalism.

In 1898, Dharmapāla borrowed an idea from Protestant Christianity with the formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, which encouraged men to do good deeds in the world for others, observe the Buddhist precepts, and support their family by right livelihood. Although Dharmapāla's program did not have any practical success against British imperialism, it did enhance the self-respect of Buddhists in Sri Lanka, and it criticized village monks for failing to adhere to the ideal of the arahant (fully enlightened being).

At the same time that he was critical of the Buddhist monks, Dharmapāla placed on them the burden of instructing villagers about the truth of the presently eclipsed Buddhist way of life. On the one hand, Dharmapāla invented a nostalgic view of the monk in precolonial Sinhala culture as a central figure in the everyday lives of villagers. On the other hand, he claimed that the monk should take care of and nurture his flock like a combination Protestant pastor and social worker.[4] Within the context of his economic, pragmatic, political, and ideological

vision, Dharmapāla envisioned a more socially involved and actively engaged role for the average village monk.

A more conservative response to colonialism in Sri Lanka was the Buddha Jayanti in the 1950s, which was a celebration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's entry into final nibbāna. This date was important because of the belief that the Buddha prophesized that his teaching would endure for five thousand years, and that at the mid-point of that period the religion would experience a tremendous renewal and resurgence. Theravāda Buddhists celebrated this event in 1956 with major projects such as translation of the three baskets (*Tipiṭaka*) into the Sinhala language, beginning a venture to publish a Buddhist encyclopedia, and restoration of Buddhist shrines. The aim of this movement was to restore Buddhism to its pristine purity. The movement ascribed the decline of Buddhism to the leadership of the country because they had forsaken Buddhist ideals. It also aimed its ire at colonialism and Christianity for subverting Buddhism and introducing false ideals.

Not all English-educated Sri Lankans had been alienated from their religious culture, as is evident in the Insight Meditation Movement begun by the educated elite. Representing a genuine reform movement, it advocated self-cultivation by both monks and laity within the context of a universalism that opened the tradition to all.[5] Leaders of this movement taught that it was not necessary to renounce the world, and that arahantship was a realistic and attainable goal for everyone. Adopting a this-worldly asceticism, they understood the path in pragmatic terms. Using the Buddha as a model, because he never studied before attaining liberation, they stressed that study of the teachings was not essential for practice and realization. They advocated meditation for the laity by teaching its benefits. They taught that the practice of mindfulness (*sati*) could develop insight meditation (*vipassanā*); but they also taught that it could be cultivated through ordinary activity. In summary, this movement represented a rejection of the traditional practice of world renunciation and emphasized instead an asceticism within the world.[6]

In contrast to this emphasis on meditation, a more social and ethical reinterpretation of Buddhism was offered by the Sarvodaya Śramadāna movement, which began in Sri Lanka in 1958, following Christian missionary models with minimal grounding in Buddhist teachings. Wanting to rediscover their Buddhist heritage and to reinterpret the tradition to provide answers to modern problems, followers of the movement wanted to know pragmatically how to create a better Buddhist society. The movement borrowed elements from Protestant Buddhism and the philosophy of Gandhi, but the Gandhian aspects were given a Buddhist interpretation. For Gandhi, the term *sarvodaya* referred to the welfare or social uplifting of all people, with the goal of building a righteous and just society. This type of society would be impossible until people worked for the good of everyone. A. T. Ariyaratna, the movement's leader, reinterpreted Gandhi's term to refer to the awakening of everyone. This awakening was not primarily economic but,

more important, it represented the moral development of the individual. Ariyaratna envisioned an awakening of villagers to self-sufficiency and prosperity.

For Ariyaratna, this vision was tied to the meaning of *śramadāna*, which meant for him work camps in depressed villages. From 1958 to 1966, hundreds of these camps were organized, with over 300,000 volunteers participating. This emphasis was reflected in the reinterpretation of the term to signify giving (*dāna*), a significant Buddhist virtue, that came to mean in this context the sharing of a person's time and selfless gift of labor. Besides giving, kindly speech, useful work, and equality were promoted as major values. These values were partly reflected by workers who referred to each other as brother and sister and gathered every day to teach and discuss ideals. Other features of Buddhism were reinterpreted. Economic development became a synonym for awakening villagers to self-sufficiency and prosperity, which also included moral development. Ariyaratna's notion of awakening included the person, village, nation, and world. The notion of awakening was tied to a reinterpretation of the meaning of Dhamma (teaching, doctrine, law), to reflect social change and development. Thus, the Dhamma (teaching) was world-affirming and presupposed an optimistic attitude toward human potential. The law of cause and effect (karma) did not operate automatically; it was now under human control and was a process that could be changed.

Ariyaratna also reinterpreted other fundamental Buddhist teachings. The Four Noble Truths were refocused on the concrete suffering of the village, and the origin of suffering was connected to the decadent condition of the village and its causes in egoism, competition, greed, and hatred. Cessation of suffering became a hope that the suffering of villagers could cease. The Eightfold Path became a means of solving mundane problems. Moreover, basic ethical virtues were reinterpreted to emphasize respect for all life, compassionate action, expressing sympathetic joy after seeing how one's efforts have helped others, and equanimity, meant to develop detachment from praise or blame. Overall, Ariyaratna's program emphasized world affirmation, universalism, rationalism, social reform, individualism, meditation, useful and pragmatic action, achievement of goals, and a this-worldly asceticism.

The Internal Problem of Caste

In contrast to the responses to colonialism made by Buddhists of Sri Lanka, there were reformers in India who focused on an internal social problem in the twentieth century—the caste system. The key figure in this struggle was Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), the fourteenth child born to an Untouchable couple in India. The family's Untouchable status placed the family at the lowest possible rung of the caste system. Enduring persecution throughout his life, he became only the second Untouchable to graduate from high school in India. With support from a liberal Hindu leader, he proceeded to graduate from college and then received a doctorate from Columbia University. Upon his return to India, he

joined academic life, worked for Indian independence from British rule, and eventually became the elected political leader of the Untouchables prior to Indian independence. In addition, he served as a member of the Nehru's government after independence.

Due to his criticism of the injustices of the caste system, Ambedkar became a victim of violence by those threatened by change. One the basis of his personal experiences of being evicted from his home and physical beatings inflicted by detractors, Ambedkar became convinced that reform of the Indian caste system, even if it could be achieved, was inadequate because it could never solve the deeply entrenched problem of untouchability. In 1935, he decided to take a dramatic step by renouncing Hinduism and his social status as an Untouchable by converting to Buddhism. In a sense, Ambedkar was following in the footsteps of the historical Buddha. After two decades in which he was involved with other matters, on October 14, 1956, he and his wife recited the three refuges, along with a crowd of 380,000 Untouchables. This event occurred during the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's final nibbāna. Ambedkar died six weeks later. However, his initial action inspired other Untouchables to follow his example by renouncing their social status; within five years, over three million others followed him.

Ambedkar rearranged the teachings of the Buddha according to his own political agenda. He did not emphasize, for instance, the Four Noble Truths, karma, rebirth, or monastic life. From Ambedkar's perspective, the basic teachings of the Buddha referred to personal ignorance and selfishness as causes of suffering. Ambedkar thought that the Buddha's teachings needed to be expanded to include the cruelty of others and the organizational injustice of existing social systems. The traditional understanding of karma blamed the individual Untouchable, for example, for his or her social status as a punishment for past evil deeds. Ambedkar, on the other hand, argued that the focus of karma needed to be changed from the individual to the unjust caste system.

Ambedkar placed great stress on Buddhist virtues because they could form the foundation for social activitism and liberation. Loving kindness and compassion, for instance, could be the basis for treating Untouchables more humanely. The virtue of wisdom enabled one to grasp one's condition and take remedial action to change it. Accepting the spirit of the Eightfold Path as a whole could help people conquer such things as hate, anger, and greed. It could also foster self-respect, eradicate the roots of class struggle, overcome social inequality, and enhance opportunities for needed social and political change.

Ambedkar discovered theoretical social affinities between the Buddha and Karl Marx. Like Marx, the Buddha became a social reformer, an advocate for a more egalitarian society, a rationalist philosopher, and a this-worldly thinker. Ambedkar neglected the supernatural qualities of Buddhism in order to focus his attention on social injustice, poverty, the quest for happiness, and a critique of Hinduism. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was a sociopolitical, liberating ideology with

relevance for the present moment on earth and not for some vague after-life condition.

Those that he inspired continued his work after his death by founding organizations like the Buddhist Order of the Three Realms (Trilokya Bauddha Mahasangha). This organization sought to develop a social revolution by establishing public centers with modest classrooms to disseminate information on Buddhist teachings and practices such as meditation. These Dharma talks were also applied to ordinary social problems like domestic violence, issues of self-esteem, and poverty. The organization also established retreat centers to further enhance instruction begun at the public centers. Finally, residential communities were created, where people developed spiritual friendships, and learned lessons about living in harmony with others and contributing to the common good. The movement also created social projects such as schools for children and adults, vocational instruction, and health care clinics.

Mission to America

Buddhism received a multifaceted reception in the West. On the one hand, many scholars made contributions to the study of Buddhism. Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852) in France was a great translator. The Welsh orientalist T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) and his wife Caroline made indispensable contributions to translation work and established the Pali Text Society. The Oxford University professor Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) edited the Sacred Books of the East series, and the journalist and poet Edwin Arnold (1832–1904), in his work *The Light of Asia* published in 1879, widely disseminated a positive portrait of the Buddha that was well received amid the growing public optimism of the late Victorian era. In general terms, the American Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Henry David Thoreau were familiar with and fascinated by religions of Asia. But because scholarship on Asia during this period in America was in its infancy, and because the language barrier limited access to primary source materials, these thinkers lacked any genuine in-depth knowledge of the various Asian religious traditions.

The broad reception of Buddhism in the West requires many volumes to do it justice; this section will focus on its reception in America. A good place to begin is with a brief discussion of the Theosophical Society. During the 1870s, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York City by Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891). The term *theosophy* means divine wisdom. Its roots have been traced to Neo-Platonist and gnostic traditions in the thought of the fourth-century philosopher Porphyry. Theosophy represented a revival of the *philosophia perennis* (perennial philosophy), a belief that everything was derived from an eternal, unitary principle. This principle was essentially spiritual, and it was manifested dramatically by particular enlightened beings. The major figures of the movement established societies in such other countries as

England, India, and Sri Lanka. Olcott became an advocate for Buddhists in Sri Lanka under colonialism, and he fought to defend the island's Buddhists from Christian missionaries. Overall, the message of the society was international, universal, and eclectic, and it represented a direct challenge to the intellectual and cultural hegemony of the West at the latter part of the Victorian era.[7]

Prior to his service for the Union Army during the American Civil War and work as a member of the commission that investigated the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, as a young man Olcott had become interested in spiritualism. While working as a journalist, he met Blavatsky, a Russian émigré and spiritualist, in 1874 in Vermont, where he was investigating supernatural events in a farmhouse. After establishing the Theosophical Society the following year, the two of them traveled to India in 1879 and to Sri Lanka the following year, where they converted to Buddhism. Blavatsky was not as committed to Buddhism as Olcott, who was appalled by the Sinhalese ignorance of their own religion. Olcott attempted to overcome this ignorance by establishing lay and monastic branches of his society on the island, and published *The Buddhist Catechism*. This work was published in many languages, and was republished in over forty editions. Moreover, Olcott performed psychic healings to counter the conversion efforts of Christian missionaries. Olcott also had a vision of reuniting the northern and southern branches of Buddhism in order to create a world association. Overall, the many branches of the worldwide Theosophical Society were used to spread Buddhist notions.

Blavatsky, who was more famous than Olcott, had arrived in America in 1873 after a divorce. She claimed to have studied with spiritual masters in Tibet, and said she was able to communicate with them telepathically during her life. Among her voluminous writings was *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), a work that presented a vision of the universe evolving from its original spiritual form to its present material form. This spiritual evolution included souls that were identical to the universal soul, and they were reborn depending on their karmic condition. Her work entitled *The Voice of the Silence* (1889) has been considered a Buddhist work that was written originally in an alleged ancient language that has never been identified. Blavastky called her thought "Esoteric Buddhism."

In addition to the contributions of the Theosophical Society, the single most significant event for the reception of Buddhism in the West occurred in 1893 in Chicago—the World Parliament of Religions. This event gave representatives from the various world religions an opportunity to present their beliefs to a largely sympathetic audience. Americans were exposed to the complex nature of Buddhism and its potential contributions to the growing gap between science and religion. The World Parliament of Religions marked the beginning of the modern interreligious dialogical movement. And it gave impetus to the initial Buddhist missions to America.[8]

As knowledge of Buddhism grew during the twentieth century, figures like Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, and others linked Buddhism with the drug culture. This connection portrayed Buddhism as an

experiential religion that had much in common with the type of experience induced by drugs. Kerouac (1922–1969) called his group of friends the "beat generation." In 1960, Kerouac published a Buddhist scripture entitled *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, which was preceded by *On the Road* (1957) about his adventures traveling across America. His famous *Dharma Bums* followed these works in 1958; it is a fictionalized account of his religious adventures with a group of friends in California. The poet Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) appeared as a character named Alvah Goldbook in the novel, and Gary Snyder (b. 1930) appeared as a person named Japhy Rider.

Ginsberg is famous for his poem "Howl," which he first read in October 1955, about the minds of his generation being destroyed by madness and drugs. After being exposed to the works of D. T. Suzuki, Ginsberg traveled to the site of the Buddha's enlightenment in India, and he visited the Dalai Lama. Ginsberg finally met Chögyam Trungpa in 1970, and he became a disciple of this lama and worked as a teacher at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. Many of Ginsberg's poems were reflections of his association with Buddhism. Like Ginsberg, Synder was also inspired by the writings of Suzuki to travel to Japan, and he stayed for seven years practicing Zen meditation. Upon returning to America, he founded a Zen meditation center, was involved in the environmental movement, and taught at the University of California, Davis.

Major Types of Buddhism in America

From a broad perspective, Buddhism in America can be divided into three major types, with many subdivisions. The first is the ethnic Buddhism of Asian immigrants. Before the World Parliament of Religions, this ethnic Buddhism took many forms, and was tied to the identity of the Asian immigrants. Ethnic Buddhism excluded those outside the immigrant group because it administered to the social and spiritual needs of the newly arrived Asian communities. These Asian Buddhists were motivated to immigrate for mostly economic reasons, and to secure a better future for their families.

This first group consisted chiefly of Chinese immigrants who arrived in California in response to the Gold Rush of 1848. These immigrants created social organizations for mutual aid grounded on kinship and linguistic distinctions. From these voluntary associations, there evolved merchant organizations that were called the Six Companies, which became primary supporters of the religious life of the immigrants. It was common for headquarters of the various companies to build a temple on the top floor where members could chant the names and attributes of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Overall, religious practices in these temples consisted of a mixture of Confucian ancestor worship, popular Taoism, and devotional Pure Land Buddhism.[9]

The second major type of Buddhism in America was missionary, and sought adherents and converts to its path. The major missionary Buddhist traditions in

America were Zen, Tibetan, and Vipassana Buddhism; the last had its origins in Sri Lanka, although Westerners received it from Thailand and Burma. Although some non-Asian Americans practice various forms of devotional Buddhism, the appeal of Zen, Tibetan, and Vipassana forms of Buddhism are related to an emphasis on meditation, which meets a demand by people wanting this type of practice.

The Vipassana movement or Insight Meditation is appealing to some Americans because practitioners do not have to alter their lifestyles, political convictions, philosophical viewpoint, cultural preferences, or prior religious affiliation. At the same time, practitioners do not have to adhere to a particular organization, teacher, or set of Buddhist teachings.[10] What is really important and central to one's religiosity is the practice of meditation. Insight meditation even incorporates American values such as democracy, equality, and individualism, and it can easily accommodate itself to a feminist or gay lifestyle and thought.

Another type of imported Buddhism is Zen. It experienced an explosion of interest during the 1950s due to its popularization by D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) and Alan Watts (1915–1973). The son of a Japanese physician, Suzuki taught English in primary school and studied at Waseda University in Tokyo before practicing Zen meditation with Shaku Sōen. Suzuki translated into English his master's address for the World Parliament of Religions. After accompanying Sōen to Chicago, Suzuki worked for and lived with Paul Carus and his family in La Salle, Illinois, for about eleven years. During this time, Suzuki translated Buddhist texts and composed his first book, entitled *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (1907). He returned to Japan, taught, married an Ameican student of Buddhism named Beatrice Lang (d. 1939), and returned to America after the Second World War to lecture on Zen at Columbia University and other campuses. Among his voluminous writings were his three-volume *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1927, 1933, 1934) and *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1959).

In contrast to Suzuki, Watts was born in London, and he publicly called himself a Buddhist while a teenager. He became a student of Christmas Humphreys of the London branch of the Theosophical Society. Watts assumed editorship of the society's journal and published his first book on Buddhism, *The Spirit of Zen*, which was heavily depended on the writings of Suzuki. He and his wife immigrated to America during World War II, and resided in New York City where he studied, published, and gave seminars. Influenced by his wife's vision of Christ, Watts earned a seminary degree and became an Episcopal priest and served as a chaplain at Northwestern University for five years. He resigned from his position after his wife had their marriage annulled for alleged sexual perversion. He supported himself by a grant from the Bollingen Foundation and a position at the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco. His writings, public lectures, and films provided financial means to support him as a popular figure.

A less well-known figure was Hakuin Yasutani (1885–1973), who established his own school called the Three Treasures Association. He adhered to the Sōtō

teachings of Dōgen while also including the kōan practice of the Rinzai school. Two of his American students distinguished themselves by founding Zen centers: Robert Aiken in Hawaii and Philip Kapleau in Rochester, New York. Kapleau (b. 1912) was influenced by Suzuki, practiced Zen meditation in Japan for thirteen years, and founded the Zen Center of Rochester in 1966. His book *The Three Pillars of Zen* was initially published in Japan in 1965 and became a useful handbook about the experiences of ordinary people. Kapleau adapted Zen practice to American culture by, for instance, chanting in English, allowing Western dress during meditation, and giving disciples English names. Although some monastic Zen practitioners can be found, American Zen is predominately a movement of laypeople who practice meditation and monastic discipline at certain periods of their lives.[11]

The arrival of Tibetan Buddhism in America was tied directly to the Tibetan diaspora caused by the Communist Chinese invasion of Tibet. Chögyam Trungpa (1939–1987) was identified as an incarnation of the Trungpa lama of the Kagyupa sect. After he escaped from Tibet, he studied at Oxford and founded a meditation center in Scotland. Having suffered a permanent injury in an automobile accident, he renounced his monastic vows, although he became a lay teacher of Buddhism. Having moved to America in 1969, establishing a meditation center in Vermont, and publishing *Meditation in Action*, he made a major contribution to the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in America by founding the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, in the 1970s. Unfortunately, he became involved in some sexual scandals with his female students. The negative publicity served as a setback, but it did not blunt the development and acceptance of Tibetan Buddhism. This type of negative image of Tibetan Buddhist teachers is counteracted by the visibility of the Dalai Lama, the publishing ventures of the movement, its international campaign to free Tibet from foreign domination, and its embrace by figures within popular culture.

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso) is one of the most widely recognized religious figures in the world. Having escaped the Chinese occupation of his country, he established a Tibetan community in exile in 1959 in northern India, and thousands of Tibetans followed him into exile. Because of his charisma, advocacy of nonviolence, tireless work for the Tibetan people, writings, lectures, and assiduous traveling, he has maintained a high public profile. For championing the cause of his people as a religious and political leader in a nonviolent way, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. American academics, college students, and celebrities have embraced the political cause of the Dalai Lama.

Hollywood creativity has called attention to the Tibetan cause with motion pictures such as *Red Corner*, starring Richard Gere, about the injustice of the Chinese judicial system; *Seven Years in Tibet*, starring Brad Pitt, tells the story of a man who lived in Tibet and became a Buddhist; and the motion picture *Kundun*, directed by Martin Scorcese, is a story about the childhood of the Dalai Lama. The Beastie Boys, a rap/hip-hop band, sponsored "Concerts for a Free Tibet" in order

to call attention to Tibetan political issues among pop music fans. In addition, the group's Adam Yauch founded the "Milarepa Fund" for Tibetan relief.

In addition to these Buddhist groups with missionary intentions, Asian immigrants who arrived in the mid and late twentieth century represent the last major type of Buddhism in America. The best examples of these immigrants are Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists.

Korean Buddhists established traditional temples in immigrant communities in major American cities. These temples tend to stress devotional practices, with a Sunday service consisting of scripture reading, chanting, a sermon, and various ceremonies. New trends in Korean Buddhism also arrived through those teaching to converts for more than three decades. Zen Master Seung Sahn, for instance, arrived in 1972 with his model of Buddhism that used a popular folk practice of bodily prostrations and chanting. Seung Sahn stressed proselytizing and called for "Action Zen." This type of Zen shifted emphasis from striving for liberation to shared action, and blurred the boundary between seated meditation and popular practices.[12]

In sharp contrast to the gradual influx of Korean Buddhists into America beginning in the 1950s, Vietnamese immigrants fled their country in 1975 after the fall of Saigon, capital of South Vietnam. Over a half million Vietnamese arrived in America over a period of a few years, and they constructed more than 150 temples. The Vietnamese brand of Buddhism does not appeal to Americans because its practice does not stress meditation. The Vietnamese eclectic practice includes elements from Ch'an, Pure Land, T'ien-t'ai, and popular Vajrayāna. The most essential practice is gaining merit in order to secure a better rebirth or a place in the Pure Land.[13] The two most eminent Vietnamese Buddhist teachers have been Thích Thiên Ân (d. 1980) and Thích Nhāt Hạnh, a prolific author.

Concluding Comments

If one looks at the various Buddhist movements within America, it is possible to find some common denominators among practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, Insight Meditation, and Zen. Adherents of these types of Buddhism tend to be overwhelmingly white. They are socially middle to upper-middle class in status, and they are more highly educated, with an income above the national average.[14] Many of these people are looking for spiritual growth and an experiential element that they cannot find in their inherited religion. Some of them are seeking a wisdom that will help them to improve themselves. Others practice Buddhism as a means of coping with social and personal problems. Some people are motivated to become Buddhists by a quest for friendship, authority, and immediacy.[15] What all Buddhists and non-Buddhists share is a pluralistic context. In the open religious marketplace of America, people have many choices, religions experience more competition for adherents, religions encounter each other more often, and many religious voices can be heard. For the foreseeable future,

Buddhism in its many different forms promises to be a growing religious voice in America.

Buddhism adopted and practiced by Americans, however, has changed from its traditional form as it adjusted and accommodated itself to a new culture. It has been very difficult to convince an American audience to seriously consider adopting celibacy as a lifetime commitment. At talks giving instruction about Buddhism, it is not uncommon to hear discourses about happiness and how everything is interrelated, and to hear no mention about the First Noble Truth, that all life is suffering. As Buddhism alters its message and practices within the American context, it is hardly a radical prediction to claim that American culture will also be transformed in major and minor ways. It will be interesting to see how Buddhism develops in America, because thus far there is no real correlation between the wide influence of Buddhism and its relatively small number of actual adherents.

CHRONOLOGY

Western Dates	Major Events
563–483 B.C.E.	Life of Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha
327–325 B.C.E.	Invasion of northwest India by Alexander the Great
322–185 B.C.E.	Mauryan Dynasty; Buddhism spreads throughout northern India
269–232 B.C.E.	Reign of King Aśoka, advocate for Buddhism
247 B.C.E.	King Tissa officially adopts Buddhism in Sri Lanka
200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.	Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism; Buddhism spreads to south India, central Asia, and China.
140–115 B.C.E.	Reign of Greek King Milinda (Menander)
29 B.C.E.	Portions of Buddhist canon take written form in Sri Lanka
50–200 C.E.	Reign of Kushana Dynasty in northwest India and central Asia
78–101 C.E.	Reign of Kushana king Kanishka, patron of Buddhism
200 C.E.	Nāgārjuna, founder of the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyāna philosophy
320–540	Gupta Dynasty rules India
300	Buddhism introduced into China
344–413	Kumārajīva translates Sanskrit texts into Chinese
372	Buddhism arrives in Korea through China
400	Asaṅga and Vasubandhu found Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna; Buddhaghoṣa active in Sri Lanka
402–411	Fa-hsien, Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, visits India
476–542	T'an-luan, the first Chinese master of Pure Land Buddhism
500s	Chinese monk Chih-i founds T'ien T'ai school of Buddhism
552	Korea introduces Buddhism to Japan
629–645	Hsüan-tsang, Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, visits India
607	Prince Shotoku founds first national Buddhist temple in Nara, Japan
624	Jojtsu and Sanron schools established in Japan
654	Hosso school enters Japan
658	Kusha school established in Japan
671–695	Travels of Chinese monk I-tsing

700s	Fa-tsang founds Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism
710–794	Nara Period in Japan; Buddhism becomes a state religion in 728
736	Kegon school established in Japan
738	Ritsu school established in Japan
740–798	Mahāyāna Buddhism established in Tibet
750	Construction of Borobudur stūpa on the island of Java (Indonesia)
760–1142	Pala Dynasty rules northeast India and supports Buddhism
805	Saicho establishes Tendai school in Japan
830	Kūkai establishes Shingon school in Japan
1000–1100	Revival of Theravāda in Sri Lanka and Burma
1042	Indian monk Atīśa arrives in Tibet
1044–1077	Theravāda Buddhism established in Burma
1150	Construction of Angkor monastery and temple in Cambodia
1175	Hōnen establishes Jōdo school of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan
1200	Rinzai school of Zen founded by Eisai and Sōtō school by Dōgen in Japan
1201	Shinran establishes Jōdō Shinshu sect of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan
1220	Muslim invasion of northern India; destruction of Buddhist centers
1253	Nichren founds a sect named for himself in Japan based on the *Lotus Sūtra*
1275–1317	Thai king recognizes Buddhism
1300s	Tsong Khapa reforms Tibetan Buddhism and forms Gelugpa school
1327	Cambodian king establishes Theravāda Buddhism
1360	King of Laos establishes Theravāda Buddhism
1700s	Japanese Zen master, painter, and poet Hakuin reforms Rinzai school of Zen
1874	Friedrich Max Müller begins to edit the Sacred Books of the East series
1879	*The Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold published
1880	Henry Steele Olcott helps Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka
1881	Pali Text Society founded for translation of Theravāda canon
1891	Mahābodhi Society founded
1893	World Parliament of Religions meets in Chicago
1931	Buddhist Society of America founded in New York City
1937	Soka Gakkai founded in Japan
1944	Buddhist Churches of America organized to unite Pure Land sect's Buddhist temples in north America

1950	World Fellowship of Buddhism organized in Sri Lanka; Chinese Communists begin to attack Buddhism
1956	Celebration of 2,500 years of Buddhism; B. R. Ambedkar's revival of Buddhism in India
1958	Sarvodaya Śramadāna Movement begins in Sri Lanka
1959	Fourteenth Dalai Lama establishes Tibetan exile community in northern India
1960	Nichiren chapter founded in California
1968	Tarthang Tulku propagates Tibetan Buddhism in the United States
1970	Chogyam Trungpa Tulku begins to spread Tibetan Buddhism in United States
1989	Fourteenth Dalai Lama awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

ABBREVIATIONS

AN *The Book of Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya)*, 5 vols., translated by E. M. Hare and F. L. Woodward (London: Luzac, 1961–1972).

Dhp *The Dhammapada*, translated by John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

DN *Dialogues of the Buddha (Digha Nikāya)*, 3 vols., translated by T. W. Rhys Davids and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (London: Luzac, 1966–1971).

Dhs *Dhammasangini*, edited by Edward Muller (London: Pali Text Society, 1897), *Jātaka The Jātaka*, 6 vols., edited by E. B Cowell (London: Luzac, 1969).

MMK *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyakākarikā*, translated and edited by Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

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